

# Evaluating Translations of Korean Literature: Current Status, Rationale, Purposes and Opportunities

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*Zhodnotenie prekladov kórejskej literatúry: súčasný stav, odôvodnenie, zámery a príležitosti*

*Resumé* Štúdia ponúka poznatky, ktoré autor získal pri podrobnom čítaní prekladov kórejskej literatúry do nemeckého a anglického jazyka. Výsledky predstavujú príspevok ku komparatívnemu štúdiu jazykových a štylistických charakteristických znakov (štýl *langue*) týchto troch jazykov. Môžu poslúžiť pre potreby vzdelávania, keďže predstavujú konkrétne prípadové štúdie. Takisto môžu poslúžiť na zdôraznenie kultúrnych rozdielov v myslení a zdanlivo samozrejímavých domnienkach na strane autorov ako aj prekladateľov. Výsledky tejto štúdie ponúkajú aj originálny prínos pre posúdenie poetológie významných kórejských spisovateľov.

*Keywords* Korea, Literature · Translation · Translation Criticism · Translation Evaluation, Criteria

## I

Evaluating how well or how poorly Korean literature is translated into Western languages is something that has not been done comprehensively until now. Access to evaluations written for those major institutions that support the translation of Korean literature into Western languages is deliberately restricted (the present writer attempted in vain to obtain permission to try such an »evaluation of evaluations«), which is regrettable.<sup>1</sup> A plea is hereby made for

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1 These top secret evaluations are, all the more interestingly, written at several different stages:

increased transparency and the chance to openly discuss such evaluations. Notwithstanding the likely complications (any attempt at evaluating evaluations might, if not handled with the utmost delicacy, clash with the demand for analyst's and translator's anonymity—which of course has to be preserved), it would in principle be beneficial to enable the discussion of the verdict on a given translation. Such discussions of evaluations (as well as annotated collections of errors) would greatly contribute to that mysterious 'equilibrium'<sup>2</sup>—based on the history of interaction, a sufficient tradition of translating in each direction, and the constant accrual of knowledge and routine—that, once attained, would ensure that it is no longer a hazardous affair to translate between Korean and German.

Apart from these institutions' evaluations *ad usum*, one only sporadically comes across evaluations comparing a Western-language translation with the Korean original. They are usually found in a scholarly context, but there is little to no dialogue or ongoing debate in the sense that, e.g., one critic finds fault with another critic.<sup>3</sup> In Korea, painting a different picture, translations of

(a) for translations that are part of an application for a translation grant; (b) for completed translations, i.e. evaluations of translations that are submitted by translators as their 'final product', whereupon the institution pays the balance to translator; (c) for translation prizes (in this case published translations are evaluated).

- 2 Cf. »Translation is a practice established in the course of the historic interaction between cultures and languages, and consequent efforts to find matching expressions in the two languages. Anyone performing some actual translating between a pair of languages will step into the historical tradition of the practice and will [...] mature within it, contributing [...] to its maintenance and, hopefully, improvement. The tradition is embodied in extant translations, in dictionaries, textbooks, grammars and the like as well as in the knowledge in the minds [...]. At some stage [...] an equilibrium for the standard every day practice of translation may be reached when just about anyone, the self-taught included, with sufficient motivation and a spirit of self-criticism may receive sufficient training.« Götz Wienold, »Translation Between Distant Languages: The Case of German and Japanese«, in *Übersetzung / Translation / Traduction. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung*, 1. Teilband, ed. by Harald Kittel (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft; 26), 418.
- 3 For the Japanese-German pairing there is more debate, for a number of reasons. The polemic—»Pro litteris iaponicis oder Vom Schaden schlechten Übersetzens« [On the Damage Bad Translations Do], *Japanstudien* 8 (1996), 183–192—Jürgen Stalph came out with had a stimulating effect. As for a relativation of this aggressive manifesto cf. the ensuing debate

Western literature into Korean<sup>4</sup> have regularly been a subject of debate,<sup>5</sup> meticulous scrutiny and not rarely damning assessments which cause a stir even in the media.<sup>6</sup> These evaluations, however, have a pronounced focus on vocabulary. A translator might have misinterpreted, for example, the idiom »to toss one's cookies« (in the sense of 'to vomit') and taken it at face value to mean 'throwing around cookies', for which he would be found at fault.<sup>7</sup> A common shortcoming of these compilations is the lack of a search for possible valid reasons speaking in favour of the solution that the critic dismisses. Castigating the translator for mistranslating a »six« to a 'seven', and lamenting that even a preschooler could tell the difference,<sup>8</sup> is an example of these critics' routinely ungenerous approach. The eagerness to find fault is so strong that looking for potentially sound grounds for an unconventional solution is not considered an option.

between Jürgen Stalph and Asa Bettina Wuthenow: »Pro und Kontra in der Übersetzungskritik« [Pros and Cons in Translation Critique], *Japanstudien* 11 (1999), 265–276.

- 4 Tellingly, translations of older *hanmun* literature (Korean literature written in classical Chinese) into modern Korean seem to represent a comparatively much less contested field. The most comprehensive survey on Western translation of Korean older literature in general (*hanmun* and vernacular) to date is O Yun-sŏn's *Han'guk kososŏl yŏngyŏkponŭro-ŭi ch'odae* [Invitation to English Translations of Korean Classics] (Seoul: Chimundang 2008).
- 5 As for the historical side of this cf. Kim Won-Hee, *Die Geschichte der Translation in Korea* [The History of Translation in Korea] (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 136–151.
- 6 An example of this is the recently published *Oyŏk sajŏn* [Mistranslation Dictionary] by An Chŏng-hyŏ (Seoul: Open Books, 2013). This book even made it onto bookstores' bestseller shelves and was extensively covered by the media. Among the considerable number of publications that had similar purposes, two publications authored by a collective of contributors made an especially big impact, due to their broad coverage of multiple texts and translations: *Yŏngmi myŏngjak, chŏun pŏnyŏg-ŭl ch'ajasŏ* [Anglo-American Classics: On the Lookout for Good Translation], edited by the Yŏngmi munhak yŏn'guhoe [Society for the Research Into Anglo-American Literature] (P'aju: Ch'angbi, 2005) and, in two volumes, *Ch'oego-ŭi kojŏn pŏnyŏg-ŭl ch'ajasŏ* [On the Lookout for the Best Translation of Literary Classics], edited by *Kyosu sinmun* [The Professor's Times] (Seoul: Saenggag-ŭi namu, 2006; 2007).
- 7 *Yŏngmi myŏngjak*, 227. The cases are taken from J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and a Korean translation respectively. Looking at the sentence itself, the mistake seems avoidable, since the situation described really suggests a bad smell: »The cab I had was a real old one that smelled like someone'd just tossed his cookies in it.«
- 8 An Chŏng-hyŏ, *Oyŏk sajŏn*, 652 (s.v. »six«).

### *Recurring Topics*

It is a common occurrence in book reviews that the translator's name and judgments as to the quality of the translation are, at best, merely anecdotal and impressionistic. One comes across, on a regular basis, book reviews with meaningless or unreliable judgements of translation quality.<sup>9</sup> Cheap and damning verdicts as well as cheap and enthusiastic praise are standard practice. But even in the case of the occasional academic conferences and symposia devoted to literature translation, one sometimes wishes for an attitude of sticking to concrete examples and foregoing the speculative conceptualisations and grand gestures.

