

A Comparative Analysis of Four English Translations of “Gamja” by Kim Dong-in¹

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This paper analyzes four English translations of Kim Dong-in’s short story “Gamja” to examine their differences, find related problems in translation, and thereby suggest proper strategies for future translations of Korean literary works. Though evaluations on translation differ according to critics or readers, this paper focuses on the differences in expressions rather than elaborating on translation theories. The story of an ill-fortuned lady named Bok-nyeo, “Gamja” is one of the best-known stories in Korea and an excellent representative of modern Korean literature from the early 20th century. Various translation strategies adopted in the translation of this short story boil down to two methods: literal (word-for-word) translation and free translation. To what extent translators depart from the stylistic norms of a source text depends totally on the freedom of the translators. Though translators have a certain leeway in choosing the linguistic forms, they should devote themselves to conveying the author’s intended meanings rather than merely transferring the text at a linguistic level. Key points found during the analysis of the translations of “Gamja” include the necessity of resolving the ambiguity of the Korean language in the translations, the importance of understanding Korean culture and particular contexts of the original text, as well as mastering the language.

Keywords: “Gamja,” Kim Dong-in, word-for-word translation, free translation, Korean-to-English translation, source text, target text, transcultural communication, text, context

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Introduction

Translation cannot be simply defined as the task of transferring a source text into a target text. As Lawrence Venuti points out, “Translation studies brings together work in a wide variety of fields, including linguistics, literary study, history, anthropology, psychology, and economics” (Venuti 1995:vii). In the age of globalization, where active transnational and transcultural communications are increasingly emphasized, the necessity of translating quality Korean literary works and cultural contents into foreign languages, including English, cannot but be overly emphasized. Only a handful of research, however, has focused on the translation of Korean literary works into English, in comparison with those on English-to-Korean translations and translation theories in general.

This paper analyzes the actual Korean-to-English translations of a modern Korean masterpiece, focusing on various problems as well as difficulties inherent in the translations, and suggests proper strategies for future translations. The paper will examine four different translations of Kim Dong-in’s “Gamja” (Potatoes), which is widely regarded as a work of landmark proportions in the history of modern Korean short stories. “Gamja” is the story of Bok-nyeo² who is sold to a widower as a young woman and, due to the husband’s indifference towards her, struggles to make ends meet at the sacrifice of her family status being degraded to the lowest class in her own society. She consequently commits adultery, first with her superintendent, and then with some of the neighboring beggars in the slum area. When stealing some potatoes in the end, she is caught by a Chinese man named Mr. Wang and, from then on, devotes herself to having extramarital affairs with him for the sake of money. However, upon hearing that Mr. Wang plans to get a young wife, she attempts to kill him on his wedding day, but instead, faces her tragic end.

This short story was chosen with the intent to examine the current status regarding English translations of prominent Korean authors. Thanks partly to the popularity of “Gamja” among readers, I have been able to find four different translations of the short story thus far — a comparatively large number of translations considering the small number of published Korean classics.

2. Bok-nyeo can be spelled as Pok-nyŏ according to the McCune Reischauer system of Romanization.

Regrettably, however, the four translations I have collected — “The Potatoes” by Bong-sik Kang and In-sook Chin, respectively, “Potatoes” by Kevin O’Rourke, and “Potato” jointly translated by Charles Rosenberg and Peter H. Lee — did not mention which version of the Korean-language source text was used. It seems highly probable that the translators might have depended on different versions of the same work and thus produced different translations, although the differences may mainly lie in some expressions rather than the plot or the main theme of the original work.³

From a variety of slightly different versions of the short story thus far published, I have chosen, as the model source text, the original edition first published in the January 1925 issue of the literary journal *Joseon Mundan* (Joseon Literary Circle), which was published during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). The reason for choosing the first edition of the story is twofold. First, I believe that the original version best represents the author’s own intention both in terms of language and style. Second, it minimizes the possible controversies or misunderstandings resulting from the different English translations of the text.⁴ The aim of this paper does not only lie in finding some misunderstandings

3. There are slight differences among various editions of “Gamja.” Let me site three of them here: the original first published in the January 1925 issue of the literary journal *Joseon Mundan* (Joseon Literary Circle); the 2005 version from 20 *Segi Hanguk Soseol I: Lee Gwang-su · Kim Dong-in Oe* (Korean Novels of the 20th Century I: Lee Gwang-su, Kim Dong-in, and Others); and the 2000 version from *Gamja/ Baeddaragi: Kim Dong-in Danpyeong-jip* (Gamja/ Baeddaragi: A Short Story Collection of Kim Dong-in). Here is an example from the opening sentence of “Gamja.” Apart from the comments mentioned below, there are other differences in styles and in the use of mechanics like commas.

