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In Their Own Words: Korean Perspectives on Becoming English Interpreter/Translators

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

KOREAN PERSPECTIVES ON BECOMING ENGLISH

INTERPRETER/TRANSLATORS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Jon H. Bahk-Halberg

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August 2007

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: In Their Own Words: Korean Perspectives on Becoming English Interpreter/Translators

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This interview study looks at the learning, life, and experiences of 15 professional Korean English interpreter/translators, exploring influences on their career choice, their education and upbringing, and their perspectives on their careers now. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What kind of background experiences led to these interpreter/translators' interest in the field? (2) What kinds of language and cultural learning experiences have they had? (3) What experiences do they say have been the most useful, and the most challenging, regarding the work they do now? (4) What advice can they offer to those interested in following them in their chosen career? Initial interviews of 15 interpreter/translators' life histories were conducted. More focused second interviews continued with 12 candidates, and 7 were interviewed a third time.

The results include selected interview transcripts addressing major issues selected from more than 40 hours of recorded interviews, addressing specific topics suggested by the research questions and others that came out of the conversations, as well as analysis of the transcribed conversations.

The results from the thematic analysis of the life experiences indicate that Korean English interpreter/translators' career choices, learning and lives, followed some common patterns that say much about not only the field, but the specifics of the field in Korea.

More specifically, the study indicates that despite negative opinions of the career by others, as a low-prestige career, particularly for males, those who stayed with it did so because of an urge to help others communicate – "to be a bridge," as one put it.

The study finds the Korean English interpreter/translators commonly had unique educational and career paths, leading them to break free of many of the expectations of Korean society, particularly for those who work as free-lance interpreter/translators. Though many see the work as a low-status service profession, albeit high-paying at the top levels, nearly all talked about satisfaction from challenge of their work. The work, the life, and the challenges, as well as the shadow of stress and burnout, were all issues of concern for these professionals.

The study advocates more research into the changing English-language education field in Korea, as well as looking into the issues of social status and prestige, the predominance of women interpreter/translators in Korea in contrast to other parts of the world, and continuing the burgeoning trend in Korea of looking into the challenges of communicating between Korean and English-speaking cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Researcher's Intention and Approach

I am of a roving disposition; but I travel not to see imposing monuments,

which indeed somewhat bore me, nor beautiful scenery, of which I soon

tire; I travel to see men. I avoid the great. I would not cross the road to

meet a president or a king; … but I have journeyed a hundred leagues to

see a missionary of whom I had heard a strange story and I have spent a

fortnight in a vile hotel in order to improve my acquaintance with a

billiard-marker. (W. Somerset Maugham, *In a Strange Land*).

During the few years I spent wandering in my reading, and meandering in my

thinking, gradually honing in on the focus of this dissertation, I was doing something else at

the same time: letting my mind make connections between the words I read and my

thoughts about the subject I wanted to look at, the process of becoming an English

interpreter/translator in contemporary South Korea. A connection that came unbidden was

the one between the quotation above and the contrasting metaphors that educational

researcher Steinar Kvale used to refer to an interviewer (1996, p. 3). In brief, Kvale wrote

that those who learn by interviewing others, as I did in this dissertation, could be described

in two ways. The researcher was sometimes described as a miner who dug the ore of

knowledge from beneath the ground in people's words, refined it from oral to written form

while maintaining its purity, and presented the refined knowledge without any

contamination from the researcher's efforts. Those who subscribed to the traveler

metaphor, on the other hand, saw the interviewer on a trip to strange lands, preparing a

story to tell others when he returned. The interviewer as traveler might be methodical or

haphazard, but either way, he would learn from his conversations with those he met, Kvale

wrote.

As Maugham suggested, it is often the unintended connections, the happenstance

happenings, that make learning come from an interview study. I was also more interested

in what I could learn from those actually involved in the field than those who teach and

theorize about it, though I talked to and read what teachers and theorists said about the art

of interpretation and translation.

My main focus in this study was listening to some of the best English

interpreter/translators in Korea talk about their experiences in life, work, and in learning to

become an interpreter/translator. While the study began with of my own interest in the area

of interpretation/translation, I saw that it had obvious applications to studying or working in

the field. Perhaps less obvious were its application to all educated citizens of the world,

because of Korea's prominence in recent history in economic and political world affairs.

For those not familiar with the region, I follow standard practice in South Korea by

referring to the nation as "Korea," when of course, the Republic of Korea in the southern

part of the peninsula and the North Korean dictatorship have been divided by ideology for

more than 50 years now, though many Koreans still regard the two as one nation, and

expect reunification in the future. However, except where I specifically refer to "North

Korea" in this study, my research and writing about Korea is in reference to South Korea.

From my life experiences and what I have learned in the classroom, it was clear to

me that my learning style and personality were much more in tune with the postmodern

"traveler" metaphor mentioned above than the more positivist "miner" metaphor of a

researcher searching for buried knowledge. I was conscious of being only a traveler, as a

student, as a teacher, as a resident of the city and country I lived in. I was sure that what I

learned and taught in this life were interconnected in a way that couldn't be explained by

the old ideas of knowledge as a material commodity to be mined, purified, and digested

before being processed into some form of knowledge to be shared.

Living in Seoul, especially with recent events in the North, such as last year's

missile and nuclear tests and this year's tentative settlement of the continuing nuclear crisis,

I was very conscious of the fact that I was here only temporarily. Living in the shadow of a

"rogue nation" with nuclear capabilities brought with it a reminder that life was temporary

too.

A story about a wise rabbi put it this way:

Around the end of the 19th century, a tourist from the United States visited the

famous Polish rabbi Hafez Hayyim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home

was just a simple room filled with books. The only furniture was a table and a

bench.

"Rabbi, where is your furniture?" asked the tourist.

"Where is yours?" replied Hafez.

"Mine? But I'm only a visitor here."

"So am I," said the rabbi.

(Ketcham &Kurtz, 1993, p.34)

Whether because of my existence as an obviously different outsider, a Caucasian foreigner in Seoul, because of my awareness that life was short, or simply because of my nature, I was, and am constantly conscious that this investigation into myself and into life is only temporary. For more than a decade, I have fully expected the next year or 5 or 10 to find me in another place in Korea, in Asia, in the world, just plain somewhere else — or not. Then again, I might just stay here for life. Either way, I am only a visitor, on an annual contract, with no guarantees.

I saw my role in putting the words of this dissertation on paper as that of a chronicler of what interested me and what was worth sharing with others on this sojourn – listening to stories of interpreter/translators and attempting to retell and add my ideas about their meanings for the reader. While I have learned a lot about Korea and Koreans in the past decade, as well as the state of English language learning here, I am not an authority on translation. However, I have become a part of the communication process in an important and interesting area with this research, receiving stories from those who have become top-notch Korean/English interpreters or translators, and I have heard a lot about the pressures and interests, the pushes and pulls, that put them on the path to becoming the main channel of communication between the Republic of Korea and the English-speaking world.

I tried to remember to make the story something more than a self-absorbed tale of a suffering graduate student's struggles with his dissertation, though I might not have started these pages in the right direction. I recognized that if I just wrote about the mammoth task of writing a dissertation in general, it would apply to every ABD in history and, because of the whining, would be neither interesting nor relevant. However, while I wanted to avoid self-absorption, I also saw that I had to include myself in this story. I was a part of the process and what I saw and heard was a part of the experiences I tried to describe in this dissertation. As Kvale noted, "The interviewer is him- or herself the research instrument" (1996, p. 147). So in this interview-based study, I attempted to act as both the instrument of observation and the observer taking measurements from the instrument, my own perceptions and impressions I took in from the interviews.

I was part of this story, and my questions and perceptions were integral to it. I tried to keep from intruding too much, but as much as any of the qualitative researchers I read and learned from in this project, I understand that the idea that this research was only about my "subjects" and that I could stay out of the picture was a fiction, and not even a very productive fiction at that.

In the course of this research, I interviewed professional interpreter/translators at all levels, from recent graduates to seasoned veterans with decades of experience working in international business, government, and other areas. I listened numerous times to these experts for their answers and ideas in response to my questions, pored over interview and class notes from the past four years working as an English instructor at a Korean Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation, changed directions on my research focus, and wrote countless pages that were eventually deleted. I know, for me, there has been a lot of learning along the way, about the process, about the field I work in, and about communication in a very important area of the world, yet one that might not be so familiar to those in the Western Hemisphere.

Context of the Study

I am fortunate to have what could arguably be considered the best and most interesting teaching job in the Republic of Korea, one which calls exactly on my interests and skills as a former journalist. All of my students have strong English skills, and there is little if any focus in my classes on the basic beginning steps of language learning. Instead, the students I teach, in classes whose English title might approximate "Critical Discussion

of Current Issues" and "Advanced English Skills," are encouraged to read, write, listen, speak, argue, and think about as much as they can learn in current world affairs, topical issues, and current English, not necessarily only the variety of English spoken in the United States. We try to learn what we can about what Kachru called "World Englishes" (Kachru & Nelson, 1996), varieties of English spoken around the world.

The GSIT students and alumni from my classes work with clients from many English-speaking countries around the globe, as well as many non-native English speakers using English simply as a "lingua franca" in their field, along with their countrymen who need to understand those who function in English. The only time I try to enforce my language policing skills is in helping students avoid what are commonly referred to as "Konglish" expressions, or common Korean English learner errors, many of which are built in to the most-used English teaching materials in Korea (Shim, 1999), that could lead to embarrassment or misunderstanding when the students go out into the world of professional interpreting and translating. I spend a lot of my time working with students to find interesting and topical subjects for discussions and presentations, while also still trying often to keep a gentle monitor operating in the background to observe and let them know about any recurring problems with their language use.

When I got started at GSIT, I had some things to offer in the areas of helping advanced English learners polish their language usage, including slang and jargon, knowledge and interest in world affairs and journalism in the English language, and experience in the practice and teaching of public speaking. These were the skills I was asked about in my initial interview and they remained a focus of my classes. In addition, I still continue to learn much from my colleagues and students about how a school of interpretation and translation functions, or at least how this school functions, with virtually all of the students' attention, effort, and time devoted to practicing interpreting and translating from English to Korean and from Korean to English.

After more than a decade working with students learning English as a second language, most of that time with university students in Korea, but also with international military personnel of all language backgrounds in the U.S., I believe the students in this study could well be the most advanced group learners I have ever worked with. They are the cream of the crop, top graduates of the top universities in Korea and elsewhere. Getting admitted to GSIT means they have already won a tight competition.

Beginnings

My current interest came about because of an early awareness and fascination

that came from working with such a high-level group. While working at the U.S.

Defense Language Institute English Language Center in San Antonio, Texas, where

international military personnel training at U.S. military or other schools went for

English language training, I was certified as an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) rater

and evaluated the language proficiency of hundreds of English learners. Here in

Korea, at the GSIT, I interviewed all of my first-year students in the spring of 2004,

using an abbreviated format modified from my OPI training. While I did these

interviews alone, rather than using the "official" method which calls for a pair of

evaluators, I used OPI criteria and ranked nearly all of the students above the 3-point

range, a level which, on the government scoring sheets I once used, is called "general

professional proficiency." From these interviews it was clear to me that the English

language listening and speaking proficiency of these students as a group was

noticeably higher than the average ability of any group of students I had worked with

before, in Korea or the U.S.

As I worked with these students in the spring of 2004, I thought I saw a unique

opportunity with a very special student population. Though they were just beginning the

journey toward the highest qualification as interpreters and translators, they were already at

the top of the heap in another sense. Those admitted to this graduate program had the best

English ability and had graduated from some of the best universities in Korea and overseas.

Entrance interviews and written examinations that tested their ability to translate and

interpret from English to Korean and vice-versa were extremely challenging.

My evolving ideas about the "point" of this project have gone through a few

evolutions. However, I am still interested in my students from that first year—the learning

processes they went through, their ability to communicate in written and spoken English,

their ability to "switch codes" from one language to the other and their remarkable short-

term memory for spoken language. My initial, perhaps slightly naïve, thought was to

simply look at characteristics of successful Korean English language learners and see if any

generalizations could be made that would be useful. However, while I was interested in

their language ability, I was intrigued with the motivation which led them to this

demanding educational and career pursuit and the kinds of activities which furthered their

interpretation and translation skills.

For some of my students who grew up in different parts of the world, moving from a Korean-speaking to an English-speaking environment in the mysterious language acquisition period, it seemed natural to learn to speak two languages as virtually all humans learned to speak the language around them. Others struggled harder to learn at a more advanced age, sometimes with immersion in English-language environments overseas or in Korea (for example, in the Korean Army working with U.S. forces) that may have helped accelerate their language abilities. Still others seemed to have learned with less exposure to an English environment and just naturally "picked up" their language skills. I was interested in all three types of students. Maybe they really were not so different, since all of them had some kind of exposure, whether intense or not, to English as a second (or third) language, and for various reasons they all developed enough interest in that language to make it a focus of major learning.

Although their advanced skills in two languages might have made them "special" in some ways, this dissertation was focused not so much on their language learning as on their interest and ability in becoming a communication channel between two languages. That was something that made them truly unique. Those with strong skills in two languages were not common in Korea, or in many places around the world. But rare indeed were those who

not only can communicate in two languages at different times, but also had what some said

was a gift – the ability to translate the written word, or interpret the spoken word, from one

language to another while keeping the meaning of a message intact.

In this study, I used interviews to look in detail at the learning experiences of

interpreters and translators at all levels, and discovered more about the factors they think

led to their specialized interests and abilities in the field. I have seen this project as a

descriptive study on becoming a translator and the translator's life. The aim was to look at

the life and educational experiences that brought them to this career goal and the learning

experiences behind and still in front of them as professionals who transform messages from

one language and cultural realm into another.

In *The Interpreter*, a novel whose main character is a Korean-American who

interprets in New York City courtrooms, author Suki Kim gives an image that, to me,

describes well something of what an interpreter/translator must do:

> Suzy scribbles a few key words into her notepad … No matter how long a sentence,
>
> she must not leave out a single word in her translation. An interpreter is like a
>
> mathematician. She approaches language as if it were an equation. Each word is

instantly matched with its equivalent. To arrive at a correct answer, she must be

exact. Suzy, unbeknownst to herself, has always been skilled at this. It cannot be

due to her bilingual upbringing, since not all immigrant kids make excellent

interpreters. What she possesses is an ability to be at two places at once. She can

hear a word and separate its literal meaning from its connotation. This is necessary,

since the verbatim translation often leads to confusion. Languages are not logical.

Thus an interpreter must translate word for word and yet somehow manipulate the

breadth of language to bridge the gap. While one part of her brain does automatic

conversion, the other part examines the linguistic void that results from such

transference. It is an art that requires a precise and yet creative mind.   Only the true

solver knows that two plus two can suggest a lot of things before ending up at four.

(pp. 90-91)

This seems an accurate description of the interpreter's and translator's tasks and

required skills, as well as the mental processes that take place, partly unconsciously, as they

perform. Whether they are dealing with heads of state or business executives, a medical

conference or a gathering of research economists, they have special talents that can be

nurtured. How much of this ability is teachable? Often, students at GSIT have strong skills

at shifting from one language to another before they get any translation training. Those that

excel seem to have something that sets them apart from the rest, something beyond an ear

for language. That something extra was one of the things I wanted to learn more about.

HUFS GSIT

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) sits squarely in the middle of the

tightly-packed urban congestion that is Seoul. The capital of South Korea since 1394, Seoul

is the seventh most-populous city in the world, with a total 2005 population of about 10.3

million people – nearly a quarter of the country's population (Seoul Metropolitan

Government, n.d.). That proportion jumps to nearly half of South Korea's population if we

include the entire Seoul Metropolitan area -- 23.5 million people, making it the second

most-populated metropolitan area in the world, and one of the most compact and crowded

cities, just behind Tokyo, Japan (Seoul, 2007, Wikipedia.).

The Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation (GSIT), is housed in a bland-

looking, six-story building on the north side of the university's small, also rather bland

campus. While HUFS graduates may well be proud of their school for its national

reputation as the best foreign languages university, they also acknowledge that it does not

have Seoul's most pleasant campus. The tightly crowded, 30- and 40-year old buildings

leave little room for attractive landscaping. While there have been improvements in recent

years, HUFS's Seoul buildings and grounds may never match the Kyunghee University's

just several hundred meters away. That campus is also known as "Kyungheeland" by

HUFS students, who often walk over there to sit under tree-lined walks instead of hanging

around at their own school. It is also very different from HUFS's other, newer and more

beautiful suburban campus an hour outside Seoul in the satellite city of Yongin, with its

green forested landscapes and ponds, freshened by cool mountain breezes.

The only unique feature of the GSIT building is a round structure in its west end,

inside of which is Aekyung Hall, an auditorium sometimes used for large classes and larger

conferences or other gatherings. The auditorium is an open space three stories tall, with

eight upper-level interpretation booths at the back of the hall accessible from corridors on

the third floor outside the auditorium. These interpretation booths are used at times for

interpreting foreign speakers and conferences. They are also used for the dreaded exams at

the end of the first year, which divide students into consecutive interpretation and

simultaneous interpretation tracks, and the graduation exams at the end of the second year.

Korea's Growing Connections to English and the World

In recent years, Korean popular culture, as expressed in "K-pop" music, Korean

television dramas and several recent movies, has become extremely well-known in many

countries in Asia. It is also getting an increasing amount of attention in the United States

and Europe. In politics and foreign affairs, South Korea is becoming a global player. In

addition, relations between the two Koreas—and their potential effects on the rest of the

world—make what is being said in Korean an important factor for everyone in the English-

speaking world to understand.

It has been estimated that there are about 80 million speakers of the Korean

language, most living in North and South Korea. Large numbers of Korean speakers also

live in China, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand, along with many who have emigrated to

other nations, such as Australia and the United States. (Korean language, 2007, Wikipedia.)

Inside South Korea, understanding English, particularly spoken English, is a prized

and valuable skill. While middle school, high school and university students have long been

exposed to English classes emphasizing grammar rules and some level of literacy in written

English, until recently speaking has for the most part been neglected. However, as more

Koreans travel abroad, the nation known for hundreds of years as "The Hermit Kingdom" for its state policy of excluding (or executing) outsiders, particularly those from the West, is making rapid gains in its vision of, and its visibility to, the world beyond its borders. The "Hermit Kingdom" label however, has now been transferred to North Korea, one of the last lingering enemies from the Cold War Era, and still the most isolated of them all from outside ideas and influences.

After living in Korea for much of the time since 1995, I have seen many changes take place as South Korea has opened to the world. As an English teacher in Korean universities, I have witnessed firsthand some of the improvements in English language ability being reported by virtually all observers of the language-learning scene in Korea. While China's obvious growth in economic power is now making Chinese a more popular choice of study for millions of Korean students, the primacy of English is so far unchallenged. ("More young South Koreans," 2004)

Many Korean students want to become a translators or interpreters. Many young people dream of being a language expert who can make Korean words and thoughts comprehensible to the world outside and who can take advantage of Korean fascination

with that world by explaining the West to Korea. Unfortunately, many do not have the language skills or the other qualities necessary for an interpreter or translator.

GSIT Students

Though I talked to professional interpreters/translators from several different experience levels for this study, they all shared a connection, as former students or faculty at the GSIT. This is not unusual, since until the last several years, nearly all Korean interpreter/translators were educated at the GSIT. Students at GSIT come from many different backgrounds and have a variety of skill, talent, or ability levels, both in their first (Korean) and second (in this case, English) languages. However, language proficiency is only a start – some would say less than half the battle. Each November, between several hundred and over 1,000 applicants try for one of 40 or 50 places in the new Korean-English interpretation/translation class, which begins in March. The first thing to be tested is their ability in the written and spoken language.

Many of these students may have to settle for less, but for most of the GSIT students a simultaneous interpreter is the pinnacle of the profession. Another other option is conference interpreting. It would not be fair to those who are proficient, or even artistic,

in translating written literary works or other areas of translation to say that they all have the same goal in mind. Many of these aspiring translators, like their mentors working in the field, are artists in their own right. Consecutive interpreting too, has its own prerequisite abilities, such as skill at being visually expressive, a "showman," and skill at public speaking. Still, almost every student dreams of putting the words of a national figure—a president, prime minister, or a foreign minister—into another language to help his or her country communicate with the outside world.

In Korea there is a great sense of national pride. The nation's increasing importance and prominence as a partner in world geopolitics fuels the imagination with thoughts being a high-level interpreter and acting as a bridge between cultures. The odds against having this opportunity are high, and the competition can be daunting. The pressure is intense, as the interpreter shows up, day after day, studies background information on a new subject until late at night, then faces the pressure once again.

All of the students at HUFS' GSIT are Koreans. While they have different proficiency levels, it is safe to say they all have an extremely high English language ability compared to other educated Korean English speakers. They have learned English in English-speaking countries or in Korea in a range of different ways and for a range of

reasons, which have been labeled "circumstantial bilingualism" at one extreme and

"elective" bilingualism at the other (Valdés and Figueroa, 1994, p. 11). When one of my

students was in primary school, her parents moved to Bangkok, where she went to an

international, English-language school. This situation made her a "circumstantial"

bilingual. Another became interested in English in elementary school and studied after

school every day. She could be seen as more of an "elective" bilingual. Of course, no one is

completely at either extreme of the spectrum; many people have experienced both kinds of

situations in their lives and either used them to learn a language or did not.

Many of the students at HUFS' GSIT have studied and/or graduated from

universities in English-speaking countries. Those who have learned English in Korea are

high achievers, and virtually all have at least spent some time studying, living or traveling

in English-speaking countries. Most of the students report spending from six months to a

year preparing for the entrance exam. Many who don't succeed the first time try again the

following year.

These students have already achieved a measure of success in spoken and written

English simply by being admitted to the program, having won out in competition against

many other applicants, and passed stringent entrance examinations and interviews. By

making the most of their language education, in Korea or abroad, they have achieved high

levels of facility in the English language, levels that most language educators would hope

for in students from similar language backgrounds as the final result. Though they have yet

to achieve their goals in the interpretation/translation field, I became interested in trying to

find out what they have done just to get to this point.

Initial Interests and Plan

I am now in an environment where strong English language learners are the rule

rather than the exception, and I have taught in other places where strong English language

learners can be found in large numbers. This realization has led me to change my original

ideas and look at the process of learning to be an interpreter/translator, rather than at the

bigger picture of learning English as a second language, a task which not only seems too

big for this project, but one that others have tried many times with no definitive answers.

In this dissertation, I looked more closely at the experiences, goals and achievements of

interpreter/translators of varied experience levels.

Who are they? Where do they come from? How did they get into it? What does it

take to be an interpreter? How do they make it? How do they see what they do? And

finally, is it worth it? These are the questions I was curious about as part of my overall

interest in what it must be like to be one of those who channel the words of another into

their own language—and even more difficult, channel the words of their own language into

English. Sometimes the language has been learned well, sometimes imperfectly, during a

multinational childhood spent hopping from school to school, culture to culture and

language to language.

I have read a lot and listened as practitioners in the fields of interpretation and

translation talked about what they do and how it works, including various theories about

what goes on during the process of interpretation and translation. However, I have no

personal experience other than closely observing them as they work. I do have years of

experience listening to and reading work produced by Korean English students, and in

recent years I have focused on graduate students of interpretation and translation. This,

combined with what I've learned through extensive reading and experience with Korean

culture and language, has given me some insight into the challenges and benefits of the

profession.

While this study has not been written with an emic view from the inside of the

interpreter's experience, it has been written from the perspective of an interested outsider

who has observed what is going on at close hand. I hope I have been well-equipped to act

as another kind of bridge, one between the world of interpretation and translation to the

eyes and minds of interested observers—prospective members of the field, students of

culture, curious readers wanting to know about communication between Korea and the

West or others outside the confusing, and often enigmatic Korean culture.

Research Questions/Objectives

At the beginning of this project, the intent was to look at both interpreters and

translators as separate groups. However, as the project continued, with one interviewee

telling me about another potential interviewee, I soon realized it was taking a shape of its

own. I began by consulting experienced professors at the GSIT in order to make a list of

the most knowledgeable and useful candidates for an interview study, the best continuing

students, part-time faculty, or other interpreters and translators working in the field.

All of the people I talked to have been involved in translating at some point in their

careers and many continue to be. However, the primary focus of what I learned from the

responses to my questions, again and again, seemed to be more about interpreting spoken

language than translating written texts. Interpreting is considered the highest goal for the

vast majority of students who enter GSIT and other similar Korean schools, and it is

regarded as their highest calling. For these "best of the best," it seems that interpreting is

the most challenging and most interesting part of their work and life, although it can also be

the most stressful.

In addition, my curiosity was drawn to the idea of the human capacity to listen to a

flow of words in one language, and transform and retransmit a large percentage of the

information, including the important details, into another language. This is impressive with

any pair of languages, but with languages having structures as radically different as Korean

and English, it is awe-inspiring. It is an amazing gift, even if done one chunk at a time,

while the speaker waits to be interpreted. At times I find it close to unbelievable that some

individuals can actually transform the information simultaneously, listening to one

language and speaking in another. Interpretation may be something the average person pays

little attention to. But watching it being done close-up, and watching students develop from

beginners to professionals can often be like watching a gifted artist at work.

In inquiring into the educational experiences and life lessons learned by English

language learners on their way to professions as interpreter/translators, my main research

questions have been shifted and modified several times. At this point, with more ideas

about what can be learned from talking to interpreter/translators about their life, learning

and work, I've come to a point where simpler seems better. The main questions I pursued

in this dissertation are as follows:

- What kind of background experiences do interpreter/translators talk about that led to

their interest in the field, in terms of both language learning and development as a

communicator?

- What kinds of language and cultural learning experiences have

interpreter/translators had, both in the classroom and in their lives?

- What experiences do interpreter/translators say have been the most useful, and also,

the most challenging to them in connection with the work they are doing now?

- What advice can interpreter/translators offer to those interested in following them in

their career path?

The questions above are not the ones I had when I began this study, but after

looking at the topic and talking to many interpreter/translators at length, they have become

the focus of my interest. That is why I have thought about, asked about, and written about

the professional background, learning and lives of those who are learning and working as

English interpreters and translators in Korea today.

In addition, a question which arose from my classroom experience and my reading

is this:

● In learning about, living in, and practicing interpretation/translation between Korean

and English-speaking cultures, what kind of problems or other "side effects" have you

experienced from cultural differences?

The question was sparked by recurring memories of strange, different or just plain

odd language and cultural experiences and misunderstandings in the classroom that didn't

quite fit my outsider understanding, as well as the numerous stories and anecdotes told to

me by students and friends about their experiences with the "other" culture. Many of these

stories, including some from people who have made intercultural experiences a way of life,

aroused my curiosity. I wanted to know how experienced, professional,

multilingual/multicultural guides saw difficulties in the interaction of contrasting cultures

or whether, in fact, they saw any problems at all.

Overall, as I note in below in chapter II, my goal was, following the ideas of

Polkinghorne, Kvale, and many others, to find some meaning from the stories of these

interpreter/translators' stories about their experiences in regard to their learning and

development as interpreter/translators. Again to foreshadow what I write about in more

depth in Chapter II, I wanted to simply "(l)ook for a story that needs to be told" (Pagnucci,

2004, p. 22). For many reasons cited above and in the following pages, finding out about

the learning and lives of these influential communicators was a project that I saw as both

interesting and important, and definitely a story that needed to be told.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter may not, in some ways, resemble what a typical "Lit. Review" chapter

in a dissertation is expected to look like. I think part of the reason for that is because this

dissertation, like many dissertations, has at least partially conflicting goals: to come up with

new and original research results and present them in a standard and ancient format. It is

my hope that some brief explanation will help readers understand why a deviation from the

norm seemed to fit this project as it was being written.

Schwandt (2001) writes about a review of literature from two perspectives.

Concerning the the first, he writes:

A widely held view is that reviews are a means of collecting and organizing the

results of previous studies so as to produce a composite of what we have already

learned about a particular topic. This approach assumes that knowledge accumulates

within a field, and hence understanding of some phenomenon can be built up piece

by piece, brick by brick, eventually yielding a more complete, thorough, and hence,

trustworthy understanding, which in turn can be more confidently applied to solving

a problem of a particular kind (pp. 229-230).

Schwandt adds further that this "traditional notion of the literature review is based

on a bio-medical model of combining multiple single studies that address related or

identical causal hypotheses to arrive at a valid generalization of a causal relationship" (p.

230). That didn't seem to me to be anything like what I intended to do with this study: look

at the world of Korean English interpreter-translators from a vantage point outside, yet near

enough to learn some things from them about how they see their world and how they got

into it. I had no intention of coming up with any large-scale generalizations from my look

at a small, select group of individuals, but simply wanted to examine how some

exceptionally skilled individuals in a specialized field found their way into, learned the

skills of, and are continuing to perform in, an interesting and important area of world

communication.

Continuing in his entry on literature reviews, Schwandt mentioned another

possibility for the genre, an "interpretive review" propounded by Eisenhart (1998) that aims

to widen the field of discussion of human activity and "disrupt(s) conventional wisdom by

revealing something surprising, startling, or new" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 231). In addition,

Eisenhart lists as one of the features of this new way of looking at literature reviews "a commitment to use research findings to improve communication and understanding across human groups" (Eisenhart, 1998, p. 393). Eisenhart's point is that this kind of review allows researchers and readers to "grasp the logic" of a new point of view they probably wouldn't have even thought about before, which might well open minds to "new possibilities for action and more constructive contact" into the world of the people being studied (Eisenhart, 1998, p. 393).

These are big goals for any research project, and I am not sure what I offer here completely fulfills them. But I am sure that Eisenhart's words reflected what I was trying to do with this project, to get a view through someone else's perspective, to "walk in another's moccasins," and try to understand how they see the world we share. And I am completely certain that I understand things differently regarding the world that Korean English interpreter/translators inhabit than I had before beginning this research project.

I have divided and subdivided this chapter under three main headings. In the first, which I simply titled *The Setting*, I wrote about the environment that gave rise to this study, beginning with the book that sparked the general idea of talking to translators about their learning and lives in the first place. I went on from that point to highlight details from

pertinent existing resources to that help readers understand more of the scene of the study:

the Republic Korea. I refer to sources that provide information about that country's

national focus on education in general, English education in particular, and getting to the

particulars of the setting, some background information on an institution what was cental to

the focus of this study, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies' Graduate School of

Interpretation and Translation. The second major division under this chapter, entitled *The*

Field, attempts to briefly outline some basic theoretical as well as more practical

information about the field of interpretation and translation in general, as well as more

particularly regarding the vocation as practiced in Korea. In the third major heading area,

The Study, I wrote about literature pertaining to some of the specific research issues and

directions taken in this particular study. Though I also touch on many of these issues in

Chapter III, the methodology chapter, what was included here seemed to me to be of a

more theoretical or "meta-analytical" nature than the material in Chapter III. There, I wrote

more specific details regarding what I actually did to perform the research involved in this

study.

The Setting

An Inspiration

A key source of my early research thoughts, in conjunction with the work I was

doing with Korean interpreter/translators, was Belcher and Connor's *Reflections on*

Multiliterate Lives (2001). In their introduction, they summed up what became the genesis

of an idea for my project:

> Our contributors are precisely the type of 'multi-competent' language users,
>
> successful users of more than one language, that Vivian Cook (1999) has argued
>
> researchers and teachers of language need to know far more about, and students of
>
> language need to have more exposure to. Research, after all, has tended to focus on
>
> what language learners lack rather than on what they have achieved. And our
>
> classrooms, Cook reminds us, have too seldom provided second language (L2)
>
> students with access to examples of skilled L2 use. The collection of personal
>
> accounts of the formative literacy experiences of highly successful -- both
>
> linguistically and professionally – L2 users assembled in this volume should help
>
> address the needs expressed by Cook and certainly felt by many others. (p. 3)

While this investigation focused on the skills of interpretation and translation rather than bilingual literacy, I was hopeful at the outset that, by asking the right questions, looking at the answers, asking more questions using in Rubin and Rubin term "responsive interviewing" (2005, p. 30), in the context of further reading I would have some worthwhile insights of my own in this study, which also examined advanced multilingual specialists who have had successful, and varied L2 learning experiences.