When examples are given, trivial discourses on *realia* are most popular. Translating between distant languages is—and this is a commonsensical statement—all the more difficult because the further apart the languages, the further apart, as a rule, the living environment, which means that in translation we are confronted with an abundance of phenomena that cannot be adequately named or described (while the source language would have the perfect expression). In such cases, one must choose between the following options: putting up with a total loss of meaning; supplementing an explanation (in a glossary or a footnote); or compromising in form of additional in-text explicitation. *Realia* such as 'yellow sand' or highly connotative vocabulary such as *han*<sup>10</sup> rank among the most

- 9 A confirmation, just e.g.: Pekka Kujamäki reflects a widely shared feeling when he declares that he sees the *en passant* mentioning of mistakes on the level of vocabulary as an indicator of a lack of diligence or *bona fides* on the part of the reviewer: »Vertraut sind uns auch die Wortkorrekturen in Rezensionen von übersetzten Romanen, die uns leider gerade das offenbaren, was sie zu verschleiern meinten, nämlich die fachliche Unfähigkeit des Kritikers zur weiteren, fundierten Reflexion.« [Familiar to us also are the corrections of single word-choices which we may read in reviews of translations of novels, these corrections just laying bare what they are intended to conceal, i.e. the inability of the critic as far as a further-reaching reflection based on something well-founded is concerned]. P. K., »Was ist ein Übersetzungsfehler? Gefragt anhand mehrerer deutscher Übersetzungen eines finnischen Romans« [What is a Translation Mistake? Asked on the Basis of a Number of German Translations of a Finnish Novel], *Translationsdidaktik*, ed. by Eberhard Fleischmann, Wladimir Kutz, Peter Axel Schmitt (Tübingen: Narr, 1997), 580.
- 10 One of the foremost keywords of 'Koreanness'. The English *Wikipedia* provides, among a number of other approximations, the following tentative definition: »Han denotes a collective feeling of oppression and isolation in the face of overwhelming odds. It connotes aspects of lament and unavenged injustice.« (Wikipedia, s.v. *han*). Cultural codewords and other voca-

beloved of subjects because they represent undeniable difficulties (cases of so-called »one-to-part« or »one-to-zero« equivalences), and these problems are easy to grasp and understand. Another perennial hot topic is the richness of Korean as a source of onomatopoeic expressions and the losses perceived when translating into a language that is, in that respect, less well-endowed. Also notoriously recurrent are complaints about the unavoidable losses that occur when translating from a language where relative status and personal relationship are, via honorifics, constantly indicated (e.g. Korean), to another one where this is not the case (e.g. German). Such problems are greatly favoured at the expense of others which are, actually, of a far more delicate caliber: differences regarding sentence structure; distinction between topic and comment; textual cohesion; all kinds of phenomena that form the style of a *langue*.

*Syntax as a Problem or as the Problem*

The search for the *mot juste* is definitely not a translator's greatest challenge. Providing a most interesting rationale for his endeavor,<sup>11</sup> the famous German translator and publisher Burkhard Kroeber justified his new rendering of Alessandro Manzoni's already oft-translated *I Promessi Sposi* not by the need to choose more apt or more contemporary words, but as follows:

[...] ich habe mit dieser Arbeit auch ein übersetzungsästhetisches Projekt verfolgt, mich auf eine Herausforderung eingelassen: dem Satzbau des Originals so eng wie möglich zu folgen, da ich überzeugt bin, daß ein Großteil dessen, was das Original für den muttersprachlichen Leser reizvoll macht [...] gerade in der Art und Weise liegt, wie die Sätze gebaut sind—und das heißt, wie die Gedanken geführt, die Argumentation aufgebaut, die Gefühlsreaktionen des Lesers gelenkt werden.

[In this work I also pursued a project of translation aesthetics, I embarked on a challenge to follow the syntax of the original as closely as possible, because I am convinced that a large part of what makes the original appealing to the native reader [...] lies precisely in the way in which the sentences are constructed—and that is how thoughts are guided, how the argument is structured, how the emotional reaction of the readers is channeled.]<sup>12</sup>

bulary without satisfactory one-to-one equivalents in other languages are, however, not a peculiarity of Korean and should not dominate the discussion about translating Korean into other languages to the extent that it unfortunately still does.

11 Burkhard Kroeber, »Zu meiner Neuübersetzung der *Promessi Sposi*« [On my Retranslation of the *Promessi Sposi*], in *Sprachvergleich und Übersetzungsvergleich*, ed. by Jörn Albrecht and Hans-Martin Gauger (Frankfurt a. M. [etc.]: Peter Lang, 2001), 413–425.

12 Kroeber, »Zu meiner Neuübersetzung der *Promessi Sposi*«, 419–420.

By concentrating not on the words but on their sequence,<sup>13</sup> Kroeber is certain to convey that very order of ideas via which the author goes, in his interaction with the reader, beyond what is merely told and transcends to what is suggested, because the appeal of the text derives from a sequencing, precisely calculated by the author (»vom Autor genau kalkulierten Abfolge«). The content of what is communicated to the reader is unfolded in a measured succession of narrative information. This information is revealed, via the composition of the sentences and the arrangement of their elements, in a deliberate order of disclosure.<sup>14</sup> Kroeber insists that this order is not meaningless (»Es ist eben nicht egal, was zuerst mitgeteilt wird und was sich dann daraus ergibt«). By changing the architecture of Italian sentences to facilitate the perceived necessities of German syntax and stylistic traditions, one would frequently turn the narrative, emotional, and psychological order upside down.<sup>15</sup>

Kroeber addresses a frequently overlooked problem: word order may be a less obvious problem than semantics but the losses that result from inattention to syntax are enormous. Sequence is, or at least may be, correlated to relevance.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most important principles Koreans who struggle with English (a large group, of course) are taught by English-coaching gurus would be that a Korean proposition becomes English when reversed: the sentence »Look at the girl in the black dress sitting over there all alone by the bar.« would be translated by reversing the order of the syntactic units ('at the girl', 'in the black dress', 'over there', 'all alone', 'by the bar'). First becomes last and last becomes first, second becomes last but one and *vice versa*, and so on, so that when one connects the

13 As Kroeber puts it himself, with deliberate exaggeration: »Entscheidend sind für mich nicht die Wörter selbst, sondern deren Reihenfolge, also die Abfolge, in der sie dem Leser präsentiert werden.« [Decisive are, as far as I am concerned, not the words themselves but their order, i.e. the sequence in which they are disclosed to the reader.] (ibid., 417).

14 »was dem Leser nicht nur mitgeteilt, sondern durch den Bau der Sätze, die Reihenfolge der mitgeteilten Elemente etc. suggeriert wird—also der narrativen Informationen [...], und diese haben [...] ganz eminent mit dem Satzbau zu tun« [What is not merely communicated to the reader but, via the build-up of the sentences and the sequence of the elements that are disclosed, suggested—i.e. of the narrative informations, and these are very closely connected with syntax] (ibid., 420).

15 »stellt man leicht auch die narrative (emotionale, psychologische) Logik auf den Kopf« (ibid.)

16 An exemplary analysis of this, based on translations of William Faulkner's works into German, can be found in Jutta Muschard's book *Relevant Translation. History, Presentation, Criticism, Application* (Frankfurt a. M. [etc.]: Peter Lang, 1996).

corresponding units (of the Korean sentence and its English equivalent) by lines, the result will be a star-shaped graph illustrating the embarrassing fundamental differences: things are turned upside down.

The conventional syntax patterns of the target language, however, often overrule the crafted and well-calculated order of the original and this leads to translations that do not do justice to rhetorical intent or narrative strategy. This can be best observed in instances where order is of utmost importance. Korean collections of Western aphorisms provide excellent examples, notoriously disregarding the essential principle, i.e. the surprise (or *pointe*) at the end:

Some of the world's greatest feats were accomplished by people not smart enough to know they were impossible. (Doug Larson).

세계의 위한 업적의 일부는 그것이 불가능하다는 것을 모르는 어리석은 사람들이 이룩한 것이다.<sup>17</sup>

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret. (Ambrose Bierce).

화날 때 말하게 되면 두고두고 후회할 말을 하게 될 거다.<sup>18</sup>

As the marked script highlights, the Korean translations place the point that was the very *telos* of the original somewhere in the middle.

Such carelessness with order is so common that it could be called ubiquitous. Kim Hoon's (b1948) novel *K'al-ŭi norae* (Song of the Sword)<sup>19</sup> begins with the succinct sentence »Pöryöjin sömmada kkoch'i p'ïotta«. While the German translation<sup>20</sup> does the order justice by translating it to »Die verlassenen Inseln standen alle in voller Blüte.« [The deserted islands all stood in full bloom.], the English translation<sup>21</sup> opts for an inversion of order: »Flowers blossomed on each deserted island«. This may too have its advantages, but still it remains an example of the prevailing approach, which ranks the preservation of

17 Yi Su-hŭi, *Nae maŭm-ül arajunŭn kamsöng myöngöŋ* (Seoul: T'uri puksŭ, 2008), 216.

18 *Ibid.*, 119.

19 Seoul: Saengag-ŭi namu, 2001.

20 Kim Hoon, *Schwertgesang*, tr. by Heidi Kang and Ahn Sohyun (Stuttgart: Delta, 2008).

21 The magazine *LIST*, ed. by the Korea Literature Translation Institute, published the first chapter of the novel, tr. by Jung Ha-yun and Ahn Jin-hwan, in issue 2,3 (Winter 2008) <list.or.kr/articles/article\_view.htm?Div1=10&Idx=74> (last retrieval 30 June 2013).

order far below the pursuit of an order that is perceived to be more ‘congenial’<sup>22</sup> to the target language itself.

