

LOOKING IN: REFLECTIONS OF OWN AND OTHER CULTURE IN THE LEARNING JOURNAL

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Abstract: *This study provides extracts from the students' learning journals and discusses themes which emerged in student learning journals in the areas of reflection of the two languages and cultures, considerations of the target reader and critical reflection of one's own translation. The data shows that the learning journal in the translation classroom provides ample room for reflection of source and target culture, opening up doors for intercultural discussion and contemplation. Undergraduate students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea were asked to submit a final project for their Korean into English translation class. Students could choose between two texts which both contained culture-specific lexis. They were to work on the text as a group of two or three. The complete process from start to finish was to be recorded in a learning journal, with dates included. The completed project was to include a schedule plan for the project, translation drafts and the learning journal detailing the complete process. Results suggest a close relationship between the translation of CSL and intercultural competence (Byram, 2000) and the role of the learning journal in eliciting students' reflection on aspects related to considerations of source and target text cultures.*

Keywords: *reflection, own culture, other culture, translation, learning journal, culture-specific lexis*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reflection is a form of mental processing that is used to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess (Moon, 1999). The learning journal has been applied to various fields, and Using a reflective learning journal can promote students' critical and reflective thinking (Li, 1998). An advantage of the learning journal is that it can draw students' attention to the process of translation (Li, 1998). A study based on postgraduate students of translation and interpreting studies in South Korea found that through the journal, students were able to analyze, review, set goals and recognize change and development. The learning journal fulfilled its purpose of providing room for students to reflect upon their own work and progress, and through reflection they were able to work towards their development as translators (Lee, 2014). This study looks at learning journal excerpts from students' studying a Korean into English translation class at a university in Seoul, and focuses on their contemplations of the translation of culture-

specific words contained within the source text. The translation of culture-specific lexis (CSL) requires communicative and intercultural awareness. Working with two or more languages and cultures, translators need to have such awareness and furthermore, be able to draw on existing knowledge and resources to effectively communicate between the source and target text cultures.

This study provides extracts from the students' learning journals and discusses themes which emerged in student learning journals in the areas of reflection of the two languages and cultures, considerations of the target reader and critical reflection of one's own translation. The data shows that the learning journal in the translation classroom provides ample room for reflection of source and target culture, opening up doors for intercultural discussion and contemplation.

2. MAIN TEXT

2.1 Background to the study. The relationship between translation and globalization has been an area attracting profound interest in recent years (cf. Cronin, 2003, 2006; Ho, 2008). There is no doubt that there is an important link between intercultural competence and translator competence. Learners

dealing with translation (i.e. translation studies students) are often working with one L2 or more, and as such the ‘language learners’ discussed here naturally includes translation studies students or translator trainees.

The discussion of translation competence is not new and has been widely discussed in translation studies and translator training (Adab, 2000; Alves and Goncalves, 2007; Campbell, 1998; Colina, 2003; Kelly, 2005; PACTE group, 2003, 2011; Presas, 2000; Pym, 2003; Schäffner and Adab, 2000; Way, 2008). The definition of translator competence is far from straightforward, and various models of translator competence have been presented in translator training research (cf. Gile, 2009; Kelly, 1998, 2002, 2005; Neubert, 1994, 2000; PACTE, 2003). It is defined by Kelly as the macro-competence which constitutes the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes which professional translators use (Kelly, 2005), and her model includes communicative and textual competence in at least two languages; cultural competence; subject area competence; instrumental and professional competence; psycho-physiological or attitudinal competence; interpersonal competence and strategic competence. Among these many competences, cultural competence and communicative competence in at least two languages is particularly relevant to today’s translating studies student and L2 learner.

Considering today’s globalised world, it can be said that communicative competence is a particularly important required quality for translators. As Hatim and Mason (1990) point out, the translator’s communicative competence is attuned to what is communicatively appropriate in both source language (SL) and target language (TL) communities (Hatim and Mason, 1990:33). Therefore, as L2 learners who are also translating studies students working with the culture of two languages, it is especially important to be communicatively competent. This is directly related to intercultural competence, which is the

ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality (Byram *et al.*, 2002:10).

The translation of culture-specific lexis is one task which requires mediation between languages and cultures and the abilities to meet the objectives outlined in Byram’s ICC model (1997). As pointed out by Kelly (1998), translation decisions taken

often serve to reinforce and perpetuate stereotypical constructions of the source culture, thus preventing, rather than furthering, intercultural understanding. As such, the way such culture-specific lexis is handled is an important factor in the translation process as it directly affects the finished translation product and can either hinder or aid intercultural communication.

Culture-specific lexis refers to items in a text which are deemed to be unique to a particular culture, and may pose problems for translation from the source text (ST) into target text (TT). These items are a challenging area for translation as the way these are dealt with directly affects the finished product – potential problems could be, for example, what Venuti (1998) calls the ‘foreignization’, when the characteristics of a text unique to the source text culture are preserved as much as possible at the sake of readability, or on the opposite side, ‘domestication’ of a text. A problem translators face is the question of how to deal with cultural aspects which are contained in a source text, and finding the most appropriate way to successfully convey these in the target text. Culture-specific lexis can include those culture references which may be part of a culture’s daily life, within the society of which that culture’s members share a set of values, beliefs, ideas and knowledge, and which they have direct access to.