I think Belcher and Connor's admonition to look at skilled L2 learners was as fruitful for my project as for theirs and that it will continue to be in future projects. It spoke to me directly because I regularly interact with and consult students, professional interpreters and others who are the top people in their field in the Republic of Korea. The fact that these skilled multilinguals are now in a specialized field makes them even more useful and interesting sources of information, and yet this is an area which has received little attention outside the interpretation/translation community. Because of the pervasive influence and power of interpreters and translators in today's world, looking at who they are is an important part of the communication picture that really deserves to be closely examined and better understood by those who rely on them as language experts for communication with others.

Because of the field's popularity and utility in Korea, I considered that looking at it through the eyes of practitioners would be an interesting and valuable project, useful for those who rely on the messages relayed to Korea from the English-speaking world (again, virtually everyone) as well as for the many students interested in the field as a career option.

While many articles and books deal with particular aspects of interpretation and/or translation tasks and goals, including articles written by Korean interpreter/translators, to my knowledge there are no studies that take an overall look at the field in Korea by asking interpreter/translators about their lives and their work. While that may make this project of less interest to specialists curious about, for example, the "ideal curriculum for the training of translators" (Lee-Jahnke, 2006, p. 61), or "entrance exam testing for conference interpretation courses" (Donovan, 2003, p. 17), it also makes it more relevant to readers with less specialized interest. Thus, it seems to me to be of greater value to everyone, particularly for those who are looking at the field from outside the specialty.

In addition to those of us who rely on the skills of interpreters and translators to bridge the language gap, interpretation and translation between English and Korean has importance in other ways. In Korea, English language and English interpretation/translation

education courses continue to grow in popularity and importance (Lim, 2004). There are an increasing number of Chinese and Chinese interpretation/translation classes in Korea, but English classes still have primacy both in the language itself and in the skills of interpretation/translation.

Language & Literacy in Korea

Korea has an adult literacy rate of 98 percent, (Gordon, 2005) one of the world's highest, and the traditional high regard for the scholar/academic has deep roots in the country's Confucian past. Respect and pride can be seen in the reverence Koreans have for language and literacy and in the honor given the birthday of their alphabet and the revered ruler who called for its creation, King Sejong the Great (1397-1450). On Oct. 9, the supposed anniversary of Hangul, in about the year 1444, daily newspapers here run editorial columns and articles detailing Hangul's superiority as a scientific form of writing that is more systematic than other writing methods, such as Chinese characters, Japanese derivations of those characters, Arabic and Cyrillic scripts, and the Roman alphabet. This is a typical proclamation of the annual newspaper column extolling the virtues of the scholar-king and the writing system he is credited with having created:

World-renowned linguists say that Hangul is at the top of all the alphabets in the world, the easiest to learn and the most scientific. They say Hangul is "the dream of alphabets." This made it possible to lower Korea's illiteracy rate to almost zero and provided the driving force for the country's development. Because Hangul has a phonetic system that reflects even the shape of the vocal organs, it can express every language in the world. The Chinese can merely express McDonald's as "Maidangrow" and the Japanese, as "Makudonardo." This is why we carry out a movement to make characters in Hangul for nations without characters, like Nepal. Five minutes' explanation will suffice to enable foreigners to write their own names in Hangul. Hangul is the most machine-friendly language, one that is prepared for the age of information and technology. It has a great potential for global use. Let's visit King Sejong Memorial Hall in Hongreung Royal Tomb, Seoul, or Youngreung Royal Tomb in Yeoju over the weekend and pay our respect to him. Ah, King Sejong of Information and Technology! (Kim, 2004).

The Importance of Education in Korea

The preceding newspaper column is one example of the respect, honor, even awe that many Koreans seem to hold for the written language and their own alphabet. Koreans have the same attitudes about education, scholars in specialized fields, and even academics in general. Although the Confucian scholar may not hold such an honored place in society as in ages past, the feelings of respect for educational achievement and literacy still linger. With more Ph.D.s per capita than any other country in the world (Kohls, 2001), Korea's long-held reverence for education has roots that go back a very long way. As longtime Korean intercultural expert L. Robert Kohls puts it: "One of the most effective ways of advancing oneself in Korea has been education. This has been true for the past five hundred years." (Kohls, 2001, p. 139)

Since I arrived in Korea in 1995, I have seen clear and obvious evidence of this view of education in my students, my Korean friends, and my colleagues. I have acquired a profound respect for Korean's passion for education and drive to succeed in the field. Over the summer of 1998, I watched, fascinated, as a close Korean friend literally learned to write in English, progressing from the word and sentence level to completing paragraphs and two- to four-page essays. As I watched the daily improvements, my friend's

determination and drive to learn to write in English was an inspiration. The fact that all of

my students go through a similar process, though perhaps not always as dramatically or

rapidly, continues to amaze me as I watch them in the classroom.

Coming from a small city in northern Michigan and a fairly monolingual, mono-

cultural background, I have undergone my own consciousness-raising experience as I

worked with and learned from my Korean students. The Korean respect, even reverence

for education has also shown itself in the way people regard my position as a lecturer in the

Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

in Seoul. Recently, an Australian friend who is new to Korea asked a Korean passerby for

help in contacting me. He told me that when he showed the Korean my card, which has my

university logo and academic title on it, the passerby remarked that I must be a "very

important person." Hankuk University of Foreign Studies' GSIT is definitely on the map

for most Koreans.

Where one goes to school is very important here. The first consideration is usually

that the school must be in Seoul. According to an old saying, "When a horse is born, send

it to Jeju Island, home of South Korean horse-breeding, but send a newborn child to Seoul."

(Choe & Torchia, 2002, p. 176). Today and for the five and a half centuries before the

Korean War, Seoul has been the capital of a unified Korea. Nowadays, even more than in

the past, it is a magnet drawing any South Korean who wants *the best*, whether it be a

material good, a job, or an education. "Now 17 million people – or just over a third of

South Koreans --- squeeze into Seoul or satellite cities that account for only 1.2 percent of

the nation's total area" (Choe & Torchia, 2002, p. 176).

Once in Seoul, the competition to get the best continues, as Korean parents push

their children to excel and qualify for the right school. Education is one of the best ways for

modern Koreans to bypass the rigid class structure that still exists to some extent. One

observer cites the influence of Korean mothers, whose ideas provide a strong influence on

all Korean society, from their children and husbands to their peers:

> The figure of the disciplinarian Korean mother, hovering about her child and
>
> attending to his needs so long as he keeps his nose in the books, is a character as
>
> familiar to Korean society today as it was (in the past). To say that Korean mothers
>
> take education seriously is only to begin to understand them; one woman, a writer
>
> well known in Korea, emigrated to Long Island so that her two sons could go to
>
> Harvard. By the seventh grade both sons had outscored most high school seniors on
>
> the College Board exams and thereafter never earned less than straight A's. Soon,

however, the mother learned that Harvard might have regional quotas for admission:

so she moved the family to Texas, thinking there would be fewer applicants from

the Lone Star State than from Long Island. (Cumings, 1997, p. 60)

English Education in Korea

Education is one focus for parents intent on giving their children all the advantages

they can. English is another, especially for parents who want their children to be able

communicators in the "world language" (Crystal, 1995, p. 106), whether they themselves

can communicate in English or not.

Nearly 9 out of 10 Korean elementary school children attend private

institutions after school. Parents spend an estimated US$11 billion every

year in supplementing their children's education ... Findings indicate every

household in the largely middle-class province of Gyeonggi spends a

monthly average of W470,000, or about US$400 on private tutoring.

(After school education booming, Sept. 25, 2004)

Although Hankuk University of Foreign Studies is not one of Korea's universally recognized "top three" universities (Seoul, Korea and Yonsei Universities, well-known by Koreans under the acronym "SKY"); it is recognized as the top university of foreign languages in the nation. The university's Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation has an even better reputation and, despite growing competition from younger institutions, is still generally accepted as the best place in Korea for a would-be interpreter/translator to be trained. Established in 1979, the GSIT recently gained prestige and increased its academic stature by becoming Asia's first member of the Europe-based International Permanent Conference of University Institutes of Translators and Interpreters (CIUTI) in the fall of 2004. (Kang, 2004)

The Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation

When I began working at the GSIT in March 2004, I had very little knowledge of the field, aside from occasional editing jobs, helping Korean translators refine their English translations of journal articles, short stories, instruction manuals, and the like. I was hired to work with first-year classes. In these first-year classes especially, GSIT administrators

see a need for many students to keep building their English language skills as they work on translation and interpretation skills in other classes.

My only information about the GSIT was that it was the top school of its kind in Korea, and that it was very tough for students to get into, with about 1,000 applicants each year competing for up to 50 or so openings in the new class. The assumption that followed from this fact was that the students must be very good, which has since proven to be true.

A few students, those who have learned the language from a young age in English-speaking countries, are indistinguishable from native English speakers in both written and spoken English proficiency. The majority, however, who have not spent as much time and gained as much proficiency in English-speaking environments, need to work on language skills in various areas. All of the students seem to benefit from the content of the course, which focuses on current world affairs, discussion, and public speaking and presentations. All perform at well above the average proficiency to be found in almost every other group of Korean English students I have encountered or heard about in more than a decade of teaching Korean English learners.

Since I first started working at GSIT, I have learned a little more from my students and colleagues about translation studies and teaching translation. As I worked on this study,

I continued to learn more about the translator's needs. However, in some ways, I think my early inexperience in translation education made me a good observer and listener and brought to my attention some factors that a person with more background knowledge and education in the field might have passed over as "given" in a research project. As Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki put it in the prologue to the book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's there are few" (1973, p.21).

I think my approach is one that allows me to follow possibilities uncovered by reading about and talking to those who know interpretation and translation from the inside. I see from an outsider's perspective, yet from very close distance—hopefully the forest, or big picture of the field, as well as a few of the trees, or the basic ideas and concepts of interpretation/translation theory and practice, as explained by my interview partners. The attempt throughout the process has been to find out what the experience of becoming a translator has been like for these uncommon individuals in a very important, but little-studied field, at least by those who don't work in translation

The Field

Teaching Translation

In *A Systematic Approach to Teaching Interpretation* (1995), Seleskovitch and

Lederer write that "interpretation is not a matter of 'translation' in the sense of directly

substituting one language for another" (iii) Instead, they say, "Interpretation involves

establishing *sense equivalence.*" They emphasize the process as composed of three steps:

"1) merging elements of linguistic meaning with extra-linguistic knowledge to obtain sense;

2) deverbalizing that sense as it emerges; and 3) spontaneously expressing this sense

linguistically" (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1995, p. 22)

Because of the importance of teaching students to listen for overall meaning, or

sense, Seleskovitch and Lederer downplay the language-learning aspects of

interpreter/translator training. This point shows that what an interpreter must do goes far

beyond the idea of code-switching, as seen in bilinguals who readily change from one

language to another depending on their conversation partner or context. Seleskovitch and

Lederer urge that, "instead of associating and comparing the source and target languages,

the teacher should strive to dissociate them as much as possible" (Seleskovitch & Lederer,

1995, p. 22). They add that while this idea may not be too difficult to convey to students, it

can be very challenging to get them to do it continuously:

> Having learned a foreign language by associating lexemes, verb tenses, idiomatic
>
> expressions, etc., they will still try to substitute corresponding terms: 'How do you
>
> say …?' … Such questions occur to them much more naturally than do questions
>
> concerned with sense: 'What is this really about?'" (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1995,
>
> p. 26)

I emphasize this "sense equivalence," or, in the original French edition of the book:

"*théorie du sens,*" because many of the faculty members at HUFS GSIT have studied under

Lederer and subscribe, or at least listen closely to her ideas on theory. For advanced

students at the doctoral level, and even for master's candidates, several of these educators

say that theory is an important, but often-neglected, dimension of interpreter/translator

education. One professor at GSIT wrote about how it should fit into the overall curriculum:

> There are numerous topics that can be discussed in a theory course. At the top of the
>
> list must be an explanation of the interpretation process so that students understand
>
> the why, before they think about the how. Exposure to different theories is also

important, since sometimes students, themselves, do not know that interpretation

theories even exist.   (Lim, 2004, p. 148)

The distinction raised by Seleskovitch and Lederer, along with the qualifications

raised by others in the context of translating into the "B" language, seem productive areas

to explore further. I asked my interviewees how they learned language and translating, as

well as how they saw connections between languages and meaning at the word, sentence,

and discourse levels.

Translation Theory

E. A. Nida, who has been mentioned as "probably the world's leading scholar on

translation" (Brislin, 1976, p.1), described translation by quoting the literary critic I.A.

Richards, who wrote that he considered the act of translation (e.g., from English to

Chinese) to be "the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the

cosmos" (Nida, 1976, p. 79). While that may seem like an exaggeration, my observation of

simultaneous translation from Korean to English, Spanish or French under rapid-fire

pressure, make it seem almost an understatement.

The term "translation" is commonly used to refer to all types of tasks in which the meaning of words is changed from one language to another, as for example, in the term "translation studies," which can also include interpretation. In this study, however, I have used the terms as they are used where I teach, with "interpretation" referring to translating spoken language, and "translation" to working with written text.

Theories and ideas about the act of translation have been put forth for millennia. For example, "(t)he distinction between 'word for word' (i.e. 'literal') and 'sense-for-sense' (i.e. 'free') translation goes back to Cicero (first century BCE) and St. Jerome (late fourth century CE)" (Munday, 2001, p. 19). However, the history of translation studies – particularly focusing on the translator or "process," rather than the product – has only seriously begun as an academic subject in the last 35 years (Campbell, 1998; Connor, 1996). Similarly, the systematic study of second language acquisition has a fairly short history, with serious research beginning only in the 1940s or 1950s (Ellis, 1997).

Though it may be true that "the teaching of interpretation is entirely different from the teaching of languages" (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989/1995, p. iii), many translators and translation scholars say one should avoid "at all costs" teaching the most challenging types of translation, such as simultaneous interpretation, into a "B" language (Lim, 2003, p.

153). As translator Stuart Campbell notes, "(t)he majority of writing on translation tacitly implies that translation is done into one's first language" (1998, p. 11). However, while these "shoulds" and implications might be true in an ideal world, they are not always realistic possibilities. In the past, in translating one major Western European language to another, there was almost always the luxury of having a native speaker translating into the target language. That is not the case in much of the world today. While there are more departments of Asian and Korean studies at Western universities now than in the past, Korean is still not a widely-studied language. Translators who are native speakers of English and proficient in Korean are much less common than Korean natives who have a strong command of English. It is also not the case in much of the world with other challenging "minority" languages. Instead, often immigrants to English-speaking countries like Australia or the United States translate from their little-known language into their limited English (Campbell, 1998).

In *After Babel*, his seminal but controversial study of translation and literature, literature and translation critic George Steiner again quoted I.A. Richards' line saying that the translation of ideas from one language to another, might well be "the most complex type of even yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos" (Steiner, 1998, p. 50). However,

with almost the same breath, Steiner added that there was just as much complexity in all

human communication, even within the same language. Languages change over time.

There are differences in dialect or idiolect, variations in social hierarchies, with or without

differences in speech register, tone, or slang. With every communication, "a human being

performs an act of translation, in the full sense of the word, when receiving a speech-

message from another human being" (Steiner, 1998, p. 48).

Yet, while acknowledging Steiner's point about the ubiquity of translation, few

would deny that *inter-lingual* translation (of written texts) and interpretation (of spoken

language) are indeed a specialized skill, and may in fact be two different types of skills.

(Nida, 2002)

To understand someone's words, any reader needs to be able to connect it to what

has been previously understood. Translators and thinkers from at least as early as Cicero in

Rome of the first century B.C. to St. Jerome in the fourth century A.D. have written about

some of the same issues, though perhaps using simpler terms. Cicero wrote of using

"language which conforms to our usage," and St. Jerome that he chose to "render not word-

for-word, but sense-for-sense" (Munday, 2001, pp. 19-20). The "recurring and sterile

debate" about "whether translation should be literal (word-for-word) or free (sense-for-

sense)" (Munday, 2001, p. 33) continued on into the twentieth century, when other facets of translation began to be considered.

In the 1950s and '60s Russian-American linguistic philosopher Roman Jakobson and American Biblical translator Eugene Nida tackled the questions of meaning, equivalence and translatability, with Nida particularly influenced by Chomsky's new ideas about the nature of language as he propounded a "scientific theory" of translation. Nida examined two "types of equivalence:" formal and dynamic (Munday, 2001, pp.36-44). In formal equivalence, which could be seen as similar to "word-for-word" translation, Nida looked for similarities in form to the original source-language message, reproducing grammatical units, word usage, and meanings as closely as possible. A dynamically equivalent translation, he wrote, was one that would be justifiably seen as "just the way we would say it" by a bilingual, bicultural person (Nida, 1964, p. 136). "One way of defining a (dynamically equivalent) translation," he added, "is to describe it as 'the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message'" (Nida, 1964, p. 136)

As in other soft sciences, many translation studies scholars, even those who thought Nida had some good ideas to offer, questioned how standards could be *objectively* applied. They noted that looking at the "equivalent effect" of a translated message on source and

target-language receivers leads to its own kind of subjective judgment calls by the evaluator (Munday, 2001).

As the field of translation studies grew, so did its focus on a variety of issues involving the priorities of source texts authors, target texts producers, readers (or listeners), and the power relationships between all of these parties involved in the act of communication that is translation. Vermeer's *Skopos Theory* (Vermeer, 1996) proposed that the needs of the target language audience take precedence. This was reflected in the work of most pragmatically-minded translators at the time, and perhaps still is. After all, the customer's demands take precedence as long as he or she is signing the check. From the 1970s to the 1990s, others in the translation field compared source and target texts and based their assessments of translation quality on discourse analysis, examining genre, register, specific types of grammar, and other elements.

In the last decade, scholars such as Toury, Chesterman, and others, have used detailed linguistic comparisons of languages in terms of "norms" or "laws" that can be used to judge and improve translation quality and find a methodology for what Toury called "descriptive translation studies" (Munday, 2001, p. 112). In recent years, other scholars

have been looking more at culture than linguistics to find answers to questions about the

best kind of translation.

Translation scholar Lawrence Venuti, with echoes of points made by post-positivist

academics and qualitative researchers in other fields, wrote that translators make many

unseen choices that invisibly guide and direct what the reader understands from a newly re-

created textual message (2000).

> Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the
>
> translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign
>
> text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences, basically
>
> domestic, drawn from the receiving language and culture to enable the
>
> foreign to be received there. The foreign text, then, is not so much
>
> communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and interests.
>
> The inscription begins with the very choice of a text for translation, always
>
> a very selective, densely motivated choice, and continues in the
>
> development of discursive strategies translate it, always a choice of certain
>
> domestic discourses over others. Hence, the domesticating process is
>
> totalizing, even if never total, never seamless or final. It can be said to

operate in every word of the translation long before the translated text is

further processed by readers, made to bear other domestic meanings and to

serve other domestic interests. (Venuti, 2000, pp. 468-469)

Venuti's words make visible the hidden hand of the translator, making substantial

changes to a work in the name of making it accessible to readers in other, often dominant

cultures, such as that of the West, and particularly the United States. It seems to make a

point about all cultures and all translations: that the translator's interpretation is, in itself, an

act of creating a new message.

Steiner (1998) stated that there is no one translation theory, going further to ask how

such a thing could be possible, without any solid ideas of the workings of the human mind

or the mechanisms of speech in any real sense (p. 309).

Our models of the learning process and of memory are ingenious but also of the

most preliminary, conjectural kind. We know next to nothing of the organization

and storage of different language when they coexist in the same mind. How then

can there be, in any rigorous sense of the term, a 'theory of translation'? (Steiner,

1998, p. 309)

Nida (2002) noted: "As yet there is no one generally accepted theory of translation in the technical sense of 'a coherent set of general propositions used as principles to explain a class of phenomena,' but there are several theories in the broad sense of 'a set of principles that are helpful in understanding the nature of translating or in establishing criteria for evaluating a particular translated text'" (p. 107).

The lack of an acceptance of a single theory should be no surprise, Nida added. Translation has drawn its theories from a range of other disciplines, including, he wrote,

> linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, communication theory, literary criticism, aesthetics, and sociosemiotics. The fact that there is no generally accepted theory for any one of these behavioral disciplines should be a sufficient reason for people to realize that there is nothing basically inadequate about translating simply because those who translate cannot always explain by means of some comprehensive theory precisely why they do what they do" (Nida, 2002, p. 107).

Nida (2002) put it another way from Steiner: "(T)heories are always chasing practice in order to explain what has already been discovered" (p. 114).

So what has been discovered? While it seems that almost all interpreters and translators have gone beyond the first steps of the centuries-old debate between "word for word" and "sense for sense," favoring the latter, going beyond that point is a challenging question for almost all of them, even scholars at the forefront of translation theory. Rather than "theories of translation," Robinson (1997) wrote more about "approaches" to translation. It was my experience that many working interpreters and translators, even some of those at the highest levels, have difficulty talking about and fully explaining what their own "theories" are. They may know what they do, but it's a real struggle to explain how they do it. I think Robinson put it well when he wrote, "each translator will eventually develop a more or less coherent theory of translation, even if s/he isn't quite ready to articulate it" (1997, p. 105). This study sought to confirm or question his statement, and my line of questioning addressed this area.

In contrast to the distinction between translation and language acquisition noted earlier, Campbell writes that second language acquisition *is* a particularly important factor when looking at interpreters and translators who are translating into their second language. "(I)n very many cases an individual translating into a second language is still acquiring that language, so that it makes sense to think of learning to translate as a special variety of

learning a second language" (1998, p. 1). He bemoans the fact that translation scholars have

"ignored the issue of language development, tacitly assuming the existence of a perfectly

bilingual translator" (Campbell, 1998, p. 1). Many of my interpretation/translation

graduate students are clearly still at different levels of proficiency in English, and from

what I can gather, the same applies to the Korean proficiency of some of those who've

grown up and been educated overseas. Campbell's ideas seem particularly applicable to the

environment where I am teaching.

Translating in Korea

Much research is being published, particularly in the last two decades, about Korean

translation specifically. Indeed, the June 2006, edition of the translators' journal *Meta* was

entirely devoted to Korean translation. However, while topics such as Korean neologisms

(Choi, 2006), comparisons of Korean-English phonological structures (Cho & Park, 2006),

and the use of extralinguistic knowledge in translation (Kim, 2006) are indeed useful and

meaningful topics for experienced translators to look into, this paper's purpose lies in

another direction.   My goal is to help those outside the world of Korean

interpretation/translation see something of what goes on in that world. For this reason, specialized research articles seemed not to be too applicable to this project.

Korea was for centuries known (or more accurately, perhaps, *not* very well known) as "The Hermit Kingdom." Into the twentieth century, after some slight notice had been paid by the West to the Korean Peninsula late in the 1800s, Japan won out over Russia to gain the "rights" to colonize Korea. Until the end of World War II, the peninsula continued to be isolated from much of the world as a Japanese colony (Cumings, 1997; Scheer, 2003). At mid-century, the beginnings of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union split the country in a war that while not active, is still not resolved.

However, since the 1960s, South Korea's growth and development has been astonishing, from a per capita annual income of less than $100 in the 1960s to a nation which estimates its annual per capita income to bypass $20,000 on its way to $30,000 in the near future. South Korea today has the world's twelfth largest economy, and recent developments in science and technology have earned it international respect. The nation's economic expansion, now rebounding after suffering an economic crisis in the late 1990s,

is being hastened by opening markets, foreign investment and more and more foreign goods

appearing on store shelves.

Along with opening markets and growing foreign interest, for Korea today, the

"most urgent task is to be more of a communicator, and to disseminate its ideas more

clearly for an international target" (Scheer, 2003, p. 5). This is where Korea is at a

disadvantage, compared to countries where English is more widely used. With few native

speakers of English who speak Korean, there is a great need for more Koreans who can

interpret and translate into English, both in Korea and in many other areas of the world.

Working at the premier graduate school of interpretation and translation in South

Korea, I undertook this project in order to understand where my students – these needed

interpreter/translators for our future – came from and where they are going. In his

introduction to a chapter on translation in a linguistics text, D.D. Oaks notes that despite the

need for translators to have a command of two languages, "(s)ome people … mistakenly

assume that knowing another language automatically equips someone to serve effectively

as a translator" (1998, p. 595). He adds that there are numerous other issues and

complications involved in translation. Important among them are understanding the

importance of register in a second (or third) language, syntactic and lexical

incompatibilities between the languages being translated, cultural differences that can interfere with comprehensibility, and other factors (Oaks, 1998, p. 595).

While I have learned a few things on the job and in the classroom about the teaching and learning of English to those who speak another native language, my firsthand knowledge about the process of learning to be an interpreter/translator has been observed from watching others, since my knowledge of languages other than English is at a basic level in French, Spanish, and Korean. I have had no interpreter/translator training. Still, through reading related research and learning from these students and professionals, at the very least I hoped to gain knowledge that will provide insights to help inform my teaching and that of others working with Korean/English interpretation/translation students, and Korean-speaking students learning English in general. At best, there may even be lessons learned that can apply to language learners in other contexts and career areas.

American movies, books, and other materials, either in their original or translated (subtitled) form are part of the educational and maturational process of all Koreans. In this milieu, those standout students who manage to apply and succeed in gaining admission to the GSIT are some of the most interested of a very interested population.

Why is this worth noting? Because while an American can (and occasionally does) succeed in gaining a fair knowledge of the Korean language, I don't think his or her experience level or understanding of Korean culture will ever be as great as the Koreans' understanding or exposure to American or Western culture. A Korean teen's exposure and knowledge, even with the inevitable stereotypes that come from watching too many TV shows or movies about American life, gives him or her a much greater understanding, and often leads to a high interest in learning more about the United States or other English-speaking places. For most Americans, there is only the occasional Korean grocer, who now seems a stock character in television programs or movies set in American cities. There are also the now-fading memories of the popular movie and comedy series *M*A*S*H*, which offered up its own smorgasbord of inaccuracies and stereotypes about Korean culture, even though it looked only at the Korean War era, 50 years in the past by the calendar, but light years away from the lives of most Koreans today (Coleman, 1997).

In addition, while there may be some interpreter/translators of Korean and English who started from an English background, Korean is still a little-studied, exceptionally challenging language for an English speaker to learn, particularly at a Western educational institution. However, every Korean student is encouraged to learn English from a very

young age. The vast majority of those now getting their education partly in English-speaking countries, by chance or design, are almost certain to be the future link between English and Korean. Likewise, many will probably be the channel through which many Westerners, including Americans, get their version of the words being spoken and events taking place both in North and South Korea.

Though it is usually the case that Korean-English interpreter/translators are more knowledgeable about English language and culture than Western-based native English-speaking interpreters are about Korean language and culture, that doesn't mean there are never misunderstandings of English by Koreans. The miscommunications that can result when Koreans cannot understand what is being said in an English-speaking country and vice versa were on display in two incidents in recent years, one laughable and the other less so. In the first, Seoul's *Munhwa Ilbo* newspaper ran a story on Feb. 3, 2004, the day after the Mars rover, Opportunity, landed on the red planet and sent the first batch of photographs back to earth. As explained by Korea Herald columnist, Cho Se-hyon, the *Munhwa Ilbo,* a major afternoon daily,

> translated articles from the New York Times and other American press reports and
>
> published them. In the reports, a NASA expert, Dr. Steven W. Squyres, looking at

an amazing picture just transmitted from Mars, was quoted as exclaiming: "Holy

smoke... I'm just blown away by this." Thereupon, the *Munhwa Ilbo* ran the

headline: "The second Mars rover lands, sees mysterious smoke." Reading the

headline, I almost split my side laughing, realizing that the translator and editors at

Munhwa Ilbo have obviously taken Dr. Squyres' exclamation literally. It was

fortunate for the *Munhwa Ilbo* that Dr. Squyres didn't shout: "Holy cow," instead of

"Holy smoke." As soon as I noticed the mistake, I sent an e-mail to the writer,

suggesting that the newspaper correct the article right away. I am sure I wasn't the

only one to have done so. But the *Munhwa Ilbo* kept the smoke on Mars drifting all

that day. (Bevers, 2004)

Another translation mistake that caused a less humorous, and potentially deadly,

misunderstanding came in April 2003 when North Korea made an announcement in English

that it was in the final phase of successfully reprocessing more than 8,000 spent fuel rods at

the Yongbyon nuclear complex. The announcement infuriated officials in Washington, who

at that point considered calling off nuclear arms talks with North Korea. After South

Korean and U.S. interpreters went back over the statement, looking at the original Korean

version, it was discovered that North Korea seemed to have overstated the number in

English. (Sohn, 2003).

One obvious, but difficult area of confusion, connected to the above example,

comes when interpreter/translators work with numbers between Korean and English. The

Korean counting system, like many in Asia, is based on increments of 10,000 rather than

1,000.   For example, the number 100,000 is referred to as "*ship-mahn* (ten ten-thousands)"

rather than "one hundred thousand," as it would be in English. It's almost a given when

buying things in Korea that the price, if stated in English, will be off by a digit or two. The

Korean 1,000 won note is worth about U.S. $1, and almost every time I hear a price quoted

by a merchant in broken English it is wrong – "One million won" (about $1,000) often

means 100,000 won (about $100), after the shopkeeper gets lost in the zeros. It gets even

more confusing if a price for Korean goods is quoted in U.S. dollars, since not only the

counting system, but the monetary system is based on a different power of 10.

In a special lecture to GSIT students in May 2005, CNN reporter and Seoul Bureau

Chief Sohn Ji-ae said that working with numbers between Korean and English is *the*

biggest single source of confusion in interpretation between the two languages. "When you

go from English to Korean and Korean to English in numbers – Wow! – You're just

praying they get it right!" Sohn said.

Considering the powerful impact that can be had on world affairs by what happens

in both nations, there seems to be an obvious value in looking at how Korean

interpreter/translators come into being. I see this as an opportunity that should not be

passed up, particularly for someone who has a very special opportunity to look into the

process at the midway point and who is in close contact with such an interesting and

exceptional group.

Korea's Communication Gap

In addition to the kind of important, but easy-to-understand confusion over numbers

cited above, deeper problems of communication stem from a lack of understanding between

Korea and the outside world, and these can affect interpretation, translation and all

communication. A prime example of an important communication gap can be seen in the

lack of awareness by the world about the lingering animosity almost all Koreans feel

toward Japan, its neighbor across the East Sea (or Sea of Japan, depending on which

country you live in).

On the day I first wrote this paragraph, the English-language *Joongang Daily* (April 8, 2005) included a front-page article about the first meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers since "an intense diplomatic furor between the two countries" began in late February. A constantly simmering dispute was at that time boiling furiously between the two nations over a rocky islet midway between them that Koreans call Dokdo and the Japanese, Takeshima. Combined with continuing complaints over what Koreans say are distorted and inaccurate Japanese textbooks whitewashing the country's past, not only its role as an aggressor in World War II, but also in the preceding decades, its colonization of much of Asia, including the virtual enslavement of Korean and other Asian forced labor and "comfort women," the Dokdo/Takeshima issue, both at grassroots level and in official circles in Korea, had emotions running high.

While tensions over Dokdo have since cooled, other events, such as North Korean missile firings in summer 2006 and the October nuclear tests, as well as actions by Japanese Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe in visiting Japanese war memorials such as the Yasukuni Shrine, which Koreans and many Asians say pays homage to war criminals, have highlighted differences in perceptions between the West and East over friends, foes and fears. For some South Koreans, one of the biggest fears after recent North Korean saber-

rattling was that it would encourage former Korean colonizer Japan to rearm and have an excuse to again occupy Korea. Many in Asia feared that the nuclear tests would lead to an Asian arms race ("Tests spark", Oct. 9, 2006).

However, for many Americans, who hardly even know the difference between Korea and Japan, frictions between these two major Asian nations, as well as similar ones between China and Japan, are relatively unknown. With the passage of six decades since the attack on Pearl Harbor and the healing of psychic wounds of World War II, including the United States' use of nuclear weapons, its relationship with Japan is as friendly as that with our other foe from that era, Germany. Further, the U.S. relationship with Japan is now on better footing than that with Korea.. However, as Koreans often remind anyone who will listen, a major difference is in the fact that Germany apologized and atoned for its actions during the Nazi era, while they say that Japan has not apologized or paid for its 35 years of damage to Korea. The problem for Korea is that few are listening, and fewer still understand how they see the world and Japan, their geographically close but in some ways, very distant neighbor. I would suggest that part of the problem is in the way they tell the story and who they tell it to.