The insight that the alteration of the original’s sequence may detract from what is relevant is frequently substantiated when one evaluates translations from Korean into English or German, or *vice versa*:

그는 적어도 스무 살이 넘어 어떤 시골 백일장에서 장원할 때까지는 자신의 가문이나 출신에 대한 기억을 가져서는 안 되었다.<sup>23</sup>

For them, it is unthinkable that he might have retained any actual memories of his family or origins before that fateful moment, so often chronicled, when he won first prize in a rural poetry-contest at the age of nineteen.<sup>24</sup>

Sie können sich einfach nicht vorstellen, daß er tatsächlich Erinnerungen an seine Familie oder seine Herkunft bewahrt haben könnte, die vor den entscheidenden Augenblick zurückreichen, von dem wir so viele Schilderungen haben—als er mit zwanzig Jahren in einem ländlichen Dichterstreit den ersten Preis errang.<sup>25</sup>

What is switched in both translations is the focal point. The extrapolation of features absent from the original (»fateful«, »so often chronicled« and »entscheidend«) builds up even more weight on the wrong place. The two translations cause the reader to anticipate that the poetry contest will now be in the center of the talk (while in fact it is only addressed later on in the book, in ch. 14 out of a total of 34). Only upon reading a few sentences further one realizes that the talk goes in a different direction for the time being. A very sensible reader might guess rightly that the focus of what really is to be told was moved out of position in the translation. What the original points out is, in fact, the following: people who prefer legends to fact (and the narrator contests their views) would hold that the hero had, until his victorious participation in a poetry contest at the age

22 This expression is borrowed from the excellent chapter »Contrastive Topic and Practical: Word Order and emphasis in German« of a book by Sándor Hervej, Michael Loughridge and Ian Higgins, *Thinking German Translation. A Course in Translation Method: German to English* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed. 2006), 198–209, here 209.

23 Yi Mun-yŏl, *Sim* (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 2008), 14.

24 Yi Mun-yŏl, *The Poet*, tr. by Chong-wha Chung & Brother Anthony of Taizé (London: Harvill Press, 1995), 1.

25 Yi Munyol, *Der Dichter*, tr. by Kim Sun Young and Friedhelm Bertulies (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 7–8.

of nineteen, no vivid memories of his family's former glory (that he had only witnessed as a little child) whatsoever and that (again in the view of these people) it was only the contest that triggered the buried memories. In order to mirror this the translation is best advised to proceed in parallel with the order of ideas as conveyed by the original: That he might have retained such and such memories before that and that time when those memories were awakened was unthinkable for them.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Criteria and Models in Evaluation*

When discussing criteria for the assessment of translation quality, much talk revolves around consistency. There are calls for a »taxonomy of criteria for analysis«<sup>27</sup> and suggestions about how such could result in standardized judgments on numeric scales. Until now, at best some »starting points«<sup>28</sup> have been compiled for such an endeavor, and the question is whether it can ever go beyond that at all. There is no convincing model that would help measure the proportion of mistakes, so picking out anecdotally 'representative' examples remains the most common way to justify a verdict.

The eagerness to create 'top-down' guidelines and to generalize an approach for potential believers to follow<sup>29</sup> tends to ignore some wisdom that most

26 The German sentence is, beyond the problem of focus, multiply flawed, because it would mean that people thought of the poet as a person whose memories of his family and provenance did not reach back to a time before his victorious participation in a poetry contest at the age of nineteen, which evokes the idea of an amnesiac who has lost all memories that concern his family and origins, albeit not all of them, only those who reach back before that ominous day of the contest. This is very improbable, and also inconsistent with the subsequently unfolding narration.

27 Cf. the term »Taxonomie von Analysekrterien« in Wolfram Wills, *Übersetzungswissenschaft. Probleme und Methoden* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1977), 289. For reference cf. Heidrun Gerzymisch-Arbogast, »Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen für die Evaluierung von Übersetzungsleistungen« [A Scholarly Basis for the Evaluation of Translation Services], in *Translationsdidaktik. Grundfragen der Übersetzungswissenschaft*, ed. by Eberhard Fleischmann & al. (Tübingen: Narr, 1997), 573-579.

28 Tomás Conde, »Quality and Quantity in Translation Evaluation: A Starting Point«, *Across Languages and Cultures* 13,1 (2012), 67-80.

29 Establishing a criterion may, as a matter of fact, prove a lot easier than venturing the judgement that it has indeed been met, i.e. that the phenomenon matches the criterion. Top-down methodologists tend to be satisfied with criteria and are secretly pleased that this means they will not run out of work to do, because secondary criteria to help check whether or not the phenomena fulfill the requirements need to be found. (This brings about the call for

theorists, no matter how ambitious, have to acknowledge (or at least pay lip service to):

one should be aware that in translation criticism one will always be forced to move from a macro-analytical focus to a micro-analytical one<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the best product of evaluation theory is a by-product: singular cases that can, at the same time, serve as convincing examples of types of wrongness and exemplary descriptions how this wrongness can be described and explained (or, on the other hand, examples of types of errors that are not in fact an error but creative solutions, intentionally chosen).<sup>31</sup>

tertiary criteria, etc., leading to a classical infinite regress.) Or, rather, theorists are satisfied with creating models for something a competent reader would do more or less automatically. The fiction of evaluation theory is, in the end, that one supervisor sets guidelines for multiple lesser beings. The role model behind all this perhaps resembles a sales manager directing sales-supervisors who control ordinary low-earning salespeople. Though humble in tone, there is still a large measure of hubris in theorists' claims of being able to »provide a basis for systematic comparison«. A genuinely philological approach would dismiss this, because an able reader will get along very well without that »basis« since, actually, the linguistic model at best sums up the existing factors involved in what is already going on any able reader's mind. Cf.: »all a linguistic model of translation criticism can do is provide a basis for systematic comparison, making explicit the many factors that might theoretically have influenced the translator in making certain decisions and rejecting others, thus providing the basis for evaluating a particular case.« Juliane House, »Concepts and methods of translation criticism: A linguistic perspective«, in *Übersetzung / Translation / Traduction*, 1. Teilband, 716.

30 House, »Concepts and Methods of Translation Criticism«, 717. Notwithstanding this, theorists are busy criticising each other's criteria, preferentially using the argument that this or that notion would be »difficult to operationalize«. The need for operationalising is a fiction, since Martians do not to evaluate translations while humans will not rely on an operating plan that at best (cf. footnote 29) depicts what they do anyway, provided they are competent readers. Looking at practical tests of these types of theories, we usually get the same results: The observations that really matter could have been made using traditional methods (if not everyday common sense and simple language competence), and without the intimidating framework.

31 We have to mention that some even plead for less emphasis on looking out for faults but rather for especially good solutions and contrasting them with standard solutions. However, such an approach would have to rely on hypothesizing the supposed solutions lesser minds would have chosen. Cf. Daniela Calinski's review (»Pak Wanso: *Das Familienregister*«) of the German translation of *Kūdae ajikto kkugo innün'ga* by Pak Wan-Sō, *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 21 (1997), 261–262.

When it comes to selling a translation critique to an audience (be it just an academic one), the delicate point is the deeply rooted concept that any talk about the right choice of words boils down to little more than some idle talk about taste. However, when talking about an author's or a translator's choice of expression, their prosodic rhythms, and other aspects of language usage, some kind of objectivity is still possible.<sup>32</sup> Because stylistic phenomena can be described in a professional, elucidating way, there are many 'matters of style' in language use where a consensus among competent speakers will eventually be attained if language analysis and description is conducted with sufficient diligence. Grammars and guidebooks concerning style and the correct use of language, let alone philological works, could not otherwise exist.

## 2

What can in-depth evaluations of translations, combined with a search and analysis (or description) of errors and mistakes, do to approximate the aforementioned mysterious 'equilibrium'?

*Language Comparison*

Evaluations can offer contributions to the comparative study of linguistic and stylistic features (the style of the *langue*). Evaluating translations might indeed contribute to clearer insights into fundamental mental differences between speakers of the two languages in question. Translations that are evidently not proficient can lay bare fundamental differences between source and target languages—while in the case of a language pairing where the equilibrium has been attained, most differences can be bridged and handled through routine practice.