Texts	Comments
1 싸움, 姦通, 殺人, 도적, 求乞, 징역, 이, 세상의 모든 비극과 활극의 出源地인, 이七星門밖 빈민굴로 오기 전까지는, 福女의 夫妻는(土農工商의 第二位에 드는) 農民이였었다. (<i>Joseon Mundan</i> 318, L 1-2)	The starting word <i>ssahom</i> is an old-style expression of the current <i>ssaum</i> . Moreover, this edition uses lots of Chinese characters.
2 싸움, 간통, 살인, 도적, 구걸, 징역 이 세상의 모든 비극과 활극의 근원지인, 칠성문 밖 빈민굴로 오기 전까지는, 복녀의 부처(산농공상土農工商의 제 2위에 드는)는 농민이였다. (Changbi Publishers 281, L 1-3)	The Changbi edition consistently uses the Korean alphabet.
3 싸움 · 간통 · 살인 · 도적 · 징역, 이 세상의 모든 비극과 활극活劇의 근원지인 칠성문 밖 빈민굴로 오기 전까지는, 복녀의 부처(산농공상土農工商의 제 2위에 드는)는 농민이였다. (Cheongmoksa 5, L 1-3)	The Cheongmoksa edition uses both Korean and Chinese characters. In this edition, <i>gugeol</i> (beggary) is missing.

* Underlined parts are writer’s emphasis.

4. Another reason for the adoption of the original 1925 text is that it is hard to figure out whether

and mistranslations, including mistakes or errors, but also in offering a simple road map and suggesting strategies for future literary translations.

The Comparisons of Four Different Translations

Norman Shapiro views translation “as the attempt to produce a text so transpar-

the respective translators based their translations on similar, if not the same, texts. For example, a dialogue in O’Rourke’s translation, who mostly sticks to word-for-word translation, is significantly different from Chin’s translation in terms of outcome. Either the two translators relied on different editions or Chin translated too freely. Whether the translator Chin added more sentences or chose a different source text, the result is a translation that differs from the others. That is the reason why I chose a model text for the comparisons. The following example is a dialogue between Bok-nyeo and her husband.

Editions	Texts	Comments
Original 1925 edition (in Korean)	「베 사 섬 좀 치워달나우요」 「남 조림오는데, 남자 좀 치우시관」 「내가 치우나우요?」 「二十年이나 밥먹구, 그걸 못치워!」 「에이구, 콕 죽구나 말디」 「이년 똥」 이러한 사훈이 끈치지 안타가, 마슴네 그집에서도 쪼껴나왔다. (<i>Joseon Mundan</i> 319, L 8-14)	The original dialogue consists of six sentences, three each by Bok-nyeo and her husband. Other current Korean texts I have found have the same pattern.
Kevin O’Rourke’s Translation	“Clear away those sacks of rice.” “I’m sleepy. Clear them away yourself.” “Me, clear them away?” “You’ve been shoveling rice into you for twenty years or so, can you not clear away that much?” “God, you’ll be the death of me.” “Huzzy.” There was no end to this kind of row and finally they found themselves thrown out of that house, too. (O’Rourke 1981:87)	O’Rourke’s translation matches exactly the original 1925 version and other current editions I have found, composed of a six-sentence dialogue. The translations by Kang and Rosenberg-Lee are the same.
In-sook Chin’s Translation	“You, man, put this sack of rice in the other corner of the house, will you do that?” “You do it for me, I am sleepy this morning.” “How can I carry such a heavy thing?” “You say you won’t?” “No, I say I cannot hold it myself.” “You have eaten rice some twenty years, and yet you say you cannot carry it yourself.” “You know it. I am weaker than you. Will you please do me a favor and take it to the corner? will you?” “No, I won’t do it. You do it yourself.” “I say I cannot do it, it I too heavy for me.” “Then what else do you think you can do?” “No, I can’t; speak for yourself, what you can do anyway?” “What did you say?” An argument of this sort continued day after day over the daily work at the house. Before long they were fired. (Chin 1970:80-1)	The translation of Chin is characterized by a free translation and the addition of six more sentences (underlined parts), thus making a 12-sentence dialogue.

* Underlined parts are writer’s emphasis.

ent that it does not seem to be translated,” and adds that a good translation “is like a pane of glass” and people “only notice that it’s there when there are little imperfections — scratches, bubbles” (Venuti 1995:1). This is the ideal that all translators ought to pursue but one that is actually hard to achieve. After all, how to convey the exact or, at least, the closest meaning of the source text and equivalently transfer the style of the author are key issues in the translation of literature. To put it more concretely, how to interpret and convey the rhetoric, literary symbols, and metaphors as well as culture-related vocabulary remain difficult tasks to be resolved.

Evaluations on translation will naturally differ according to critics or readers. However, I will focus here on the different expressions employed in the translations rather than elaborating on difficult and comprehensive translation theories and their applications in translating. First, in Section 1, I will discuss the comparison between literal translation and free translation, which has been and is one of the most critical issues among translators and translation students. Second, I will elaborate on the difficulties in Korean-to-English translation in two areas: culture and language. In the culture part (Section 2), I will focus on the translations of cultural terms in Korean, while the language part (Section 3) will deal with the ambiguity and the selective omission of the subject in Korean sentences, since these two are some of the most widely discussed issues in Korean-to-English translations. Finally, I will discuss the subordinate but nevertheless important issues of the translation of titles and proper names.

