

PhD Thesis Abstract

A Study on the Role and Status of News Translators in South Korea: Focusing on the Case of English News

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1. Background and Objectives

This research aims at investigating the role and status of news translators in media organizations operating in South Korea focusing on news translation between Korean and English. The act of translation has long been considered inferior and derivative compared to the act of original work production and translators have been seen as secondary to original authors, leaving the job without social and official position and degrading translators' status. However, translation and translators may deserve more attention and improved status since they have played key roles in the evolution of human thought and intellectual life throughout the history, ranging from the invention of alphabets, the emergence of national literatures, the dissemination of knowledge and the spread of religions(Delisle & Woodsworth 1995, x iv). News translators, in particular, are under very complicated and peculiar conditions which can affect their role and status compared with translators in other fields. News translators are working for media organizations whose main business is producing original news texts based on news gathering and reporting, key task of reporters, not of translators.

This means the act of translation, key task of translators, and therefore the role and status of translators are likely given less attention and recognition compared with the act of news gathering and reporting, and the role and status of reporters within media organizations(Vuorinen 1995; Tsai 2005). On the other hand, news translators have much in common with reporters in terms of tasks and required ability and attitudes(Goldscheider 2004; Gambier 2006). Also in news translation, authorship and status of source texts is likely disintegrated, and

therefore fidelity to source texts is not given absolute value, possibly allowing translators more discretion to intervene in and transform source texts than those in other fields (Stetting 1989; Bassnett 2006; Bielsa 2007; Bielsa & Bassnett 2009; Doorslaer 2010). These conflicting aspects of news translation highlight the need for in-depth and exhaustive exploration of the role and status of news translators and are what motivated this study that sheds light on which role translators are playing in the process of news production and which status they are given in comparison with such role.

2. Research Questions and Methods

This research seeks to answer the following three research questions.

Which tasks news translators undertake and which discretion they exercise in the process of news translation, the key stage translators take part in among the four stages of news production which consist of news selection, news translation, news editing and news transmitting?

Which tasks news translators undertake and which discretion they exercise in the other three stages of news production?

What are translators' overall working conditions and identity perceived by themselves and other news production participants within media organizations?

To answer the research questions, three types of research methods, namely interviews, textual analysis and surveys, were adopted. Such an integrated approach was taken in order to cover not only the textual but the extra-textual aspects surrounding news translators. These three research methods are implemented in stages, and throughout the stages, collected data was compared between translators and reporters involved in the news production to gauge more precise role and status of news translators. Within the translator group, data from freelance and in-house translators were divided and compared. As for the analysis on the identity of translators and reporters, data from editors and desks working with each group were also included.

In the first stage, a total of 14 professionals involved in news production such as translators, reporters, editors and desks were interviewed to gain the ideas of general news production process and working conditions of news translators in South Korea to set up more feasible research design and scope.

The second stage, textual analysis, collected a total of 296 pairs of source texts and target texts which were then classified by five news translation strategies

including deletion, addition, substitution, reorganization and synthesis, categories borrowed and adapted from the terms and concepts suggested by previous research on news translation (Hursti 2001; Gambier 2006; Bielsa & Bassnett 2009; Chen 2009, 2011; Bassnett 2011; Lu & Chen 2011). Qualitative and quantitative comparison between translators' and reporters' intervention in and transformation of the classified texts was followed. The compared texts were then evaluated based on a few gauges of expectancy norms of news translation, borrowed and adapted from previous studies in Translation Studies and Journalism, including intervention in and transformation of source texts when necessary as well as compliance with major principles of news writing and reporting (Mencher 1984; Reiss 1989; Lanson & Stephens 1994; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; Chesterman 1997; Missouri Group 2005).

The third stage was surveys with a total of 44 news production professionals, also including translators, reporters, editors and desks, and asked questions regarding major indicators of job status, such as education and expertise, visibility, influence, income and identity, used in previous research in Translation Studies and Sociology (Edwards 1943; Blau & Duncan 1967; Dam & Zethsen 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Sela-Sheffy 2008, 2010; Sela-Sheffy & Shlesinger 2008; Katan 2009a, 2009b; Koskinen 2009; Setton & Guo Liangliang 2011; Ruokonen 2013).