2.2 Research Question. The following question is investigated in this paper: What considerations of the source and target text cultures can be observed in the learning journals of students learning Korean into English translation, particularly in relation to the translation of culture-specific lexis (CSL)?

2.3 Methodology. The students were undergraduates at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, where one of the authors was employed as a faculty member. The university is well-known for its teaching in foreign language subjects. The students were taking an Introduction to Korean into English Translation class, which was one semester (16 weeks) long. Although they were all taking the same class, the students’ majors were different, with students majoring in English interpreting and translation, English linguistics, business studies, management and such. During the semester, students had practice translating texts from Korean into English, and the topic for the text to be translated was different each week, according to the syllabus. Topics included society, culture and tourism, business and such. Students also had assignments every week: they would translate a

text which was based on that week's topic, and submit a first draft. In the following week there would be a group presentation based on that week's assignment text, and students were able to share any difficulties encountered and hear others' opinions. Following the presentation, students worked in small groups and had either peer editing or self editing sessions which were followed by group discussions. During the discussions they would talk about their own and other student's first drafts. After that day's class, students would then submit a revised version of their first draft, along with a learning journal entry.

Towards the end of the semester, students were asked to submit a final project. Two texts based on topics already covered during the semester were provided, and students could choose between the two, either Culture and Tourism or Society. They were to work on the text as a group of two or three. The complete process from start to finish was to be recorded in a learning journal, with dates included. The completed project was to include a schedule plan for the project, translation drafts and the learning journal detailing the complete process.

The translation brief for the Culture and Tourism topic text stated the following: You have been asked to translate the following for the national tourism office. The text is the opening chapter of a book for promotional use. The Society topic text had the following instructions: you have been asked to translate the following for a UK-based government organization which is interested in the social trends in Asian countries.

The culture and tourism text provided for the final project was a text the teacher had translated herself previously. The text was chosen for its storytelling style, and also because of its 'Koreanness'. Although the actual words used in the text were not so difficult, there was the challenge of how to translate words which were specific to Korean culture to a target audience of tourists or potential visitors to Korea. The society text was from a news article, and as such had a very different tone to the culture and tourism text. While the style itself may have been more straightforward, there were some words which were challenging for the students to translate. Two such different texts were chosen with the students' varied disciplines in mind.

No particular emphasis was made on the CSL contained within the texts for the final project; however, students had encountered and dealt with CSL in previous translation texts over the course of the semester.

The learning journal for the students in South Korea contained the following suggested questions: 1) How do your drafts differ? What changes were made, and for what reasons? Give details. 2) Describe the translation process and give details (e.g. background information research, editing etc. 3) Any problems or difficulties encountered. They were also encouraged to write about any other points which came to mind.

The learning journal excerpts were then thematically analysed using the software Nvivo and the CSL-related entries extracted for further analysis.

2.4 Findings and Discussion. This section presents excerpts from the data to answer the research question proposed in this paper. The excerpts are presented in their original form to preserve the students' voices, although the romanization and translation for the Korean have been added. The students are referred to by numbers to preserve anonymity.

2.4.1 Reflection of the source and target text cultures

We had to discuss whether there is exact counterpart English word for *seywel* 'time'. There were a lot of translated results for this word, including 'history', 'time', 'the trace of time', 'the stream of time', and even 'seywel' as it is pronounced. Bill voiced optimism using the word 'seywel', but Mina and I thought it is a bit weird, because, although the *seywel* 'time' has special mixed feelings to Korean, it is not a universal concept of all people. (Student 10)

Reflection on both languages and cultures is found in the data. The above excerpt shows how the students considered the CSL '*seywel*'. The word can mean 'time' on a basic level, but when heard by Korean L1 speakers, it carries a meaning which surpasses 'time' at a denotative level, and contains connotations which relate to 'years', 'history' and the 'passing of time'. As such, it poses a challenge for the translator; as the student mentions here, which word to use is a dilemma as the word "has special mixed feelings" for Koreans, the connotations may not translate to the target reader - L1 speakers of a different language, from a different culture.

The excerpt below also shows similar contemplation from the student:

Also I was not sure that foreigners are familiar with markets and if the word market means the same things as *sicang* 'market' or not. I thought about translating both *sicang* 'market' and *centhongsicang*

'traditional market' to traditional market, but it might be too different from the source text and I could not know for sure if the 'writer considered *sicang* 'market' and *centhongsicang* 'traditional market' as the same thing or not. So at the end, I decided to follow the source text. (Student 2)

The excerpt shows how the student is considering the two cultures, source and text, in the translation of the CSL *sicang* 'market' and *centhongsicang* 'traditional market'. She is also wondering whether the English word 'market' means the same thing as the Korean equivalent. The student regards *sicang* and *centhongsicang* to be the same thing, as they both refer to an open, uncovered market, but she mentions how she was unsure whether she can use the same word 'market' to cover the two.