1. Literal (word-for-word) Translation and Free Translation

The translations of the first sentence in “Gamja” show how translators differ in their interpretations of the same text. The translation order will be Kang (2000), followed by Chin (1970), O’Rourke (1981), and Rosenberg-Lee (1974). I have also translated the words below the original text to help English-speakers understand the text more easily.

【Source text 1】 *Ssahom, gantong, sarin, dojeok, gugeol, jingyeok./ i sesang-
ui/ modeun/*

[Fighting, adultery, murder, theft, beggary, imprisonment/ in the world/ all]

bigueuk-gwa/ hwalgeuk-ui/ chulwonji-in./ i chilseong-mun/ bat/ binmingul-ro/

ogi/jeonggajineun./

[tragedy and/ of events/ epicenter/ this Chilseong gate / outside/ to slums/ coming/ before]

Bok-nyeo-ui/ bucheo-neun/ (sa-nong-gong-sang-ui/ je i-wi-e/ deuneun)/

[of Bok-nyeo/ the married couple/ (of scholar, farmer, artisans, and merchants/ the second highest class)/ ranking]

nongmin/ ieosseodda.5 (318)

[farmers/ had been]

【Translation 1-1】 Before they moved to the slums outside the Gate of Seven Stars—the epicenter of all the vices and tragedies of the world: fighting, adultery, murder, robbery, beggary and imprisonment—Poknyo, like her husband, had belonged to the respectable caste of farmer, which ranked just below the gentry and above the artisans and merchants in the social hierarchy. (Kang 2000:149)

【Translation 1-2】 Squabbling, adultery, murder, theft and imprisonment—all these things happened every day in this slum clustered around the Ch’ilsŏng Gate. Before Pok-nyŏ and her husband moved to this place, they lived among farmers who till and hoe the field all day long. (Chin 1970:78)⁶

【Translation 1-3】 Fighting, adultery, murder, theft, prison confinement—the shanty area outside the Seven Star Gate was a breeding ground for all that is tragic and violent in this world. Up to the time of coming there, Pok-nyŏ and her husband belonged to the second of the four traditional classes—scholar, farmer, tradesman, merchant—they were farmers. (O’Rourke 1981:85)

【Translation 1-4】 Strife, adultery, murder, thievery, begging, imprisonment—the slums outside the Ch’ilsŏng Gate of P’yongyang were a breeding ground for all the tragedy and violence of this world. Until Pongnyŏ and her husband

5. In terms of the Romanization of the Korean alphabet both in the source text and the basic text of my paper, I will follow the New Romanization System for the Korean Language proclaimed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2000, rather than the time-honored McCune-Reischauer system.

6. Of the four translations, all the translators except Bong-sik Kang use the McCune-Reischauer Romanization System for the Korean alphabet. Kang uses his own Romanization. (See “Boknyo” in Kang’s translation as an example.)

moved there they had been farmers, the second of the four classes (scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants) of society. (Rosenberg and Lee 1974:10)

Kang’s translation faithfully followed the sentence structure of the original text, which is composed of a single sentence, by using dashes as parentheses and neatly interpreting its meaning. However, the translation did not begin with the words “fighting, adultery, murder, robbery, beggary and imprisonment” as in the case of the source text, thus it failed to immediately strike the readers with a vivid picture of the turbulent background to the story. The other three translations faithfully followed the word order of the original text by starting with the six (or five according to the source text and the translation) nouns. The reason for the omission of the word “beggary” (*gugeol*) in Chin’s and O’Rourke’s translations seems to be attributed to the omission of the word in some newer versions of the source text.

One of the shortcomings in Chin’s translation — composed of two sentences — is that the translator did not consider the parenthetical part in the original text (*sa-nong-gong-sang-ui je i-wi-e deuneun*). The phrase, I believe, has an important symbolic meaning that shows Bok-nyeo, the main character, has ultimately fallen from the “second” highest class in society to the lowest class. As the story develops, Bok-nyeo goes through a great ordeal, including adultery, robbery, and beggary, and probably fighting according to the text. There is even a high probability that she might have committed murder and been imprisoned if she had lived longer. Chin instead adds a new phrase “who till and hoe the field all day long.” I believe, however, that it is the mission of the translator to convey the intention of the author to the readers of the target text in any language.

Moreover, O’Rourke changed the original two nouns — *bigeuk* (tragedies) and *hwalgeuk* (fighting) — into adjectives (“all that is ‘tragic’ and ‘violent’”) in his translation, which produces a weaker effect. Chin’s translation of the same phrase “all these things happened every day in this slum” is also weak in contrast to the original text. The two translations contrast with those of Kang (“the epicenter of all the vices and tragedies of the world”) and Rosenberg-Lee (“a breeding ground for all the tragedy and violence of this world”).

The translation by Rosenberg-Lee clearly divided the original text into two parts and is quite close to that of O’Rourke in pattern: the first being the fact that the slums were “a breeding ground for all the tragedy and violence of this world” and the second being that the Bok-nyeo couple “had been farmers, the second of the four classes.” Another example of the difference between literal and free translation is well manifested in the following example.