3. Research Findings

3.1. News Translators' Role and Discretion in News Translation Process

The key findings of this research obtained from the three stages of methods are as follows.

As for the first research question, news translators undertake limited scope of tasks and exercise weaker discretion in terms of intervention in and transformation of source texts compared with reporters in the stage of news translation. The textual analysis showed that passive intervention in and minor transformation of source texts as well as violation of the expectancy norms of news translation are more noticeable and frequent in the texts produced by translators than those by reporters. Three elements can explain the difference between these two groups found in the textual analysis, according to the surveys and interviews. The

surveys revealed that translators hardly take part in news gathering and original news writing or combine and merge a number of source texts into a single text as opposed to reporters who are freely engaged in such activities. The result indicates that translators have weaker discretion in producing texts within media organizations, and therefore intervene in and transform source texts in a more passive manner than reporters. Interview findings suggested that the identity of translators perceived by themselves may also be attributed to the passive intervention and minor transformation since some of the translator respondents see it is beyond their authority to drastically and actively intervene in and transform source texts to the extent which reporters do. In short, translators are not allowed to or not motivated to actively intervene in and drastically transform source texts. Concerning the explanation for the violation of the expectancy norms of news translation, interviews found that translators are not given enough opportunities of training and education related to news writing and reporting by media organizations or not paying full attention to or giving much value on meeting the expectancy norms of news translation even if sufficient training and education is provided. Among the translators, in-house translators intervene in and transform source texts in a more passive manner than freelance translators. This can indicate that the context of prototypical institutional translation in-house translators usually work, namely a circumstance where an official body uses translation as a means of speaking to a particular audience (Koskinen 2008, 22), may impose bigger constraints on translators than the context of peripheral institutional translation, a more loose definition of institutional translation which refers to a circumstance where translation takes place in or for specific organizations.

3.2. News Translators' Role and Discretion in Other News Production Processes

Regarding the second research question, translators undertake limited scope of tasks and exercise weaker discretion also in terms of visibility, influence and autonomy compared with reporters in the stages of news production other than news translation. And the limited tasks and weaker discretion was shown to be attributed to the dichotomous views of media organizations as well as of translators and reporters which draw a clear line between the ability, expertise and role expected and required for each professional group. For example, as

for a survey question on the news production stages respondents are mainly involved in except news translation, nearly 70 percent of translators selected news editing, a task which requires linguistic ability and expertise while 87 percent of reporters chose news selection, a task which calls for ability to judge news value. This suggests media organizations assign different and separate tasks for translators and reporters possibly based on the dichotomous views. About a survey question on the interaction with other news production professionals, translators communicate with others in the fewer number of news production stages than reporters, indicating weaker visibility. Paradoxically, translators communicate with others more frequently in the stage of news translation, their key task, compared with reporters. The result suggests that translators may be more influenced by or dependent on others in carrying out their key task than reporters, and therefore exercise weaker influence or autonomy within media organizations. Within the translator group, in-house translators face bigger constraints and exercise weaker influence or autonomy than freelancers, supporting the findings for the first research question introduced above.

3.3. News Translators' Working Conditions/Identity within Media Organizations

Concerning the third research question, huge gap was found between translators and reporters in overall working conditions and identity perceived by themselves and other news production participants within media organizations. Survey results showed that both translators and reporters believe a professional involved in news translation should play the role of a journalist (63% and 93% respectively), but in reality most of translators (84%) tend to play the role of a translation expert while a majority of reporters (73%) play the role of a journalist which corresponds to their ideal. This suggests that translators may face stronger constraints which prevent or discourage them from playing what they believe is an ideal role. As for a survey question on the influence and status respondents think they have within media organizations, translators scored lower than reporters, indicating that translators own perception of weak influence and low status may be one of the constraints. This perception can prompt translators to draw a clear line between themselves and reporters concerning the scope of tasks and the extent of discretion in the overall stages of news production, resulting in translators' passive intervention in and minor translation of source texts as shown