The *stylistique comparée* that used to identify quasi-ontological differences between, e.g., German and French, seems to have lost much credibility, but it has nevertheless been productive, even though the foundations of the formerly strict antithetical contrasting of German and French are eroding and the claims to a different worldview or a different mental climate<sup>33</sup> may sound like the

32 In the discussion one might think sometimes that the old maxim of Aristotle is forgotten: »It is the mark of an instructed mind to rest satisfied with the degree of precision to which the nature of the subject admits.« (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, ch. 3, 25.1094b.)

33 Cf. Helmut Gipper's *dictum* that the language of translation transposes the original into perspectives of a different worldview (»dass die Übersetzersprache das Original in die ihr

remnants of a distant past. It is still an inspiring idea that the genuine strengths of a language are highlighted all the more, paradoxically, when inadequate and futile attempts at adequacy and similitude in translation are made.<sup>34</sup>

For obvious reasons, the differences between German (as an example of a Western language) and Korean may contrast more sharply than those between German and French; the comparison in the latter case has to contend with the difficulty that the differences are less clear-cut and that the option of a literal translation often can be not be dismissed easily (i.e. often a literal translation is grammatically possible).<sup>35</sup>

One of the foremost German pioneers of translation evaluation theory, Katharina Reiß, gives the memorable example of the choices a translator faces when trying to convert a Fidel Castro (b1926) speech into German. Fidel Castro's demagogic, monstrously long speeches would cause, Reiß reasons, fatigue in Germany if translated without abbreviation, whereas audiences in Latin America would not get tired as easily because the tradition of illiteracy had accustomed people to repetitiousness. Thus, a translation that orients itself at the ideal of evoking similar responses would be well advised to leave out repetitions.<sup>36</sup> Given this famous example—the message being, of

gemäßen Perspektiven einer anderen Weltsicht transponiert und damit automatisch ein anderes Geistesklima schafft». Helmut Gipper, »Sprachliche und geistige Metamorphosen bei Gedichtübersetzungen«, *Wirrendes Wort* 1 (1966), 209.

34 For Mario Wandruszka, the specific potentials (»eigentümliche Möglichkeiten«) of a source language are highlighted, of all things, by such unavailing translation efforts (»das vergebliche Bemühen der Übersetzer um Entsprechung und Gleichwertigkeit«). Wandruszka, [Review], *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 73 (1963), 253.

35 Thus the language comparison that has its deep-rooted and venerable traditions in Europe (unlike the one done with regard to East Asian languages which is still in its infancy), deals with 'idiomatic' examples: For instance, French phrases translated literally into German (or *vice versa*) result in less idiomatic, but usually still grammatically and lexically correct text. Cf. Jörn Albrecht, »Übersetzungsvergleich und Paralleltextvergleich als Hilfsmittel der konfrontativen Sprachwissenschaft und der Übersetzungsforschung« [Translation Comparison and Parallel Text Comparison as a Tool of Confrontative Linguistics and of Translation Studies], in *Sprachvergleich und Übersetzen: Französisch und Deutsch*, ed. by Sylvia Reinart and Michael Schreiber (Bonn: Romanistischer Verlag, 1999), 9–32 (here 13).

36 Cf. Katharina Reiß, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Übersetzungskritik: Kategorien und Kriterien für eine sachgerechte Beurteilung von Übersetzungen* (München: Hueber, 1971), 48–49. English as *Translation Criticism—The Potentials and Limitations: Categories and Criteria for Translation Quality Assessment*, tr. by Erroll F. Rhodes (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2000).

course, not entirely novel—of how to translate a text that originally was intended to appeal to a specific audience (and thus comparable to literature), we could transpose and apply it to a Korean–German contrast: Readers of German translations of Korean literature frequently bemoan<sup>37</sup> the fussiness or intricateness of authors such as Yi Chŏng-jun. While the impression of intricateness is not baseless at all, the repetitions that are responsible for this impression are maybe calculated just as Fidel Castro’s are, aiming at guaranteed effects and approving responses. It seems that there are classes of repetition with which the Korean reader has no problem, while they would frustrate a German reader. (The constant use in Korean of one and the same name instead of variations thereof—via substitutions or pronouns, as would be done in German—is the same scenario *in nuce*.) Now, the translator often could use a little turn of phrase and the odd repetition suddenly sounds acceptable. Here is an example of the simple ingenuous repetition, one that would have turned out less strange-sounding if the translator had complied more strictly with German stylistic demands and thus been cognisant of the need to vary his wording:

“네 동생 개, 살아야 몇 달 더 못 산다.” 고모가 들려준 얘기의 핵심은 두호가 얼마 더 살지 못한다는 것이었다.<sup>38</sup>

37 E.g.: »eine endlose [...] Reflexion, deren Resümees wieder und wieder zusammengefaßt werden« [endless speculation, the results of which are recapitulated again and again], cf. Susanne Messmer, »Gärten und Croissants«, *Lebende Sprachen*, 1/2007, 34–35; »irritieren durch Wiederholungen des gleichen Inhalts in ähnlichen Worten« [confuse the reader by presenting repetitions of the same content in similar words], cf. Tilman Spreckelsen, »Ein Garten für Frankfurt, eine Höhle für Manager. Buchmessen-Gastland Korea«, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 22 July 2005, 38; »nehmen koreanische Leser gerne zum Teil wörtliche Wiederholungen in Kauf, die vollständig zu übertragen im Deutschen geschwätzig wirkt«, cf. Kai Köhler, *Aufbruch aus der Morgenstille. Koreanische Literatur in deutscher Übersetzung* (Marburg: LiteraturWissenschaft.de, 2005), 21; »Bei der Wiedergabe seiner Erzählungen im Deutschen treten selbstverständlich Schwierigkeiten auf, die Worte und Sätze des koreanischen Autors mit den Empfindungen der Europäer in Einklang zu bringen; etwa wenn der Autor [...] Worte und Sätze immer wieder wiederholt, um sie dem Herzen des Lesers einzuprägen.«, cf. Sang-Kyong Lee, »Die literarische Welt von Chŏng-Jun Yi. Mit einem Abriss der Geschichte der modernen Literatur aus Korea«, in Chŏng-Jun Yi, *Die Feuerfrau und andere Erzählungen* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1998), 204.

38 Chŏn Sang-guk, »Uridül-üi nalgae«, *Usang-üi nunmul* (Seoul: Minümsa, 2005), 115.

»Dein jüngerer Bruder, der hat nur noch ein paar Monate zu leben.« Der Kern ihrer Erzählung war, daß Duho nicht mehr lange zu leben habe.<sup>39</sup>

[literally: »Your younger brother has but a few months left to live.« The essence of her talk was that Duho did not have much time any longer to live.]

The recapitulation sums up the essence of a long talk, in a way that we find in almost exact congruency with the introductory sentence of the direct speech itself. It would sound much more acceptable, had the translator opted for a *rem tene verba sequuntur* approach and written something in the lines of: »All in all, the essence of it boiled down to the simple message that Duho's days were numbered.«

#### *Topic/Comment*

Comparing Korean and German, there is a significant discrepancy in topic/comment structure. Differences in the understanding topic/comment structure surface when the question is how to choose the correct approach to substituting a given element in the following sentence.<sup>40</sup> Korean often does not need to clarify a theme in cases where it would be compulsory in German. There are also cases where the opposite is true, i.e. in Korean the reference would not be self-evident and would have to be explicated. Concerning this issue, an 'equilibrium' between Korean and German is far away because there is very little expertise that has been gathered until now and that one could draw from.

일단 전단지 초안을 짜보기로 결정했다. 옛날 방식이다.<sup>41</sup>

The first thing to do, everyone agrees, is to draft a flyer. Of course, a flyer is an old-fashioned response to a crisis like this.<sup>42</sup>

39 Jeon Sang-guk, »Unsere Flügel«, in *Abbes Familie und andere Erzählungen*, tr. by Kim Sun-Hi and Edeltrud Kim (Thunum: Peperkorn, 2008), 174.

40 On a strictly grammatical level, Ahn In-kyoung has dealt with such problems in her thesis *Substitution als Prinzip der Textkonstitution: Eine kontrastive Analyse zwischen Deutsch und Koreanisch* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1993).