In another local newspaper article, Kim Sam-hoon, South Korea's ambassador

to the United Nations, when asked about Japan's desire to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, replied, "A country that does not have the trust and support of neighboring countries and does not know how to reflect on its history does not have the qualifications to become a permanent Security Council member" (Lee, April 1, 2005). While this somewhat vague quote surely has a lot of clear meaning to Koreans who understand the message underlying the diplomatic words, the fact is that Korea has not had its case heard in the court of world opinion, and neither have with China and other Asian countries still scarred by decades of Japanese colonization and the aftereffects of World War II.

The ambassador's words might be soothing to Korean ears, but to others, their generality and vagueness makes them almost meaningless. While it may not make much difference to the world, I think that someone with a strong insight into Korean language and culture, as well as powerful understanding of the English language and Western culture would be able to do more to let the English-speaking world know about this major factor in Asian relationships that, after this many years, is not at all in the past to many people. Korea, once subjugated by Japan, seems less able to forget the past than its former oppressors might wish. I don't think a massive blame game for past history will help

anyone, but neither will the continued sweeping under the rug of a longstanding

international grievance. Not communicating its side of the story very well only seems to

prolong and intensify the national chip on its shoulder that many Koreans bear, which

makes for a strong sensitivity and capacity for resentment against foreign powers, including

allies (such as the U.S.), who are seen as dominating Korea's national policies in any way.

Americans are understandably more concerned about what has happened recently in

North Korea than about a 60-year-old historical enemy. There is little hope of

understanding and working together with people in this part of the world unless one has a

clearer understanding of the South Korean position regarding the North, an understanding

Korea's sometimes rocky relationships with other Asian neighbors, such as Japan and

China, and an awareness of Korea's long history of isolation from other outside influences

as well as its cultural animosity toward outsiders. This is why translators and interpreters

are needed to help Koreans and the West better understand each other.

The Study

Languaculture

Spradley (1979) notes that understanding another language is integral to understanding a person who spoke that language. "Language is more than a means of communication about reality: it is a tool for constructing reality" (p.17). While I don't think my Korean language skills are up to constructing a detailed form of reality, I can offer a lot to this project in terms of what I have learned (and stereotypes I have unlearned) in the years I have been here about Korean culture and Korean people, especially in the field of education. I believe this classroom and worldview cultural experience, along with the fact that my interviewees all have high proficiency in English, has given me a very good foundation for understanding what was going on as I approached this interview study and tried to interpret the answers I received from my conversation partners.

Shaffer (2003, p. 223) wrote about "languaculture" – a term coined by Michael Agar: "Agar makes use of the term 'languaculture,' arguing that language and culture are so intertwined that the term "languaculture" should be used rather than the two terms, "language" and culture," separately (Agar, 1994, p. 60)."

Shaffer goes over the hypotheses on the connection between language and thought, that language is dependent on thought, thought dependent on language (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis), and that the two are mutually interdependent. While most agree that the third theory is correct, several linguists, he notes, including Crystal (1995), Pinker (1994), and others, have written that the connection between thought and language is indeed a strong link and not so far away from Sapir-Whorf as some may tend to believe.

Pointing to the strength of this link in his Korean learners, Shaffer refers to three Korean languacultural influences on error production in English: the Macro-to-Micro principle, the similar Most-to-Least principle, and the principle of Least Opposition (Schaffer, 2002, p. 223-230). The macro-to-micro principle is seen in the way Koreans order units in elements such as addresses, dates, and names, Schaffer notes. In the Korean language, all are spoken and written by using the largest category first, then going down to the smallest unit. Korean addresses are written using first the nation, then the province name, city name, *gu* (district or borough) name, *dong* (neighborhood or ward) name, and finally the house number in the *dong*, as street names are not commonly used for addresses here. For example, my home address is now Seoul, Nowon-gu, Kongreung-2dong 270-66, Apt. Ka-101. In a similar manner, in Korea dates are written from macro-to-micro

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elements; first year, then month, and ending with the day's date, for example, 2005.2.24.

Also, like other Asian countries, a person's proper name is expressed with the family first

and the individual given name second. President Roh Moo-hyun is an example of this, with

his family name, "Roh," preceding his two-syllable given name "Moo-hyun." All of these

trends contrast with English, and perhaps Western, languacultural syntax expectations, as

Schaffer points out (Shaffer, 2003, pp. 219-231).

While I can take care of myself fairly well in Korea, have no problems keeping

myself fed in Korean restaurants and no difficulty getting home in a Korean taxi, I probably

will not be having any deep political or philosophical conversations in Korea in the near

future. However, that doesn't mean I can't communicate with my students, who are almost

all Korean L1 speakers. As I noted above, they are very capable English L2 learners and

my classroom "Konglish" skills are more than strong enough to cover any weak points in

English pronunciation or usage. I feel I was totally able to communicate effectively and in

great detail with the students and interpreter-translators I chose to work with on this project.

Culture and Narrative

A strong influence on my thinking about what kind of knowledge this study may bring to the field comes from reading *Second Language Learning as Participation and the (Re)construction of Selves* by Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000). The authors draw on the ideas of Bakhtin, Bruner, Rorty, Polkinghorne, and others to make the point that learning a second language is not simply acquiring the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of a new communicative code, but a long-term struggle to enter another cultural world.

Pavlenko and Lantolf note that, language is more than simply accumulating the building blocks of a new language, as it has a lot to do with involvement with a new language community and culture. They say that it is at least as much about *participation* in that new community as it is about *acquisition* of a set of skills. To study second-language acquisition in terms of participating in a new language community – language socialization – they suggest that we need to consider first-person narratives as a rich source of data.

Pointing to the "increasing stature" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p.159) of personal narratives in the social sciences similar to this study, they suggest that much can be learned from language participants about acquiring a second language. Still, they concede that "narrative knowing" has not attained the acceptance level of experimental/observational

methods which have resulted in so many great achievements in the hard sciences. They

write:

> We find it difficult to dispute Polkinghorne's (1988) incisive, although we suspect,
>
> for some, controversial observation, that the social sciences have not manifested the
>
> same level of accomplishments as the hard sciences, despite nearly a century-long
>
> love affair with their methodology and discourse(Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p.159).

They strengthen the point by quoting Polkinghorne directly:

I do not believe that the solutions to human problems will come from developing

even more sophisticated creative applications of the natural science model, but by

developing additional, complementary approaches that are especially sensitive to

the unique characteristics of human existence. (Polkinghorne 1988: x).

While I have at times been slightly uncertain about how much I can learn from just

talking to students about their experiences, again referring to my journalistic experience, it

has always made sense to me to learn about a phenomena by asking those directly involved

in it. In addition, rereading Pavlenko and Lantolf persuaded me that simply asking people

about themselves, what they do, how they learned, and what it means to them, is valid.

Referring to Bruner's words from his 1996 work, *The Culture of Education*, Pavlenko and

Lantolf wrote:

> Jerome Bruner, one of the founders of modern cognitive psychology, recognizes
>
> that the doxology of the scientific method – 'thou shalt not indulge self-delusion,
>
> nor utter unverifiable propositions, nor commit contradiction, nor treat mere history
>
> as cause' – is unable to describe the basis on which ordinary people go about
>
> making sense of their and others' activities. The problem, in Bruner's view, is that
>
> the ways in which people make sense of their experiences and themselves as
>
> 'testable propositions'. Consequently, the quest for the causes of human sense
>
> making itself makes little sense, and therefore, the logico-scientific mode of
>
> conducting research requires a complementary mode – a mode that searches for
>
> *reasons* rather than causes (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 158).

This seemed to me a perfect fit for the description written by Pavlenko and Lantolf,

as they, and I, interpret the ideas of Bruner (1986, 1990, 1996, & 2002) and Polkinghorne

(1988). I agree with Polkinghorne that answers to the big questions are more likely to

come from new ways of asking questions involving human participation rather than from

using the old tools of scientific investigation in more sophisticated ways.

Narrative/Interview Research

"(T)he interview is neither an objective nor a subjective method – its essence is intersubjective interaction." (Kvale, 1996, p. 66)

I think there are more important reasons than "statistical skepticism" to be leery of using numerical data in studying how the Korean student goes through the process of becoming interpreter/translator. Certainly there are areas where statistical data and numbers can be useful, but as Polkinghorne said in his landmark book, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (1988), "I find that our traditional research model, adapted from the natural sciences, is limited when applied in the study of human beings" (p. x). Polkinghorne strongly suggests that in his field, psychology, practitioners working with human data, people's stories, had a better understanding of the way things were and what needed to be done than researchers using more "scientific," positivistic approaches.

I think it is easy to make the same arguments that Polkinghorne (1988) did about the "human sciences" when researching in almost any educational setting, and this study seems better fitted to an approach in which the researcher asks experts, in this case interpreter/translators, how they went about getting as far as they have, and what has led

them to continue in pursuit of their goals. I want to learn from what my subjects can tell me, rather than analyze them as bits of data. As Kvale put it so succinctly, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" (1996, p.1). Of course, not every answer from a student about how they learn, or a professional about what led them to their career skills and interests, will render the ultimate truth. But I think the answers I got from students and professionals make up pieces of that ultimate truth, just as a chip of colored glass, useless by itself, is an integral part of the pattern of an elaborate stained glass window. It certainly seems that if one wants to know how someone went through the process of learning to do something, asking them directly would be a good way to go, and the first one I would choose.

The type of research interview I used has been defined in various ways, but the one I prefer is "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p. 5-6). While I wanted my interviews to be as open-ended as possible, with my conversation partners having a lot of autonomy in what they said to help me understand their world, the interviews were based on my ideas and my curiosity about their world as starting points. I attempted to make the interviews as close to informal conversations as

possible, but Kvale reminds me that "(t)he research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation" by introducing a topic and asking follow-up questions to probe for more meaning (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). However, he argues that this human touch, the subjectivity of interview conversations as research is a strength, not a weakness, because humans are uniquely capable of catching nuances of meaning and differences of opinion in how those being interviewed see a phenomenon and in communicating a message or painting a picture of "a manifold and controversial human world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 7).

Mishler (1986) noted that variations within the questions, or the way questions are asked, can have great effect on the answer that will be received. From my experience as a journalist asking questions, and from my experience in the classroom working with Korean students, I can appreciate his warning. Differences in tone, register, politeness, and many other variables that might lead the respondent to try to provide the answer the interviewer is looking for would defeat the purpose of this study. While I understand that true objectivity or neutrality is out of human reach, I strived throughout my questioning, whether on paper, by E-mail, or in person, to be a friendly, positive, interested scholar, not using what I thought were leading or loaded questions while providing as much encouragement as I

could to respondents to talk about themselves fully and freely. Asking open-ended, "answerable" questions is a skill I developed a knack for in my newspaper days. I find it is important to put myself in the respondent's shoes mentally and think about how possible, or easy, or comfortable it is to answer a question. If it works for me, seems to get the right answer to lead toward my point, and "feels" answerable, I use it. While I tended, in this study, to use fairly open-ended questioning techniques, trying to follow the thread of conversations as I talked to my partners about their experiences in becoming and being interpreter/translators, that does not mean I went into the interview without a clear idea of the areas I wanted to learn about and the potential questions I would ask.

Despite the fact that I grew up in what has been called an "'interview society' in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives" (Silverman, 2000, p. 822), I don't really think I understood the information-gathering possibilities and pitfalls until I worked as a journalist for several years. Of course, not everything learned in interviews is the pure, unvarnished truth. However, I couldn't imagine a more efficient way of finding out what I wanted to know, from the likelihood of a labor strike to the meaning of a complex economic phenomenon, than calling an expert who already had the background knowledge I lacked, in these examples a knowledgeable labor organizer or economics

professor or two. While it also made sense to go out and do some learning about the issue

when time was available, at a few minutes before deadline, when there was a missing

element of information in a news story, there was no better way to find out the information

I needed than to get on the phone and ask someone who knew the answer.

Certainly there are factors to beware of with this "fast and easy" approach. I soon

learned not to be shy when asking a major executive the questions many readers were

curious about – "what enquiring minds want to know," to recall an old advertisement for a

well-known "gossip" news tabloid – for example, what was his or her annual income? I

learned to do this not because I am naturally nosy and aggressive (well, perhaps a little), but

because I quickly found that when I omitted the questions everyone was curious about, they

were first my editors wanted to know when I wrote up the story. I also learned, almost as

quickly, not to expect that answers to probing questions would always be truthful. I think

this experience has served me well, and while today I would say I am "skeptical" rather

than "cynical," that too, is a subjective (qualitative?) judgment call. While I am sure

working for newspapers taught me not to shy away from tough questions, I think it also

taught me to do enough homework and not to believe everything I heard. Despite the

currently poor reputation that journalism has in the U.S., I don't think I came out of the experience an inhumane human being.

Sociologist and mass media pioneer Paul Lazarsfeld is cited by Mishler as one who understood in 1935 that "variability in how interviewers ask questions is the key to good interviewing and not a problem to be solved by standardization (Mishler, 1986, p. 22). While I am sometimes not so sure I can spell out precisely why certain question types seem to work better in some situations than others, after more than a decade as a journalist, and about the same amount of time spent trying to encourage reluctant Korean and other non-English speakers to "open up" in class, I have a lot of experience at finding ways to encourage people to talk.

One method worthy of mention – simply keeping quiet – is sometimes left out of guidance to interviewers. I was glad to see that Kvale included it (1996). Silence really can be golden, particularly during an interview. Often I've found the best way to get people to talk is to not ask too many questions, but to just sit quietly and give time to come up with an answer. I agree with Kvale when he wrote about "silence" as one type of interview question:

Rather than making the interview a cross examination by continually firing off

questions, the research interviewer can take a lead from therapists in employing

silence to further the interview. By allowing pauses in the conversation the subjects

have ample time to associate and reflect and then break the silence themselves with

significant information (Kvale, 1996, p. 134).

In addition to Kvale's explanation, I also think that silence in conversation, as also

suggested by those who talk about extending "wait time" in ESOL instructional settings,

puts some gentle pressure on those on the answering side of the research conversation.

Silence can be tough to take, particularly for those accustomed to American or Western

conversational style. While I think I've become very comfortable with silence and "waiting

out" students or conversation partners, I also confess I at times needed to guard against

using it in ways that would have equally made the interview feel like a cross-examination.

More on Narration

A truly skilled academic writer can make learning and research seem interesting and

easy. While it may be because of his subject matter, telling stories, it seems that Gian

Pagnucci did just that in his recent book on narration. From where I sat as I wrote these

words at my desk in Seoul, looking at the project before me, his words certainly seemed to lighten my load: "What if, instead of telling doctoral students, "Look for a gap in the research," we said, "Look for a story that needs to be told"? (2004, p. 22). While this project presented an opening for new research, I was intrigued by Pagnucci's looking at the idea for untold stories. After all, especially in qualitative research, almost any topic can be a new way of looking at a research problem, if things haven't been done in exactly that way before. Pagnucci seemed to put it another way that makes more sense, simply and understandably, similar to the way that telling stories makes simple, understandable sense to people, both as they listen and as they talk.

As I continued to read about talking to people, listening to their stories and retelling my own story about their stories, I realized that I was setting up a major task for myself. It would be tough enough to design a study that is reliable, valid, objective and replicable. However, in this study, that would mean taking the standards of the quantitative paradigm and trying to make them apply to qualitative research, an impossible task (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). Instead, I needed to not only do the research, but also write a good story, narrative scholars say. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) list seven criteria for evaluating narrative research, originally proposed by psychobiographer Willam McKinley

Runyan in 1984, and they seemed when first encountered, a challenging list. The criteria are:

1. Providing insight into the person, clarifying the previously meaningless or incomprehensible, suggesting previously unseen connections;

2. Providing a feel for the person, conveying the experience of having known or met him or her;

3. Helping us to understand the inner or subjective world of the person, how he or she thinks about their own experience, situation, problems, life;

4. Deepening our sympathy or empathy for the subject;

5. Effectively portraying the social and historical world that the person is living in;

6. Illuminating the causes (and meanings) of relevant events, experiences, and conditions; and

7. Being vivid, evocative, emotionally compelling to read (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 172)

While these criteria may have been meant for in-depth analyses going beyond the type of interview/narrative research I am proposing, they were extremely worthwhile goals

to shoot for. I hope I have achieved at least some of the aims in this study. I would rather

aim high and miss the mark than aim low and hit it.

The ideas in Polkinghorne's influential book, *Narrative Knowing and the Human*

Sciences (1988), were a clear fit with what I wanted to do in this project: simply to find

meaning from others' stories of their experiences in regard to their learning and

development as interpreter/translators.

Polkinghorne wrote:

Narrative is a form of "meaning making." It is a complex form which expresses

itself by drawing together descriptions of states of affairs contained in individual

sentences into a particular type of discourse. This drawing together creates a higher

order of meaning that discloses relationships among the states of affair. Narrative

recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they

function as parts in a whole. Its particular subject matter is human actions and

events that affect human beings, which it configures into wholes according to the

roles these actions and events play in bringing about a conclusion. (1988, p. 36)

Bell also listed good reasons for using narrative inquiry, reasons that seemed a good

fit with the project I undertook:

● Narrative allows researchers to understand experience. People's lives

matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact

of experience itself. …

● Narrative lets researchers get at information that people do not

consciously know themselves. Analysis of people's stories allows deeply hidden

assumptions to surface. …

● Narrative illuminates the temporal notion of experience, recognizing that one's

understanding of people and events changes. … (2002, p. 209)

My hope, no my goal, was to continually encourage my conversation partners to

open up and tell me stories about their development and learning experiences, to put things

in their context rather than simply answer a list of questions. While I am still a bit

uncertain as to how well my story of their stories stacks up against the above criteria

outlined by Runyan, I certainly was looking for patterns of meaning within their stories,

which were spoken by the interpreter/translators themselves with patterns of meaning in

mind. In the results, their meanings as they interpreted them seen through my eyes, I think

another layer of interpretive meaning was added to the stories. Another goal as I worked

with their words was not to ignore or delete any meanings in the way I filtered what they told me of their experiences.

I am aware that in a Korean context, asking students to tell me a story may not always have gotten the same response as in more familiar (to me) Western cultural surroundings (Gergen, 2001; Pavlenko, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). I think this potential problem was somewhat moderated by the exposure to Western narrative these interpreter/translators have had, some by living overseas, and all of them here in Korea, where the pervasive influence of the Western-oriented world culture sometimes seems as strong as anyplace in the world because of influences from movies, books, and other media exposure. In addition, my familiarity with Korean cultural expectations after living her for most of the last 12 years was a strength in terms of being able to see "between the lines" of what I was hearing from my conversation partners. And if the stories the interpreter/translators told me had an Asian or Korean flavor, so much the better!

I also took to heart Pavlenko's warnings "against treating narratives simply as factual data subject to content analysis" (2002, p. 214). She emphasized that there is good evidence showing that narratives are co-creations of the storyteller and listener, and are

strongly influenced by "social, cultural, and historical conventions" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214).

Like Runyan, Clandinin and Connelly offered their ideas about criteria for good narrative and traced the development of their thoughts on the subject over time (2000, p. 184-185). From John Van Maanen's "apparency" and "verisimilitude," to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) "transferability," as opposed to the more positivistic "generalizability," they noted the importance of avoiding assumptions about cause-effect relationships simply because things happen one after the other in time. But in 2000, they wrote about shifting their thinking from looking at "what makes a good narrative" to "what makes a good narrative inquiry," helping them look more closely, not only at the text itself, but also at the overall inquiry. Looked at from this direction, I was again challenged, yet also somewhat comforted, by the Zen-like answer they approached in response to their big question about narrative inquiry:

> As we continue to work at the boundaries of narrative inquiry, we attempt to
> develop criteria that work within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.
> However, it is *wakefulness* that in our view most needs to characterize the living out
> of our narrative inquiries, whether we are in the field, writing field texts, or writing

research texts and wondering about what criteria to use in a particular narrative

inquiry. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185)

The word and the meaning behind it – *wakefulness,* "the process of paying close and

continuous attention" (wakefulness, n.d.), appealed to my imagination in terms of what I

wanted to do with these interviews: pay attention closely and continuously as my

conversation partners told me about their lives.

Learning From Those We Interview

Like Rubin and Rubin (2005), I prefer the term "conversational partner" to

"subject," which sounds like a lab rat, "collaborator," which collocates in my mind after

"French" and brings to mind thoughts of Nazi sympathizers in the Vichy France of World

War II, or "informant," which sounds too much like a "snitch" who reports a troublemaker

to the authorities, as they also note. But it's more than the term that I like. My partners in

these conversations most certainly were helping me with this project, at least as much as

my professors or my reference materials. They agreed to share with me their stories about

their development and learning experiences that have changed their lives and helped make

them who they are.

When Spradley writes about the "essence of ethnography" (1979, p. 4)," he

expresses the distinction this way:

Instead of collecting 'data' about people, the ethnographer seeks to learn from

people, to be taught by them. … Ethnographers adopt a particular stance toward

people with whom they work. By word and by action, in subtle ways and direct

statements, they say, "I want to understand the world from your point of view. I

want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the

meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them,

to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me

understand?" This frame of reference is a radical departure from treating people as

either subjects, respondents, or actors (Ibid. p. 34).

It seems clear to me from several perspectives (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Brown,

1988; Fanselow, 1987; Freeman, 1996; Gebhard, 1996; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Hinkel,

2001; Paley, 1990) as well as from my own classroom experience, that a teacher of

language especially, whether engaged in research or not, must always be ready to learn

from his students, much like Spradley suggested that researchers be ready to learn from

their informants. One of my favorite reminders for this idea comes from Wayne W. Dyer's

1976 book, entitled *Your Erroneous Zones*. There, he wrote:

> A colleague of mine who teaches graduate courses for teachers frequently asks the
>
> old-timers, who have spent 30 years or more in the classroom, "Have you really
>
> been teaching for 30 years or have you been teaching one year, 30 times? (p. 146)
>
> I hope I can learn a little, do something better every year, and continue to grow, as a

person and a teacher, rather than doing the same old thing year after year.

While my conversation partners may not have been the only, or even the best

sources of information on what kinds of learning and knowledge are needed to become a

successful interpreter/translator, which might be better gained from their teachers or

theorists who have analyzed the processes they went through, they *could* provide direct,

first-hand information on the learning process itself, being products who were at one time

completely enculturated in the environment of the Graduate School of Interpretation and

Translation (Spradley, 1979, 47), and are now, similarly, living in the world of

interpretation and translation that I want to know more about.

This project depended on my storytelling, and also on the stories of my students.

But I don't think that's too much to demand of such an essential human capacity. As

award-winning storytelling teacher Vivian Gussey Paley notes, "Play and its necessary core of storytelling are the primary realities in the preschool and kindergarten, and they may well be the prototypes for imaginative endeavors throughout our lives" (1990, p. 6).

Biases and Acknowledging Their Presence

It seemed important to me in a qualitative research project to understand the importance of being as upfront as possible about my biases. I agree with most qualitative researchers, who "would deny the possibility of pure objectivity in any scientific endeavor" (Hatch, 2002, p. 9). While I hope my data, evidence, and final results are to a great degree based on the empirical evidence I can gather, I also had to remember to acknowledge that I was working with human instruments, both in myself and in my informants or "conversational partners" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 14). I am a long way from a belief system, as scholars Peter Schwartz and James Ogilvy attributed to those holding a "Newtonian world view." This view would hold that as an observer I "can be isolated from experiments and the world (I am) studying to produce an 'objective' description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 21). Instead of dreaming that I can somehow be an "objective" chronicler of my students' stories, I have tried to follow the suggestions I have read to be aware of,

admit to, and use my own subjectivities to help me make more out of what I heard from

them.(Hatch, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985 Vandrick, 1999: & Woo, 1999).

"Who are you to do this?" asked Agar (1996, p. 91) in a chapter title, and the

question is a good one. In the first sentence of that chapter, his portrayal of ethnography as

"really quite an arrogant enterprise" (Ibid.) led me to some introspective thoughts about less

positive things than the noble-sounding "traveler" metaphor by Kvale (1996) mentioned at

the beginning of this proposal. Agar expresses concern about the "personality and cultural

background of the ethnographer" (1996, p. 93), noting, "before psychoanalysts are

considered competent to analyze others, they must first go through analysis themselves"

(Ibid., p. 92).

This admonition, to remember that my culture, my background, my education, my

personality, and my values all make me less than precise as a scientific research instrument,

helped me look at some of my own cultural interference. I think I have already looked at a

lot of the "cultural baggage" I carried to Korea more than a decade ago, but I have no doubt

there is so much more that I will be discovering it for the rest of my life. In teaching and

communicating with Koreans, I have had many opportunities to look at what Vandrick

called "A feeling of superiority of West to East, of English to other (especially non-

European) languages, so that teaching English becomes a kind of preaching a 'better way' to the 'natives'" (1999, p. 63). Do I see the elements of my American born and bred personality (Woo, 1999) that conflict with the expectations of my Korean students, no matter how "Westernized" they may seem?

Agar's warning, the "on-the-job training" I have received in intercultural communication over the past decade and lots of reading have helped me remember to try to take into account and try to let my readers see those facets of my personality that may have affected or interfered with my study. On the other hand, I saw this interview study as being about Korean English interpreter/translators, and not as an autoethnography. How much do I need to write about my academic and career background? What about my friends and relationships in Korea? Should I go into detail about any personal issues? Which ones? These were questions that arose in my mind as I reread Agar's book, along with some personal narratives in other areas that came to mind. They are questions I have thought about, continue to consider, and have definitely informed my wondering and writing as work continued on the project.

Making Connections

A lot of material that I read in preparing for this dissertation, at least the ideas I have

seen that interested me most, had to do with new ways of looking at learning, and thinking.

It may be that this is just due to the newness of ideas that others have looked at a long time

ago, but like Kuhn's "new paradigm," the idea of finding a new way to look at things is one

that I found very attractive.   Into the mix of ideas about research and interviewing,

narration and analysis, translation and learning, that have made up the backbone of my

study into what makes an English translator in Korea today, I have sprinkled a few drops of

ideas from other areas that seem to offer something different in terms of analyzing learning,

thinking, and doing.

I found things resonating in my mind and in front of my eyes as I read, making

connections between Fanselow (1987) with his "breaking rules," de Bono (1990) and his

"lateral thinking," Bruner's different "modes of thought" (1986), and the many scholars

referred to in these pages on issues of qualitative, interview, and narrative research. While

it may seem a stretch at first glance, these different ways of looking at learning and

thinking seem to have a connection in that they all suggest that there may be a better way of

looking into things than the "critical thinking" that has been taught and learned in the

academy for centuries, at least in the Western world. It is certainly bigger than the scope of

this research project to attempt to make major points for one way of thinking or another.

But I think I have gotten some ideas from these new ways of looking for answers

and solutions about how research by talking to people who have successfully acquired

extremely complex new language skills by using their words and stories along lines

suggested by many scholars (Bruner, 1986, 1990 & 2002; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000;

Heath, 1984; Paley, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; Rule & Wheeler, 2000;

and many others). Using them to guide my thinking, I went on to speak at length to a group

of interpreter-translators about their learning, experiences, and expectations, which I think

has resulted in more knowledge about what has occurred in their as well as some ideas

about how others could use what they have experienced and learned, which might well help

work toward encouraging it to happen for other learners.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"Since methods go with theories, there really are no grand categories of research

like 'quantitative research' and 'qualitative research'" (Gee, J.P.,1999, p. 6).

My Approach to Research

Throughout my learning, not only at the university I am currently writing this

dissertation for, but throughout my life, I continue to wonder and learn about my approach

to research. In this section, beginning with what I found to be the most clear way of

looking at things I could find, I explain something about my approach in terms of

methodology and method, moving on to how the different perspectives of the participants

in this project, including myself, affected what I learned, and moving on to a discussion of

more theoretical concerns: issues of epistemology, generalizations or the lack thereof, and

paradigmatic concerns.

Methods and Methodology

As I reviewed Schwandt's *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (2001), I felt some uncertainty, not for the first time, about the shifting meanings of the words "method" and "methodology."

Schwandt's definitions help to clarify the meanings of these terms, which are often used in different ways, but his five definition areas for the term "method" and three pages of text and tables on "methodology" also make it clear just how cloudy the meanings can still sometimes be. Table 1 on the following page shows his ideas about the connections and distinctions between methods and methodology.

While, as I said, some cloudiness remains after reviewing Schwandt's chart, I am fairly sure that in this study, at least, my research methodology fits somewhere on the borderline between "ethnographic and naturalistic" and "narrative and interpretive interactionist." Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that my research mixed elements of both methodologies, rather than being on the borderline, as I briefly highlight following the chart.

Table 1. *Illustration of Relationships Between Methodologies and Methods in*

Qualitative Inquiry (Schwandt, 2001, p 163).

Methodology	Methods of Generating Qualitative Data	Object of Understanding and Theorizing Reconstructed byMethod
Social phenomenological	Registering methods (e.g., audiotape- and video-transcribed documents); methods of contextual description	The social or everyday life (the life-world) understood from the perspective of interaction or the interaction order; the social accomplishment of reality
Ethnographic and naturalistic	In-depth, ethnographic (semantic) and unstructured interviews; life-history interviews; participant observation	The social or everyday life (the life-world) understood from the actor's perspective, knowledge, experience, intentions, interpretations, etc.
Narrative and interpretive interactionist	'Active' and narrative interviews	The dialogic process of communication; the 'exchange process' and the joint construction of accounts of social life in conversation and reflection
Objectivist hermeneutics	Exegesis, hermeneutic method	Author's intended meaning of the text

Reading further in this study will reveal the methods and theoretical

understandings that fit with those two approaches in Schwandt's definitions, but a

glance at the methods corresponding to the ethnographic and naturalistic, as well as

the narrative and interpretive interactionist shows immediate connections with this study's use of unstructured life-history interviews that, to my mind, also included something of a narrative element. Throughout my interviews, I tried to let my conversation partners tell their stories with as little interference as my interviewing techniques would allow..

For more clarification of my thoughts on methodology and methods, I went back to the main source of my research methodology background, Lincoln and Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), which reconfirmed my interest in research that fits under "the naturalist paradigm," as they lay it out (pp. 14-46). All of their axioms, ontological, epistemological, limited generalizability, causal linkages, and the role of values in inquiry (pp. 37, 38) make more sense to me than they did years ago when I first encountered them.

In ontological terms, Lincoln and Guba write that "realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic" (1985, p. 37). This description certainly fits my project, as I have tried to build conclusions after hearing, reading and comparing words from the diverse perspectives of each of my informants, processed through my eyes, ears and mind, to be read by still another person or persons who will have their own perspective on the slices of life history I asked about and interpreted in this report.

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Perspectives

Each of the people I talked to had a distinct perspective on what it's like and what it takes to be a high-performing English language interpreter/translator in Korea today. There were also many insights into working in the U.S., where Korean is a little-studied language with few qualified native speakers, even at the highest levels. I am sure if I had gone into this study from a different continent, I would heard different perspectives on it. But I am here, and I got what I could from here. I think it is definitely information worth sharing with others, both here and in other areas with differing perspectives.

While I do not think I am nearly the poet that communication researcher Deborah A. Austin is, I like what she writes about multiple realities in a brief autobiographical poem which concludes an article, in prose and poetry, on new forms of qualitative writing:

She became

Who she is

   being right in the

                middle

   of things

that's how she came to know the world

      (a little differently than some others

      . . . so she learned their way too)

Yet

she still believes

that being right in the middle of things

   talking   listening   doing   watching   asking

is how one comes to understand

   contradictions   contingencies   multiple realities

the stuff of everyday life

This is how she studies

And represents

      close relationships and family

        gender, ethnicity, spirituality

those things that interest her most

(Austin, 1996, p. 230)

While I tried to understand my informants' worlds, sharing "how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6), my own perspective on the perspectives (realities) of the students has certainly been part of the process and end product. At every point the research bears my fingerprints, from the questions I developed and the many experiences which informed them to the way I asked the questions and reacted to responses.