【Source text 2】 Chilseong-mun/ batgeul/ han burak-euro/ samgo/ geu gose/ mohyeo-inneun/

[Chilseong gate/ outside/ as the area of one settlement/ (they) established/ there/ gathered]

modeun saram-deurui/ jeongeop-eun/ georaji-o/ bueop-euroneun/ dojeokjil-gwa/

[of every people/ (their) principal job/ was beggary,/ as the secondary job/ robbery and]

(jaguineggiriui)/ mae-eum/ geu battggu/ i sesang-ui/ modeun museopgo/ deo-reoun

[(among themselves)/ prostitution,/ among others,/ of this world/ all horrible and/ dirty]

joe-ak/ deurieosseodda

[vicious things/ had been]

Bok-nyeo-do/ geu jeongeop/ euro/ nasseodda. (319)

[Boknyo,/ too,/ the major job/ to do/ went out]

【Traslation 2-1】 The occupants of the slums made a regular job of beggary and their side lines were robbery, theft, prostitution among themselves and any other dirty and vicious things. Poknyo picked up a regular job. (Kang 2000:156)

【Traslation 2-2】 ... where the people clustered in shabby shacks, engaging in begging, stealing (among themselves), prostitution and all other shames and crimes that one could possibly imagine in this kind of world. The first thing Poknyo started to do was to go out to the town for begging. (Chin 1970:81)

【Traslation 2-3】 Taking the area outside the Seven Star Gate as one community, the principal occupation of all the people that were gathered in that place was begging; as a secondary occupation they had thieving and (among themselves) prostitution, and apart from these occupations there were all the fearful, filthy crimes of this world. Pok-nyo also entered the principle occupation. (O'Rourke 1981:87-8)

【Traslation 2-4】 The main occupation of the people gathered there was begging, and their secondary pursuits were thieving and whoring among them-

selves. All the other terrible and sordid vices were practiced as well. Pongnyŏ started begging with the rest. (Rosenberg and Lee 1974:12)

O’Rourke faithfully translated *jeongeop* and *bueop* as “the principle occupation” and “a secondary occupation,” respectively, and Rosenberg and Lee used “the main occupation,” while Kang adopted the technique of free translation, “a regular job” and “their sidelines.” Chin, however, appears to take little consideration of the expression, purposely or not, in the translation. Chin mentioned instead “engaging in begging, stealing (among themselves), prostitution” and all other crimes. As if to imply the atmosphere of the time, Chin only mentioned “The first thing Pok-nyeo started to do,” focusing more on the aspect of time rather than space as the original text *jeongeop* and *bueop* (literally translated as “the principal job” and “the secondary job” each) suggested. Citing Hilaire Belloc who laid down six general rules for the translator of prose texts, Susan Bassnet says: “The translator must render ‘intention by intention’ bearing in mind that ‘the intention of a phrase in one language may be more emphatic.’ By ‘intention,’ Belloc seems to be talking about the weight a given expression may have in a particular context in the SL (source language) that would be disproportionate if translated literary into the TL (target language)” (Bassnet 1983:116).

【Source Text 3】 *Ilbon-mallo/ hajamyeon/ sambakja/ gajeun/ joheun ireun.*
 [In Japanese words/ to say it/ three beats/ like/ the good news]

igeobbun/ ieodda. (322)
 [only this one/ was]

【Translation 3-1】 It was killing three birds with one stone. (Kang 2000:164)

【Translation 3-2】 *No translation*

【Translation 3-3】 If you were to put it in Japanese it was the grace of three beats to the bar, that’s what it was. (O’Rourke 1981:91)

【Translation 3-4】 If I were to describe it in other terms, it was “a waltz through life” … (Rosenberg and Lee 1974:15)

Chin omitted this part in the translation, and O’Rourke here again translated the original text literally. While Kang decided to go with an English counterpart, Rosenberg and Lee took a more dramatic approach by using “a waltz through life.” Each of the strategies above depends on the philosophy of the respective translators. What is important is which side the translators should take between

the original source text and the target readers. Ahn Hye-young says that translators, in terms of the long-standing debate about translators' freedom to depart from stylistic norms of a source text, can have a leeway in choosing the linguistic form.

To what extent a translator is justified in departing from the stylistic norms of a source text is a subject of long-standing debate. Doubtlessly, however, the translator must have a certain amount of leeway in choosing the linguistic forms to convey the intended meanings. This is where the creative freedom of the translator can be best exerted. (Ahn 1995:21)

When it comes to the translation of literary texts, however, it is more recommendable for translators to take a faithful approach to the original text. It is because, unlike practical texts, literary works contain the intentions of the respective authors, and the translator's job is to convey them to the readers. Peter Newmark is in favor of word-for-word translation both in communicative and in semantic translations. He says:

In communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation. (Newmark 1981:39)

Eugene A. Nida, however, cautions translators that leaning towards the extreme end of either literal or free translation might be dangerous. He says:

Though there is a relatively wide range of possible legitimate translation beginning with somewhat literal F-E (Formal Equivalent) renderings to rather highly D-E (Dynamic Equivalent) ones, there are certain points on both ends of this scale at which extremely F-E or D-E translations fall off rapidly in efficiency, accuracy, and relevance. (Nida 1964:183)

Thus, the proper strategy of translators cannot be overly emphasized as they represent the voice of an author. Although even translation theorists differ in their opinions with regard to the choice between literal translation and free translation, there is no definitive answer. Thus, the skills of translators based on their translating experiences and know-how are very important.