The excerpts in this section show how translation tasks involving culture-specific words enabled the students to consider both source and target cultures, and whether the translation of a word which may be culture-specific can convey any connotations it may carry.

2.4.2 Thinking about the Target Reader. The translation of CSL also enables students to think about the target reader and decide how to translate for the target reader accordingly. This can be seen in the following excerpts.

The text itself was not that hard but culture specific items like *centhongsicang* 'traditional market' or *seywel* 'time' made it harder because the target readers were foreigners. (Student 2)

The data shows the student's concern for the target reader. Although short, the excerpt shows how CSL enabled the student to think about the target readers; it is explicitly mentioned that, because such words are culture-specific, they made the translation task more challenging as the target readers were foreigners.

Student 2's excerpt from the previous section also shows contemplation of the target reader. The student mentions that while Koreans may know that the words refer to the same thing, she is not sure whether target readers from a different culture would understand that they refer to the same thing:

What made me worried was that all Koreans know that both are the same place but foreigners would not know that. Also I was not sure that foreigners are familiar with markets and if the word market means the same things as *sicang* 'market' or not. (Student 2)

In the excerpt below, the same student shows awareness of the translation brief (which stated the text was for the opening chapter of a tourism promotion book, and decides to leave the *hangul* (Korean characters) in the translated text:

However, I thought since the translated text is for foreigners who are going to visit Korea, I wanted them to know how they can write *caylaysiaicang* 'open market' in Korean. I thought even if they do not know how to write it, having Korean letters with them would help them to find the way to traditional markets when they actually come to Korea and travel around. Therefore, in the third draft, I put *caylaysiaicang* 'open market' in Korean. (Student 2)

As this section shows, the learning journal provided a space for students to reflect on their translation of CSL in relation to the target reader. As they were given a translation brief which specified the target reader, they were able to explore and investigate how to render words containing culture-specificity.

2.4.3 Critical Reflection of One's Own Translation. Finally, the translation of CSL also allows students scope to reflect critically on their own translations, as can be seen in the excerpts in this section.

In the source text, I do not know why but it seemed like *sicang* 'market' and *centhongsicang* 'traditional market' is kind of separated and it made me think a lot. (Student 2)

Excerpt 3 shows how the student considers the two words 'market' and 'traditional market'. The student feels the words are referred to separately i.e. as in not both simply meaning 'market' and as such mentions how this made her think a lot about the meanings of the words during their translation.

Below, the student considers the differences in nuance between two source text words, *paykswu* 'unemployed: informal' and *siloepca* 'unemployed'. Although on a basic denotative level, the words both refer to 'unemployed person/people', they differ in that the former is more colloquial and informal and the latter the standard word:

In fact, even the first word, *sasilsang paykswu* 'real unemployed' was really hard to translate. Because there is a difference nuance between *paykswu* 'unemployed: informal' and *siloepca* 'unemployed'. (Student 5)

The student considers his translations during the revision process. He mentions how in the first draft he had simply translated word for word, and proceeds to contemplate the meaning of *seywel*, 'time':

But the real change was about 'time' and 'memory'. In the first draft, I just wrote that local markets are different because they have people's 'time.' It was just word-to-word translation. But when it comes to the concept of 'time.' The markets should have the exact time people experienced. But even the markets change. People would see something special in the local market, but it's not the same thing they had. They're not 'the things' but evocative images. They're similar things. Under this context, I thought it's even wrong to say it has just 'time'.

Literally, *seywel* 'time', can be translated to 'time' and that was what I did in the first draft. However, we all thought that it is a little different from just 'time' because it contains the meaning of time that has past and trace of that time. Translating to 'trace of time' was the best choice I could think of even though I was completely satisfied with it because I could not think of better way and could not find parallel texts for *seywel* 'time'. (Student 9)

The student considers deeply the meaning of '*seywel*', which he translated into 'time' in his first draft. However, as the project proceeded he thought more and more about this word, and with his peers also agreed that it was not the same as simply the word 'time', although at denotative level they may be equivalent. Hence, in his later version he opts for a different translation of the word: 'trace of time', although he mentions he is not fully satisfied with this: it is difficult for him to find a target text word which conveys the connotations '*seywel*' carries.

This section has shown how the translation of CSL enabled students to critically reflect upon their own translations and to ponder the words in source texts to explore suitable ways to convey the connotations into the target text.

3. CONCLUSION & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper has presented excerpts from the end-of-semester projects of undergraduate students studying Korean into English translation. It has attempted to explore how the translation of CSL and the recording of their thoughts in a learning journal enabled students to ponder and explore the way they translated, particularly in relation to reflections of the source and target text cultures

and the target reader. It is hoped this paper has opened up doors for the contemplation of using culture-specific lexis in translation tasks and the reflective learning journal to build on and develop students' intercultural awareness.

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