Also, there were innumerable co-creators I wasn't even aware of, some I will never be aware of, others I have thought about and tried to acknowledge in my thinking, as well as my writing: my dissertation committee, my readers, and everyone who has ever taught me anything about writing in academia: "Academic rules help to shape life stories to such an extent that narrative texts cannot be seen as other than co-created" (Tierney, 2000, p. 544).

Epistemology

In analyzing my own personal ideas about how to go about approaching this project,

I saw my epistemological base as strongly aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985)

ideas. The interactions that took place between me and my informants or "conversational

partners" [Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 14]), went in both directions. Certainly the wording of

my questions and comments affected the answers I got from my partners (Mishler, 1986).

However, it is also worth noting that the responses affected my further comments and

questions, as I continued to compare and contemplate the data with questioning and writing

and going back for second and third helpings. I also tried to use my limited understanding

of discourse analysis (Crystal, 1997; Gee, 1999; Gumperz,, 2001; Johnstone, 2002;

Schegloff, 2001; Scollon and Scollon, 1995, 2001) to gain insights into what my partners

and I were saying to each other beneath the surface of the words.

Richards' chapter titled "Collecting and Analyzing Spoken Interaction" (2003. pp.

172-230) provides some basic definitions and methodological ideas for those interested in

examining what's being said "between the lines" or not explicitly stated as people

communicate. He uses the labels "conversation analysis," "interactional sociolinguistics,"

and "critical discourse analysis" to refer to different types of analyses of spoken

communication with different goals, but he does not even mention "discourse analysis," which is also used by many scholars (including Gee, Johnstone, Potter & Wetherell, Scollon & Scollon, Silverman, and others) to refer to many of the same and various other methods of examining spoken and written communication.

The analysis of my interview data uses discourse analysis as well as other types, but my treatment of discourse seems to have more "descriptive" than "critical" goals, as explained by Johnstone (2002). This assumes, like many discourse researchers, "that pure description is possible and desirable" (Johnstone, 2002, p. 25). I emphasize my focus because I think, in defining critical discourse analysis for this project, there is little need, in this setting, for these purposes, to examine how "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk" as cited by Van Dijk (2001, p. 352). Further, I do not see my role in this project as a "dissident researcher," taking an "explicit position," trying to "understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality" (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). However, as Johnstone also notes, at some levels, all discourse analysis is critical, since it is "at root, a highly systematic, thorough approach to critical reading (and listening), and critical reading almost inevitably leads to questioning the status quo" (Johnstone, 2002, p. 26).

Generalizing, and Not Generalizing

Lincoln and Guba's axiom on the generalizability in naturalistic (qualitative) research offered some comfort and eased this researcher's expectations. The writers even say in a chapter title: "The only generalization is: There is no generalization" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 110-128). I am certain that I learned some interesting things and made some connections with what other students and other research projects say about learning, about lives, about language, and about translation. While I think what I have learned is useful to me and others who are curious about interpreter/translators' backgrounds, development, and lifestyles, I am somewhat less certain that I have found some grand, overarching theory that will apply in all cases to everyone.

In the pages of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and elsewhere (Janesick, 2000; Stake, 2000;Yin, 2003), there is discussion of the possibility — but neither the certainty nor the necessity — of making limited generalizations that go beyond the specific focus of a qualitative research project. I hope I have found some answers that make sense beyond the worlds of the interpreter/translators I talked to, outside of my classroom, beyond GSIT, maybe even outside of Seoul, but this question is not for me to answer.

Like the axiom regarding generalizability, the axiom regarding causal linkages

helped ease the pressure, or perhaps just led to more realistic expectations about what I

expected to learn. Contrary to the purely positivistic belief that "(e)very action can be

explained as the result (effect) of a real cause that precedes the effect temporally (or is at

least simultaneous with it)" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38), my beliefs align with those they

attribute to naturalists, that distinguishing cause from effect is impossible in a world where

both are continually changing each other (Ibid.). Since this study has elements of narrative

research inherent in it, as I asked students about their life-altering experiences and

decisions, I remembered the warning of narrative researcher S. Crites about "avoiding the

illusion of causality" (quoted by Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 184-185), that *before* and

after did not necessarily mean *cause* and *effect* (Ibid.).

Lincoln and Guba's final axiom regards the role of values in inquiry. While a

positivist researcher might somehow believe it is possible for research to be value-free, I

have long subscribed to the theory that there are countless outside values influencing any

type of research, whether it be qualitative, quantitative, or somewhere in between.

Paradigms

I believe Hatch is on target when he writes:

Paradigm is one of those words that is overused to the point that its meaning has

been lost. Writers of popular books about everything from business to gardening

use the notion of a paradigm shift to sell the importance of their products or ideas.

I've heard television preachers use the term, seen it on the backs of trucks going

down the highway, and read a brochure that touts a new paradigm in termite control

(2002, p. 11).

The term *paradigm shift,* a major change in thinking, was explicated by Thomas

Kuhn in 1970, and elaborated on by Lincoln & Guba and others doing psychosocial

research in the 1980s. The excessive use of the term clearly demonstrates how important

the idea is, particularly for people who research, think, and write about what people say and

do. The strength of the words, "paradigm shift," is evidence of something with deeper

implications than an advertisement of a "new and improved" product on a colorful label.

For one who has long doubted the possibility of being truly objective about

anything, there is a lot to like about qualitative research methodology. In my former career,

writing for newspapers, I saw too many biased "factual" news stories to believe that the

total truth can be found in anything written by one person, if there even is such a thing as

total truth. It seems better to admit one's biases than to try to pretend they do not exist and

have no effect on the research. I am very suspicious of numerical data that doesn't clearly

add up. In an old-fashioned, possibly ignorant way, I believe in the old quote, often

attributed to both American humorist Mark Twain and British politician Benjamin Disraeli,

that there are three kinds of lies: "Lies, damned lies and statistics."   I have seen attempts by

corporate public relations managers, as well as military public affairs officials, to baffle the

public with confusing statistics and numbers that can be used selectively and out of context

to state the opposite of what the facts really demonstrate. While of course, that doesn't

mean that I believe all statistics are false, it does mean that I always try to look at statistics

with a very skeptical eye, especially if they are startling or dramatic.

It would seem that the main problem researchers need to guard against, whether

their methods are quantitative or qualitative, is blindness to the subjectivity of all research.

The mere fact that one devises a numerical method of statistically analyzing results from a

survey does not mean that the questions provide an accurate answer to the research

question. Similarly, using open-ended interview questions can at times get worthwhile

results, but an interviewer who is better at listening to him- or herself than the interviewees

might just as well write up the report without talking to anyone. Agar points out that

ethnography, which he calls "an arrogant enterprise, … (a)t best, … can only be partial"

(1996, p. 91). As noted in chapter II (this volume, p. 69), I thought long and hard, not about

whether I had biases, but about what they were. I have learned a lot about Koreans and

their culture since moving here in 1995. Almost every day I learn more about how to

communicate with and understand people here. I have also learned a lot through this

project, and continue to learn about my ignorance, my assumptions, and now my growing

understanding of what interpreter/translators do and how they do it.

Research Design of This Study

This section provides context for the "how," the "where," and the "who" regarding

the way this study was put together. I first discuss some of the background information and

decisions I made that helped me put together my plan for the specifics of how to research

my topic. Following up on that, I include some background information on the site where I

did much of my research, as well as the people who shared their knowledge, their

experiences, and their perspectives that compose this project.

A Qualitative Design

In beginning to put this study together, I gained insight from a book whose intent seemed more appropriate for the latter stages of a research project, Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis* (1994). The authors wrote that a qualitative research design should be preplanned

> (e)nough to reach the ground, as Abraham Lincoln said when asked about the proper length of a man's legs. It depends on the time available, how much already is known about the phenomena under study, the instruments already available, and the analysis that will be made. (p. 17)

Miles and Huberman admit that their opinion about the wisdom of an open-ended vs. a structured approach to qualitative research is not precisely in between, but tilted more toward the structured approach (1994, p. 17) They state that it is generally accepted that, in qualitative research, structured design should be kept to a minimum before fieldwork begins. However, they warn that, while open-ended studies make sense for experienced researchers who are studying unknown phenomena and who have plenty of time, less-experienced researchers like myself should start with a plan.

I started out by looking for a pattern of relationships in what I learned from the

interpreter/translators I talked with. The data consisted of narrative responses in semi-

structured to unstructured informal interviews about their English language and literacy

background and factors that led to their interest in the field of interpretation. I have tried to

use what I learned from scholars in the areas of qualitative, interview, and narrative

research to inform my findings, and while I still have questions about drawing any

conclusions that will have applications outside of my own teaching and learning, I also

believe that the human mind is a "self-organizing patterning system" that "has a wonderful

capacity for making sense." (deBono, 1990, p. 133). Specifically, how did I go about this

study?

The study was largely based on interview research, using Kvale's "semistructured

life world interview" (1996, p. 5) as a model. As I mentioned in the first chapter, Kvale

writes about the process of interview research by contrasting the images of the researcher as

a miner and a traveler:

In the *miner metaphor*, knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer

is a miner who unearths the valuable metal. Some miners seek objective facts to be

quantified, others seek nuggets of essential meaning. In both conceptions the

knowledge is waiting in the subjects' interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by

the miner. The interviewer digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject's pure

experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions. (Kvale, 1996, p.3)

Kvale continues along these lines, sarcastically emphasizing the "purity" (1996, p.3)

of the knowledge that some assume can be gained from the "miner" approach, before

setting up his other metaphor, that of the interviewer as traveler. The interviewer as

traveler, he writes, is "on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home"

((Kvale, 1996, p. 4).

> The interviewer-traveler wanders through the landscape and enters into
>
> conversations with the people encountered. The traveler explores the many domains
>
> of the country, as unknown territory or with maps, roaming freely around the
>
> territory. The traveler may also deliberately seek specific sites or topics by
>
> following a *method*, with the original Greek meaning of "a route that leads to the
>
> goal." The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that
>
> lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with
>
> them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as "wandering together with"
>
> ((Kvale, 1996, p.4).

What the traveling reporter hears and sees is described qualitatively and is reconstructed as stories to be told to the people of the interviewer's own country, and possibly also to those with whom interviewer wandered. The potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler's interpretations; the tales are remolded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are validated through their impact upon the listeners….

The two metaphors − of the interviewer as a miner or a traveler − represent different concepts of knowledge formation. Each metaphor stands for alternative genres and has different rules of the game. In a broad sense, the miner metaphor pictures a common understanding in modern social sciences of knowledge as "given." The traveler metaphor refers to a postmodern constructive understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research. The miner metaphor brings interviews into the vicinity of human engineering; the traveler metaphor into the vicinity of the humanities and art. (Kvale, 1996, p.3)

As I tried to emphasize at the beginning of the first chapter, throughout this process I saw myself as more of a traveler than a miner in my research methods. I have

high hopes that readers will agree that my conversations with interpreter/translators of various types yielded results that made it worth the trip.

Research Site

The research was conducted, with permission, in my offices and classrooms at HUFS GSIT with graduate students and faculty there, as well as in other locations amenable to conversations and recording, such as coffee shops, restaurants, apartments and other places in Seoul.

While at the beginning I had questions about how much to cloak the university in anonymity, I eventually decided it would be acceptable to refer to the university itself. Part of my initial uncertainty stemmed from the fact that even if I did not mention the name, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies' Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation is the oldest and generally known as the best place in South Korea for training interpreter/translators. To make the school anonymous, I might also have needed to remove some of the above descriptions, which I considered important in defining the setting. Of course, I guaranteed the anonymity of those involved in the project and obtained informed consent from all of them.

Data Collection

My Approach to Data Collection

For this project I tried to employ the technique Rubin and Rubin call "responsive interviewing" (2005, p. 30). While my study has doubtless been colored by my past classroom experiences with the few former students I talked to, I searched for ways to look at how to use those experiences in my project to make them assets, rather than problems, and build on them when interviewing the other interpreter/translators I spoke with. I made an effort to pay attention to warnings not to only use "low hanging fruit" (Ibid., p. 64). However, in an interview study as in journalism, it is almost inevitable that the best conversation partners, those who had the most to say, and those who "gave the best quotes" will take center stage. Throughout my work, I have also tried to include those who perhaps were more reticent in our conversations, yet made good points that might have been less interestingly put, but were still germane to the subject at hand.

These are judgment calls, but judgment calls are needed in qualitative research. I continued to make decisions—and change them—about what is important to know and share about becoming and being an interpreter/translator in Korea. I will probably continue

to revise them long after the dissertation is completed. Because so much of what I read,

heard and learned was transmitted through the understanding of my partners, I think it was

absolutely critical to continue to look into and learn about how their thinking, their culture

and their learning affects the messages they receive and transmit to all of us who rely on

their skills.

The Interviews

In the autumn of 2005, I first talked to two of my top students from the previous

year. At that time, they were in their second year of the two-year GSIT program and no

longer my students. I only work with first-year GSIT classes in my advanced English class.

Around the same time, I asked several leading interpreters on the faculty for referrals to the

top interpreter/translators in Korea. Each gave me a list of 8 to 10 names. There was some

overlap on the three lists I started with, but there was also a good variety of experience

levels on all three lists. I tried to contact all of these interpreter/translators by E-mail, and

after receiving a few responses I telephoned them to set up interview sessions. I gave

priority to contacting those people whose names were on more than one list, as well as to

those who had been mentioned by the first interpreter/translators I talked to. In addition to

the first interviews with two former students, I talked to 13 interpreter/translators, all

experienced professionals, of whom several were also full-time or part-time faculty

members teaching interpretation and translation at the GSIT. These interpreter/translators

were all professionals, with experience levels ranging from several decades, reaching back

almost to the beginnings of the field at professional levels in Korea, to those with only a

few years under their belt.

Though all of my conversation partners had studied or and/or worked with GSIT,

that is not out of the ordinary in the Korean interpretation/translation field. Since 1979

when GSIT began operating as Korea's first Graduate School of Interpretation and

Translation, it has been recognized as the leader in the nation. Other Korean universities

such as Ewha Women's University, Handong University, Pusan University of Foreign

Studies, Seoul University of Foreign Studies, and more, have since then inaugurated their

own graduate programs in interpretation and translation. Still, HUFS GSIT is arguably the

top school in the field in Korea.

Spradley (1979) says his approach to ethnographic interviewing requires, at a

minimum, a series of six to seven one-hour interviews. This number seems to be based on

an intensive ethnographic project which includes living in the setting and observing

people's lives. Frankly, in a project as focused as this one, so much time seems like overkill. I felt it did not call for as much of an on-site presence, since I wanted to learn from the students' own interpretations more than from my own observations about their behavior or lives during their studies. Also, for the past several years I have worked and lived on-site in many ways.

Richards (2003) cites recommendations from other scholars of from 2 to 15 hours for interview research. Because I agreed with Richards' note that "tiredness can begin to creep in after an hour or so (2003, p. 67), my plan, which I followed closely, was to talk to each interviewee in one- to two-hour sessions. The first session was intended to obtain some basic background information on each one, using some of my initial demographic questions about their family, language, literacy, and interpretation/translation background. I had little difficulty with these initial questions, but also got little in the way of interesting or useful-seeming answers. However, many of them were useful in follow-up interviews because they gave me interesting areas for further questions about their family's attitudes, growing up experiences, and the variety of ways they got advanced English proficiency.

The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Sections containing useful data were transcribed, along with notes taken during the interviews, reflective

journal entries written soon after the interview, and additional listening to the entire

audiotape. Before I began I did not have a good idea of what it meant to transcribe only the

"useful data" from interviews, but I found it very difficult to transcribe only parts of most

of the interviews.

More than a decade of experience as a news reporter equipped me with some skill at

listening and noting the important parts of a speech or dialogue in order to write a news

story soon afterwards. However, this first real foray into more detailed research revealed

the difficulty of distilling the essence of conversations when there was no discrete answer

to be obtained. It was more important to look at all the words being said to get a context of

the whole conversation.

Because of this need for context and reluctance to exclude part of the conversation,

I ended up transcribing almost completely 20 of the 34 interviews I conducted with

interpreter/translators. I talked to 15 individuals for an initial interview of one to two

hours. Of those 15, I scheduled more focused second interviews, which usually ran closer

to one hour, with 12 interpreter/translators, and I talked to 7 of those during a third session,

again, lasting about one hour. This gave me a total of about 41 hours of recorded

interviews.

These interviews began in the fall of 2005, after receiving my initial approval to begin research from Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). I continued interviewing in the spring and summer of 2006, with the final follow-up interviews taking place in the fall of that year.

Beginning in the fall of 2005, I interviewed these interpreter/translators, starting with a few of my former students, and continuing with some of the best professionals I could find, located by contacting GSIT colleagues who were, in my judgment, perceptive and demanding teachers as well as experienced evaluators of their former students and colleagues. I talked to interpreter/translators at all levels, ranging from high-ranking second-year graduate students (selected from personal classroom experience with them and other professors' assessments) to experienced professionals with a few years, to veterans with 20 to 30 years' experience. Some of them had worked for several presidents. Together they covered the gamut of experiences in translating and interpreting throughout the Republic of Korea for the last two decades, all the way back to the presidency of Park Chung-hee, who was assassinated in 1979. The broad experience was especially true of the Korean interpreters of English.

A copy of the E-mail I used to invite participants to help with the project is

included as Appendix A.

Practical Ideas for Interviewing

As noted above, Rubin and Rubin see the interview "as an extended conversation"

(2005, p. 108). They also stated (pp. 108-109) that the interviewer should be conscious of

keeping the conversation going, staying on one topic until it's been covered well without

switching around, clearly shifting to a new topic when it is time to move on, rephrasing and

repairing to help clarify potential misunderstandings without adopting the tone of a cross-

examiner, and perhaps most important, <u>asking</u> for narratives and stories. As a newspaper

reporter, I picked up some skills at asking questions in a comfortable, conversational way

without making the questioner role seem too obtrusive. Still, at times during these

interviews, I found myself stumbling over obstacles of my own making, such as

opinionated responses, leading questions, and asking for the obvious with "teacher

questions" aimed at eliciting a certain response. By writing reflective journal entries soon

after the interview and reviewing recordings, I caught many of these gaffes. While I tried to

be reflective of my questioning and evaluating behavior during and between the interviews,

I think it is obvious, and perhaps inevitable, that my subjectivity has slipped in at least once or twice.

In one journal entry example, from October 25, 2005, I noted that I'd been confused about a former student's example of *jeong*, a Korean word for a cultural trait that approximates "togetherness" or "unity" in English, but is almost universally assumed by Koreans to be incomprehensible by Westerners. Rather than take her response and move on, I felt defensive and started to resist what she was saying. "I can't believe I pushed her so hard to get an answer to what I didn't understand – to hear what I wanted to hear. I acted like it was a silly thing to say. What kind of interview was that?" I asked myself on the page. "I need to apologize for that kind of pushy interviewing." Later, I did apologize and we talked about the issue more after some serious reflection. The following day, I noted: "Everytime (sic) I finish another interview I'm in a different mood. Today was bad, then good. So excited after talking to (name removed). Great quotes."

On Feb. 2, 2006, I reminded myself to look at my own interpretation of what these interpreter/translators were telling me:

What about looking at misinterpretations? For example minute 38 in (participant's name) conversation. Trying to interpret my questions and missing connections. Am

I hard to interpret? Do I know where I'm going? Does there need to be a sense of direction to follow assumptions behind a conversation? Do all conversations have a kind of a theme or does it change from time to time? Interpreting conversations?

From my newspaper days, some of the tips Rubin and Rubin offered almost seemed like "givens" to me (2005, pp. 114-122). Ideas about stages in interviews and interview relationships, such as introducing myself and the reasons for the interview, asking easy questions and building a comfortable, empathetic relationship before getting to the tough questions, and finally toning things down and closing while leaving things open for future conversations all seem fairly elementary.

However, I found several of Spradley's (1979) points more interesting and less obvious in light of past experience. His breakdown of the rapport-building process into stages of apprehension, exploration, cooperation, and participation took some information I thought I understood and put it in a new way that really made sense to me and helped a lot during the course of the actual interviews.

Spradley broke the rapport process down this way:

Stage   Remember

● Apprehension stage..........There is <u>always</u> apprehension. Explain purpose and relax. Get informant talking. Descriptive questions – Can you tell me about your childhood/family/school years? Keep informant talking.

● Exploration stage...........Informant tries to figure out what I want, explores the interview and relationship; don't push at all in this stage --no pressure to cooperate.
Wait out any feelings of tension. 3 big points: 1. Make repeated explanations, 2. Restate what informants say (don't reinterpret, just restate – nonjudgmental), and 3. Don't ask for meaning, ask for use of unfamiliar terms – not trying to get them to define and translate, but just to use these terms again. For example, when students use an interpretation term like "shadowing," don't ask at this point for definitions, just ask questions that get more use of the term – "How often do you use shadowing?" "What kinds of situations have you 'shadowed' with?"

● Cooperation stage............Informants and interviewer not worried anymore about making mistakes. More cooperation. Informants spontaneously correct interviewer, help toward the goal of the interviews.

● Participation stage............Final stage, only sometimes reached. Subject realizes he/she is teaching interviewer. Heightened cooperation, full participation in the project.
(Spradley, 1979, pp. 78-83)

I also found new ideas in Spradley's suggestions for getting help from conversation

partners for developing questions during the interviews. Like Kvale's admonition

(mentioned above on p. 57) that the simplest way to find out what people thought was to

talk to them (1996, p. 1), Spradley suggests that a good way to find out what question to

ask knowledgeable people is to simply ask them to help build questions using phrases like

these:

1. What is an interesting question about ____?

2. What is a question to which the answer is _____?

3. Please write a text in Q-A form, about _____.

(1979, p. 84)

His words, elegant in their simplicity, helped me remember me that the sometimes

underused method of directness was often the best strategy to work with, and almost always

the best way to start.

Capturing the Data

I used interview data almost exclusively in this project, apart from what I already

knew about the environment of the country, the institution where virtually all of my

conversation partners have studied and/or taught, and background knowledge and

experiences gained in the classroom teaching future interpreter/translators.   I used a

pocket-sized digital audio recorder, and transferred sound files onto my computer for

playback and transcription. Because of the reliability and almost flawless fidelity of my

recorder, I found it distracting to take more than occasional brief notes during

conversations. During the interviews, along with recording all conversations, when

possible I also made notes of important points. However, as Richards (2003) and Kvale

(1996) noted, at times I found note-taking during interviews an obtrusive obstacle which

and interrupted the flow of conversation. I became even more aware of how distracting it

could be to make lengthy and detailed notes at critical points in a conversation, and I

learned, yet again to try to make my note-taking fairly unobtrusive or to wait until a more

relaxed moment to write a note or two. I transcribed the recorded conversations myself,

using fairly standard conventions. I did not see the need to note the lengths of pauses in any

more detail than can be gained from using notes in brackets, as suggested by Rubin &

Rubin (2005). Although there are many opinions on how much detail to add to a

transcription, they all seem to sum things up the same way: get enough detail to allow for

whatever analysis desired. For my purposes of trying to look largely at the content of what

was said, rather than going too deeply into how it was said, I used fairly simple standard

written English transcriptions, with some pauses, interruptions, and exclamations included

in parentheses

Field Notes/Reflections

As soon as possible after each interview, I took time to write about any reflections

or feelings about the interview itself, reviewed my notes taken during the interview to try to

fill any gaps, and spent time searching for any connections between what was said and

answers to my research questions. In Kvale's "six steps of analysis" (1996, p. 189), three of

the six steps of analysis come before anyone even looks at a transcript, which reminded me

that "first impressions" are important to record for later recall. "These immediate

impressions, based on the interviewer's empathetic access to the meanings communicated,

may … provide a valuable context for the later analysis of transcripts" (Ibid., p. 129).

On the other hand, Agar (1996), warns against trying to use field notes to "vacuum

up everything possible, either interrupting your observation to do so or distorting the results

when retrieving them from long-term memory" (p. 162). He is not so much advising

against field notes as reminding novices to use them to focus on important points to

remember, such as ideas and observations to follow up on in further interviews, and other

things that it is important to remember to deal with eventually. While Agar warns against

the over-reliance on field notes, he strongly suggests a personal diary be used as a research

tool. Writing in a diary or journal about my reactions to the GSIT, the students, the

interviews, and life in general as a dawdling dissertation writer has certainly resulted in

more useful detail to add to my narrative analysis, and as Agar notes, also included my

"role more explicitly into the research process" (Agar, 1996, p. 163).

I took Agar's suggestion, and even before this study's proposal was accepted,

regularly recorded my thoughts about the ongoing work. This research journal was an

excellent source of ideas for my continuing ongoing analysis of the stories my conversation

partners and I continued to build and, especially in the later stages, provided much food for

thought on directions to explore with my writing up of the patterns and connections I found.

Data Analysis

My Approach to Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the few facets, perhaps the only facet, of doing qualitative

research in which there is a right way and a wrong way. … (T)he right way to

analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection. At

the outset of a qualitative study, the investigator knows what the problem is and has

selected a sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the researcher

does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what

the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are

collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing

analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer

volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while

being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. (Merriam, 1998, p. 162)

While I did not approach this study expecting to make any sweeping

generalizations, groundbreaking theories, or even major conclusions, I do think I have

learned some interesting insights and perspectives about the subject at hand, the lives and

learning of English interpreter/translators in Korea. After reviewing the above lines by

Merriam, I am certain that I have done my best to follow her prescription for success by

trying to see patterns and make connections in what I was learning from the interviews,

from the very first interpreter/translator I spoke with until the last. I can also say that to the

best of my ability, any connections that did arise were "grounded" in the data I obtained

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They feel that, after each instance of data collecting, it is important to note the key concepts or issues that arose. Constant comparison is, of course, key to Glaser and Strauss's ideas on obtaining theory from data. By comparing interview data, I did indeed see patterns, concepts, and theories, to appear as possibilities, which I compared to the continuing data, noting which patterns appeared to be the strongest.

I have attempted to use techniques from qualitative research methods in general, informed by ideas from scholars in interview and narrative research to look for these patterns from the results of my interviews in this project. I looked at the literature in the order listed above in order to gain insight from my data. While I obtained enough data to work with, I wanted to be sure to look at it from more than one angle in order to allow any patterns to emerge in the data and in my mind. I am fully aware that any conclusions that emerged were not simply objective "facts" that came out of the data, but only possible views of a reality that have been collaboratively cobbled together by the conversation partners I worked with and myself, with the aim of getting some ideas about how certain people have come to learn and practice a particular interesting, unique, important and very special professional skill.

Interview Analysis Techniques

This project has, of course, benefited from the reading and thinking I did in the early stages as I put together the proposal. I would have had little idea about where to begin without doing a good deal of background research. However, while I continued to learn from and improve my thinking from reading and listening to others throughout the project, I was more focused in the later stages on the fascinating data I got from the responses to my interview questions. "More important than borrowing concepts and themes from the literature is finding those that emerge from the interviews," wrote Rubin & Rubin (2005, p. 210). They suggest looking for these themes in the questions asked, ideas frequently mentioned in responses, and indirect revelations from emotional, tonal, or other shifts, as well as by comparing interviews to each other.

Kvale warned researchers like me against being in the position of asking "the 1,000-page question" (1996, p. 176). The question he refers to is this: "How shall I find a method to analyze the 1,000 pages of interview transcripts I have collected?" (Kvale, 1996, p. 176) At that point, he writes, it is already much too late. Analysis and the goals of interview research must be firmly in mind as the study is being planned, questions are being asked, notes are being taken, and transcriptions are being prepared. In other words, analyzing data

should be a continuous process, not left until the end when I have hundreds of pages of interview transcripts to deal with. Spradley (1979) agrees, noting that the difference between a lot of social science research and ethnographic research, such as this study, is that the stages of choosing a problem, collecting and analyzing data, creating hypotheses, and writing up the results are all going on simultaneously (p. 93). "Most important," he writes, "instead of discrete stages, ethnographic research requires constant feedback from one stage to another" (Spradley, 1979, p. 93).

What these and other scholars were telling me is that while they would not provide any "main roads to the meanings of the interviews" (Kvale, 1996, p. 187), there are many tools to choose from, which are closely related to the "thematic questions … asked from the start of the investigation and followed up through designing, interviewing, and transcribing" (Kvale, 1996, p. 187).

The interpretive-analytic process described by Kvale begins when those being interviewed describe their experiences with a researcher. It continues as the subjects themselves see meaning in their experiences, after which the researcher "during the interview, condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee describes, and "sends" the meaning back," making for a "self-correcting interview" (Kvale, 1996, p. 189).

All this interpretation occurs before the researcher even begins to make a transcript. During that process, of course, interpretations continue to be made as recorded spoken language is transformed into words on the page.

Throughout the interviewing process, from the very first interview, I listened and transcribed, always attempting to organize my ideas around what I heard from my conversation partners more than from any preconceived notions. Of course, the idea that I could to do this without being part of the responses I got is a fiction, as evidenced by occasional clumsy responses that almost shut down conversation. Trying to understand concepts like *jeong* was at times a challenge, especially when an explanation – talking about how the Korean connection can even make one feel safe enough that being forced to drink while taking medication – can seem more puzzling than the question itself Fortunately, everyone I talked to was patient and understanding about dealing with the gaffes of ignorant foreigners like myself.

Silverman pointed out that the meanings of what people say are not a direct connection to some objective reality (2000). But like Spradley (1979), he emphasized that understanding the meanings of the words people used can be discerned from their

connections or relationships to other words, following the ideas of Saussure. He added that

meaning is also found in how the words are commonly used, after Wittgenstein.

Although the variety of analytical theories did not provide a clear route to the

question of how to do this or any study, as noted above, there are connections between the

theories. Whether it's called "coding" as in Spradley (1979), Merriam (1998) and many

others, or "categorizing," as emphasized by Kvale (1996), it was crucial that I reduce the

stories from my conversation partners to some basic units of meaning or themes. This

would enable me to find concepts that could be compared for similarities and differences

with similarly reduced concepts in responses from others. Starting with my basic research

questions, and going more specifically to the interview questions relating to each research

question, I feel I have found, or perhaps more accurately, "co-created" categories and

patterns in what I learned from the interpreter/translators I talked with.

These patterns, around which I built the chapter IV and V categories, followed a

chronological pattern based on the interviews, which themselves were based on the

general question areas I was interested in, working in a loose chronological format. From

the start, I wanted to learn about the interpreter/translator's early life and background,

their family and educational influences, and how they got into the field. Apart from these

general starting points, much of the rest of the interview data came out of the interesting

responses, similar to what Agar call "rich points" (1994), that I referred to in my notes as

"surprises." These unexpected stories, about challenges such as the difficulties of

transitioning back and forth from the Korean educational culture to Western/English

system, as when one interpreter/translator recounted the shocking experience of getting a

score of 63 on an IQ test because her Korean was so poor.

Narrative Analysis Techniques

Since the data that arose from the interviews could also be referred to as narratives,

or at least "mini-narratives," whether the answers were combined into a longer and more

detailed narrative form by the informant or into thematic narratives by the researcher, it

came as no surprise that the analytic techniques for looking at interviews have similarities

to those for looking into narrative. Using ideas from narrative research, I looked for

"common themes or plots" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 177) in the stories interpreter/translators

told me about their developmental, learning and professional experiences, and, as I listened

to recordings, transcribed, and reviewed the transcripts, I continued to look for "a focus for

analysis" (Riessman, 1993) in the responses of my conversation partners. I kept my initial

research questions in mind as they continued to change and develop in light of what I learned from my conversations, and I "narratively coded" my data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) with the people, places, patterns of concepts and ideas that emerged. Common (or unusually distinct) themes that emerged were all possibilities for codes.

As noted above, some of these initial patterns were formed even before my first interview. I knew, for example, that I wanted to find out about family and educational backgrounds, and in *general*, the experiences that led to a career in interpretation. But the common factors that emerged from our conversations, for example the *hae wae pa/kungnae pa* (overseas English learners/domestic (Korean) English learners), were patterns that, from an initial interest, tended to fill the conversations after more and more interesting stories were recounted by my interview partners.