2. Translations of Korean Cultural Terms in English

Katherine Barnwell indicated three strategies existing in translating words or expressions related to the culture of the source text that are not closely akin to the culture of the target language (Yu 1980:23). The first strategy is to describe them in several words, while the second is to use them as they are. The third is to find equivalents in the opposite culture and completely change the words into those of the counterpart culture (Yu 1980:23). Using the Korean dish *kimchi* as an example, the first strategy would render it as “spicy pickled cabbage,” while the second and the third one would employ *kimchi* and “cheese,” respectively. We may find “cheese” as having the closest equivalent to *kimchi* in Western cultures in that they are both fermented and the most prevalent and favored dishes. In most cases, the first strategy is the most desired one. However, when it comes to the translation of metrics and denominations as well as numerical signs and measurements, the second method is widely used. Here are some examples.

【Source text 4】 *Geu-ui/ sae seobang ... iraneun saram-eun ... abeoji-ui sidae-eneun/*

[Her/ new husband ... if we call him so . . . in (his) father’s era]

batto myeot-majigi-ga/ isseosseuna. ... palsib-won-i./ geu-ui/ majimak jaesan/ ieossedda. (318)

[several *majigi* of field/ there were . . . 80 won/ his/ last fortune/ had been]

【Translation 4-1】 Her bridegroom,..... was the son of a well-to-do farmer with a few acres of land. finally there was only eighty dollars left. (Kang 2000:151)

【Translation 4-2】 The bridegroom, was a descendant of a rich farmer who had had many acres of forest land..... The 80 *won*.....were the last he could make from his properties and belongings. (Chin 1970:79)

【Translation 4-3】 The man who was her bridegroom.....although formerly in his father’s time.....with even several *majigi* of land.....in the end the eighty wŏn was his last possession. (O’Rourke 1981:86)

【Translation 4-4】 Her bridegroom in his father’s time, the family had been farmers of considerable means and owned several plots of land. the eighty wŏn ... was the last of his estate. (Rosenberg and Lee 1974:11)

O'Rourke employed Barnwell's second strategy by using *majigi*, and added a footnote, which says "*Majigi*—a measurement of land, about 7500 sq. feet" (O'Rourke 1981:86). Kang and Chin used the third strategy by expressing "a few acres of land" and "many acres of forest land" respectively. Rosenberg and Lee took an acceptable road by rendering the word into the phrase "several plots of land."

Another example of using the third strategy is the translation of 80 won⁷ by O'Rourke, Chin, and Rosenberg-Lee. The three groups translated it into either "eighty wŏn" or "80 won." Kang, however, translated the term into "eighty dollars" which appears to be more dynamic but at the sacrifice of losing the present value of the currency. We can think of the strategy of using "won/wŏn" and adding a footnote at the bottom as O'Rourke did in the translation of *majigi*.

Other examples of the translation of Korean cultural terms include *maggan* (*haengnang*) *sari* whose translation differs for each group of translators.

【Source text 5】 *geudeureun/ yohaeng./ eoddeonjip/ maggan (haengnang)/ sari-ro/*

[they/ by chance/ (in) a certain house/ servants' quarters (a residents' room)/ as a life of]

deureogage/ doeyeodda. (319)

[enter into/ happened to]

【Translation 5-1】 ... he was fortunate enough to get engaged as a resident coolie in a wealthy family. (Kang 2000:153)

【Translation 5-2】 ... by chance, they happened to find an opening in a place where both of them could be hired as servants. (Chin 1970:80)

【Translation 5-3】 ... by bit of luck they managed to get into servant's quarters in a certain house. (O'Rourke 1981:87)

【Translation 5-4】 ... through sheer luck, they entered a household as live-in servants. (Rosenberg and Lee 1974:11)

7. *Won* is a unit of Korean currency. £1 currently equals roughly 1,900 won/ \$1 equals roughly 950 won. But it had a considerably higher value during the days when this short story was written.

The word *haengnang sari* refers to “getting permission to live in a *haengnang* room in another’s house in return for a promise to work as a servant for a certain period.” The word *haengnang* means a room attached to the main gate of a house. The translations of O’Rourke and Rosenberg-Lee appear to be faithful to the original text, while Kang’s rendering of “coolie” is a little bit awkward but, nevertheless, interesting as it means “an unskilled worker who is paid very little money, especially in parts of Asia.”

3. Different Translations Resulting From Ambiguity or Selective Omissions of the “Subject” (S)

In Korean-to-English translation, one of the main factors for different translations originates from the ambiguity of a Korean sentence. This ambiguity sometimes derives from the selective omission of subjects (in Parts of Speech) in the Korean language.