41 Sin Kyöng-suk, *Ömma-rül pu'ak bae* (P'aju: Ch'angbi, 2008), 10.

42 Shin Kyung-sook, *Please Look After Mom. A Novel*, tr. by Chi-Young Kim (New York: Knopf 2011), 1. The German translation follows exactly this English version. Cf. *Als Mutter verschwand*, tr. by Cornelia Holfelder-von der Tann (München: Piper, 2012), 7.

Literally, the second sentence of the original simply says: »[It] is the old-fashioned method.« The translation here refers »to a crisis like this«. It is, in fact, not easy to preserve the conciseness of the Korean original because the problem of reference arises. What does ‘old-fashioned style’ refer to? Is it simply old-fashioned to draft a flyer? No, the explicitation hits the mark. Perhaps there are alternatives that could do without this explanation, such as, for example, »quite old-fashioned, maybe/admittedly«. But the translation is perfectly unambiguous as to the reference and in that respect the solution the translator arrived at was a good one.

The following example represents a solution that might have followed the original too closely, at the expense of rhetorical consequence and substitution-logic in the target language:

도와달라는 일의 성격에 대해, 기하 형은 끝끝내 입을 다물었다. 가벼운 농사 일에서 혹 멧돼지라도 쫓아야 하는 게 아닌가, 라는 생각에, 나는 마음이 복잡했다. 구제역인가 그런 질병이라면 인체에도 해가 오는 게 아닐까 [...].<sup>43</sup>

Old Gi-Ha had remained stubbornly silent about the nature of the help he was asking for. I felt confused, my surmises ranging from light farming to having to pursue wild boar. Suppose it were foot-and-mouth disease or some such thing, can't that be harmful to humans too?<sup>44</sup>

The Korean original shows a parallelism that cannot be preserved in translation and that, in fact, draws attention to a quite deep-rooted difference between the languages or mentalities involved. What kind of assistance is the protagonist supposed to provide? Was it just helping with planting, weeding, manuring, or harvesting (»light farming«)? But such trivial labour would not explain Gi-Ha's secretiveness, so what about assistance on a wild boar hunt, something that regularly makes it into Korean regional news broadcasts? So far, the speculation makes sense. But then there is a jump, although syntactically there is a parallelism in the echoing of the uneasy question ‘Wouldn't one have to chase wild boar?’ with the ensuing ‘Was it foot-and-mouth disease?’

43 Pak Min-gyu, »K'oriön Süt'endöjü« [Korean Standard], *Kaseutera* [Sponge Cake] (Seoul: Munhak tonge, 2005), 188–189.

44 Park Min-Gyu, »Korean Standards«, tr. by Brother Anthony of Taizé, *Korean Art & Culture* 22,1 (2008), 88–99 <[hompisogang.ac.kr/anthony/KoreanStandards.htm](http://hompisogang.ac.kr/anthony/KoreanStandards.htm)> (last retrieval 30 June 2013). Quotes here refer to the online version and are therefore given without pagination.

This should prompt us to reflect on Koreans' less rigid understanding of rhetorical consistency. Can one count on the English-speaking listener's leniency if we adopt the Korean way of phrasing things to the same extent as Brother Anthony does? In German, it most certainly would not work. A German reader would find fault with a parallelism that on the surface suggests that a disease can be an alternative way to provide assistance (of a kind with farming or hunting). In order to switch to the idea that Gi-Ha's stubborn silence might be due to the fact that his farm is affected by foot-and-mouth disease and the protagonist and narrator of the story is now expected to help load the animal cadavers onto trucks, one would at minimum need a little reworking to indicate that the category has been changed: There is no more talk about the 'kind' (*towa talla-nŭn il-ŭi sŏngkyŏk*, 'the nature/character of the work that Gi-Ha was asked to help out with') of service that the protagonist is expected to fulfill; instead, the talk switches clandestinely to the reason why Gi-Ha is so stubbornly silent and one would thus have to signal this in this translation. However, one would have to consider the broader scope and the Korean tolerance as to elliptic expressions. As soon as one interprets the question »*Kujeyŏg-inga?*« ('is/was it foot-and-mouth disease?') not in the minimalistic fashion but by including what seems to be left out on the visible level (i.e. extended to as »Or had it [Gi-Ha's sudden call and his asking the protagonist to come over] something to do with foot-and-mouth disease on his farm?«), everything is placed in order. Of course, this would entail the explicitation of the switched topic, and thus a 'loss' in terms of conciseness.

#### *Application to Language Training*

Language comparison is—despite dogmatic claims that would try to limit or even prohibit and sanction the learners' use of their native language—a matter-of-fact primal and natural strategy in the learning of a second language.<sup>45</sup> In this vein, evaluations of translations would have the potential to meet needs of language learners of all levels. They could also serve the purpose of training professional translators by providing prototypical examples and case studies of

45 Cf. Wildenauer-Jósa's claim, »dass der Sprachvergleich mit Mutter- und/oder Fremdsprachen eine Lernerstrategie ist, die von erwachsenen Lernenden im Lernprozess eingesetzt wird. Wird im Fremdsprachenunterricht diese Realität ignoriert oder sogar sanktioniert, bleibt der Lernende mit seiner Strategie auf sich alleine gestellt.« [that the comparison of one's own mother-tongue with the foreign language is a learning strategy that is used by adult learners. If this reality is ignored or even penalised in language teaching the students are left to their own devices.] Doris Wildenauer-Jósa, *Sprachvergleich als Lernerstrategie. Eine Interviewstudie mit erwachsenen Deutschlernenden* (Freiburg i. B.: Fillibach, 2005), 231.

possible mistakes to be aware of. But the uses go beyond isolated examples of mistakes to avoid because the analysis can shed a light on the processes which led to them being made.

Popular recommendations from practitioners tend to dwell on the labours involved in clarifying detail and the adventures of surviving in a minefield of potential errors, which thus boils down to the message that as a translator one has to consider all sorts of things. In the case of the Korean-German pairing, one might suspect that the notorious hints at the wide range of linguistic pitfalls and difficulties of the original are meant to discourage and deter non-native speakers of the source-language, thus cementing the status of Koreans as tone-setters as far as translations from Korean to German are concerned. But in fact, many mistakes can be traced back, as freakish incidents of miscommunication, to the collaboration between native and non-native speakers of the target language.

In this context it must be remembered that over decades the forums for debates on the quality of translations of Korean literature into foreign languages have been dominated by Koreans themselves. Thus discussions dwelled on the specifics and fine nuances of the original and on the target language's perceived inability to accurately render these specifics and nuances. The tendency was to forget that a translation might also 'add' something and that one should not limit this notion of 'addition' to the familiar intentional 'compensation'.<sup>46</sup> The concept of 'loss' is so pervasive that even reviewers who cannot compare the target text with the source text articulate their satisfaction with a translation by claiming that there was no loss.<sup>47</sup>

46 See »Beim Übersetzen [...] geht immer etwas verloren, vielleicht das Wesentliche. Es kommt aber immer auch etwas hinzu, vielleicht etwas anderes Wesentliches, und sei es nur in einer Wendung, die in der Übersetzung glücklicher sich fügt, als das in der Sprache des Originals möglich war.« [In translation {...} there is always something that gets lost, maybe the most essential thing. But at the same time something is added, maybe something else essential, be it only one formulation that turns out better in the translation than it was possible to render in the language of the original.] Klaus Reichert, *Die unendliche Aufgabe. Zum Übersetzen* [The Neverending Task. On Translating] (München: Hanser, 2003), 39.

47 »Fast nichts vom knappen und punktgenauen Ton der Autorin ging in dieser Übertragung verloren.« [Almost nothing of the author's concise and precise tone got lost in this translation.] Susanne Messmer, »Gärten und Croissants«, *Lebende Sprachen* 1/2007, 36. This judgement about the German translation of Kim Hoon's novel *K'al-üi norae* (cf. above footnote 20) is written by a journalist specialized in things Chinese and whose biography and other pursuits give no hints of the kind of advanced proficiency in Korean that would allow such a judgement. Equally

There is another reason for the still prevailing pairing of a native speaker of Korean who has a fair command of German with a native speaker of German whose role is perceived as an auxiliary one: Korean has only a short history of international exchange and it is a relative late-comer to standardization because its use as the nation's unrivaled language of literature does not stretch back very far. This historical development is indirectly accountable for the long-cherished belief among Koreans that their national language cannot be learned, a belief that has now, in the face of the success of Korean as a foreign language taught over the world, quite eroded. However, the old popular belief in the 'unlearnability' of Korean, at least for Western foreigners, has (along with practical circumstances, such as the scarcity of foreigners fluent enough to work as translators) played an important role in the usual composition of the translator/co-translator pairings, as well as in the turning a blind eye to the otherwise obvious fact that non-native speakers of the target language should confine themselves rather to the role of assistant, acting in support of main translators, who are native speakers of the target language, by providing them with everything they need to make up for their deficits.