While these coded texts may have helped in seeing patterns close to the surface, as Clandinin & Connelly note, it is in going further, looking into "questions of meaning and social significance" that field texts are made into research texts (Ibid.). The coding and categorizing help to uncover patterns and relationships in the words of the interviewees, but the analysis and interpretation have helped me get closer to understanding the meaning of what my conversation partners told me about their lives. It is hard to imagine how I could

look for meaning without trying to understand and analyze their narratives. After all, in many situations from everyday communication to the research setting, it has been pointed out that "the ubiquity (of narratives) is evident" (Mishler, 1986, p. 106; see also Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Influential sociolinguist William Labov (1997) agreed, writing that in the years since his groundbreaking 1967 work with Waletzky on personal experience narratives, "(i)t gradually appeared that narratives are privileged form of discourse which play a central role in almost every conversation." Mishler further points out that their "ubiquity" offers support for the idea of some researchers that "(n)arratives are one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to order, organize and express meaning" (Mishler, 1986, p. 106). This is precisely the meaning that I refer to and have attempted to discover, or at least to participate in discovering.

The stories I learned from about becoming and being interpreter/translators helped me understand how they individually and collectively "made sense of their experiences and construct meanings and selves" (Chase, 2003, p. 80). For example, before I began this experience, though I had general knowledge of the importance Korean parents place on education, it hadn't been driven into my mind with the force of words such as, "Even if you starve, you have to teach your children."

Conversation/Discourse Analysis Techniques

Throughout the pages of many works on interview and narrative research are references to many ideas from the disciplines and sub-disciplines that have come to be known as conversation and discourse analysis. As noted above, the parallels and overlaps between interview and narrative research are similar to those that one can find when analyzing the discourse (form) of the interview responses and narratives (content). Like a naturalist who knows the forest and has specific knowledge of many of the trees and plants, it appears that looking at the overall patterns and themes and examining the details of the language would be complementary activities. But I also needed to beware of getting lost, finding myself in a situation where I could not see the forest for the trees.

I think there is some room for questioning whether there are really distinct boundaries between this type of analysis and narratives and interviews. Labov's work with personal narratives over the past 30 years, referred to by Johnstone (2001) offers some ways to look at the discourse structure or narratives of personal experience that were useful in this study. He outlines several types of narrative clauses, in addition to time sequencing, that can be grouped by their use in communicating the structure of events in a narrative.

Abstract, orientation, complicating action, coda, evaluation, implication, credibility,

causality, assigning praise or blame, viewpoint, objectivity, and resolution are all structural

categories suggested by Labov (1997) to help organize and conceptualize narrative of

personal experience in a systematic way. They look at more discrete discourse "tree" level,

rather than at the forest of overall meanings or the "big picture."

Gergen (2001) emphasizes the social role of self-narrative, which particularly seems

to make sense in the Korean context, where so much of how people think about themselves

and their lives has to do with others. Looking from a discourse-level perspective, he writes

that the way people structure their stories of themselves, temporally, culturally, in terms of

defining relevance, causality, and even their own identity in stories, has much to do with

social expectations. These elements were negotiated between me as interviewer and my

partners' perceptions of what is culturally acceptable as narration. I needed to keep this in

mind as I tried to see their messages from their perspective and interpret them to the outside

world, with my perspective acting as a "middleman" between the two.

One area where I noted a clear distinction between the expectations of my

conversation partners and myself was in the view of the relative importance of English as a

tool. To be sure, these students are some of the strongest performers in English language

proficiency in South Korea. But still, their ideas about the language compared to mine were from different worlds. I, as an American engaged in teaching advanced English, focusing in class on the importance of communicating without a flaw in English, naturally have different ideas about the relative importance of the language compared to the interpreter/translators. For them, English was just one of the skills they need to use to do their job. In addition to the Korean language, other skills such as memory work, notetaking, working with others in a confined simultaneous interpretation booth, and many other concerns were things I needed to find out about by talking to people and asking them to tell me about their work and their lives.

Triangulation

As I was reading background literature for this study, I found it interesting that fewer and fewer, and shorter and shorter, references to the topic of triangulation appeared as my reading shifted from qualitative research in general and toward interview and narrative research. Lincoln and Guba wrote that data triangulation was "crucially important" by "validating" each piece of information against at least more than one source or research method (1985, p. 283). Merriam cited articles from more than 30 to nearly 60

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years ago, referring to triangulation by "multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods" to establish validity (1998, p. 204).

Denzin and Lincoln, after German researcher Uwe Flick, write that "(t)riangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation" (2000, p. 5). Combining methods, data, or perspectives in one study, they say, again citing Flick, "is best understood … as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). While this research project was produced by one investigator, and largely relied on data gained from a single method, interviews, it gained much from the fact that I interviewed and collected stories from a number of "data sources" – people.

Schwandt wrote:

The strategy of triangulation is often wedded to the assumption that data from different sources or methods of data must *necessarily* converge on or be aggregated to reveal the truth. In other words triangulation is both possible and necessary because research is a process of discovery in which the genuine meaning residing within an action or event can be best uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points. (2001, p. 257)

But not all agree with these assumptions. Richardson questions the idea "that there is a 'fixed point' or 'object' that can be triangulated, preferring the idea of "crystallization" to "triangulation," since "there are far more than 'three sides' from which to approach the world" (2000, p. 934). Janesick uses the crystal metaphor to mean that the use of other academic and artistic fields should be used with research and "broaden our understanding of method and substance" (2000, p. 392). Particularly applicable to my project, with its focus on interview and the narrative results that it is hoped will come from those interviews, was Janesick's example of historians who "rely on documents and interviews almost entirely. There is constant discussion of method, but this is connected to content" (Janesick, 2000, p. 392). Going even further, Janesick dares to question "the assumption that the trinity of validity, generalizability, and reliability, all terms from the quantitative paradigm, are to be adhered to in research" (2000, p. 393).

Still, while there are dissenters to the idea of triangulation, and even questions about the concept of validity, that does not appear to mean there are calls for less rigor in qualitative research. And while I admire Janesick's bravery, and agree with her in some ways, I doubt that my doctoral dissertation is the best place to take up the call to arms against the academy I hope will grant me a degree someday. These dissenters'

replacements for triangulation involve writing: for Richardson as a primary research tool, and for Janesick as a major part of the research process.

Looking at my project, I learned much from these different ideas about triangulation and validation. Clearly, in addition to having the different perspectives from each of my interviewees, I needed to provide more data and attempted to analyze my data from more than one perspective. Some of these additional perspectives came from my own journal of experiences relating to this research project, as strongly suggested by Richardson and Janesick. I also used member checks of transcripts to see if my conversation partners agreed with my transcription, or if they changed their thinking about key points as we met for continuing interviews.

But for the most part, in this study, I relied on the interviews themselves as sources of data. Where many responses were similar, I indicated that in the transcript data and analysis in chapters IV and V. As well, when differences arose in how the interpreter/translators saw themselves and their world, I also mention that in the data and analysis chapters. Experiences such as growing up overseas, working in what many spoke of in negative terms as "the service sector," and needing to have other important activities in life apart from interpreting to avoid burnout were some of these similar response

patterns. Differences stood out when one interpeter/translator told me about her mother encouraging her to go into the field, where I had previously been surprised that most of my conversation partners parents were lukewarm, or even opposed to their low prestige career choice in prestige-conscious Korea.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

While I have not omitted the name of the university where I work and where all of the interpreter/translators I interviewed were studying, have studied, or were teaching when I talked to them, I have guaranteed all participants that any information gained in research interviews would be used only for this project and not released to anyone else. I have attempted to protect their anonymity by using pseudonyms used pseudonyms and avoiding the use of identifiable details, along with ensuring them that the project will not in any way reflect on their work or connection to the university. I interviewed no current students of mine, only former students, and I continually made clear that their help with my research project would have no affect on their grades or performance at GSIT in any way. A tentative informed consent letter is attached as Appendix A.

Research Journal

As part of this study, I kept a research journal, which served as a record of my research experiences. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) note, "Journals are a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience" (p. 102), and the importance of my thoughts, ideas and decisions to this dissertation need to be expressed as I think about what I am doing and how to do it. Spradley writes that "ethnographers should always keep a journal" which will "become an important source of data." (1979, p. 106).

The act of journal writing has been called "a rigorous documentary tool" (Janesick, 2000). While it can sometimes be a challenge to keep up with it, I have found that special projects, trips, or other adventures have provided reasons throughout my life that make journal writing an obvious thing to do and provide huge benefits later when I want to look back a the experience. It was a definite "must do" for this research project. For years, I have kept a small memo pad in my shirt pocket, which I refer to as my memory. On it, I record things I need to remember, notes, lists, quotable quotes, and the like. As this project began to take shape, I have continued to use my "memory" to record the things that Spradley suggests adding to a research journal: "a record of experiences, ideas, fears,

mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs and problems that arise during fieldwork" (1979, p.

106).

CHAPTER IV

THE INTERVIEWS

Introduction

This chapter contains selections from the data gathered in this project. I have tried

to recompose and edit the words of the interpreter/translators in a way that reflects the title

of this dissertation, *In Their Own Words*. It seemed worthwhile to add background

information in only a few spots where there was a general agreement among all respondents

(or among virtually all Koreans, as on the very high value placed on education) and where

some context was needed. But for the most part, the interviewee's own words appear in the

answers to the basic questions. To protect the anonymity of interviewees, I used

pseudonyms and only a few identifying features, such as a general idea of the speaker's

experience level, gender and some other details. More information on my interpretations,

perspectives, analysis and conclusions about what was said in the interviews can be found

in Chapter 5.

Though I refer to my conversation partners as "interpreter/translators," and all of

them have at times worked in translation, most of those I quote in this study usually worked

as interpreters. For those with the requisite skills, conference or simultaneous interpreting is

the most demanding and the most lucrative type of work, the sought-after "dream job"

among the many students entering the field of interpretation and translation in Korea.

Those quoted in this study, except for a few high-level students in the early pages of this

chapter, have already attained what is for many, a far-off dream: to be a high-level

conference interpreter.

I have divided the selections from our conversations into units and organized the

units under three major sections, as shown in the Table of Contents. These sections are

entitled "Chances and Choices in Early Life," "Becoming an Interpreter/Translator: Natural

Advantages?" and "Being an Interpreter/Translator: Work, Life and Challenges."

Chances and Choices in Early Life

Influences and Education

Without exception, the people interviewed said their parents were strongly behind

their education, as are the vast majority of Koreans in almost every profession. Sun-jae, a

conference interpreter in her third year of full-time work, said her parents and grandparents

were "just as motivated as any other Korean parent" toward education, whose general view

was "that even if you starve, you have to teach your children."

But these exceptional performers had even more pushing them on. The parents, or at least the fathers, were college-educated, which has become more common over the last few decades in Korea, *much* more common than in previous generations. A few even told me about grandparents with advanced education, which was truly exceptional before the Korean War.

The parental drive that urged them toward an education, no matter what the field, was a recurring theme as I asked about upbringing and educational goals. So-young, a working interpreter with more than 10 years' experience, said her father had an advanced graduate degree, and her grandfather had even studied in the U.S. in the 1950s, which was extremely unusual at that time. So-young put it this way:

> All, all, Korean parents, they're very supportive, of their kids' education. They, you know, as long as the kid wants to study and further their education, they would support and, you know, pay for the education. That was the same for my parents.

But like several others I talked to, So-young said that while her parents wanted her to do well in her studies, they did not try to decide what she should study or encourage her to study language. In fact, "They didn't really say that much about what I should study."

A Dubious Goal

As with So-young's words about her parents, many of my conversation partners

said their parents hadn't pushed them in one direction or another for their education in the

beginning. It wasn't until later that many parents suggested to their sons and daughters that

interpretation and translation might not be the best career choice for their long-term future.

Unlike in Europe or elsewhere, in Korea translation or interpretation are not

recognized by many in society as a worthy professional career goal (Choi, J.W. & Lim,

H.O., 2002). That includes many parents concerned about their son or daughter's career

choices. But also like some others I talked to, So-young said that, although her parents

hadn't pushed her toward any particular career, after she set her sights on interpretation, her

parents were more than a little uncomfortable about it and initially tried to dissuade her

from the choice.

But, you know, my father, he didn't really encourage me to become an interpreter.

He didn't think it was such an important ... job …. He just said why would you want

to go to a graduate school of interpretation and translation? I don't really,

recommend that. It's just a level above -- just one level above secretary, he used to

say. He didn't really like it, but you know, I insisted, and I wanted to do it. So, after

that initial comment, he didn't really say anything about it.

While their children's education is a major goal for all Korean parents, other

interpreter/translators also said their parents had discouraged them from

interpreter/translating as a career goal, sometimes quite adamantly.

Sang-hoon, who had studied mechanical engineering in college, had already come

from his home in Daegu, the capital of North Gyeongsang Province, to study at Seoul

National University, Korea's top-rated, most prestigious university, when he was drawn to

interpretation/translation. By most Korean standards, admission to SNU meant his career

was well on its way. His proud parents were more than a little displeased when his interest

and capabilities in English led him to look into interpreting as a career. They had a hard

time understanding their son's abrupt decision, he said, but it was *his* choice, and one that

Sang-hoon stuck with over their opposition:

They're all, like, are you trying to throw it all away? … I didn't live abroad. I have

never lived abroad. Um, first time I ever actually took a flight, was right before I

entered college; it was in 1997. Before that I never even thought about speaking

English for a living. So not many people really thought that was what I (*inaudible*)

wanted to do. But I found out later, somehow, I was interested in speaking English.

And later, after I finished my military service, I found it was more interesting to

deliver someone's message to other people.

Finding a Need

My interviewees had several different kinds of early experiences that led them to an

unusually strong interest in English. Sang-hoon, like many male students at GSIT, first

experienced English language in use as a KATUSA soldier – Korean Augmentation to the

United States Army. Military service is mandatory for college-age males. It is a 26-month

rite of passage that virtually everyone goes through except for those who are exempted

because of physical reasons, alternative service, or other limited considerations. Many

English speakers compete for admission to the KATUSA units because that duty is often

seen as easier and more interesting than service in the Republic of Korea Army.

Serving as a KATUSA allows soldiers to translate and otherwise guide their U.S.

counterparts through the many details of life in Korea that the Americans may find baffling.

It begins with language, but includes moving through crowds, driving in traffic, dealing

with other Korean military members and many other factors of everyday life. Several

interpreter/translators have found their calling by going through KATUSA service. Sang-

hoon talked about his KATUSA experience and how it changed his career path:

> I served as a KATUSA – A Korean soldier in a mil- U.S. base. So, I had a lot of
>
> chances to translate, or interpret between Korean - ROK Staff, they called – ROK
>
> Army Staff – and the U.S. soldiers, sometimes officers. And it really was interesting
>
> and it was enjoyable, because I could become like a bridge between two different
>
> people, help them understand each other. It was really fun -- I think. So – and – in
>
> those years, I had a roommate who actually wanted to become an interpreter. Who
>
> actually wanted to enter this school. That's when I learned about this school, what
>
> they do here and what I needed to do to prepare for this school. So I really didn't
>
> think about this much, but after I finished the service and came back to college, I
>
> had only two semesters left before graduation, and I really wanted to learn English
>
> more, so I took several more classes at the English department instead of the
>
> engineering department. And, I didn't really enjoy mechanical engineering that
>
> much. It was, of course, interesting, but I didn't think that it would be a job that I

could do for, like, 20-30 years more. So I thought – why not? Just give it a shot and just, … decided to enter this school.

Sang-hoon said one incident in particular had motivated him toward working as an interpreter and made him see how crucial the need was for communication between the worlds of those who spoke Korean and those who spoke English:

> While I was in the military, there was an event – KATUSA week, it's like a sports
>
> event, wh- where all the U.S. soldiers on the camp, and the KATUSAs joined
>
> together. And there was like this two-month long preparation process. So I – I was
>
> part of the organizing staff. So I went to like a big meeting, with some generals,
>
> and colonels, and other officers. It was really annoying, because those ROK
>
> officers, didn't really understand what was going on there, and they didn't, want to
>
> know actually, they just gave the job of writing down all the transcripts to us, and
>
> they were just, like sitting there. But it was really annoying, because they are
>
> responsible for, our national defense, and they said – they always say our U.S.-
>
> Korea military alliance is so important, and they don't even understand each other.
>
> And … it was a really frustrating, irritating officer, an American officer, a major ….

He treated, like, y'know, he treated every ROK army officer as if they were like, some subordinate, or, not really civilized people thing. That was definitely annoying, and I don't think, the Korean officers recognized that. Because that was a big, y'know, difference. I could, uh sense that, but I don't think they did. It was also another, really irritating point….I wanted to tell …the ROK Army officers, what was going on between you two. You don't just understand each other and you two are even being insulted and you don't know it.

Sang-hoon added that, being a minority in the mostly-U.S. Army contingent, he may have been sensitive to what he perceived as slights or insults to the Korean officers by the Americans. Nonetheless, the strong desire – the frustration about what he thought was an unfilled need – for someone to help explain what was going on to his countrymen was a big part of his initial motivation for entering the translation field.

Other interpreter/translators, like Min-ah, a recent female graduate, like Sang-hoon, just starting her career as an interpreter/translator, had simpler reasons for becoming interested in being a guide between the English-speaking and Korean spheres.

Min-ah: Well, first of all, I really liked, English as a language. I like all kinds of

languages, but when it comes to English, I had this really strong passion to learn it

and master it and communicate -- to be able to communicate in English, um, close

to a, a native level. Uh, and I also like, helping people communicate, even before I

came to this school, since I spoke a little English, when there were times when

people were having trouble communicating -- because they couldn't speak English, I

would, I always, you know, felt like just jumping in and helping them, like on the

subway -- everywhere. So, I thought, if I, you know, took this course (GSIT) and

became a professional translator so I can help people communicate in a more

professional way –

Researcher: Mmmm Hmmm

Min-ah: Uh, that would be really great. …

Researcher: Your early, your initial interest … Where do you think it came from?

Min-ah:: I like … the way it (English) sounds.

Researcher: Mmmm Hmmm.

Min-ah: I like the culture that's embedded in the language … It's more, …. there's

openness, there's flexibility, …. there's relaxedness, umm, and it sounds much

better, … than Korean.

Researcher: Are there other things about you that led you want to become an

interpreter/translator?

Min-ah: I always liked to get involved in other people's business. Um .. like my

family … when my family members have …. trouble … they tend to come to me

more than they, you know, go to other, other members of my family. Um, and I

think that's because, I'm a good listener. I like to listen, and I like to... find solutions

to problems that, you know, do not necessarily involve me. And, yeah, that

definitely comes from my personality.

"Falling Into" Interpretation/Translation

For many of the professionals I talked to, interpretation and translation was a career

that they found by chance, proving the point made by Robinson in *Becoming a Translator*:

"Translation is often called a profession of second choice" (1997, p. 27).

One interpreter/translator who had looked at other options before turning to interpretation/translation was typical of many of those interviewed in not thinking or knowing much about the field or studying for it as a career before coming by chance upon it. Hye-jin, who said she was in her third year "in the business," talked about her experience:

> **Hye-jin:** By the time I was a senior (in college), I really didn't know what I wanted to do because I was majoring something that I really didn't want to do (English education), so I took the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) to – in order to go to law school, but I did not get, as high of a score that I wanted. So I decided that it really wasn't worth it if I wasn't going to get into a certain tier of law school, and so I took the test for this school, GSIT, and, luckily I got in first try, which I thought I wouldn't. And so I became an interpreter. It was kind of a coincidence. … That was 2001.
>
> **Researcher:** Okay. Did you um, … did you know about GSIT a long time? How'd you find out about interpreting and translating?
>
> **Hye-jin:** I didn't know that there was this – um, a master's course in interpretation at all. I did not know that people actually studied this.

Researcher: When did you first start – when did you think about doing this for a

living?

Hye-jin: Um, in senior year (of college). In senior year I, by accident I heard from a

friend that there was a school at HUFS (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies) that,

actually had this master's course. And I just knew that a lot of people wanted to get

in and it was difficult to get into, so it just seemed like something really prestigious.

So, I went to this, um, this private academy that prepares you for this school. And I

took the course for about a month, and that, in during the course of the month, they

actually turn on CNN for about three minutes and then ask someone to interpret.

And, it was, um, really interesting for me and, really entertaining actually. I liked

the tension of the classroom. Uh, I liked that everybody was really concentrating. I

liked that I could use both of my language skills. And I really liked talking to

people, so I thought, maybe this is it. And so I just took the test after the month, and

I got in.

Becoming an Interpreter/Translator: Natural Advantages?

Growing Up In Two Languages

Many of those who "fell into" the career, like Hye-jin, were starting out with a big

advantage over others in Korea: They had been exposed to English at an early age by living

overseas, either in an English-speaking country, or attending English-speaking international

schools elsewhere. This made them what Koreans call *hae wae pa*, or overseas learner, as

opposed to *kungnae pa*, what Koreans call those who haven't had the overseas language-

learning experience at an early age.

The line between *hae wae pa* (overseas learners) and *kungnae pa* (those who

learned English in Korea) sometimes seemed indistinct. The people I spoke to lived

in English-speaking cultures at different ages and for different lengths of time. There

were also variations in their return to Korea, their getting re-acquainted with Korean,

and their later reintroduction to English-speaking language and culture. Many

interpreter/translators spoke of moving back and forth from one culture to another.

So-ra, a conference interpreter, translator and educator with decades of experience

working at the highest levels, listed the places she'd grown up like this:

I was born in Seoul but we left, I think. about six months afterwards, or no, it was nine months after -- to the States. My father was posted to Arlington (Virginia), and then I lived in the States for about three years or so. Came back to Korea, and after a few months, we went to Rome. And I went to – lived in Rome for nine years. Came back, attended Seoul Foreign School (American curriculum international school) for two years, and then we went to London. I was in London for two years before I came back. My senior year in high school was in Korea, in a Korean school.

This kind of globetrotting experience in one's early years, which today is still unusual for educated Koreans, was almost unprecedented before the 1980s. But for many of the participants in my interviews, it was typical.

Even among those who did have overseas experience in English-language environments, most said that being an interpreter/translator had been something they found late, often in their junior or senior years in college, if not even later. I asked another experienced female interpreter who had a globetrotting childhood what it was that led her

into the field. Yoo-jin, who's worked for almost a decade with presidents of major corporations as well as high-level government officials, had an unusual answer:

My mom! My mom went to one of those *tongdae hakwons* (interpretation/translation institutes). I don't know why! But she just went. She came home one day and said, "Hey, it's interesting. You might want to go to that graduate school, you know." And that was the start of my interest in *tongdae* (interpretation/translation graduate school). And she said, "If you become a freelance interpreter you have a lot more time than being a teacher. So that was actually my motivation for coming to *tongdae* …. I was thinking about becoming a teacher in middle school or high school mathematics. That was only because I thought teaching would give me a lot of free time. I'm a very disrespectful person when it comes to motivation about *tongdae*. (My thought process was) freelance, okay, that's a lot of time on your hands. … I started out because of the leisure time, but I see there's a great need now for interpreters. If I didn't, I wouldn't be working.

While, as noted previously, there were many paths that led to an interest in becoming an interpreter/translator, several of my conversation partners just fell into it in a

natural progression after living abroad while growing up, learning English and perhaps

picking up interpretation/translation skills as part of their everyday life. For some, like So-

ra (the experienced high-level interpreter also quoted above), interpretation/translation was

something they seemed to grow into naturally, in the same way that a person who grew up

near the seashore would be likely to learn how to swim at an early age.

> **Researcher:** When did you think about Interpretation/Translation as a career
>
> possibility?
>
> **So-ra:** When I was young, living in Rome, since I was one of the few Korean kids
>
> who knew how to speak Italian, I helped a lot of people – *ajumma* (housewives) –
>
> when they had to go grocery shopping -- or -- to the pharmacy or what ever -- so I
>
> did to interpret -- that -- if you can call it that. And then, in -- university, for a part-
>
> time I would -- I did a little bit of interpreting. But I never really thought about it
>
> that seriously. And then, after college, I thought I'd get a career and earn oodles of
>
> money but, for some reason, I was not accepted. I sent out my résumés to several
>
> companies but nothing really happened, and so, instead of sitting on my hands
>
> doing nothing, I just decided to apply to this graduate school. And I was accepted
>
> and so, then it just sort of happened.

Researcher: Really?

So-ra: It wasn't that planned.

Many top interpreter/translators, like So-ra and Yoo-jin, are *hae wae pa* (overseas learners). But there were notable exceptions. Often, those who didn't learn the language overseas, known in Korean as *kungnae pa*, or domestic learners, had a special teacher or experience that provided a special spark to their desire to learn language, in this case, mostly English. Even Korean learners acknowledged that *hae wae pa* have a big advantage, particularly in activities like simultaneous interpreting, where being strongly bilingual means the interpreter can easily and spontaneously access both Korean and English virtually simultaneously. Some of those who did have the advantage seemed almost embarrassed by it at times, calling it "politically incorrect" to talk about at GSIT or elsewhere among their fellow interpreter/translators.

Not only did many of those interviewed have experience with life overseas in English-speaking environments, they also had a lot of back-and-forth experiences going from English-language to Korean-language surroundings once, twice or several

times. Sun-jae, 29, in her third year as a professional interpreter, talked about the

back-and-forth lifestyle:

> **Sun-jae:** Uh, I was … born in Seoul, and I lived here until I was six, and then, …
>
> my father, he went to study abroad, in Edinburgh, Scotland. And so the whole
>
> family went with him. I think that was in … '84? …'84, we stayed there for seven
>
> years until he completed he –his studies and then we all came back again.
>
> **Researcher:** So you grew up, in Seoul, how much in Edinburgh?
>
> **Sun-jae:** Seven years.
>
> **Researcher:** From age …?
>
> **Sun-jae:** Six to 13? Does that add up? Is that correct?
>
> **Researcher:** Critical time.
>
> **Sun-jae:** Yes, so I didn't go to primary school here in Korea. All of those seven
>
> years were, six years of primary and one of junior high school.
>
> **Researcher:** Okay. Ah, when you came though, uh where did you go to school, did
>
> you go to regular high school, did you go to an English-language high school? …
>
> **Sun-jae:** When I came back, uh, because there is a difference in semesters between
>
> Korea and, and the U.K., I'd completed my first year of junior high, but when I

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came back I was still in the first year of middle school. I had one semester left. So, I

started off from there, at just an ordinary middle school with the other Korean kids.

And then, uh, high school, I took a test, and then went to a foreign language high

school. One of the five or six that are located here in Seoul.

The Bilingual Lifestyle – Pros and Cons

Since the mid-1990s, it has been obvious to any observer in South Korea that

Korean parents and educators have done all that they could to get students of all ages

proficient in English. Private schools, summer camps, theme parks, simulated English-

language environments, or immersion programs, can be found throughout the Republic of

Korea today, with "English villages" sprouting to meet the demand from the Seoul suburb

of Paju in the north, to Mokpo on the southern tip of the Korean peninsula.

However, the language and cultural immersion experience these participants talked

about was not simulated, but a real-life immersion program. The back-and-forth lifestyle,

often in transition between two cultures and two languages provided obvious advantages

later in life, particularly for the select few I talked to who turned their bilingualism into a

professional choice. It also could make growing up a tough experience, trying to fit in to a

different language and culture every year or two. Hye-jin, quoted earlier (p. 160) about

shifting her goals toward Interpretation/translation from law school, talked about her

childhood and teenage experiences going back and forth from Korean to the U.S., back to

Korea, and then to English-language American schools in Eastern Europe before returning

to Korea again:

> **Hye-jin:** Umm, it was very difficult because when I first went to the states (in
>
> second grade), I didn't speak English, but when I came back to Korea (in sixth
>
> grade), I had noticed that I had forgotten a lot of Korean. And then by the time I
>
> was, I became a fluent sixth-grade Korean level, I went to Budapest (American
>
> School in seventh grade), and then, I had to catch up on the rusty English that had
>
> rusted over the years. And then, three years in Budapest actually had a very big
>
> impact on my Korean, and when I came back to Korea –
>
> **Researcher:** -You lost a lot?
>
> **Hye-jin:** – I lost a lot, although, my parents tried to make sure I don't lose Korean
>
> by making me speak Korean – only Korean – at home. But that didn't work very
>
> well because my brother and I spoke English, while we spoke Korean to my parents.
>
> And then when I came back to Korea at grade 10, I had difficulty reading Korean

textbooks, and listening to the nine o'clock news, that was very difficult, but everyday conversation was okay. … And, by the time I graduated high school, I was much more comfortable in Korean, and my English had become quite rusty again. But the very interesting aspect of my language is … I find it really interesting too, but, speaking and listening, I'm still much more comfortable in Korean. But reading and writing, I'm much more comfortable in English.

Researcher Really?

Hye-jin: Yes, up to date. I tried to analyze why that is so. I think, because I listen and speak in Korean in everyday – in my everyday life, so for obvious reasons I'm more comfortable in Korean. But, the Korean school system, in high school, didn't allow me many opportunities to read or write, rather, I was mostly reading textbooks, rather than novels or any other … books. And, I wasn't writing too much because most of the tests were multiple questions. Whereas, the six and a half years I spent in the American system I was reading through the library, and, I was writing quite a lot. And when I came back to Korea I noticed that, my reading skills were better in English, so I could read faster,

Researcher Mm hmm –

Hye-jin: --and it made me keep on reading English books, a- as opposed to Korean

books, because it just – I was, reading fast enough for me to see what was

happening in the book. So I kept on reading novels in English and I enjoy novels a

lot, and so I think that's why I'm better at reading and writing in English.

Yoo-jin, an interpreter with 10 years experience quoted above (p. 164), talked about

her biggest trauma resulting from the bilingual, bicultural upbringing:

I came back to Korea in fifth grade, so throughout middle school, my Korean wasn't

that good. I didn't understand any of the questions I took in my first exam in the

Korean education system. I think it was an IQ test and my IQ turned out to be 63 or

something!

While to an outsider without the same experiences, growing up between

two cultures might seem a challenge, it just became normal – the way life was – for

many of the people, like So-ra (also quoted above), who later found their way to

careers in interpretation/translation.

So-ra: It was not so bad because -- for the nine years that I was in Rome, that

was -- like -- pretty steady ….

Researcher: What ages was that?

So-ra: That was from 4 to 13. So that was really a big chunk. And if I had

been moving back and forth like, most people average about three to four

years. And so, if you do that, and that can be difficult on a child. It was

difficult for me as well, but not as much as –

Researcher: At 13 you came back to Seoul for two years?

So-ra: Right, mmm hmm. But I went to Seoul Foreign School (A Western-

based international school with a K-12 American curriculum) -- I didn't go to

a Korean school.

Researcher: So that was kind of a buffer –

So-ra: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay, okay, so Rome, Seoul Foreign School, London – all

English schooling --?

So-ra: Right, all English.

Researcher: And then you went to high school in Korea -- for two years?

So-ra: Senior year.

Researcher: Only senior year? …

So-ra: Senior year in high school and then Ewha (Korean women's university).

Researcher: Had you kept up with your Korean well enough?

So-ra: No, no!

Researcher: Was high school a challenge?

So-ra: I was just like a zombie! I just sat there and ...

Researcher: Senior year in high school was a loss?

So-ra: Uh huh, uh huh, but I had to finish high school. My body was there, but my mind was elsewhere, definitely (laughter).

Most of those interviewed, particularly those who worked as high performing interpreters in today's market, had childhood experiences with English because their parents were expatriate Koreans whose careers had taken them overseas. The children of diplomats or overseas executives, they had childhoods with many advantages, though there

were hardships to growing up overseas, and moving from country to country, or language

to language, at a young age.

Is Overseas Experience Necessary?

To be able to survive in the interpretation marketplace in Korea today, "I think you

have to have some exposure" to living in the world of English speakers, said So-ra, the

veteran high-level conference interpreter. She continued:

In this day and age, I think it's silly if you're a *kungnae pa* (domestic Korean

learner) and you've been here all your life and you want to be an interpreter, and if

you don't even think about going abroad, even for a short period of time, I think

that's very silly. I mean, there's – just exposing yourself to the rest of the world, I

think is important. But, just, more than that, all the good interpreters have lived

abroad, I think… So it's unrealistic to say that you can be a *kungnae pa* and still do,

and be a top conference interpreter.