【Source text 6】 *Bok-nyeo-neun/ wollae./ ganan-eun/ hanama/ jeongjikhhan/*
[Boknyo/ originally/ poor,/ but/ honest]

nongga-eseo./ gyucheuk-itge./ jaranan/ cheonyeo/ yeosseodda. (318)
[in a farming family/ under the discipline/ brought up/ a girl/ was]

【Translation 6-1】 She had been decently brought up in a poor yet honest farming family that had shed the strict dignity of the gentry……. (Kang 2000:149)

【Translation 6-2】 Pok-nyō’s father was a poor farmer, but she had been brought up in the clean and honest climate of a family. (Chin 1970:78)

【Translation 6-3】 Pok-nyō had always been poor but she was a girl who had grown up under the discipline of an upright farm home. (O’Rourke 1981:85)

【Translation 6-4】 As a young girl Pongnyō was reared strictly in a poor but moral farm family. (Rosenberg and Lee 1974:10)

Although *nongga* (farming family) is modified by *ganan-eun hanama jeongjikhhan* (poor but honest) according to the sentence structure of the original Korean text, Chin and O’Rourke interpreted the part very differently than the interpretations of Kang and Rosenberg-Lee, which I think are more proper. The

Rosenberg-Lee team translated *jeongjikhhan* into “moral,” not honest, for example, but this is also reasonable.

This type of difference comes directly from the misinterpretation of the original text and largely from the ambiguity of the original text. Another example clearly shows us the problem caused by the omission of subjects in Korean sentences. The following does not specify a particular subject. Neither *Bok-nyeo* nor *ryangin* (or *jangin*) serves as the main subject of the sentence.

【Source text 7】 *Bok-nyeo-ga/ sijibeul gan/ dui/ han samsa-nyeon-eun./*
[Bok-nyo/ got married/ after/ for three to four years]

ryangin-ui⁸/ deoktaek-euro/ ireong-jeoreong/ jinaegaseuna./ ijeon seonbae-ui/
[of (his) father-in-law/ thanks to the grace/ manage to/ get along, (but)/ of the former gentleman-scholar family]

ggori-in/ jangin-eun./ chacha/ sawi-reul/ mipge bogi/ sijakhayeodda. (318)
[was the last trace/ the father-in-law (who)/ gradually/ his son-in-law /despise / began to]

【Translation 7-1】 Some three years after their marriage he had managed to get along with the help of his father-in-law, who, a member of the gentry by birth, slowly began to despise him. (Kang 2000:153)

【Translation 7-2】 In some three or four years following the marriage, he would ask favors from his father-in-law, Pok-nyō’s father, whose patience toward this idler had come to an end. (Chin 1970:79)

【Translation 7-3】 Thanks to the goodness of her father, Pok-nyō managed to get by one way or another for three or four years after marriage, but little by little, even the old man, although he still had a bit of the gentleman-scholar about him, began to look with distaste on his son-in-law. (O’Rourke 1981:86)

【Translation 7-4】 After Pongnyō married him, they survived for three or four years, thanks only to her father’s aid; but even he, the last of the old-time scholars, began bit by bit to regard his son-in-law with hatred. (Rosenberg and Lee

8. *Ryangin* in the original source text should be interpreted as today’s *jangin* (father-in-law) and the more recent versions of the text that I have found all use the latter version. Besides, it appears to be proper from the context of the sentence.

1974:11)

O’Rourke differs in his interpretation of the subject of the sentence as he sees Bok-nyeo as the subject of the predicate “managed to get by one way or another for three or four years.” The original sentence appears to have multiple subjects: Bok-nyeo, her husband, and *ryangin* (*jangin*, father-in-law). The main subject that can be inferred from the structure of the sentence is Bok-nyeo’s husband (or the son-in-law). Rosenberg and Lee again take an acceptable road by interpreting the subject of the main sentence as “they” or the couple.

O’Rourke uses a compound sentence by incorporating the conjunction “but,” and his translation, like many other parts, is very lengthy — fifty words in the example above. His translation is quite different than Kang who uses thirty-one words, a succinct and concise restructuring of the sentences. Song Yo-in remarks on the optional deletion of the subject in a Korean sentence.

“The optional deletion of the subject in a Korean sentence is a constant source of ambiguity. In most cases the subject can be inferred from the context, intonation, gestures and the level of honorifics used. But in literary works of art one often encounters passages where such optional deletions have rendered the meaning unduly ambiguous. (Song 1984:93)

In the Korean language, the optional deletion of the subject in a sentence is customary, while in English, such a case is rarely found. This may not be a major issue in normal communication, but when it comes to the translation of a Korean text into English, the translator must pay a great deal of attention to handling the optional deletion of the subject because, for foreigners, it is “a constant source of ambiguity.” Especially in the translation of literary works, translators encounter many passages in which optional deletions render the understanding highly ambiguous, as Song suggested.