*Source- or Target-Based Critique*

A very archetypical typology of mistakes could distinguish between (1) those that catch the eye when only looking at the translation; (2) those only revealed when taking an expert look at the original; (3) mere *prima vista* mistakes that turn out being solutions with good reasons that speak in their favour.

The usual translation evaluation tends to see mistakes of the second kind as the most interesting and the source-based critique that would dig such mistakes up as the most honorable of labors because it requires expertise in both of the languages involved. But in fact there are mistakes of that kind that do little harm:

baseless is the praise for the translators in another commendation devoted to the same translation (which in fact, as an aside, does contain a quite considerable number of flaws such that any ordinary reader should notice): »An dieser Stelle soll auch den beiden Übersetzern [...] gedankt werden, die solch eine Sprache in einer traumwandlerischen Sicherheit ins Deutsche übertragen haben.« [Here (at last) one has to express gratitude to the translators who translated such a language with instinctive sureness.] Alice Grünfelder, »"In mir tanzte das klagende Schwert"—Martialisches Kriegsgewalt versus lyrische Impressionen«, *Korea Forum* 2010/1-2, 113.

앉은뱅이책상을 딛고 일어나 밤이나 낮이나 켜 있는 형광등을 가려놓았던 종이를  
늘어뜨렸다.<sup>48</sup>

Standing on a low table, I pulled down the cardboard that, in violation of the rules,  
shaded the fluorescent bulb that shone day and night.<sup>49</sup>

Ich stieg auf den kurzbeinigen Tisch und zog das Papier herunter, das ich an der  
Tag und Nacht eingeschalteten Neonleuchte angebracht hatte.<sup>50</sup>

A very simple and clear-cut mistake: the original text states very clearly that that the hero used the table as support while attempting to stand up. The reason for the mistake (in both translations) might be that an original rough translation used expressions that allowed an incorrect interpretation by a second person who only judged on the basis of the rough translation.

In fact, a large proportion of mistakes occurring in the translations of Korean literature into German illustrate that source text dependent critique and target language dependent critique actually have to be considered as something intertwined (i.e. a combination of 1 and 2), rather than two separate approaches.

어쩐 일인지 택시는 쉽사리 잡히지 않았다. 여섯 대제의 택시를 놓치고 나는  
어렵게 합승을 하게 되었다.<sup>51</sup>

Aus irgendeinem Grund hielt kein Taxi. Nachdem ich den sechsten Wagen verpasst  
hatte, gelang es mir schliesslich, weiterzukommen, indem ich in einen Wagen  
zustieg. Besonders zu den Hauptverkehrszeiten ist das möglich, auch wenn schon  
ein Fahrgast im Taxi sitzt.<sup>52</sup>

48 Hwang Sŏg-yŏng, *Oraedoen chŏngwŏn. Hwang Sŏg-yŏng changp'yŏn sosŏl*. (Seoul: Ch'angjak-kwa pip'yŏngsa, 2000), 8.

49 Hwang Sok-yong, *The Old Garden*, tr. by Jay Oh (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2009), 7.

50 Hwang Sok-yong, *Der ferne Garten. Roman*, tr. by Oh Dong-sik, Kang Seung-hee and Torsten Zaiak (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), 7-8.

51 Cho Kyŏng-nan, *Sikppang kumnŏn sigan. Cho Kyŏng-nan changp'yŏn sosŏl* (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 1996), 42-43.

52 Jo Kyung Ran, *Zeit zum Toastbacken*, tr. by Jung Young-Sun and Herbert Jaumann (Bielefeld: Pendragon, 2005), 36.

[literally: For whatever reason, no taxi stopped. Six cars passed, but then I managed to get on track by hopping on a car. Especially during rush hours this is possible, even if there is already a passenger in the cabin.]

The translation is syntactically clear, but contains a logical flaw. It is, in the end, an explicitation the translator opted for that blurred the idea. After all, *hops<sup>ing</sup>* ('zusteigen' in German, 'hop on' in English)<sup>53</sup> is by definition only possible if another guest is already in the taxi, on their way somewhere. It is true that, especially during rush hour, it is common in Korea 'to hop on', but the addition that this was possible 'even if there was a passenger' confuses everything, because the passenger who is already in the taxi cabin is a *conditio sine qua non* for any 'hopping on' or, to be more precise, for any 'hopping on' in the intended sense of *hops<sup>ing</sup>*, so it is not just something one accepts in exceptional circumstances, as the 'even if' wrongly suggests. It is difficult to guess the exact *dérroulement*, but it seems very probable that this mistake shares common origins with those that originate in the complicated process of a team effort of the kind described above.

The following example represents a similar case:

하지만 그가 다른 아이들보다는 좀 영리하고 민감했다 해도 다섯 살의 나이는 어쩔 수 없었다. 잡고 있는 어머니의 치맛자락을 통해 전해 오는 불길한 떨림에도 불구하고, 이윽고 밤이 깊어 가자 아슴아슴 잠이 오기 시작했다.<sup>54</sup>

He might have been rather more sensitive than other children but he still was only four. Inevitably, as the evening wore on, despite the ominous trembling he could feel through the hem his mother's skirts that he was grasping, he began to doze.<sup>55</sup>

Vielleicht war er, mit seinen vier Jahren, empfindsamer als andere Kinder in seinem Alter. Als der Abend voranschritt, begann er, trotz des unheimlichen Zitterns, das er durch den Saum der mütterlichen Kleider spüren konnte, zu dösen.<sup>56</sup>

53 It has to be mentioned that the Korean word is a very precise, specific expression, whereas the German »zusteigen« is less unequivocal.

54 Yi Mun-yöl, *Sin*, 15.

55 Yi Mun-yöl, *The Poet*, 2-3.

56 Yi Munyöl, *Der Dichter*, 9.

[literally: Maybe he, with his four years, was cleverer and more sensitive than other children of his age. As the evening went on, he began to doze off, despite the uncanny trembling which he could feel through his mother's clothes.]

On a very superficial level the sentences of the German translation are perfect, but the logical connection is, for any attentive reader, nevertheless flawed. The original explicitly expresses some kind of inverse relation: 'However, even though he was cleverer and more sensitive than other children, he was, nevertheless a child of but four years. And so he began to doze off despite the uncanny trembling which he could feel through his mother's clothes.' The German translation suggests, syntactically, a continuum but still one cannot overlook that, semantically, there must be an adversative relation (he was sensitive and felt the trembling, but nevertheless he fell asleep).

Such a mistake is indeed most likely not the work of a translator who misunderstood the original but of a team comprised of one translator who perfectly understood it and another one who had to rely on the former's rough translation.

One could argue that mistakes a careful reader can detect even when just sticking to the translations (type 1, cf. above) give a more damning verdict as to translation quality than mistakes that cannot be found unless one consults the original. This would be supported by the wisdom that a translator must know one language well, preferably his own.<sup>57</sup> Originating in teamwork between unequal partners or in the main responsibility of a non-native speaker of the target language, the sticking to original wording at the expense of intended meaning occasionally creates unintended comedy:

언제나처럼 نوم에게 주곤 하는 카스테라에 약물을 묻혀서 슬며시 던져 주면  
영악없이 깨각 끝나 버릴 걸?<sup>58</sup>

57 This aphorism is ascribed (as an *impromptu* in conversation) to Donald Carne-Ross (cf. Christopher Logue, *Prince Charming. A Memoir* [London: Faber and Faber, 1999], 221) and has become a frequent quote. For similar statements cf. Carne-Ross, »Translation and Transposition«, in *The Craft and Context of Translation. A Critical Symposium*, ed. by William Arrowsmith and Roger Shattuck (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 3-28.

58 Im Ch'öl-u, »Kū mul«, in *Abōji-ūi ttang. Im Ch'öl-u sosōlchip* (Seoul: Munhag-gwa chisōngsa, 1984), 218.

Ich würde ihm den mit Rattengift versetzten Kuchen hinwerfen, so wie ich es alle Tage tat.<sup>59</sup>

[literally: I would throw him the rat-poison laced cake, just as I used to do every day.]