Others who had also learned the language overseas agreed, at least to

some degree:

"It's very common with the good people, the top people," said So-young, the female intepreter-translator with more than 10 years' experience in the interpreting booth. She said that learning the language from age 11 to 14 overseas, rather than learning in an English class in Korea had been a "huge advantage for her" in terms of comprehension and speaking fluency as an interpreter.

Young-han, a male interpreter/translator who lived in the U.S. from age 4 to 10 and has worked in the field and taught interpretation and translation for more than a decade, agreed that growing up overseas was a big advantage.

In, for example, comprehension um, they are less inhibited by language problems, in comprehending messages. Um – so there's actually a greater freedom that you can employ when you are selecting the language – so I would say – the less command of language in terms of freedom that you enjoy, the less competent you are (in interpreting); you are constrained by many mental pressures. … *haewae pa* (overseas learners) have a strong, clear edge over *kungnae pa* (domestic learners) – comprehension. Without accurate comprehension, there is no way you can go about translating anything. The most difficult problem for *kungnae pa* is comprehension.

It's a big drain on their cognitive resources. To be at the best level – those at the top

– you have to start with a good command of English.

Still, more than one interpreter/translator, who had themselves learned English as a

second language largely in Korea, while admitting that overseas learners had an advantage,

said where and when they had learned a language wasn't the only thing that could make the

difference in the long run. Sang-hoon, the recent male graduate quoted at the beginning of

the chapter, put it this way:

> **Sang-hoon:** It's really a great advantage, that I cannot really make up for later. But,
>
> that's an asset, but that doesn't determine who really becomes good interpreter.
>
> **Researcher:** What does?
>
> **Sang-hoon:** To be abstract: enthusiasm. To be specific: how much effort you put
>
> into it, you, you. How much background studies you did for the topic, how much
>
> prep-you prepared, you by listening to, or hearing, or reading parallel texts that deal
>
> with similar y' know, topics. Efforts can make up, and of course, language... skill is
>
> something, you can learn easily overseas, but anal- analyzing skills, or
>
> understanding skills, that's not something you just learn, um, automatically. You

have to put yourself in, into, you've got to push yourself, to just, not be complacent

with what you have and keep pushing. That determines, I think, who will be a

better interpreter. I cannot say best, but, who becomes better … I didn't live abroad.

I have never lived abroad.

One experienced male interpreter/translator and teacher of interpretation said there

were many things more important to be a good interpreter than how much time one had

spent in an English-language environment. Yong-ok has been working in English

interpretation/translation in Korea since the late 1970s:

Yong-ok: First of all, not everyone is born as an interpreter. Because uh,

interpretation is not for everyone.

Researcher: Okay …

Yong-ok: There are some people, who are meant for interpretation. Second, you

have to know, a lot of things. Uh, knowledge is power. Knowledge, information,

intelligence; you have to be very smart. That's it. And you have to be very talented.

Researcher: Is overseas experience helping a lot of people now?

Yong-ok: No, no, no no.

Researcher: You don't think it helps?

Yong-ok: It helps, but it's not everything. It's not a uh, it's not a prerequisite or a great advantage.

Researcher: So *hae wae pa* (overseas learners) don't have a big advantage?

Yong-ok: In certain, certain people. *Hae wae pa* who is born as an interpreter, has a great advantage. But even, many *hae wae pa*, they are not meant for interpreters …. So ah, the best students each year, more than uh two-thirds of best students each year, they are not *hae wae pa* (overseas learners), they are *kungnae pa* (domestic learners).

As I continued these interviews, I began to realize that my ideas about what was important as an English-speaking American, and these interpreter/translator's ideas about what was important in terms of language ability related to their job, were very different. I'll delve deeper into this subject in Chapter 5. However, to help provide context for the data being presented here, which includes my side of the conversation, it's worth noting that after working for three years as an advanced English instructor with first-year GSIT students, I placed the emphasis on English: speaking, writing, being familiar with idioms,

and the like. Because my main language is English, and my Korean skills are limited, an

interpreter/translator's proficiency in English is what I notice first. In addition, those who

are at the top of their field, getting the most attention both in Korea and internationally, are

those whose English is virtually flawless, good enough to be working at conferences of

major world leaders, for giant corporations, or in telecommunications.

But the priorities of some of the people were very different. Their concern was

often more on being skilled and accurate in their use of Korean, a very complex language,

especially at the highest levels. Being a perfect Korean speaker was, of course, usually

more important for an interpreter in Korea than having flawless English. So-young, the

experienced simultaneous interpreter who had mentioned the *hae wae pa* (overseas learner)

advantage she herself received for three years, starting at age 11, confessed that her years

spent in an English-speaking environment were not all beneficial.

> **So-young:** It was a big advantage. But, I think there was some drawbacks in it too,
>
> because, I wasn't able to develop my Korean, which is my native language, that
>
> much.   So, I always uh have this uh fear inside that my Korean may be a little bit
>
> inferior to my colleagues.
>
> **Researcher:** Have you seen it? Do you have some limitations or …?

So-young: Uh … I mean, I don't have any limitations communicating or, but, you know, sometimes I feel like my register, the like, level of, uh, language is a little bit too childish. …Do you understand what I mean?

Researcher: You're going from English to Korean?

So-young: Yes. Uh, like ….

Researcher: And trying to mix the register of the ….

So-young: Yes.

Researcher: Oh, that would be tough anyway.

So-young: Like, I don't sound like the minister of a department. I don't sound like uh, like 50 years old.

Ji-yeon, another interpreter/translator in her early 30s who has worked in the both interepretation and translation for more than a decade, gave a different perspective on the issue. Soo-yeon. learned her English in Korea. but has become a successful interpreter and since worked overseas, as well as in Korea. She is now also a professor of interpretation at another Korean university:

Researcher: Do *hae wae pa* (overseas learners) have a big advantage?

Ji-yeon: Mmmmm … Yes. In the first part, the first one year, right after you graduate, yes, I would say, they have a big advantage. And it depends on the job. But, yeah, I think so.

Researcher: Even in the market here, where it's more English into Korean?

Ji-yeon: I think *hae wae pa* have a different level of Korean. So, if one person is *hae wa pa* and she has good Korean, good command of Korean, yes, sure, she has a great advantage. But if the Korean is weak, then I'm not so sure.

Hye-jin, who spoke earlier about "falling into" interpretation, and is herself a *hae wae pa* (overseas learner), added some more nuance to the responses with her perspective on the advantages of learning overseas at an early age:

Hye-jin: That's kind of, like, politically incorrect to talk about this at GSIT ….

Researcher: But is it real?

Hye-jin: I think … going from English to Korean consecutively, definitely people who have grown up in Korea have an advantage, because they have such a full Korean vocabulary that people who have grown up overseas don't have. That's what I've noticed. … and consecutively going Korean to English, a lot of the people

who grew up in Korea actually memorized so many English terminologies that they have a very good vocabulary of English as well. And often, people who learned the language (English) overseas, don't put in as much effort as the people who grew up only in Korea; that's the impression I got, because they don't have to put in that extra effort to perform in English.

Researcher: Okay.

Hye-jin: But frankly speaking, um, from the people that I've met, for simultaneous interpretation, because it happens so quickly, and you listen and speak at the same time, which takes up a lot of energy and concentration and brain power, that I think … maybe people who have grown up overseas have an advantage, in both ways. Because when they listen in English and interpret into Korean, they can put in less effort to listening, and, on the other way around as well. If they go from Korean to English, they put in less effort in speaking English, and so I think we have a little more brain capacity to allot to interpretation rather than listening and speaking.

Sun-jae, in her third year as a conference interpreter and translator, said she had a different way of looking at whether those who grew up overseas had a big advantage:

Sun-jae: Um, well, I sometimes think of it the other way around: Would I be an

interpreter if I had not been brought up in Scotland? Would I still have the same

interest I have in English and linguistics if I hadn't been brought up –

Researcher: (quietly) That's a great question; I should have asked it that way –

Sun-jae: – if I hadn't been brought up in Britain? And – I think the answer, would

be no (laughs). 'Cause as I said before, my mother really force-fed me, when I,

when I, arrived there. She would make me -- memorize whole chapters. And, it

turned out that one chapter wasn't one lesson, but it was, it was uh, the material that

we were to study over the course of one month. But she was –

Researcher: Well, bless her heart.

Sun-jae: Yeah, she made me memorize that (laughs). But, although it was very

difficult at that time, having to do all of that cramming, um, it really, um, opened, I

really opened my eyes up to, the difference in languages.

Researcher: Mmmm hmmm.

Sun-jae: And, how words would – how different words could-could make different

sentences and so forth, because, I would – although I'd forgotten most of my

Korean, my mom would make me study Korean as well, when I was, when I was in

– in – in Britain. And so I-I could do short comparisons of differences between a

languages, similarities between a language, that really intrigued me. I think that was

what got me um thinking about languages, and about English in particular.

There may be disagreement over whether overseas learners have an overwhelming

advantage, how much of an advantage they have or whether learning abroad is a necessity.

However, according to the high-level people I talked to, it is a fact that the vast majority –

80 to 90 percent of top-ranking simultaneous interpreters – spent at least part of their

childhoods in an English-speaking environment.

The Gender Divide

In addition to the distinction between overseas and domestic learners, those

interviewed said there are big differences in the gender gap. There are many fewer men

than women in all areas of interpretation/translation in Korea; but especially in

interpretation, said one veteran. She added that the big difference in the proportion of men

and women interpreter/translators was much greater in Korea than in Europe, and even in

other Asian countries, such as China.

Young-ok, the veteran male interpreter with three decades of experience in Korea, talked about the gender difference:

Yong-ok: Of course there's more (women than men) – it's about 99 percent.

Researcher: It's not that way in Europe, is it?

Yong-ok: No, there it's about seven to three – seven ladies and three gentlemen. Here, it's about nine to one or even less. Ninety-five percent women or something like that. In the simultaneous interpretation freelancing market, there is only one or two male interpreters who work here.

Researcher: In all of Korea?

Yong-ok: Yeah. So I would say, a hundred to one, just one percent is male.

The interpreter/translators offered varied ideas on the reasons for the big difference between the sexes in the field, and why it was so much greater in Korea than elsewhere. Young-ok bluntly stated an opinion, without any qualifications, that might raise eyebrows elsewhere.

"Because first of all, ladies are more talented in language than men are," he said.

Yong-ok's decades of experience working with hundreds of colleagues and graduate

students provided evidence for his opinion, he said. "It's in the structure of the brain."

Other interpreters agreed, saying they thought there might well be "innate"

differences in ability between men and women, but they were more likely to point to socio-

cultural reasons for a greater gender gap in Korea than elsewhere. As much or more than

any biological differences, they said they saw the effects of status and social pressure

having a lot to do with the greater numbers of women in the profession in Korea.

Working in the Service Sector

While frank expressions of opinion regarding the innate abilities of men and women

as interpreters like the one above were rare, thoughts about what made Korea different from

other parts of the world in terms of the gender difference were not. Many

interpreter/translators spoke about social and cultural factors that are unique in the Korean

market. Mi-kyung, a female interpreter and professor who also started some 30 years ago,

put it this way:

I think, from my analysis, it's that Korean people are more conservative, and very much more Confucianist, so they don't want to serve, for someone else's prestige. That's the reason why, even there are some young interpreters, male, but they quit. This job, when they get around 35, they don't want to serve for someone else.

Performing a service for someone else, but not being the creator of messages, along with being anonymous, can be hard on the kind of intelligent, analytical people who are the best at interpretation and translation, added another.

"You are always a shadow," said Ji-yeon, quoted above. After more than 10 years as an interpreter/translator, Ji-yeon now works as a professor of interpretation at another Korean university. "And the best interpretation is – the best compliment for an interpreter is – not recognizing them. So people don't know there was an interpreter. That's the best interpretation."

Yoo-jin, with about a decade of experience as a freelance conference interpreter agreed that much of the reason for the male/female difference, especially in interpreting,

had to do with service to others, though she added that income stability is a secondary

factor:

> Still in Korea, the main, the principal breadwinner is the man. Women would be
>
> less stressed about having a stable income. And then, for freelance interpreting,
>
> you're never the central person. You're always the person who's tagging along. I
>
> guess that's just – I don't know – Korean men just don't want to do that. They want
>
> to be center stage. I guess that's another issue. So the men usually don't want to go
>
> freelance. They usually go back to teaching in *hakwons* (language institutes), or
>
> working as a project interpreter and then joining the company.

"Service" may not be the first word that comes to mind to an outsider when he or

she gets a look at what an interpreter/translator does, particularly when observing high -

level conference interpreters actively creating words in another language at the same time

as they listen to high officials of government or corporations. In Korea, the high-paying

career of conference interpretation has become increasingly visible, especially after 1988,

the year of the Seoul Olympics. It continues to attract young, ambitious language specialists

who want to be the one helping to communicate with the world. Many got their first

impressions of interpretation by watching important Korean figures interviewed by the

outside world through an interpreter. What got many of them started, according to

longtime conference interpreter and professor Mi-kyung, was the idea of being close to

fame and power:

> It was the summit meetings. Because it was shown. That's why so many students
>
> decided to become interpreters; they saw me on TV next to the president. Nine
>
> o'clock news. I worked for five presidents, Chun Doo-hwan, Roh Tae-woo, Kim
>
> Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, and Roh Moo-hyun.

But virtually everyone interviewed said there was a lot more to the world of

interpretation than newcomers saw with their starry-eyed visions of a dream job, as they

saw only the excitement of being a messenger at the centers of geopolitical power. Mi-

kyung also talked about the other side of the coin:

> They don't know what exactly is our job. They think that they are good at foreign
>
> language, they think they can do this job, be on TV, they think they can have all
>
> kinds of prestigious treatment from others. That's not always the case. Only a few
>
> can enjoy that kind of prestige. But still, I think it's due to the fact that Korea is an

opening country. And so people want to do something – that can be exposed to the international community. They have a kind of certain fantasy idea of our job. But it's not always the reality. How many people can enjoy that kind of prestige?

So-young talked about her ideas about being an interpreter when she began her career.

I didn't really know what interpreters do (when I began), or what kind of work we are, like, are involved in doing interpreting. But I just had this, fantasy, about this occupation …. Because it's really sort of like a – supporting job. You know, we support the communication between two parties. But, … it depends on how you look at it. I think interpreting is very, very, very important. We contribute – a lot to the process of, other works. Because, uh, without communication, nothing can happen.

Yong-ok also used the word "service" in connection with interpretation, and he added much more information about the Korean job market that helped explain why so many more women than men worked as free-lance interpreters:

Yong-ok: And uh, as I said before, interpreting is a service.

Researcher: Right.

Yong-ok: And, uh, ladies are more apt for service, including the – at least in Korean society. When, your wife, is uh, 30 years old or 40 years old, when your wife is interpreting at conferences or uh, corporates, corporations, it's good, because – she's intelligent, and uh, beautiful English, things like that or, making a lot of money. But uh, when you, as a male, or a husband or a father, work as an interpreter at conferences or things like that, it's not very much respected, as a man.

Researcher: Yeah, kind of a status thing.… The role of women in Korea.

Yong-ok: They have a glass ceiling. They have a glass ceiling.

Researcher: Yeah …

Yong-ok: And uh, uh when you are a lady, you are a woman, it's more difficult for you to get a job first, and then once you get a job, it's very difficult to be promoted [as a man probably would] …. And then uh, after a certain age – 40 or something – uh, there's a glass ceiling. You cannot become a director general, or president of a society or company, things like that.

Researcher: So free-lance interpretation is a very advantageous career for a woman?

Yong-ok: Yes! People say, interpretation is a job where, uh, gender equality is best guaranteed.

Being an Interpreter/Translator: Work, Life and Challenges

Service and Status

As mentioned earlier, many Korean interpreter/translators faced difficult questions and expressions of concern from family or friends when they first mentioned their career plans. The view of the job as being in the "service sector" in status-conscious Korean culture can make interpreter/translators, and those who care about them and their success, feel they are treated with less respect than their demanding profession deserves.

"I don't think (my parents) like it even now," said Sang-hoon, the recent GSIT male graduate. He continued:

Sang-hoon: They think it's for like, girl's job. Or something, A helper. That was what they thought – not an owner.

Researcher: What do you think of that?

Sang-hoon: There is some truth in that, their opinions. In Korea's situation, usually,

interpreters are not treated as professionals.

Being treated with less respect than they thought they deserved was an

issue that came up again and again. Hye-jin (female, three years' experience) talked about

the specifics:

The part that got me really upset in my first three years while working was, I

sometimes meet clients who don't, um, give us credit for interpreting. It's like, um,

it's like a daily secretary that they … hired, and um, we look at ourselves as

professional whereas they kind of – some people think of interpreters as just

someone they hired for the day, so therefore it's not like, they need to treat us as a

professional like they would treat a lawyer or a doctor, but they would just treat or –

us, as someone who was there just to provide them with that service. It happened

once – it happened once or twice, didn't feel very good. … Like, um, they would

treat me as, like a secretary. Like they would say, "Can you go to the reception desk

and make a call for me?"

Speaking also on service and status, Mi-kyung, a woman with with decades of interpretation/translation experience, made similar points:

Mi-kyung: The position is in the third sector for me, which means that it's not in the production, and it's not in – you know –just a kind of service you are giving. I define my job as communicator between two different cultures, really.

Researcher: I've heard some interpreters have some grumbling about status. Being asked to serve coffee, etc. But you are talking about service.

Mi-kyung: Yes, service, you are never the master of your ideas. Clearly in service sector.

Mi-kyung later added that after years of working in the "service sector," there was one particular embarrassment she was no longer comfortable putting up with: interpreting during a state dinner:

Mi-kyung: So I refuse. When I was younger I was okay, but the last two or three years, I refuse. They are eating and I have to stand behind them, I have to talk for them, I have to work for them. For me, it's really embarrassing. There is no way

that you can be next to him. You have to be behind him, and all the people, 500

people are eating and you are not eating, you have to do your job.

Researcher: So service is one thing, but standing behind someone while they eat is

not …?

Mi-kyung: No, I cannot stand it anymore.

Income

Many of the people I interviewed almost sounded as if they were echoing Rodney

Dangerfield's famous gag line -- "I don't get no respect!" -- in their complaints about life as

an interpreter/translator. However, what they said they do get, particularly if they were

good in the lucrative market for simultaneous interpretation, is a good income and a

"freelance" lifestyle. The money can be good. Several simultaneous interpreters at the top

levels talked about incomes ranging from 80 million to over 100 million won (approx.

$80,000-$100,000 US).

But So-ra, the interpretation professor with nearly two decades of experience as a

professional interpreter herself, made clear that it takes a high degree of skill, as well as

years of experience to get to that income level.

So-ra: A lot of students, … they think that they're going to make oodles of money, regardless of their competence. They think that just by graduating from this school (HUFS GSIT) they think that straight off, they'll be making 5 million won or 6 million won per month (approx. $5,000-$6,000 US). Which isn't – true. I mean, if you're good, you can build up to that. But straight off the bat, I don't think that's – that's uh –

Researcher: How much can a good interpreter make?

So-ra: Oh I think – I've heard of top interpreters earning more than 100 million won per annum (approx. $100,000 US)

What Is It Like?

In *A Systematic Approach to Teaching Interpretation,* the authors, both renowned

interpreters, refer to simultaneous interpretation as "an unnatural exercise" (Seleskovitch

and Lederer, 1995, p. 106). While that description might be limited, it is a good way to put

it. To get some perspective on the act of simultaneous interpretation, it may help to quote

literary and translation critic I.A. Richards, himself a translator of Chinese literature, who

referred to translation of philosophical ideas, in writing, from Chinese to English as "what

may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the

cosmos" (Steiner, 1998, p. 50). Richards was talking about translating words on a page,

methodically, painstakingly, and deliberately. In interpreting spoken language, however,

searching for parallel meaning must be done quickly. The interpreter must be trained and/or

gifted at the art of listening in one language and speaking in another language, making this

"most complex type of event" all the more remarkable. How do interpreters see what they

do? So-ra spoke about how the speaker and interpreter have to work together – to "be on

the same wavelength":

> **Researcher:** How do you see what you are doing when you interpret? Can you
>
> visualize the process in any way?

So-ra: Simultaneous or consecutive? It's different.

Researcher: Tell me about both.

So-ra: Well, it's actually that it's getting into the head of the speaker, when you do simultaneous. It's a little bit like piggyback riding, but that isn't enough. You really have to get into the head of the speaker. And in order to be a really good simultaneous interpreter then that means that you're on the same wavelength as the speaker.

Researcher: It's almost like being a psychic?

So-ra: (laughter)

Researcher: Piggyback you're –

So-ra: Uh huh—

Researcher: Because it's so fast you're saying, right?

So-ra: Yes, uh-huh. And in order to be able to do that, you have to be able to analyze and follow the logical thinking of the speaker. But what happens sometimes is that sometimes, even in a monolingual situation, you're speaking to somebody, and you can't understand what they're saying.

Researcher: Mm hmm.

So-ra: They just don't make sense to you,

Researcher: Mm hmm

So-ra: and so they're explaining in different ways maybe, but you still can't understand because *their* logical way of thinking is different from *yours*. I'm not saying that they're illogical. A lot of times, Koreans'll say, after living like 20-something years without any trouble, suddenly they come along an interpreting situation where they say, Aw, Koreans are so illogical!" So, and I say, well it's not illogical. I mean have you had trouble up until now? It's like, *"No!"* Then why are they suddenly illogical when you have -- when you have to interpret it into English? So that's the difference. It's a matter of understanding their logical way of thinking. And if you can do that, then it's no trouble. And it's like smooth sailing, and it's -- and you really get a high. When you're able to anticipate properly, because, there's a lot of anticipation involved, and you feel that you click; it's almost like a high. … In consecutive, it's uh less of reading their mind and clicking with their mind because you've listened to them, and usually, regardless of whether their logical expression -- the way that they express themselves, even if it's less logical, because it's in consecutive, a lot of times you can manage to make something out of it. So,

in that sense it's less difficult but then a lot of … interpreters really don't like to do

consecutive because it's after the speaker and so you will become the speaker. And

so you're sort of exposed to your audience, and there are bound to be people in the

audience who know both languages and so, they can evaluate you, for example. But

more than that it's a matter of just "becoming the speaker," and having all the eyes

on you.

Researcher: Mmm.

So-ra: We -- we say that interpreters are communicators and all that and so, we

should like to perform in front of audiences, but, in the case of simultaneous a lot of

times we're like in a fishbowl, in a booth. And so, and we're separated from the

audience, and so, it's uh -- there's less exposure to the audience.

Young-han, the male interpreter with 10 years experience who also teaches the

craft, compared the interpreter's role to a bridge that connects people from different

language groups:

Young-han: I see myself as the – as a bridge – um – that bridges actually – the gap

– the language barrier – enable people to overcome the language barrier – probably,

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sometimes I fancy myself as a mediator whose job is actually, getting in between

people, and trying to um mediate their communication. And sometimes you have a

sense that you are actually having an impact on how people shape opinions – how

you interpret what people say – can have an impact on the opinions people shape.

Researcher: Like for example?

Young-han: Like oh well, you know – there is no – no one right

interpretation of anything. So how you interpret a person's words, is

sometimes, kind of up to you. Some people may take it at face value and

translate literally – some interpreters may venture to try to read between the

lines and add some um implications they read from the words to their

interpretation. How you interpret a person's words, and how you relate that,

can have an impact on what goes on. Even the outcome of the proceeding,

oftentimes.

Sun-jae, in her third year as a conference interpreter, made a connection

between what she does as an interpreter and the world of drama:

Sun-jae: Hmmm. Umm, this may be going too far, but I sometimes, uh, picture myself as an actress that has been given this script, and, of course the writer ha- is the person that tells me what to say, but in that script, that scenario, that person specifically states how I should say this, and the nuances that, that this uh, this actress, this character, has put in his or her words. And it's my job to be as realistic as I can and, and be as faithful as I can to this scenario, and at the same time, um, act out this character in my own style. So, even if you have the same script, the same scenario, and you have two different interpreters, I think that, uh, you would probably get the gist of the message across, um, either way, but you would have two very different portrayals of this, certain character.

Researcher: That's interesting. And not only – it's something that seems positive in one way and negative in another way. Because – (softly) that's interesting.

Sun-jae: And it's really difficult sometimes, because, um, – there are cases where you see an interpreter that does a perfectly good job; this person has acted out perfectly. But the writer, the speaker, does not like this

interpretation. Of course this, the speaker does not know what has been translated or interpreted, but does not like the style that this has been acted out and that person may feel that, um, the interpretation was too bouncy compared to what he was trying to say. He was trying to be sincere, and more solemn, but the interpretation was too bouncy. On the other hand, this person may have been very animated, and the interpretation comes out very, uh, monotone and then that person won't be happy. So I think, I also try to, see and, experience the feelings that this person is also trying to display....

Researcher: Not just the words but also the mood and, and things like that.

Sun-jae: Yeah, it's very important.

Although Yoo-jin (female, 10 years' experience) also saw interpreting as related to performing, to her, it seemed more like music than drama:

Researcher: What's it like being an interpreter?

Yoo-jin: It's different for everybody. For me I guess it's like a performance maybe, like a musical artist (inaudible) because there's a sense of performing every time you go out, especially in consecutive interpretation –

take a deep breath, go out there, and start doing your job. So you might

have nerves right before that, but once you start, you just catch on. It's

performance, you're giving a presentation yourself. But all the material is

being fed to you by the person next to you. It's like speaking yourself, as the

speaker. It's almost like becoming the speaker. The best compliment an

interpreter will get is – at a dental conference: "Are you a dentist?" At a

psychological conference: "Are you a psychologist?" That would probably

be the best compliment an interpreter could ever hear.

Researcher: How much effort does it take when you are doing it?

Yoo-jin: I guess it'd be almost like riding a bike. Once you get started, it

doesn't take that much effort. You know how to do it. You just have to keep

pedaling – or else you'll fall.

So-young, another interpreter/translator with more than 10 years' experience, saw

parallels between interpreting and persuasion – helping the speaker "sell" the idea that is

being conveyed.

So-young: I think, uh, it involves a lot of persuasion.

Researcher: Persuasion?

So-young: Yeah. Trying to persuade the audience. And trying to make them understand. So it would be, really understand what this person ... listeners, understand what the speaker is saying, so ...

Researcher: That's a -- I've never heard it that way before; that's interesting. Persuasion.

So-young: Yeah, uh. …

Researcher: Okay.

So-young: I'm not, uh, you know, I'm not trying to persuade the listener to ... follow me or ... It's not me involved, it's but uh, it's for the speaker, on behalf the speaker, I would be like, delivering message and trying -- hard to make the listener understand.

Ji-yeon compared the process to solving a puzzle:

Researcher: When you are interpreting, if someone didn't know anything about what you do, how would you explain what you do?

Ji-yeon: How do I explain …

Researcher: What are you doing when you do that? –

Ji-yeon: -- I know what you are trying to ask me. … Yeah, yeah, I know, yeah, okay. For me, interpretation is like, putting, what is it? How do I express it? Like putting, a puzzle, the pieces?

Researcher: Putting a puzzle together?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, putting a puzzle together. With the client, with the person who needs interpretation. Because that person, doesn't understand anything, about what the speaker says –

Researcher: -- Uh huh—

Ji-yeon: -- and I'm the one who understands the – what the speaker says and I try to help the client, understand.

Researcher: Putting the pieces of a puzzle together.

Ji-yeon: Yeah, putting the pieces together. With a client, so I try to have an eye contact, because I want to make sure that the client understands what I'm saying. Actually, what the speaker says through me.

Sang-hoon, the recent GSIT graduate, who has already done a lot of work in the interpretation field, explained how he saw the process:

> Okay, I try to chew... Okay, that's a weird word. I try to digest what the speaker said. First, with myself. Then I create a well-organized structure of message. And then I deliver it, to the listener…. One of my teachers actually told me that, interpreters should imagine, that there is like 80, 80-years-old Korean man who never even talked to a foreigner or watched a foreigner on TV, in the audience. If you don't understand it, you cannot speak it -- you cannot speak it out.

What Does It Take?

Going beyond the question of what it felt like or seemed like to work in interpretation, I also asked interpreters about what kinds of qualities or skills are required to be good at it. Some of their answers seemed obvious, regarding language ability, but others were unexpected. So-young (female, 10 years experience) talked about being able to quickly understand what was being said.

> **So-young:** Uhh. Mmm. In terms of skills, or talent, I think language skill is essential. And also, ability to, understand, when something comes up. Like trying

to, um, y'know, interpreters I think, we need to have this, um, very, very quick ability to understand immediately what this person is trying to express.

Researcher: Mmm Hmmm.

So-young: Now sometimes, speakers, they don't -- they're not very articulate. They would speak, and like, uh, deviate, and, you know, it's really difficult to catch what their message is. But I think interpreters need to, like, you know, sort through all those things, and find out what his messages. What he really wants to express.

Researcher: Good. Maybe that'll help with this interview.

So-young: (laughter).

She added that being asked about the skills required to become a good interpreter made her think of another question:

So-young: Hmmm … Um, you know, that reminds me of another question, are interpreters born or are they made?

Researcher: Well sure.

So-young: Yeah, but um, y'know I believe, some part of the skill are, you have to be, you know, be born with it ...

Researcher: Like?

So-young: Like, language skill.

Researcher: Mmmm Hmmm.

So-young: But other than that, like note-taking, or like, listening and speaking at the same time; splitting, like, attention, I think those can be trained, and mastered ...

Researcher: Mmm hmmm

So-young: But, in terms of the language, I think that it's very, very essential that you accumulate, from very early age. Like uh four or five. ..

Researcher: Okay.

So-young: Because, uh, you cannot really improve the language skill, overnight. …

Ji-yeon (female, 10 years' experience) emphasized the importance of staying curious, staying informed about practically everything. Along with that, she added that it was important for an interpreter to be "sincere," which was understood to mean being completely fair and honest in dealing with his or her clients:

Researcher: What does it take to be a good student, to be a good interpreter?

Ji-yeon: Okay, of course, language is a necessity, that's – that's - there is no need to talk about it. Then, curio- intellectual curiosity. By intellectual curiosity I mean, interest in everything – everything around you. Almost everything around you. It could be – some important political event, or it could be very trivial thing, around you, that's happening. So practically, interest in everything – that helps to make a good interpreter and good translator. And I think, I think it's a bit related but good personality, because interpretation and translation is a kind of communication, and it needs human skill.

Researcher: When you say good personality?

Ji-yeon: I would say … uh …good human skill. Ability to develop good relationship with people around you. Could be your client – anybody around you – that helps.

Researcher: Okay – how much of that is innate and how much can be learned?

Ji-yeon: Language, well, language, I think language can be taught, so… but in some ways a good interpreter has an innate ability to learn language. So, just being able to be a good speaker, in English or Korean is one thing. But to be – a good interpreter, is another thing. So, I think there are two different kinds of language-

learning ability. So, interpreters have a bit of different – I can't explain it in English,

but they are more sensitive about words, phrases, more a type of sensitivity. So, I

believe it's a bit innate. Even in the written interpretation – written translation, good

interpreters, good translators, are a lot better in reading, between lines …

Researcher: Okay, that's good …

Ji-yeon: …and understanding context.

Researcher: Reading between lines, context, intention – so we talked about the

language, what about the intellectual curiosity, can that be developed?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. So like, for example, as a teacher, if I bring a news

stuff to the class, and give an introduction on it, the students, develop a small bit of

interest in it and next time, when they see it on a news program, or newspaper

article, the students will, I think 100 percent, be sure of, reading it. So it's kind of

like, developing it. So I think that's a part of the responsibility of the teacher, to

develop the intellectual curiosity, step by step, so the classes have to be, well-

organized to develop that skill.

Researcher: You've seen a lot of students and colleagues interpreting. Is there one thing that stands out in terms of strengths and weaknesses? What do the strong ones have that the weaker ones don't? What are they missing?

Ji-yeon: The strongest one I know is a – she is an in-house interpreter at one of the very big investment banking companies. She also does interpreting for the Finance Ministry. I think she spent many years in the States when she was very young, so her language is near native, and let alone her language, she has got this intellectual curiosity, and she is very sensitive about words, and very sincere. She is the one that I think is the best. And the weakest ones … They miss sincerity.