in the findings for the first research question. Translators have poor working conditions compared with reporters in terms of job security, financial and non-financial compensation, chances of promotion and training or education and job satisfaction, according to interviews and surveys. Translators tend to work on a contract basis than reporters all of whom are permanent workers. Translators are given fewer chances of promotion which can help them land in a more influential position within media organizations. They also lack training or education opportunities. The poor working conditions can explain translators' perception of weak influence and low status shown in the surveys as well as violation of the expectancy norms of news translation found in textual analysis. Translators are less satisfied with their job than reporters, which may be affected by weak influence and low status as well as poor working conditions. Within the translator group, more freelance translators see the role of a journalist as ideal and actually play such a role than in-house translators. However, freelancers are under worse working conditions than in-house translators in general, suggesting freelancers may not be given recognition and compensation their relatively active role as a journalist deserve.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn as follows in terms of the role and status of news translators in media organizations operating in South Korea. News translators are playing a limited role and exercise weaker influence, visibility and autonomy, which are indicators of power, compared with reporters in the overall stages of news production. News translators see their influence and status lower than those of reporters and have poor working conditions compared to reporters within media organizations. In short, news translators in South Korea are playing a limited role and have lower status compared with reporters.

This research also identified a possible main cause of the limited role and low status of news translators and offers a few proposals to fix the cause and ultimately enhance their status. The integration of three types of research methods helped find that insufficient education and training programs led to little knowledge of news writing and reporting among news translators, and therefore the lack of confidence in their own products, discouraging them to play an active role. This can affect the quality of their products as textual analysis showed in some cases of violation of expectancy norms of news translation,

and therefore have a negative impact on the perception and status of translators within media organizations. That means effective and sufficient education and training programs are much in need as a first step to ultimately enhance news translators' status. To be more specific, education and training programs should be executed in a bilateral manner based on active feedback from editors or desks and free communications between translators and these professionals. Media organizations are recommended to designate qualified trainers among desks or editors with long-term experience to provide translators with knowledge and skills required for professionals involved in news production, not just news translation but news writing and reporting, and revise translators' products. Training translators under the news writing and reporting program prepared for cub reporters can make a practical and realistic alternative. For their part, graduate schools of translation and interpretation may offer a practicum that sensitizes students' awareness about the key features of news articles' text type and the principles of news writing and reporting.

The results from this study may inform researchers not only in Translation Studies but other closely related disciplinary areas such as Sociology and Journalism, not to mention practitioners in the relevant field. The expected benefits and value of this study can be summarized as followings. This study, as one of the rare attempts to look into the status of translators in South Korea, will help not only expand and deepen the research topic in Translation Studies as well as other disciplinary areas. Contribution to diversification of research methods is also expected since it compares various aspects of news translators with those of reporters and includes the voices from editors and desks to cover a wide range of factors and multi-layered structures that may affect translators and their activities in terms of the role and status whereas previous studies concentrated on analyzing texts produced by translators and data collected from translators. This study can also offer useful data not only to facilitate future research on the role and status of translators in various fields, but to help professional translators and training and education institutions better understand and prepare for the real working environment of news translation. Given that understanding translators' task would inevitably result in a better appreciation of their social position (Vermeer 1994, 14), this research, by expanding our knowledge of news translators' tasks, interactions with other news translation participants, overall working conditions as well as identity perceived by themselves and other participants, is expected to help pave the way to improve their social status in the long-term.

Despite these expected contribution, however, some limitations of this study require further research to improve validity and generalizability. The number of respondents for interviews and surveys, which is 14 and 44 respectively, may be small and needs to be expanded to unveil more complicated and various factors and conditions affecting translators' role and status that this study may have missed. Researcher's own evaluation of texts against the expectancy norms of news translation can be complemented with surveys, interviews or experiments with news readers or editors and desks to rule out the possibility of researcher's subjectivity and bias intervening in the process of textual analysis. The language combination and translation fields can be expanded and diversified from this study's focus of translation between Korean and English and news translation to enrich research areas on the role and status of translators in general.

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