The protagonist, however, did not throw the poisoned cake ‘every day’. Every day, he threw a cake (or cookies) to the dog in order to remain unharmed, but he threw the poisoned cake on that day alone.

General discussions about evaluation tend to offer the message that one must beware of all sorts of rash conclusions: a translator may have had things in mind that we did not anticipate. This message is important but, since it is so strongly argued, it tends to blur the other side of the picture: there are still mistakes made for no good reason.

Of course, an evaluator who overlooks the defensible reasons the translator might have had for his choices disqualifies himself. Therefore the first principle of doing a fair evaluation is to abide by the golden rule of all decent approaches to the interpretation of texts, as Schleiermacher has put it: since misunderstanding will always occur effortlessly and does not need invitation, understanding must, in every detail, be sought after actively and intentionally looked for.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Easily Overlooked Good Reasons*

The following example shows another case of how easily one can overlook the motives and the ‘reasonable arguments’ in favour of a solution that seems strange at first glance:

마음 약하게 막으면 죽도 밥도 안된다<sup>61</sup>

59 Lim Chul-Woo, *Die Erde des Vaters. Erzählungen*, tr. by Heike Lee, Tae Hoon Lee and Holger Brochlos (Bielefeld: Pendragon, 2007), 224.

60 Cf. Schleiermacher’s famous words, »daß sich das Mißverstehen von selbst ergibt« [that misunderstanding comes about automatically] which is why »das Verstehen auf jedem Punkt muß gewollt und gesucht werden« [understanding has to be wanted and looked out for deliberately]. Friedrich Schleiermacher, »Hermeneutik«, in *Schriften*, ed. by Andreas Arndt (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996), 955.

61 Pak Wan-sō, *Kūdae ajikto kkum kkugo innūn’ga* (Seoul: Munidang, [1990] 2007), 59.

Wenn du dich nicht zum Kochen entschließt, kriegst du weder Reis noch Suppe zustande.<sup>62</sup>

[literally: If you do not even take the decision to start cooking, you will complete neither a dish of rice nor a soup.]

The original literally says: 'If you make but a lukewarm decision the outcome will be neither fish nor fowl.' At a first glance, the translator neglected the meaning of the common locution *chug-to pap-to andoenda* ('it will be neither fish nor fowl') used in the original and took things too literally, turning a mere 'weak decision' into a 'decision to cook'. But at a second glance the translator has conveyed the same idea by means of using the locution for creating a sort of invented proverb that preserves some flavour of the original wording (i.e. the picture evoked by the locution). One could take this example as one of those 'the end justifies the means' cases that Katharina Reiß, Hans Vermeer or Christiane Nord have been busily highlighting.

그 밤, 그야말로 뽕밭이 푸른 바다로 변하듯 그의 삶이 뿌리째 뒤집히던 그 운명의 밤.<sup>63</sup>

that fateful night when his life was fundamentally transformed, as if the blue sea had indeed suddenly been turned into a mulberry grove.<sup>64</sup>

In jener tragischen Nacht, in der sein Leben sich von Grund auf ändern sollte, ganz so, als hätte es ihn vom blauen Meer in der Tat plötzlich in ein Maulbeergehölz verschlagen.<sup>65</sup>

The translations do not arouse any suspicion; only a comparing glance at the original would reveal the difference. The original makes use of a common locution in Korean: when a mulberry field turns into blue sea, this does not necessarily imply that something changed from the better to the worse, but primarily expresses the idea of a very extreme change, while the direction of change goes from the mulberry grove to the blue sea and not the other way round, like in the translations. However, it would be overly pedantic to incriminate the variation since it would never have worked to maintain the

62 Pak Wanso, *Das Familienregister. Roman*, tr. by Helga Picht (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1997), 53.

63 Yi Mun-yŏl, *Sin*, 14.

64 Yi Mun-yŏl, *The Poet*, 2.

65 Yi Mun-yŏl, *Der Dichter*, 8.

Korean concept as it is; the translators' decision is one that at least keeps some flavour of the original wording.

*Lack of Good Reasons*

In many cases, however, errors and flaws are noticeable to any careful reader of the translation—so that the ability to consult the original is not a *conditio sine qua non* for judgement.

어머니의 병세가 호전되기를 기다리고 있던 일월 초순의 일이었다. 어찌되었건 이른 아침에 전화를 받는다는 것은 정말이지 어색한 일이 아닐 수 없었다.<sup>66</sup>

Es war Anfang Januar, als es noch Hoffnung gab, dass es mit dem Zustand meiner kranken Mutter wieder aufwärts gehen würde. Jedenfalls hatte ich ein ungutes Gefühl, als ich früh am Morgen den Hörer abnahm.<sup>67</sup>

[literally: It was in the beginning of January, at a time when there was still hope that the condition of my mother might improve again. In any case, I had an uneasy feeling when, in the morning, I picked up the receiver.]

The connector »jedenfalls« (which, in this context, may have a tighter range of meaning and allowed usage than the English »in any case«) would be appropriate if the second sentence were to continue in the same direction as the preceding one (i.e. saying rather the opposite: 'I did not have a bad feeling when I took the receiver'). However, the second sentence talks about something that goes contrary to the previous hopes: a bad feeling. Thus, the logical relation evident to a German reader is adversative: 'In those times I still expected that mother would recover. Nevertheless I had a bad feeling.' The error is due perhaps to a misleading impression on the part of the primary translator as to the scope of the connector »jedenfalls« and the absence of a *rem tene verba sequuntur* approach on the part of the German co-translator. On the other hand, the Korean reader as well as the author would not feel the need for such a clarification and would, rather, insist that the connector in Korean does not indicate any clear syntactic relationship. At this point we have to pass over a problem that is very difficult to address and handle correctly: the question of whether or not it is safe to say that German overall, at the surface level of the language or simply due to its grammar, insists on more logical disambiguation and signposting than Korean does and

<sup>66</sup> Cho Kyöng-nan, *Sikppang kummün sigan*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Jo Kyung Ran, *Zeit zum Toastbacken*, 19.

whether, if this is the case, the translator should still struggle to avoid the ‘loss’ of ambiguity or rather be happy with the challenge to choose the most appropriate option, i.e. indulge in a form of ‘addition’ (of originally absent clarification).<sup>68</sup>

### *Different Mindsets*

Evaluations of translations may highlight differences in mindsets as well as self-understood assumptions present in authors and translators respectively, linking translation issues to cultural anthropology.

At the extremes, the evaluator may posit the existence of certain mental differences between the native speakers of the source language and that of the target language respectively. This might sound precarious, but, for heuristic reasons, one should not exclude such explanations as something *a priori* forbidden from experimenting with. In the end, talk about underlying mental assumptions must be permitted if comparing literature (starting with historical comparisons within one’s ‘own’ literature) is ever to be a matter of free discourse. At the same time, one has to acknowledge the courage it takes to go public in Korea with a statement like the following:

The trite, pretentious symbolism of Cho Byong-hwa’s poem might have been found vaguely pleasing in Europe or America at some moment decades in the past; its total lack of wit, or bite, or irony, or novelty, would seem to indicate that there is something missing in the literary tradition that still tolerates such stuff in the last years of the twentieth century.<sup>69</sup>

Brother Anthony’s point is repeated by foreign critics now and then.<sup>70</sup> According to Martin Tutsch, translator as well as bibliographer of Korean literature in German translation, Korean authors tax their reader’s patience with philosophical excursions of startling naivety.<sup>71</sup> The question may, of course, not

68 This would constitute a case that, once again, confirms Roman Jakobson’s famous maxim that »languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they may convey.« Jakobson, »On Linguistic Aspects of Translation«, *On Translation*, ed. by Reuben A. Brower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 236.

69 Brother Anthony, »Translation in Practice: A Comedy of Errors«, *Pŏnyŏk munbak* no 1 (Autumn 1996), 65–66.

70 But we could certainly find Koreans who also share this opinion, and Brother Anthony (who has even adopted a Korean name and has spent decades of his life in Korea) is not a typical ‘foreigner’ either.