Researcher: That's a very common word. What do you mean?

Ji-yeon: I will explain. You know, we work on contract, job by job. And, those who don't establish as a good interpreter or good translator, they look after money. I mean, if one project, pays better, then they just switch it, breaching the contract. And, in Korea, this – this line of business is small world. We work in a small world, small circle. Everybody is interrelated. And networked.

Confidence was the most important trait, according to recent GSIT graduate Min-ah. This was something she said she first noticed in the interpretation practice or "study sessions" GSIT students did with each other several times each day.

Min-ah: When you start losing confidence, that's when you start noticing that you're making mistakes. That's -- when everything just collapses. Like, when I was in a study session with my study partners, I could... you know, see how confident they are about their interpreting. Every time, I had a study session. And when their confidence went down it really showed in their interpretation. Their choice of words, and the speed and, and, it all showed. Also, uh, public speaking skills, because, unless you're whispering, doing whispering, um interpreting for one, one person only, it's public speaking, so, you, you have to have, the courage to speak in front of a large audience.

Researcher: Mmm hmmm.

Min-ah: Mmmm, also, a little bit of, like filling in the blanks. Maybe you caught this word, but you didn't get this word. You have to, like, read the context and then fill in the blanks, yourself.... and... not getting nervous, for me, is really important in interpreting, because, again, it's public speaking. And when you get nervous, you're

too, like focused on, like too worried about whether you going to finish this, this interpretation or not, and that kind of takes your attention off of the, the speech that's being given.

Veteran male high-level interpreter/translator Yong-ok also emphasized the importance of an interpreter/translator having the confidence to speak with spontaneity, as much as accuracy: "The most important thing is to be able to speak out, quickly and without hesitation! Comprehension is important. But if you can't speak up, what's the point?"

Mi-kyung, the high-level interpreter/translator who'd been working in the field for three decades, also emphasized the importance of getting past nervousness and fear when asked about the qualities that make a good interpreter. But overall, she said, like another interpreter/translator quoted previously, the ability to quickly analyze what the speaker was saying was most critical.

Researcher: What does it take to be a good interpreter?

Mi-kyung: A lot of aptitude. Analysis aptitude, summarizing aptitude, capacity to control yourself, to conquer the stage fright.

Researcher: Stage fright's a big deal?

Mi-kyung: Yeah, a big deal. There are a lot of people who have all this competence and aptitude, they cannot cope with the stage fright. So they cannot be a great, you know, interpreter. So, I think it's very important. So, analysis, summarize, concentration, and … spontaneity, the capacity to say something very spontaneously, because it has to be very intelligible. Because the difference between the written translation. Written translation you have a lot of time. When you don't understand easily, you can read it again, read it again. But, for interpretation, the main thing is, you have to be instantly understood by the audience. So the spontaneity is very, very important I think for interpreters. … All these combined.

Researcher: But, if you had to choose one most important one, it would be …?

Mi-kyung: For me, it is, uh, mmm, the capacity of analysis. … And then, you have to have the immediate, almost born capacity to understand your audience. To adapt to their level. So, I think, till now, whenever I do some TV or blah blah, people say I immediately grasp the level of the audience. And you just adapt your register, your speech tone. Because I am interpreter, I have to immediately feel the level, and then adapt my speech so that the immediate understanding is always realized when you

say something. Yeah. Even if your story is great, but if it is not adapted to your audience, there is no -- In the classroom, I think you improve capacity to analyze and to express. It's not know, it's know-how. The more you practice, the better you can do the job.

Stress and Burnout

Every interpreter/translator who was interviewed spoke of the high stress levels of the job. There were lots of ideas about where it came from and some about how to deal with it. Many said they saw it as a fact of life in the field. So-young (female, more than 10 years experience) said that in the long run interpreter/translators needed to find ways to deal with stress in order to keep working for more than a few years.

Researcher: Is there a lot of stress?

So-young: Yes

Researcher: Can you talk about it?

So-young: Mmm, you know, we have to speak constantly, and you know, there is a lot of tension. And we get feedbacks, immediately. Instantly. So, --

Researcher: -- from the audience?

So-young: -- from the audience, from the speaker, from the organizer, so –

Researcher: How do you get feedback from the speaker? I mean –

So-young: Oh, not speaker. Maybe, we are evaluating ourselves.

Researcher: Okay.

So-young: But, you know, we know immediately if I, I did a good performance, or

not.

Several of the top-performing interpreters I spoke with, particularly those who had

been in the profession for a decade or more, said the only way to avoid the long-term

effects of the stress of interpretation was to have another vocation and/or avocation as well.

Some of these professionals, of course, work as professors of interpretation. Yoo-jin told

me her stress relief was alternating her work as a conference interpreter with being a

mother for her children. She also talked about her observations of the profession:

Yoo-jin: If you've worked very hard, without any – If you've just worked freelance

from the beginning, the burnout would be about four to five years. And usually you

see at that point, people move on to do an MBA or go to law school or something –

moving on.

Researcher: Is there a maximum age for interpreter/translators in Korea?

Yoo-jin: No, no -- but in Korea it's still a very young profession. Even the oldest interpreters in Korea are only about 50 years old. So they'll probably set the bar for retirement age.

Researcher: Others have talked about the stress of interpretation, but you seem kind of unstressed.

Yoo-jin: I hear that a lot, from uh people that I've taught in school, and then work with afterwards.

Researcher: Do you get more comfortable in your skin after some time and experience?

Yoo-jin: That, and the fact that I have a lot of other things going on in my life that are important as well. So I don't feel that stressed out about work, and about missing work. Because I know a lot of people are really stressed out when -- they don't seem to be getting enough work and then it's "up" (busy) season. I've been very fortunate in a kind of unique way because I haven't been working like 100 percent every single day in the up-season. It's been -- I was an in-house interpreter for three years at the (Korean) National Assembly, and I did freelance work maybe

about once every two weeks or so then. Then afterwards, as soon as I left the

National Assembly I got pregnant, I went to school, I had my second child, and I

was working throughout. So there was always something else going on at the same

time besides my interpreting job. It was an escape for me actually to go out to

work. And I feel very lucky to actually be able to do something to relieve the stress

of other jobs that I have. So for me, it's always been fun. It's always been fun for

me. The people who seem more stressed about work are usually people who have

work at the center of their life. And they -- they feel stressed out because

sometimes they might feel that they are missing out on the important jobs that there

are out there in the interpreting world. And they might be counting the days and

seeing other people work more days than they do, and that might be the cause of

stress as well. And then because there's nothing else to focus on. They're just more

focused on the interpreting job itself. I feel very lucky to be doing other things. … I

guess it's a matter of -- I always tell my students -- it's not a matter of the technique

per se as to whether you are a better interpreter or translator. I think it's more the

person's nature. Because someone who really wants to be perfect in their work, they

really aren't cut out to be a freelance interpreter. Because you can't be perfect 100

percent of the time. You are <u>not</u> going to be able to get 100 percent of everything

that you've heard and repeat that in a different language. And topics change -- four

jobs this week -- four different topic -- you have to make do with what you have –

you're never completely prepared. I have a good friend from school; she wants to

be perfect in everything. So she's really cut out for an in-house interpreter or

translator job where you get to learn everything. I'm a person who hates leaving

anything in writing because it's evidence of something I've done wrong (laughter).

(Pause) You *can't* learn everything. How are you going to know more than an

expert in that field? You're not going to be able to do that. For realistic reasons, in

the up season, whether you like it or not, sometimes you are bombarded with jobs

and you just can't decline, because you know that the agency is in a fix as well, they

can't find interpreters. So you just have to oblige -- sometimes -- one in the morning

– one in the afternoon. And different topics, different locations, different people.

But you're going to have to do that and you're going to have to cope. You've got to

manage with what you have. It's a matter of locating the right information --

research skills -- identifying what's directly related to the task at hand -- which is

interpreting. I have two very young kids – one's three (years old) and one's one. I

try to be as efficient as possible.

So-ra, a veteran interpreter with almost two decades of experience said her work

teaching and writing as a professor of interpretation kept her from burnout.

So-ra: There are very few interpreters my age, first of all. … So I just do it from

time to time so -- I think like about 10 years seems to be pretty much it, for a lot of

interpreters.

Researcher: Then what happens?

So-ra: They either do something else, or -- usually they end up doing something

else. There are quite a few interpreters who become lawyers, seen that happen -- as

well as consultants.

Mi-kyung agreed that keeping active at things in addition to interpreting was what

kept her capable of doing it for nearly three decade:

If I were not professor or author of 20 books, I think I would have quit long ago.

Because if you are of a certain intellectual level, you don't want to be of service to

someone else; you want to be an actor, sometimes. That's why when I see some

very smart students, I always tell them to do something else at the same time. If not,

I saw so many brilliant, excellent interpreters who quit the job after five years of

exercise. I think it's really a pity. Now I just ask them to balance their life. Of

course, it's very financially rewarding. All Korean-English – my ex-students, can

make very easily, 20 million won a month (approx. $20,000 U.S.), so it's a very

rewarding job, but when they work, after four or five years, they are really fed up

with this status problem. You're never the master of your ideas, you're just the

master of your expressions. …You cannot alter the original message. You can do,

in your own way, the way to express the same idea, but you cannot add, alter, or

reduce the original idea. So that's the reason why sometimes, you know, these days,

… I always say to my students, before, I never said about that, I just said, ah, you

came into this school, so difficult competition, when you become interpreter -- you

are the communicator -- invisible bridge of two cultures, you make a lot of money --

you do what you want to do. But these days, on top of that, I'm adding another

speech. I'm always saying, I've found out since more than 20 years, that a lot of my

students were brilliant, exceptionally smart, intelligent -- they quit the job. And I've

tried to analyze why. In most of the cases, it's because they think it's less creative

than they thought. Because they think, sometimes you know as it's the service

sector -- you're doing always, you know, the service of transmission of the ideas.

And then, the people for whom you are working, they, five years later, the person

becomes director general, and then president of the company. And you are always

the same -- freelance interpreter. And especially, with the Asian background,

hierarchy is so important. All of a sudden, you feel that time spent, you make a lot

of money, so temporary satisfaction -- but bread is not all, in your life. So, the more

you have a creative mind, I just noticed that five or six years is just the barrier,

frontier, to change. And a lot of them are quitting [mm hmm] or doing something

else, than interpreting, because they want to feel balanced about what they're doing.

You know, so, for example, and people are saying, "But you continue to work as an

interpreter 28 years." So I always say, "But I tried to write 20 books at the same

time. I taught, I gave a lot of conferences, so there's a lot of occasions in which I

could express my own ideas." But those, the young interpreters, younger

generation, who are just doing the interpreting, they feel quite often the sometimes,

"Yeah, I can make a lot of money, but what for? I'm working just like a machine."

So now, I decided to say that, as you are an excellent interpreter, I really want to

keep you a long time. So please do a lot of interpreting but, at the same time,

simultaneously, please do something else: writing, you know, something else, that

can satisfy yourself. So that, your life is balanced. … So even a lot of interpreters

who continue their job as interpreters, but all of them are doing something else at

the same time. … And sometimes, people want to be the producer of new ideas --

not just a transmitter – yeah.

Culture Divides

In addition to her strong suggestion that her students and colleagues "do something

else" besides interpreting (and/or translating) to keep their lives full and satisfy their drive

to be creative, the conversation with Mi-kyung quoted directly above also broached another

topic, one that has received much attention for a long time in the domain of language study:

culture.

While culture has been explored by linguists, language teachers, and other

researchers for decades, these front-line language workers didn't talk as much about it as I e

expected, though there were a few exceptions. For the most part, they said their attention

was focused more on keeping up with the workload than on questions of interpretation theory or cultural issues, except for a few specific cultural problems, such as longstanding and deep Korean animosity toward other countries like Japan, which defeated and dominated Korea more than once, and made the Korean peninsula its colony for much of the first half of the 20th Century :

> **Researcher:** How much of (the) puzzle is language, and how much is culture?
>
> **Ji-yeon:** Hmmm. That's difficult. Cause I never thought about it. By culture you mean –
>
> **Researcher:** … Suppose some ignorant Westerner handed you a speech and was going to say something about "our brothers across the Sea of Japan." Or something like that. What are you going to say to him?
>
> **Ji-yeon:** To the client?
>
> **Researcher:** Yeah, if you saw it in advance.
>
> **Ji-yeon:** If I saw it in advance. Hmmm. Usually what I do if I – Usually, if it's like a one-day conference, or a week-long conference, we'd have an opportunity to talk to the speaker first.
>
> **Researcher:** That's what I mean.

Ji-yeon: So, I give my feedback, to the speaker. And it's plain, it might not be appropriate to this culture. And, I think 99 percent of the time, the speakers cooperate. Because, their intention or their object, is to make the, what is it? The audience happy. So we work together . Before the conference, before the interpretation, I work together with the speaker as a team, to make things more understandable. So I give my feedback, the culture.

Researcher: What if you didn't see it beforehand?

Ji-yeon: Then, I would be quite taken aback, and it's – uh --- still, I don't know, because no one taught me, how to handle that. But, I don't remember the exact words, but there were times like that. People make silly mistakes … Yeah, then, I just, like, what, how do I say, I don't give the exact meaning. I change a little bit. I soften it. Because I don't want the speaker to be seen as an idiot. But I don't go too far from the original, but I try to make it as soft as possible.

Researcher: I can just think of so many areas with cultural problems. I've seen it in class, from the way people think about child care, privacy, free speech, table manners, so many things are different. Don't these things come up sometimes?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, I'll give you my experience. While I was working as a corporate

interpreter for a while, there was a BOD (Board of Directors) meeting, and one of

the directors was not very happy about one of the employees there.

Researcher: This was a foreign director?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, French. Half of the directors were French; French, English.

Researcher: Okay, Westerners.

Ji-yeon: Yeah, Westerners. And … he was, giving swearing words during the BOD

meeting.

Researcher: Mm hmm.

Ji-yeon: Because, I mean the company was not in very good shape at that time and

everybody was, like, at sharp edge, full edge, so, but I couldn't, interpret, the swear

words, or things so I softened it a bit, but, by the like, facial expressions, the

Koreans understood, what …

Researcher: That he was upset?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, that he was upset. Those are the times I feel – not comfortable.

Researcher: You're between cultures there?

Ji-yeon: Yeah. And when it's going into English, sometimes there are like,

sometimes there are rude Westerners and there are rude Koreans.

Researcher: Sure.

Ji-yeon: And sometimes, they say very rude things, then ask me to interpret it into

English. That makes me very uncomfortable and I soften it again. But I don't know,

whether it's a good strategy. By that I mean, I still am not sure, how much the

interpreter can change, can soften.

Researcher: Yeah. (long pause) … Maybe it's not such a big thing. Maybe Koreans

understand the West better.

Ji-yeon: Yeah, I think that's right, that's right. So if it's going, into Korean, and the

speaker is a Westerner, and even though he says, like something pro-Japan, or pro-

China, I think Koreans understand that. They'll be, more generous. But, if that

speaker is a Japanese person, I'm not so sure. So, like, I mean, the audience will see

that, the Westerner is a third person, third party here, so he is kind of, yeah, …

Researcher: You talked about cursing in both way, or upset kind of language. Can

you think of other kinds of language where you think, what do I do now?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, the negotiations, especially, uh labor union related negotiations.

That's very difficult

Researcher: Why?

Ji-yeon: Because, both sides are very – especially the labor union – the

representatives from the labor union, are already ... in high gear, to attack … or to –

protect what they have, and to attack the employ- employer. So, already, the

environment or atmosphere, is very sensitive. So, if you say one word, one wrong

word, that may lead to a war. That's very difficult.

Researcher: So you're doing lots of checking?

Ji-yeon: Yeah -- yeah yeah. Because the nuance is really important there. And, and

because, I really have this experience, that speaker, was a, I think, he was a German,

that was a German company who was trying to buy that company; that Korean

company. And the negotiation went, very, went, not very good. And I think that was

related to culture, because he offended the labor union. The representative.

Researcher: How?

Ji-yeon: Oh, what was it, the laying off how many people kind of thing, and (the

union representative) was offended and …

Researcher: Offended by layoffs?

Ji-yeon: Yeah, the size of the layoffs, and – I don't remember the details because

it's been long years, and he did not like the – the terms and conditions he offered,

the other side offered. And suddenly, he said, I mean, the German guy said, "Oh,

the interpretation was wrong. I didn't mean that."

Researcher: (laughs) So interpreters can be the scapegoat sometimes.

Ji-yeon: Yeah, because it's easy for them, for him to say, I didn't mean to say that.

I was misquoted, yeah. …

Researcher: Do you find difficulty with intercultural understanding in any other

ways? I mean, besides like the swearing. Any other areas?

Ji-yeon: Hmmm. Humor. Is very difficult.

Researcher: One way more difficult than the other?

Ji-yeon: Both. It's difficult, it's just difficult. So, I usually ask the speaker, whether

he or she is going to say something humorous or some metaphors that I have to

remember. So, I talk about it. In what context he is going to try to. That's really

difficult. It's really cultural. Jokes, and metaphors.

Recent graduate Min-ah agreed that humor was the most difficult area of the

cultural realm for her to deal with effectively:

Min-ah: … I haven't seen a lot of cases where lack of knowledge about culture

really mattered, in interpreting. But it does, matter when it comes to, uh like humors

…

Researcher: Yeah.

Min-ah: When a speaker wanted to … joke about something. But you didn't have

the cultural, you know, knowledge to understand the joke and you'd say something

totally different.

Researcher: Mmm hmm.

Min-ah: So, if the audience was able to understand the speaker, they'd laugh. But,

because I interpreted it the wrong way, they don't laugh. That's, that's, you know, a

mistake on the interpreter's part.

Researcher: Mmm hmm. Does it –

Min-ah: -- But when it comes to understanding jokes, I think culture does -- matter.

Researcher: Understanding – is it possible to interpret jokes?

Min-ah: Sometimes.

Westerners' lack of "Jeong"

So-ra, a conference interpreter at the highest levels who grew up in both Western

and Eastern cultures, said she saw a big part of the cultural divide between East and West,

at least in Korea, in terms of the Korean word *jeon*g. The concept, difficult to define in

English, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, but a brief idea of the meaning would have

to do with a feeling of "connectedness" -- the collective love, attachment, and affectionate

bonds that Koreans profess for each other:

> **So-ra:** Koreans tend to be more emotional, than most Western cultures I think. For
>
> me, I think my complain I think for most Westerners is that they don't have *jeong*.
>
> **Researcher:** *Jeong?*
>
> **So-ra:** *Jeong* – It's closeness – it's difficult to translate as you probably
>
> know so – That I think would be the main complaint. … But in my case,
>
> even, just a little while ago, I had an Italian friend E-mail me. It had been

like – almost 30 years since I left Rome, and he E-mailed me and he's like –

"I know this has to be you! There's nobody else with this name and all of

that." But I mean, not even that, it's not even the case that Westerners don't

have *jeong*. In that case, definitely they have *jeong*

Researcher: Maybe it's a different kind of *jeong.*

So-ra: Mmm hmm.

The concept of Americans' lack of being connected in the same way as Koreans,

directly related to the Korean idea of *jeong,* also came up in a conversation with Min-ah,

the more recent graduate of GSIT:

Researcher: You just said all those positive things about Western culture, but do

you have some negative feelings about Western, American, whatever culture?

Researcher: Yeah, I do, um, I've noticed that they can be –sometimes – more

individualistic than we are. That, we like to stick together and do things, together.

And when we do that, we have to sort of ignore, our, um, like private inclinations,

preferences, and you know, when we go to, go drinking, for example, like, even

when I'm not allowed to drink because I'm on medication, they (friends) would

force me to drink and I would just, you know, go with the flow, and drink. But, I've

noticed, some Westerners, still stick to their, principles, more likely to stick to their

principles than we are, uh, which sometimes shows that they're, you know, more

individualistic.

Researcher: But I'm listening for the negative, still.

Min-ah: Oh.

Researcher: 'Cause you said, it sounded like you were saying you were forced to

do things, you know what I mean? … When you said, you were trying to talk about

negatives about Western culture, and then you talked about how you were forced to

drink when you were on medication.

Min-ah: Yeah, well, because it was just a situation … When I'm forced to drink, I

would, drink, to make other people happy. But I don't think Westerners are really

interested in making other people happy at the expense of, their loss.

Researcher: And you think that's a negative, a problem.

Min-ah: To me, from a Korean's perspective view –

Researcher: Uh huh.

Min-ah: – sometimes, it doesn't like, contribute to the conformity –

Researcher:: Uh huh.

Min-ah: – in a group…. Mmmm … Ummm … Yeah. (Long pause.)

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, my goal is to help the reader find his or her own overall view of

what my conversation partners said and what it means. I have added background and

context where it is useful, as well as my own thoughts as a participant in the conversations.

This reflective analysis is organized under three main thematic units, in the same way as the

individual unit headings were categorized in Chapter 4, and uses the same headings and

subheadings that were used in that chapter.

After discussing my thoughts on the interviews under these topic areas, I tie things

up with some overall conclusions about the results of this experience, and share with the

reader what I have learned, not only from asking *my* questions from *my* vantage point, but

also from the things they told me that were not answers to direct questions. Often, these

responses gave me more interesting glimpses into their world. While I didn't always get

what I was looking for, I think the surprising answers were more useful than those that I

may have expected.

Chances and Choices in Early Life

Influences and Education

As I wrote in this section in Chapter 4, one response I heard again and again, and which is likely to be heard from any group of professionals in Korea, had to do with their parents' attitudes toward education in general. My first interview partner in this section, Sun-jae, told me that her parents placed a higher priority on getting an education for her children than on eating. This shows how much Korean parents push their children. The words "mania" and "craze" are often heard from Korean English speakers, and quite often joined to the word education. Though the high price of after school institutes or "*hakwons*" is often the cause of complaints, since most parents see no other alternative to sending their young to after-school Korean, English, math, science, music, and other classes to ensure they can compete with all the other students attending them.

It seemed clear from the way the interpreter/translator put the issue of parental attitudes toward education that there is a strong Korean cultural foundation underlying the assumptions. Noting that her parents and grandparents were "just as motivated as any other Korean parent" toward education, this woman put it in such a way that collectivism and solidarity, the desire to conform rather than stand out, was a factor. In fact, in some ways it

seemed more of a "non-comparison" than a comparison; rather than comparing her parents and grandparents in any way that might contrast with others, the emphasis here was on commonalities with those other parents. For a Westerner, or at least an American, it seems more likely that one would speak about how his or her parents were exceptionally motivated toward education, setting them apart from other parents, instead of emphasizing how their motivation made them just like all other American parents. While the statement shows the importance of education in Korean culture, I think it also implies that Korean culture leads people to tend to see more similarities with other Koreans than differences.

In addition to highlighting the importance of what her parents and grandparents had in common with other Korean families, the comment further showed how important the concept of family is to Koreans. Intercultural communication and Korean expert L. Robert Kohls noted that when he asked the question "What is the smallest separable unit in any society?" the universal answer from Americans was the individual (2001, p. 55). But just as universally, Koreans, along with other Asians, said the smallest social unit was the family. He clarified the issue further for baffled Westerners by explaining that if he was to try to convince an Asian audience that the individual was the smallest independent unit in society, it would be as difficult, and incomprehensible, as trying to tell the American, "Oh no, it's

not the individual person but one of the billions of cells that make up your body that is the smallest meaningful unit" (Kohls, 2001, p. 55).

The statement (Chap. 4, p. 148) about the children's education being so important that one could risk starvation may not be as much of an exaggeration in the Korean context as it would if spoken by an American. Koreans really aren't so far away from memories of real hunger. It can sometimes be hard for someone who grew up well-fed in upper middle-class American culture to relate to a Korean who can remember a childhood filled with hunger and fear about where the next meal was coming from. For most in the West, hunger is a faraway idea. For almost any Korean older than 30, hunger was at least a fear, if not a memory. That memory is central to Korean thinking. Even now, "Have you eaten yet?" is a common greeting at any time of day (Choe, S.H & Torchia, C. 2002).

With regard to the importance of education, Kim and Lee (2004) provide a view of changes in higher education in Korea over the past half-century.

South Korea … has experienced a spectacular expansion of higher education during the last five decades. In 1950, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions was only 11,358. In 2002, fifty-two years later, the enrollment increased to more than 3.5 million. Currently, more than 95% of eighteen-year-old

children graduate from high schools, and more than 70% of them advance to higher

education institutions. Currently, Korea's enrollment rate in higher education is one

of the highest in the world.

As noted by one American educator and researcher on the region:

"Korea's education fever is among that society's most striking features" (Seth, 2005). It

has been clear from my experiences over the last decade what a major importance not just

an education, but the right education, can be in Korean society. In addition to higher

education enrollment rates, spending on private education for all ages is among the highest

in proportion to income of all developed countries.

A Dubious Goal

Along with the social and parental pressure toward education as a Korean fact of

life, it is also a fact that students are under a lot of pressure to take up one of the socially

valued subjects. In centuries past, occupations were ranked with "the scholar at the top,

then the student, the official, the farmer, the artisan, the merchant, the military man, the

kisaeng (female entertainer), musicians and dancers, and finally the butchers" (Crane, 1999,

p. 30). Today, prestigious careers are in academics, highly respected fields of study such as

medicine, law, engineering, or career fields which lead to opportunities to climb the

corporate ladder and eventually obtain high executive positions in major corporations.

These are still much more acceptable than a higher-paying, but more risky career as a free-

lance interpreter or translator.

So-young, whose father "didn't really encourage (her) to become an interpreter"

(Chap. 4, p.153), left little doubt about the challenge it had been for her to rebel against

expectations. This was clear from her expressiveness as she recounted her father's words

about her decision to aim for the goal of becoming an interpreter. However, like other

parents, once her father had said his piece, letting her know he didn't think the decision was

a good one, he let the issue go and let her decision stand.

There were similarities to be noted between the previous excerpt and the next, in

which the interpreter/translator's father asked if he was "trying to throw it all away" (Chap.

4, p. 151). He held a valuable degree in mechanical engineering, with potential for a

relatively high-status career at a major corporation in a fast-growing country. His father

was incredulous at his choice. But like many of the people I spoke with, he stuck with his

decision, and after it was announced, apart from voicing their objections, his parents did

nothing more to influence the decision he had made. There may be other who were

interested in the field, but didn't have the "stick-to-it-iveness" required to withstand others'

disapproval, a particularly high cost in Korea where parents still have much more authority

than in many other cultures (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985, p. 524).

Finding a Need

I found it particularly interesting that Sang-hoon said he had "never even thought

about speaking English for a living" (Chap. 4, p. 154) before he saw how he could fill a

great need by doing so. It seemed a common experience with the interpreter/translators I

talked to and may be part of the equation for many who are successful at it. They have

developed a strong desire to do it well because they have seen that it is a truly useful

service.

For many of the people I talked to, interpretation and translation was certainly not

their first choice. Robinson (1997) noted that translators and interpreters come from many

diverse backgrounds, often finding their way to the field in a roundabout way after trying

something else first:

Translation is often called a profession of second choice: many

translators were first professionals in other fields, sometimes several other

fields in succession, and only turn to translation when they lost or quit those

jobs or move to a country where they were unable to practice them; as

translators the often mediate between former colleagues in two or more

different language communities. Any gathering of translators is certain to be

a diverse group, not only because well over half of the people there will be

from different countries, and almost all will have lived abroad, and all will

shift effortlessly in conversation from language to language, but because by

necessity translators and interpreters carry a wealth of different "selves" or

"personalities" around inside them, ready to be reconstructed on the computer

screen whenever a new text arrives, or out into the airwaves whenever a new

speaker steps up to the podium. A crowd of translators always seems much

bigger than the actual bodies present. (p. 27)

For one of the conversation partners included here, and several I have encountered

in my classroom, being a KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army) soldier

attached to a U.S. military unit on the peninsula is an eye-opening experience that leads to

making Robinson's "second choice." For Korean men, it is a common path toward

becoming a professional interpreter/translator. KATUSA slots are usually reserved for

Korean service members who have excelled in English studies and can be on-the-job

training in interpretation and translation. As noted in Chapter 4, being a KATUSA is often

seen as a better way to serve the 26 months' mandatory military duty required of all Korean

males than serving in a regular Korean Army Unit.

Service as a KATUSA provides a door through which these Koreans can meet

Americans, unlike many of their countrymen and women whose biggest source of

information about the English-speaking West and especially, the United States, comes from

Hollywood movies, popular TV series such as *Friends*, *CSI* (Crime Scene Investigation),

Sex and the City, Desperate Housewives. In addition to meeting real people rather than

cinematic stereotypes, KATUSAs get a close-up view of the communication gap between

Koreans and American in a situation very similar to that existing in the civilian

interpretation/translation market.

This interpreter/translator saw a need that wasn't being filled by observing

communication problems between Korean and U.S. military officers and that led to his

goal of becoming a communicator (Chap. 4, pp. 153, 154). For many like him, KATUSA

service gives them a job that really makes use of interests and abilities they weren't even aware of before their military service.

"Falling Into" Interpretation/Translation

For others, like Min-ah who said she "always liked to get involved in other people's business" (Chap. 4, p. 158), finding the profession may have been less of a stretch. With her strong English interest leading her to develop high proficiency in Korea, Min-ah seemed more directed toward the field from a younger age. She often helped others with language needs and offered to help foreigners with problems functioning in a country that could be difficult to navigate, particularly before the 1990s. In many ways, the 1988 Seoul Olympics was Korea's debut onto the world stage (Kirk & Choe, 2006). It was also the beginning of the end for the country's authoritarian government and of an opening for more foreigners visiting, living, doing business, and teaching English on the Korean peninsula. Interest in others' problems might not have led to this career in the years before 1988, especially for a woman. Min-ah was fortunate enough to be born at the right time and to be qualified for a career that would have been less available a generation earlier.

Still, on numerous occasions during the interviews, interpreter/translators talked

about the image or status of their profession as an important factor. The impression I got,

again and again, was that it was not seen as a top job by many image-conscious Koreans.

Indeed, as noted by Choi and Lim (2002), the profession is less respected in Korea than in

other countries in Europe and elsewhere. In discussing interpreting and translating, looking

at education; indeed, in nearly all areas of Korean life, the concepts of status and prestige

are recurring themes. These "image" factors are more widely recognized as a reasonable

standard or criteria for making career, university, marital, and other major life decisions.

"Korea had a centuries-old tradition in which formal learning and scholarship

played a central role in society"(Seth, 2005, p. 2). Not only education, but the careers that

education leads to, have long been means to achieve the ends of power and status in

Korean society (Seth, 2005.). However, while scholars are and have long been respected,

particularly those attaining "prestige degrees," it was obvious to most of my conversation

partners that a degree, and a career in interpreting/translating was neither a prestige degree

nor a prestigious career for many.

The negative reactions from many interpreter/translator's friends and relations, to

their chosen career, particularly in recent years, was a common theme. However, those

who withstood the negative pressure had strong reasons to stick with their chosen goals.

While some got started in the field almost by chance because of having lived abroad or having a better capacity to acquire English than their peers, they often found that there was a genuine need to be filled. And while things are improving slowly in terms of English proficiency among Koreans, the need will continue to grow as the country continues the rapid process of economic development and integration into the world economy, in which English is certainly the *lingua franca*.

Becoming an Interpreter/Translator: Natural Advantages?

Growing Up in Two Languages

A fascinating part of living in Korea is the rapid pace of change that is very much unlike the kinds of change I have seen in places more familiar to me in the United States. Things are always changing everywhere, of course, and inventions such as the microwave oven, mobile phones and the Internet make life very different than it was for my parents' generation or even in my youth. But in Korea, a nation that was transformed from being a ruined shell after the Korean War to an economic superpower in the same time span, the change has been much more dramatic. For an American, seeing photos or reading and

hearing about life as recently as 30 years ago in Korea can seem like a century or more ago in the U.S. The changes in housing, transportation, technology, industry, and everyday life since the Korean War makes the early 1950s seem almost as far back as the American Civil War.

As fast as the country is changing in appearance, its commercial, industrial, and educational requirements are changing even faster as the society opens up to the world in business, technology and culture. The challenges and opportunities that Korean interpreter/translators face today are different than they were during the 1988 Olympics, a decade ago, or even five years ago, and they will be very different five years into the future. Many people who are at the top of the interpretation ladder today are lucky, in that their parents were among the pioneer Koreans who worked abroad in business, diplomacy, other fields, or were getting advanced education abroad.