4. Translation of Titles and Names

According to Paul Kussmaul, titles are used, among other things, to give “an idea of what a text is about” and the translation of titles is important “because they are prominent utterances, because they refer to very large textual units” (Kussmaul 1995:142). The three translated titles — two “The Potatoes,” one “Potatoes” and the other “Potato” — are slightly different, or to put it more con-

cretely, they show the difference in the use of the definite article “the” and the plurals. However, the reason why I elaborate on the title here lies more in the original meaning behind the title “Gamja.” Let me first quote the relevant source text. For the sake of convenience, I will introduce only O’Rourke’s translation, which I think is a faithful word-for-word translation.

【Source text 8】 *Chilseong-mun-bat binmingul-ui nyeoin-deureun, gaeul-i doemyeon, chilseong-mun-batge inneun, jinain-ui chaemabat-e, gamja-myeo baechae-reul dojeok-jil haryeo bame baguni-reul gajigo ganda. Bok-nyeo-do gamja-gaena jal dojeok-jil hayeodda.*

Eoddeon-nal bam, geuneun gamja-reul han-baguni jal dojeok-jil-hayeo gajigo, injeon dora-oryeogo nireoseol ddae-e, geu-ui dui-e siggeomeun geurimja-ga nireoseomyeonsoe geu-reul ggeok buddeureodda. (323)

【Translation 8】 When autumn comes, the women in the shanty area outside the Seven Star Gate go out at night carrying baskets to steal potatoes and cabbage from a Chinese-vegetable garden which is beyond the Seven Star Gate. Pok-nyŏ also made a practice of stealing potatoes and the like.

One night after she had successfully stolen a basket of potatoes, and as she was rising to her feet about to go home, a black shadow standing behind her grabbed her tight. (O’Rourke 1981:92) [Underlined parts are writer’s emphasis.]

The 1925 edition mentions only “*gamja*.” Other recently published Korean editions, however, use “*gamja*” (potatoes) and “*goguma*” (sweet potatoes) concurrently, sometimes using parentheses.⁹ With regard to this, Youe Mahn-gunn doubts how potatoes could be dug up in Pyongyang, the setting of the story and the current capital of North Korea, where it is considerably colder in autumn. In Korea, potatoes usually grow in early summer and sweet potatoes grow in the fall. According to Youe, when we realize that “potatoes” is the dialect for “sweet potatoes” in that region, the confusion becomes clear. Youe says that the main content of the short story is that Pok-nyeo steals sweet potatoes several times, and after being caught by Mr. Wang, she comes in contact with his body whose

9. I will introduce the three versions, including the 1925 edition, which mention either *gamja* or *goguma*, or both by using parentheses. The following sentences are the Korean texts of the sentences in the above-mentioned 【Source text 8】.

metaphor is “sweet potatoes” (the symbol of a man), not “potatoes” (Youe 1999:11). Tragedy strikes only after she realizes that she does not want to lose him and wants to have exclusive possession of him. Thus, the suggestion that the proper translation of the original title “Gamja” should have been “Sweet Potatoes” is convincing, though it is difficult to figure out the intention of the author who only mentioned *gamja*. In the end, the translator should carefully examine the original meaning of the source text, considering the context under which it is used.

With regard to the Korean names of the characters, one of the story’s ironies is the name of the main character, Bok-nyeo.¹⁰ Unlike the meaning of her name, she is an ill-fortuned woman. My point is that, by directly transferring the name into English, we cannot satisfactorily convey the irony embodied in her name. However, we cannot translate the name into an English style — like “Lady of Fortune” or “Lady of Blessing” — because it is a proper noun. Here again we need to map out some strategies for using footnotes. Song Yo-in says that, in this

9. Continuation

Texts		Comments
1	<p>칠성문밖 빈민굴의 여인들은 가을이 되면, 칠성문밖에 있는, 支那人의 채마밭에, <u>감자</u>며 배채를 도적질하러 밤에 바구니를 가지고 간다. 복녀도, 감자시개나 잘 도적질 하여왔다.</p> <p>옛날 밤, 그는 <u>감자</u>를 한바구니 잘 도적질하여 가지고, 인젠 도라오려고 니러설때에, 그의 뒤에 식검은 그림자가 니러서면서, 그를 꺾 붓드렸다. (<i>Joseon Mundan</i> 323, L 1-2)</p>	<p>The 1925 edition uses Chinese characters and lots of old-style expressions. It consistently uses <i>gamja</i> in this part.</p>
2	<p>칠성문 밖 빈민굴의 여인들은 가을이 되면 칠성문 밖에 있는 중국인의 채마밭 에 <u>감자</u>(<u>고구마</u>)며 배채를 도적질하러 밤에 바구니를 가지고 간다. 복녀도 감자개나 잘 도적질하여왔다.</p> <p>어떤 날 밤, 그는 <u>감자</u>를 한 바구니 잘 도적질하여 가지고, 이젠 돌아오려고 일어설 때에, 그의 뒤에 시꺼먼 그림자가 서서 그를 꺾 붙들었다. (<i>Changbi</i> 288, L 2-8)</p>	<p>This text uses <i>gamja</i> (<i>goguma</i>) and <i>gamja</i> in two subsequent sentences.</p>
3	<p>칠성문 밖 빈민굴의 여인들은 가을이 되면 칠성문 밖에 있는 중국인의 채마밭에 <u>감자</u>(<u>고구마</u>)며 배채를 도적질하러 밤에 바구니를 가지고 간다. 복녀도 감자개나 잘 도적질해 왔다.</p> <p>어떤 날 밤, 그는 <u>고구마</u>를 한 바구니 잘 도둑하여 가지고, 이젠 돌아오려고 일어설 때에, 그의 뒤에 시꺼먼 그림자가 서서 그를 꺾 붙들었다. (<i>Cheongmoksa</i> 11, L 14-20)</p>	<p>This text uses <i>gamja</i> (<i>goguma</i>) and <i>goguma</i> in two subsequent sentences.</p>