71 »[...] strapazieren die Geduld des Lesern mit philosophierenden Auslassungen von verblüffender Naivität.« Martin Tutsch, *Koreanische Literatur in deutscher Übersetzung. Bibliographie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 13.

be limited to the field of literature or to the history of literature, but is also connected to the general mentality of the relevant audiences (or to a comparative history of their mentalities), as again Brother Anthony points out:

Very often a westerner will be giggling at stereotyped clichés and sentimental posturing where many Koreans sincerely come close to tears.<sup>72</sup>

Beyond such large and extremely precarious issues there are such that touch the field of mental difference but are more concrete. It would, for instance, be a fruitful endeavour to show how Korean authors tend to skip a *tertium comparationis*, simply trusting in the ability of the reader to infer it themselves, and how the great tolerance of Korean readers for ambiguity allows them to accept comparisons that withhold the specific aspect that is thought to be the common ground of the two things likened to each other in the comparison. The following example may serve as an illustration:

아이 추워. 십칠 년 전에 여학생이었던 살찐 여자가, 마치 여학생처럼 여름이불 속을 파고들었다.<sup>73</sup>

Hey, it's cold. The fat woman who had been a student seventeen years ago dove beneath the summer quilt just like a student would.<sup>74</sup>

How does a student dive under a summer quilt when it is getting cold? The *tertium comparationis* here may only be conjectured from within the context of the protagonist's hidden frustration about his disillusioned middle-aged, middle-class existence: Both he and his wife were democracy activists with lofty ideals but the fall from idealism to sheer materialism is epitomized in his wife's transformation from a 44 kilo student into an 72 kilo *ajumma* ('auntie'). This becomes a sort of running gag that appears in various forms throughout the story.<sup>75</sup> So what the narrator conveys or implies when he says that the protagonist's wife »dove beneath the summer quilt like a student« is something along the lines of: 'as swiftly as if she was still the skinny student of days gone by'. However, an

72 Brother Anthony, »Translation in Practice«, 72.

73 Pak, »K'oriön Süt'endöjü«, 187.

74 Park Min-Gyu, »Korean Standards« (online).

75 To give an example: when his old friend tells him that his farm was attacked by extra-terrestrials, the protagonist states that he does not doubt it since little can surprise him ever since he has become witness to the fact that a woman of 44 kilos can evolve into one of 72 kilos.

*enquête* among a significant number of Korean readers<sup>76</sup> might result in a majority unwilling to produce one decisive and clear-cut interpretation of the passage, and in regard to the interpretation offered above ('as swiftly as the skinny student'), some will gladly subscribe to it and wonder why they hadn't already arrived there on their own, while others will, without being able or willing to propose at least one alternative reading, claim that such a reading is too narrow or too exact, simply because the Korean original does not explicitly narrow down the scope of interpretation.

On the other hand, if a translator were to follow the Korean example in the German translation, a majority of competent readers would, most probably, be confused and not quite ready to accept it: after all, a student does not dive under a summer quilt *per se*, there are fat students as well, not to mention students at the age of retirement, etc. Thus, the translation would at least require a little alteration to make things less ambiguous along the lines of »she dove beneath the quilt as if she was still that feather-weight student of the old days«. <sup>77</sup>

#### *Judging Poetologies*

Translating, more than anything else, opens one's eyes to the particularities of an author. This is also a reason why evaluations can give a defamiliarizing and therefore illuminating frame of reference for judging poetologies of well-known Korean writers. Since the target language will, in many cases, not allow the same scope of meaning as the original, a translation will have to strive for ever closer and more precise interpretations. In that sense, translations remind us of the »limits of interpretation«. Borrowing from a famous statement by Umberto Eco, one could alter it as follows: translation gives a more exact idea of the »right of the text«. <sup>78</sup> While it has become an outworn shibboleth to insist on the possibly big difference between *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis*, the rather less trivial position will not simply dismiss the idea of the former as a guiding principle.

After all, establishing an interpretation means assigning an intention. <sup>79</sup> At any rate, insofar as a translation limits the range of interpretation in favour of

76 The present writer is boldly extrapolating this from his own smaller sample of friends and acquaintances.

77 Park Min-Gyu, »Korean Standards« (online).

78 Whereas Eco says: »The limits of interpretation coincide with the rights of the text [...] which does not mean with the rights of the author.« Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 6–7.

79 Cf. »in whatever way one establishes an interpretation, one will at the same time be assigning an intention« Stanley Eugene Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally. Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 117.

the best interpretation—this is not denying those cases where the mere fact of a variety of possible interpretations constitutes an essential element of a text—the translation is also eager to assign intentions or to find out about intention. This is, by the way, the reason why most translators will tend to ask the author in cases of grave doubt.

On the other hand, the translator will, since he is defamiliarizing the original, reveal features of the original that would, without paying very careful and close attention, otherwise escape notice.

One author acclaimed as one of the most original contemporary writers in South Korea is Park Min-Gyu (b1968). Examining the difficulties presented by rendering his ingeniously crafted writing into German can be an excellent way to make one even more aware of his peculiarities and strengths as an author. His genuine and intricate method of complex condensation of meaning may be studied in the following fine example that really poses a problem for analysis as, again, is drastically revealed when one compares the original text with the published translation:

초등학교 이학년인 딸아이는 코를 골면서 자고 있었다. 세 군데의 학원을 돌고 돌아오므로, 아이는 곧 녹초가 되어버린다. 얘기를 끝내고, 함께 담배를 나눠 핀 후 우리는 오랜만에 관계를 가졌다. 씻고 와요 하는 아내를 옆드리게 하고, 조금은 거칠게, 공격이라도 하듯 아내의 몸을 파고들었다. [...] 제법 비만인 살찐 둔부속이, 세 군데의 학원처럼 멀고 벽차게 느껴졌다.<sup>80</sup>

Our daughter, in second grade of elementary school, was asleep and snoring. She is always utterly worn out after attending after-school lessons at three different institutes. Once we'd finished talking, after we'd shared a cigarette, exceptionally, we had sex. My wife had told me to wash before going to bed but I made her lie on her front and penetrated her a bit roughly, aggressively even. [...] Between her really fat, corpulent buttocks; it felt as impossibly remote as three different after-school institutes.<sup>81</sup>

The protagonist is a middle-class father, working desperately hard so as to be able to blend in with his contemporaries, which for a Korean father would mean bearing the exorbitant costs of having children attend *bagwons* ('institutes' for supplementary after-school education also dubbed private cram-schools), to help

80 Pak Min-gyu, »K'oriön Süt'endöjü«, 183.

81 Park Min-Gyu, »Korean Standards« (online).

with examination preparation. While his daughter is exhausted by the efforts put at her education, the protagonist who has to earn the money required is exhausted as well. This in fact is what makes the picture so complex. The frustrations of the hero are packed together in an image that is not at all pornographic but meaningfully combines the essence of the hero's misery in a mode of a transfiguration that one could call poetic realism.<sup>82</sup>

In a literal sense, one might ask why the journey to the three *hagwons* should be *per se* a long one since the three *hagwons* could just be lined up neatly in the neighbourhood of the school the daughter attends. If we liberate ourselves from the exact wording in the original, the picture is nevertheless clear: The fat buttocks represent for the husband a distance to overcome, a distance that had not existed when his wife was a skinny student. Thus, it is a great distance that he now must bridge now in order to attain his goal, i.e. penetration, and he struggles to reach it. So this exhausting sexual intercourse reminds the protagonist's troubled mind about the daily odyssey his daughter has to overcome. And again: his daughter being tired to death every day mirrors his own looming burnout. Is it possible to make this resound in a Western reader's mind? Most probably, any translation will have to be more outspoken in order to convey those associations that would just suggest themselves automatically to a competent Korean reader of the original.

## 3

The striving for sophisticated models does not significantly serve the purpose of guiding practitioners, even though this is precisely the aim of theorists and the ostensible purpose of top-down ambitions in translation studies. This paper pleads for induction instead of deduction, which means that instead of guidelines and generalisations one should strive for studiously attentive

82 Poetic Realism («poetischer Realismus») is considered to be an important movement in the history of German literature but one could apply the term to other realist authors such as Flaubert just as well. There is—not coming from a historical but a philological, i.e. exegetic, perspective—no better research to understand the ingeniously interwoven and meaningful descriptions that were the strength of the main exponents of poetic realism than the one given in Wolfgang Preisendanz's book *Humor als dichterische Einbildungskraft. Studien zur Erzählkunst des poetischen Realismus* (2nd ed., München: Fink, 1976).

descriptions of prototypical and paradigmatic as well as more specific types of mistakes. In teaching translation, abstract notions should be replaced by lastingly impressive examples of mistakes, i.e. of 'proven and tested' pitfalls, along with alternative better ways to deal with them.

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