* Underlined parts are writer’s emphasis.

10. “Bok” [福] means “fortune” or “happiness” in Chinese and “nyeo” [女] means “woman” in general, “a girl” or “a lady.”

case, the only possible leverage that the translator has “would be to affix a note either as footnote information or inside a parenthesis after the word” (Song 1984:95). It, therefore, would be recommendable to add a footnote at the bottom of the page or an endnote at the end of the text.

In a similar example, we may translate *Chilseong-mun* as either “the Chilseong Gate” or “the Seven Star Gate.”¹¹ However, we should not forget that *chilseong* in *Chilseong-mun* is a proper noun. Therefore, there should be some recommendable strategies including that of using *Chilseong-mun* or “Chilseong Gate” and adding a footnote to explain the cultural meaning of *chilseong* (seven stars) in Korea.

All of the comparisons and criticisms made thus far have been aimed at investigating ways of translating Korean literature into English in the framework of related translation theories, and to resolve the difficulties and mistakes that occur in the process of Korean-to-English translation. The difficulties of translation are caused by differences in both the language structure and the social and cultural environment. Therefore, translators of literary works should focus on both “text” and “context” in order to better convey the thoughts of the author.

Conclusion

Having analyzed four different translations of “Gamja” by Kim Dong-in, I have concluded that O’Rourke’s version has most faithfully followed the original sentences of the source text word-for-word. The translation by Rosenberg-Lee came closer to O’Rourke’s by trying to be faithful to the source text, but sometimes took a middle road. Kang’s translation is similar to that of Rosenberg-Lee in terms of style, but he sometimes used his own style by incorporating English expressions like “killing three birds with one stone” and “dollars.” Chin was comparatively freer in either deleting or adding words to the original text than other translators. In some cases, translators seemed to have difficulty in understanding the deep structure of the source text, which is partially caused by the ambiguity of the Korean language.

11. “Chil” [七] and “seong” [星] mean “seven” and “star,” respectively, and “mun” [門] means “gate.”

Furthermore, I have discussed the differences between literal translation and free translation as it is one of the most critical issues among translators and translation students, especially in the area of literary translation. In the translation of literary texts, it is more recommendable for the translators to be faithful to the original text. As even the major theorists of translation differ in their opinions with regard to literal translation and free translation, there is no definitive and conclusive answer. Thus, the skills of translators based on their experiences and know-how are very important.

I also mentioned some of the major difficulties in Korean-to-English translations in the field of culture and language. In the culture section, I focused on the translations of cultural terms citing the strategies of Barnwell, while the language part mainly dealt with the ambiguity and the selective omission of the subject in Korean sentences. From this research, I have drawn the following conclusions.

First, I have found out that, in the translation of Korean literature in English, the problem of mistranslation and omission is caused by a lack of a full understanding of the source text. Thorough understanding of the source text, both in language and culture, will surely minimize the occurrences of mistranslations and best represent the intention of the author. Translating a literary work can be compared to the job of guiding tourists through a foreign country that is unknown to them. Thus, the role of literary translators is important as they represent the voice of the respective author. Furthermore, a proper selection of the source text and its perfect understanding are utterly necessary.

Second, translators should map out effective strategies such as utilizing footnotes or endnotes as in the case of O'Rourke. As there are limits to transferring the original meaning of the source text into the target text and differing opinions with regard to the adoption of word-for-word translation and free translation, the proper strategy of translators based on their philosophy cannot be emphasized too much as they have the mission of best representing the author's voice.

Third, understanding the culture is just as important as mastering or commanding the language. As we have seen in the four translations, some of the problems occurred from misunderstandings of culture and from the differences in languages. If a translator is not well versed in the Korean culture, the translator will have an excruciating time to logically convey the culture-bound texts into English, as translation involves the task of translating the language of a different culture.

Translation is a form of intercultural communication. Translation is also an

ever-renewing process that can hardly attain perfection. However, any theories or methods, if divorced from the actual practice and taken to the extreme, will be of little use in improving translation techniques. Translation is one of the best ways to introduce Korean culture abroad in this age of globalization when transcultural communication is ever emphasized. Thus the active translation of quality Korean literary works and their publication can surely contribute a lot to introducing Korea's rich cultural legacy and heritage to foreign countries.

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