Many of those who had grown up overseas were so different from other students that in conformist Korea this was a disadvantage. I heard many stories of terrifying school experiences in English and Korean schools as they switched back and forth from one language and culture to another.

Some, however, almost seemed to find an escape from what Koreans call "exam hell" when they discovered the Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in another kind of "second chance." While they had learned overseas, their family still had ties to Korea, and they were expected, at least some of the time, to continue to compete in the Korean education race even though they might have had poorer Korean language skills. In a country which tests all elementary students to get into the best middle schools, tests all middle school students for entry to the best high schools, all high school students to get into the best colleges *and* a culture which says one must go to one of the top three universities or else, many of these high-achievers were looking for another option. They found it when they found out about HUFS GSIT and the possibilities of a career in interpretation/translation.

For many of the people interviewed for this study, getting a look at the need for interpretation/translation, as well as having the skills to fill that need, were the direct result of growing up overseas. Many started in that type of activity in their childhood, when they were more adept at language learning and less inhibited about making mistakes than their elders. They often provided guidance for their parents and other adults.

A colleague tells a story about how quickly the young pick up language compared

to their seniors. The friend, an American, has lived and taught in Korea since the 1970s,

when he received advanced Korean language training and worked as a Peace Corps

volunteer. After several years living and working in Korea and functioning fairly well in

the Korean language, he married a Korean woman and they started a family. When his

daughter, who grew up in Korea, was about four years old, she told a visitor, "I speak

English better than my mom and Korean better than my dad."

So it came as no surprise to hear (Chap. 4, p. 162) of the experiences of a young So-

ra in Rome, interpreting for adults so they could get groceries or get prescriptions filled. It

seemed a strong example of the way so many *hae wae pa* (overseas learners) naturally

transitioned into the role of interpreter/translator, shifting from serving as a household or

neighborhood helper to helping fill the communication needs of world leaders.

The Bilingual Lifestyle – Pros and Cons

There were advantages, but there were also challenges for *hae wae pa* (overseas

learners) compared to *kungnae pa* (domestic Korean English language learners) as

interpreters and translators. This is not the place to draw conclusions about the pros and

cons of the two different types of learning, but it does seem that this perhaps "politically incorrect" topic should not be overlooked, since the vast majority of interpreter/translators, particularly those working as high-level simultaneous interpreters, grew up in English-language environments, and were also exposed to Korean at an early age.

However, as has already been noted, there was a trade-off for those who spent too much time in English-language surroundings at the undefined, and perhaps indefinable critical age for language learning, in that their comparative strength in English was strongly offset by a noticeable weakness in Korean. Those who overcome a weakness in one language or the other often had to work on their language skills long and hard to become accomplished simultaneous interpreters, regardless of any potential advantage or disadvantage due to the geographical location where they grew up.

Is Overseas Experience Necessary?

Answers to the question about the necessity of overseas experience often seemed to depend on the personal situation of the person I was talking to. Those who were *hae wae pa* (overseas learners) often saw it as necessary, while *kungnae pa* (domestic learners) usually saw the opposite. A big part of the difference might have to do with the roles assigned to

interpreter/translators at different kinds of proficiency. And there is not much room for

disagreeing with the commonsense advice of high-level conference interpreter So-ra, who

said "it's silly" (Chap. 4, p. 175) to try to break into the world of interpretation without

some long-term exposure to an English-language environment. Her additional comment

that being a high-level conference interpreter was a spot reserved exclusively for those

who'd learned English during their early years also seemed a truism.

But despite what it may seem, and despite the fact that virtually all top-level

simultaneous Korean-English interpreters have had childhood experiences in English

environments, as I shared in Chapter 4, not everyone agreed. Sang-hoon, the novice

interpreter/translator who spoke of "enthusiasm" and "effort" (Chap. 4, p. 177), and Yong-

ok, with three decades of experience under his belt, who spoke of needing to be "born as an

interpreter…. meant for interpretation" (Chap. 4, p. 178) seemed to be talking about the

possibility that hard work or a natural gift could compensate for not having lived overseas.

As I mention in Chapter 4, I assumed that all interpreter/translators would focus on

in working with English and another language. However, in Korea, I learned that many of

those who had the advantage of an English-language upbringing had drawbacks, as when

So-young spoke frankly of her worry about sounding "inferior" and "childish" in high-level

Korean (Chap. 4, p. 180, 181).

The Gender Divide/Working in the Service Sector

Another issue that might be "politically incorrect," though perhaps more so in the

West than in Asia, is the issue of the gender divide. Though women are making great

strides in the Korean workplace, they still have some distance to travel. According to a

2002 U.S. State Department report, Korea's "conservative traditions have left women

subordinate to men socially and economically. Despite the passage of equal employment

opportunity legislation, few women work as company executives, and sexual discrimination

in the workplace remains a problem" (U.S. Dept. of State; Bureau of Democracy, Human

Rights, and Labor, 2002).

Women fill almost all the best simultaneous interpretation positions among Korean

English interpreters, which is strikingly different from what exists in other areas of the

world such as the U.S. and Europe. While it is true that numerous researchers have found

evidence of both physiological and performance-based evidence of an advantage for

women over men in some areas of verbal ability (Kimura, 2004), and there may be

differential in second language learning ability (Cook, 2001, p. 139), the interpreter's blunt

statement that "ladies are more talented in language than men are" (Chap. 4, p. 187) might

be questioned, or at least stated with some qualification, by some (Binder, et al., 2000).

Whatever their natural advantages, it is partly because of the challenges of sexism

in other career fields that many are attracted to a career as a free-lance interpreter-translator.

In later years they may need a paycheck for the high cost of living in Seoul, but many

college-age or young professionals list "free-lancer" as a preferred occupation. While one

more often hears a self-description as a free-lance writer, free-lance artist, free-lance

translator, or other type of job preceded by free-lance in English-speaking countries, in

Korean English it is quite common to hear Koreans, particularly young Koreans say their

goal is simply to be a "free-lancer," which to them means having an independent career

and/or life, not necessarily tied to a certain type of work.

For most men, as noted by some of the interpreters in Chapter 4 (pp. 188-195) the

security of a full-time job and the periodic regular advancement that comes with it are

necessities of life. But for women, being restricted in some ways in their job options can

also give them a kind of freedom to take on the job of "free-lancer," particularly in the

interpretation/translation field.

Being an Interpreter/Translator: Work, Life and Challenges

Service and Status

The glimpse these interpreter/translators gave me into their lives, bits and pieces of what it is like to be in the shoes of a Korean English language interpreter/translator today, was an interesting and valuable gift. Their thoughts about what it felt like to be engaged in the flow of simultaneous interpretation, their opinions about the talents and skills it took to be good at the career, and their hard-won knowledge about staying at the top of the field without becoming a casualty of overwork or burnout were all valuable information that I hope will be as captivating and useful to my readers as it was to me in my conversations with these unique individuals.

Another "big picture" issue, related to the preceding section's note that women fill most of interpretation/translation roles in Korea, is the contrast between the highly demanding requirements of the job and the low-status and subservient image for those filling the requirements. By the time Korean men reach middle age, they don't want to be in a service role anymore. They want to be recognized as a contributor or a creator.

For many reasons, interpreter-translators are seen as filling second-class or service roles. Some of the reasons for the high demands, but low image, for

interpretation/translation may be uniquely Korean factors. However, it is well worth trying

to understand more about the people carrying the message from Korean to the outside

world and vice-versa.

Income

While the status may be low, as some of my conversation partners noted, the

compensation can be relatively high – 80 to 100 million won (approx. $80,000-$100,000)

and more annually at the top levels of conference interpretation. This is one of the main

reasons Korean students still flock to private institutes for preparation in the hopes of

getting a spot at GSIT or a growing number of schools of interpretation and translation in

Korea.

What Is It Like?

Some of the most intriguing and interesting things I learned from these interview

had to do with the ways people saw their roles as interpreter/translators. Whether it's

because I talked to so many people who worked mostly as interpreters or whether the line

of questioning simply lent itself to better answers, some of the best metaphors I heard were

from interpretation experiences. "Being on the same wavelength as the speaker," riding "piggyback" on his or her words (Chap. 4, p. 199, almost predicting what will be said before it is uttered gave me some insight into what the experience of being a simultaneous interpreter must really be like.

In addition to the more conventional metaphor of being a "bridge" between speakers of two languages (Chap. 4, p. 201), I was captivated by the description of the interpreter as "an actress that has been given (a) script" (Chap. 4, pp. 203) by the original speaker in the form of the spoken words needing to be interpreted. Similarly, a consecutive interpreter, whose job it is to listen to a few lines, then interpret, then pause and listen, then interpret again, said it was similar to a musical performance (Chap. 4, p. 204), which also caught my attention as well as my imagination and helped me get a feel for what the task must be like. Riding a bike, putting a puzzle together from the speaker's words, persuading, and "trying – hard to make the listener understand" (Chap. 4, pp. 205-207) all seemed great descriptions of the process.

One interpreter/translator who helped paint the picture of the interpreter/translator's job was Sang-hoon, the recent GSIT graduate who spoke of "chewing" and "digesting" the speaker's words before "delivering" them to the listener in the target language (Chap. 4, p.

208). I remember being slightly relieved that he didn't continue the chewing and digesting metaphor when he spoke of the output. The way he talked of an instructor advising students that they should envision a Korean man of 80 years old in the audience with no knowledge or experience outside Korea when they delivered their output, along with his mention of the importance of comprehension: "if you don't understand it, you cannot speak it (Chap. 4, p. 208), gave an intellectual, as well as an intuitive insight into the process.

What Does It Take?

While comments about "language skills" (Chap. 4, p. 210) seemed to be an obvious answer to my query about the skills and abilities needed to be a good interpreter/translator, other answers were more unexpected. Sincerity, intellectual curiosity, honesty, and "good personality" (Chap. 4, pp. 211-216) were all responses that gave me insight into the character of the people I was talking to. One that seemed clear, after watching interpreter/translators in action a few times, was the need for "quick analysis." Another necessary trait that was mentioned again and again was confidence and the need for interpreters, especially to be quick, spontaneous speakers, who could successfully work despite stage fright.

For many of the students I've gotten to know the last four years teaching, this last point seems particularly appropriate. Korean students, particularly Korean English students, are notorious for telling instructors how shy they are and it is often a challenge for instructors to get them to speak up. Even at the competitive interpretation/translation graduate school, a majority of the students who have competed through many hardships and suffered the trials of "exam hell" for their seat in class invariably begin their adventure in my class by introducing themselves with sentences such as "I don't like public speaking" or "speaking English is my biggest challenge."

It is amusing, since public speaking and discussion skills are a major part of the first-year class I teach, that the first thing many students do when we meet is tell me how much they dislike the very things we will be working on for two semesters. Even more amusing is their dislike of public speaking, which is the goal they are trying to reach. A big part of what happens in their interpretation classes is getting past this fear of speaking in front of others. For some students, it can be their toughest challenge.

Stress and Burnout

I think most readers will readily understand that an interpreter/translator's job is stressful, partly because of the unscripted, but necessarily on target, public speaking involved. This is done rapid-fire, with almost no opportunity to prepare for what the speaker will say, and yet it must be accurately recreated and re-spoken in a new language. But while the stress is obvious, these professionals had interesting solutions for battling it. Working in other areas—education, creative pursuits like publishing, translating, and even being a mother—was mentioned as a way to relieve the pressure of day-to-day interpreting. The translators I talked to did not mention the same diversions, but all the successful interpreters agreed that a person had to have something else in life. Otherwise, burnout would be inevitable.

Culture Divides

And you must know this law of culture: two civilizations cannot know and understand one another well. You will start going deaf and blind. You will be content in your civilization surrounded by the hedge, but signals from the other civilization will be as incomprehensible to you as if they had been sent by the

inhabitants of Venus. If you feel like it, you can become an explorer in your own country. You can become Columbus, Magellan, Livingston. But I doubt that you will have such a desire. Such expeditions are very dangerous, and you are no madman, are you? You are already a man of your own civilization, and you will defend it and fight for it. (Kapuscinski, *R. The Emperor*, 1983, p. 45, New York: Random House)

The above lines, taken from a collection of interviews of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's servants and associates in the wake of his 1974 downfall are a powerful message about what is important in this study – a growing need to learn how to listen to what others are saying, as one of my conversation partners noted, whether we speak the same language or not. We may be divided by age, gender, profession, or many other factors. But despite our common humanity, which in many ways makes us all alike, our differences, cultural and other – that make it hard for us to understand each other – are what really divides us.

Kapuscinski's words about culture are a truism. There is a vast gulf between the worlds of those from different cultures, in the little things and the big ones. My students love to munch on smoked squid in the theatre as they watch a movie, a horrible-smelling snack to me. However, they probably can't fathom not being able to enjoy a movie without

popcorn. Several examples of more serious manifestations of the language-cultural gap appeared in Chapter 4, where interpreter/translators told of being dealing with cursing during negotiations or trying to interpret culturally specific jokes.

As I began these interviews, I was curious about what the interpreter-translators thought of language and cultural differences. How large a component was culture in accurate interpretation or translation? In some ways, and in some situations, it can be critical. But in simply interpreting words being spoken, I think I heard that it may be less important than it sometimes seemed. These Korean English interpreter/translators seemed to be telling me they had relatively few problems with culture, even if they didn't carry all the cultural baggage of a native speaker.

Of course, difficult situation and embarrassing misunderstandings were part of what happened to them on the job. However, during our conversations we sometimes seemed to be thinking of different kinds of things when we spoke of cultural miscommunication. In fact, rather than call them differences at all, it might be better to borrow a phrase from the title of psychologist William James's classic 1902 lectures, "The Varieties of Religious Experience." Rather than speak of cultural differences, I often see "varieties of cultural

experiences" -- slightly different variations of perceiving and reacting to similar

phenomena, rather than completely different types of behavior.

But whether or not these variations of a common cultural experience – how it feels

to be alone – has any major ramifications in terms of interpretation and translation probably

depends on whether one encounters a situation in which it is critical to understand the

words of someone from the other side of the cultural equation. Certainly, it is a difference

that anyone who has spent much time in "the other" culture becomes aware of in time. It is

a factor in how people think about situations they are in every day. But to the question of

how important it is for an interpreter/translator, what I heard made me less certain than I

once was.

My focus as a teacher, trying to explain the nuances and clarify the gray areas of

North American/Western/English-speaking language and culture to Korean speakers, many

who have never been overseas, may make intercultural problems seem more important than

they really are for interpreter/translators. Nearly every day in Korea, I encounter perplexing

cultural problems. I may at times be looking at culture through a magnifying glass each

time I learn something my students don't understand about the part of the world I came

from and something I don't understand about theirs. It may well be that some of the

growing focus on culture in teaching interpretation/translation is partly a result of teachers

who have a better understanding of Western culture than their students, whether they are

Western teachers or Westernized teachers.

Time and time again I heard from working interpreters that, except for a few

challenges such as jokes, they had difficulty seeing intercultural communication issues as

high on the scale of importance as I thought they were. Here in Korea, I am "the other," and

English speakers like me are the "foreigners," shocking as it may be every time I see that

word on an official sign or notice. Despite this, whether because of my own cultural

baggage or the focus of my work, it is easy for me to slip into thinking that it's important

that Koreans understand English speakers. The reality is that for both East and West it is as

important to understand as to be understood. The focus may change in the future, as

intercultural communication and miscommunication is clearly a growing interest among my

colleagues at the GSIT, and a growing focus in Korea overall.

Interpreting and Translating in Life

As So-ra noted, all communication involves interpretation of some kind, even

communication in monolingual contexts (Chap. 4, p. 199). For me, that becomes clear

when I think how I might explain the artistry of a singer like Janis Joplin to my 91-year-old

grandmother. Without some major discussion before listening to a selection of her music, a

detailed explication of Joplin's use of imagery in her lyrics, and a discussion of the power

of her wailing, slightly off-key scream, would be completely meaningless to Grandma. It is

possible that my message could be communicated in literal terms, but a true understanding

of the beauty I hear in Joplin's wail would take a major effort both on her part and on mine.

In the same way, for me to understand what my interpreter/translator conversation

partners told me in our sessions required some effort at interpretation on both sides. While I

am an outsider, not being an interpreter/translator myself, I have to think it is possible to

find out about another's world by talking to them about it. What would be the point of any

research without this basic assumption?

And, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, who got to see what the reality was "behind

the curtain," talking to the interpreter/translators about what they do and how they do it

gave me a peek at what really goes on behind the curtain when interpreters interpret and

translators translate. Most of us, even if we know better, tend to assume that we are getting

a pretty full and complete transmission of a message sent from another language to our own

every time we hear or read something that has been interpreted or translated from another language.

Learning and Understanding

In my literature review and my own mind, I continually noted the importance of not making generalizations based on a few anecdotal exchanges with certain individuals who've talked about the field of interpretation. Yet there are a few focal points for that seemed to have applications to the greater world of English interpretation and translation in Korea above and beyond the words of the interviews themselves.

The first has to do with understanding. In St. Exupéry's classic, *The Little Prince*, the fox tells the little prince: "Words are the source of misunderstanding" (1991, p. 65). "Understand" was a word that kept popping up again and again in my mind as I began to wrap up this project. The word occurred 34 times in the transcripts of conversations that make up Chapter 4; uttered six of those times by me as researcher, usually repeating a point to be sure I had heard correctly. But the point is, the word was used 28 times by my interpreter/translator participants. Of course it is a common word, often found in book titles, particularly textbook titles, and in common conversation, as seen

in the above quotation. But just as the word kept occurring in the conversations, it also

kept returning to my thoughts as the most appropriate fit for what it is that an

interpreter/translator has to do, not just once, but twice: First, he or she must clearly

understand a message; then the interpreter must make him or herself understood to listeners

or readers in another language. This may seem a fairly obvious statement, but for those

who aren't in the interpretation booth or poring over texts and reference books to create a

translation, it may be so obvious that it doesn't even really get much direct attention.

"Understand" may seem to have nearly universal applications to many areas of

work, such as writing, reading, teaching, and others. We use the word often, and it fits in

many contexts: "People don't understand me and I don't understand them; be

understanding of others' needs; if you can't do it, I'll understand."

But in other professions, and in other contexts, there are also other motives besides

purely understanding ideas. For academics, the pressures of what is interesting to students

or supervisors, as well as politically correct, can often have a lot to do with the subject and

way in which he or she may seek to understand. For the journalist, similarly, the same

pressures, along with his readers' and editors' preferences, will decide the areas where

understanding can be sought and the ways in which to seek it before trying to share that

delimited understanding with readers. Few popular authors, and even fewer television or

movie producers, make their mark by seeking to understand something that no one is

interested in reading or seeing.

Of course, the interpreter/translator also produces work that must fit within the

guidelines of the tastes and expectations of his or her audience, in some ways, the definition

of "understand" seems to fully and precisely fit the entirety of what the job requires. To

perceive, to grasp, to learn, to construe; to have background knowledge as well as a

systematic understanding, all these phrases seem to zero in on what an interpreter/translator

is trying to do every moment, and in the next, to transmit that understanding to listeners or

readers as completely and fully as is possible to ensure that the original speaker in another

language is correctly understood.

For me, understanding the job of an interpreter/translator has been, and continues to

be, a gradual process. And moments of understanding come as often from talking about

what I heard in conversations with a second or third person as they do in the initial

conversations. Understanding comes slowly and continued to grow as I wrote these words.

Where does this capacity for understanding come from, for these people? It is

different for each. From the environment, from their learning experiences, for some, from

the cultural explanations in academia that are just beginning to be heard. While these interpreters can be our guides to help understand what is going on in their culture, to expect them to also understand our culture is a bit of a stretch. They are experts and guides to what is going on in Korean language for us, not in what's going on in English language for their compatriots.

Throughout the process of designing this study, conducting the research, and putting together the results, I have been learning from interpreter/translators the whole time about their learning, lives and careers. Our conversations as part of this study, and in other, less formal surroundings, has given me a great deal of valuable information about what it is to be an interpreter/translator and what I can do in my small way to help my students be better interpreter/translators in the future.

What I have learned here has showed me how much more I have to learn about the people I work with, English interpreter/translators in Korea. As the six-party talks go on, and relations between the two Koreas, Japan, China, Russia and the U.S. ebb and flow, it is a very important area of the world to be working in. I hope in this study I have asked questions that helped to show at least a small part of what Korean English interpreter/translators' lives are like. More importantly, I hope I listened and interpreted

those answers in a way so that other can get a glimpse into that world. I know I have tried. I

also hope that the efforts of these fascinating people performing at a very challenging job

will continue to increase communication and understanding between the Republic of Korea

and the English speaking world. Today more than ever, it may be one of the most important

tasks ahead for our changing world.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS

Summary

In Chapter I, I explained that I see my role as a perpetual student in general, and

particularly in this research, as closely related to what Steinar Kvale writes of in his book

Interviews (1996) as a "traveler," one who travels to faraway places and meets interesting

people who tell him stories, which he then relates to others upon his return to his homeland.

I explain in this chapter how I was a part of this story, and my questions and perceptions

were integral to it. I included information in Chapter I on my background and where the

beginnings of my interest in this project came from, as well as how that interest evolved

and focused. Interview data made up the backbone of this study. In general terms, my

curiosity, as I explain in Chapter I, was to find out about the people who take on this

important, but largely unknown, task. Who are they? Where do they come from? How did

they get into it? What does it take to be an interpreter? How do they make it? How do they

see what they do? And finally, is it worth it? I talked to students and professionals in

interpretation/translation about many areas of their learning, their lives, and their work.

The project followed guiding research questions looking into their backgrounds, language

and cultural learning experiences, their perceptions of the most beneficial kinds of learning for their current careers, and advice for those following in their footsteps.

In Chapter II, I told the reader that the literature review chapter in this dissertation may offer a slight variation from expectations, particularly compared to the type of review chapter expected in a more objective, fact-based, or scientific study area. Rather than building on existing knowledge in the area, of which there is little directly related to the present study, I attempted to make connections between reference works in diverse areas to help the reader understand some basic information, cultural, geographical, and theoretical, that forms the backdrop of this study. At least part of the reason I found it a challenge to look at this literature review from a more traditional perspective is because this dissertation, like many dissertations, has partially conflicting goals: to come up with new and original research and present it in an ancient and standardized format.

In Chapter III, I explained my methodology in this study by first, going into some detail about my approach to research. I wrote in this first major section that while I continue, and hope to always continue, learning and wondering just what that approach is, I found myself, in this study at least, fitting my methods and methodology somewhere between what Schwandt (2001) termed "ethnographic and naturalistic" and "narrative and

interpretive interactionist." I also wrote about my research approach in terms of the

perspectives I learned from, not only in this study, but in my life leading up to this point,

that informed my research. I next outlined the Research Design of my study, looking at

how, where and with whom the study was put together. Under the Research Design

umbrella, I first discussed some of the background information and decisions that I made to

help put together my qualitative research plan, one that featured almost exclusively

interviews as research. After that, I include more detailed information on the research site.

Chapters IV and V were, the core of this study. The real point of everything I did

here was to find out what professional interpreter/translators thought about their learning,

work and lives.

Implications

Interpretation/Translation Implications

Language Skills

As noted by many of my conversation partners, one of the first and foremost

skills required to be a professional English interpreter/translator is, of course, a high level

of English language proficiency. Despite its shortcomings, and there are some, English

education in Korea has improved and continues to improve because of Korean society's

growing interest in the world, and increasing knowledge about the kinds of skills and abilities that are needed to help students compete in an increasingly competitive international marketplace.

A growing buzzword in Korea is "globalization." Though it may have begun being used some years ago more as a catchphrase than as reality, it is now a reality for most Koreans that they need to compete and connect with others internationally to continue to succeed in the future. As I write these words, we await ratification of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, an accord tentatively signed April 2, 2007, that is just one symbol of the growing importance of international trade and intercourse to this rapidly growing former "hermit kingdom" that is now, not only more knowledgeable about the outside world, but becoming more well-known by that world beyond.

In the past decade, Korean English education at all levels has improved, from Elementary school-age programs to those in Korean universities. While there is some question about the value of some of these programs, such as numerous "English-only" immersion camps that have sprung up in recent years, they all point to one fact: Korean parents, and Korean students, are demanding, like never before, to learn English. This

demand can only result in the kinds of improvements that have already been seen, and will doubtless continue to grow.

In addition, as also noted by several of my conversation partners, the potential advantage gained by living or spending time long-term in English-speaking environments outside Korea is being enjoyed by more and more Koreans. Increasing affluence, as well as fewer governmental restrictions, along with increasing acceptance and even admiration for overseas travelers, have all been both causes and the results of an attitude change whose pace has increased dramatically over the last decade or two, which is having major effects on the ability of more and more young Koreans' proficiency and use of English.

The interpreter/translators I talked to, the youngest of whom were in their late 20s and early 30s, are the products of a basic education system that is nearly a decade in the past. For them, there were few chances to really attain a high level of proficiency in English. Only a few standouts who excelled at English language learning in Korea for various reasons, as well as those males who got experience using the English language during their Army time serving as liaisons to U.S. soldiers were notable exceptions to the rule that the most-skilled interpreter/translators, those able to become simultaneous interpreters, grew up overseas.

However, the language skills of many of those now studying to be interpreter/translators are far greater than those now in the field. Continuing the improvement, there is little doubt that Korean youngsters now in school, both in an improved Korean education system that every year puts more focus and better teachers into English language skills for students, as well as increased numbers now studying and living in English-speaking environments outside Korea, will create potential future Korean English interpreter/translators with similarly much higher language skills than we see today.

Other Interpretation/Translation Skills

In addition to the necessary advanced second language skill, other requirements of being a good interpreter/translator mentioned by my conversation partners included being quick to grasp meanings, be analytical, be confident, and have intellectual curiosity, in addition to specific skills required for the trade, such as note-taking and splitting attention to be able to listen and speak simultaneously.

With the exception of the last two – specialized note-taking and attention-splitting techniques – as well as other specific interpretation/translation techniques, many of these

abilities, they said, are traits that interpreter/translators must have before going into training – things they need to be born with, or at least have developed on their own. But the increasing interconnectedness around the world, more apparent in Korea in the years since the 1988 Seoul Olympics than almost anywhere else, makes it much more likely today and in the future that that "intellectual curiosity" about what's going on in Korea and around the world will continue to grow for many future interpreters learning about the world today. Hopefully, these improvements will also lead to improved communication with the rest of the world.

Research Implications

Overseas/Domestic Language Learners

From the beginning of my interviews, and increasingly as I continued, my interest in what one of my conversation partners referred to as a "politically incorrect" topic of the perceived advantage of *hae wae pa* (overseas learners) over *kungnae pa*(domestic learners), particularly in quick-response situations, such as simultaneous interpretation, continued. While I heard a variety of opinions which seemed, perhaps predictably, to vary depending

on whether the person I talked to had learned English in Korea or overseas, it still is a question with much potential for useful research.

Of course, as noted above, the English education environment in Korea is rapidly improving to meet the demands of Koreans and the world they live in. Still, it provides a unique environment with strong new connections to the world where English is the *lingua franca*, and yet still has much room for improvement in English language learning, compared to much of the rest of the world. However, like other Asian countries such as Japan and China, it also has accomplished much in a relatively short period of time, and it will be interesting to see how things change in terms of the perceived importance of the English language in the future, as the influence of China, which is sometimes referred to as Korea's "elder brother," continues to increase its international power and influence.

The (Un)Importance of English

On a somewhat related note to the previous paragraph, one of the "surprises" for me in this study, as I mentioned in Chapter V, was how many of these excellent English users saw the importance of English as secondary, or even lower on the scale, than some of the necessary talents and skills an interpreter must have. To hear so many native Koreans talk

about the challenges of their own language was something of a revelation to a longtime

English teacher, and helped me to see things from a different perspective.

For these people, being perfect at English was far less important than being perfect

in Korean, since they almost always were working with Korean audiences, and expectations

were much higher for their Korean language skills than for their English language skills.

After working to improve their English speaking and writing skills to as high a level as

possible these last four years, it was probably good for me to be reminded that the

hegemony of my native language was more in my mind than anyplace else. Watching the

numbers of classes decrease in English/Korean interpretation & translation as those in

Chinese/Korean increase is another reminder of the same kind.

The skills and abilities required to be an interpreter/translator, as well as a look into

the rise and fall of demand for interpretation/translation experts in different languages are

both areas that have a lot of room for future study, and it would behoove other English

language scholars to occasionally remind themselves that English is not the only game in

town.

Social Status/Gender Issues

As noted in Chapters IV and V, the predominance of women in the Korean

interpretation/translation field can be seen as somewhat of a double-edged sword. Some

might see the greater number of females in what can be a high-paying, challenging career,

particularly at the highest levels, as just desserts. After all, for Korean women, employment

options in most fields fall far short of those of their male counterparts, in terms of pay,

advancement and opportunities in a society that is more male-dominated than many in the

west and elsewhere. However, some of the chief reasons for their predominance in

interpretation/translation, my conversation partners said, was because of its low desirability

for males, who can move up the corporate ladder faster in less demanding corporate

positions rather than making their own way as a "free-lance" interpreter/translator. For

Korean men, a career in interpretation/translation is not often seen an option as attractive as

climbing the career ladder at a large corporation, where steady employment, a regular

routine, and long-term job security await.

In some ways, this makes the field of interpretation/translation, as noted above, a

kind of a second chance career for skilled women interpreter/translators, since they often

have challenges finding employment that makes full use of their talents in other areas. It

also provides a relatively high-income, independent lifestyle option for many Korean women.

A study looking at the differences that may result from the female prominence in Korean interpretation/translation – whether it has any effect on communication, whether the female predominance lessens as Korean society continues to change, the effects on power relations between Korean women who become interpreter/translators and Korean society, and how much natural biological advantage women may have in interpretation/translation: all could all be fertile ground for future useful research in a Korean setting.

Interpretation/Translation Dreams & Reality

The job of an interpreter/translator would seem to fill the requirements for many young Koreans' "dream job." Yet, for their parents, the career path their interpreter/translator son or daughter has chosen is often seen as a nightmare. Similarly, there is an obvious difference between how the profession is viewed by aspiring and novice interpreter/translators compared to their seniors, who have filled the role for some time and seen the reality of the career path. While the same thing might be said of many other vocations, the tension between the dream and the reality of living the interpreter/translator

lifestyle seemed to contrast dramatically in the conversations with professionals recounted in these pages.

A project that looks more deeply into the background of the often-reported conflicts between parents and their would-be interpreter/translator children, as well as the differences in how the profession is esteemed by outsiders and experienced insiders to the field would likely reveal much about not only the field of interpretation & translation, but also speak volumes about gender, jobs, status, and power relations inside Korean society.

Affective Considerations

The interplay between reason and emotion, an area of research being looked at with new eyes in the last decade by scholars such as Antonio Damasio (2005), Daniel Goleman (1996), and others, offer many areas for further research into the learning and lives of Korean English interpreter/translators. More than simply reasoning and language skills, the field may additionally bring both demands and rewards for its practitioners in terms of their emotional well-being and satisfaction. Learning (and teaching) styles, the effects of stress on performance, and ways to reduce or work with that inevitable (and often reported) stress factor, are all areas that could be looked into more deeply.

A connected thought struck me as I reflected on a weekend seminar I attended in summer 2006 at Yonsei University in Seoul. In the seminar, positive psychologist Martin Seligman presented ideas from his recent book *Authentic Happiness* (2002), including a central point about engagement and "flow," the state of being totally involved in a productive activity, either physical or mental (p. 114). According to Seligman, a key factor in the state of "flow," produced by being totally immersed in the activity, is that for the actor, time stops. He also said that flow, or an engaged life, is key to real happiness.

As I listened to Seligman speak in English to his mostly Korean audience, with the simultaneous interpreters in their glass booth toiling in shifts to keep up with his joyful exuberance, it occurred to me that "flow" was the very definition of what these interpreters were doing at exactly that moment, and "flow" is a state that interpreters must enter frequently whenever they are working. They are engaged in meaningful activity that is done almost unconsciously, and the description by some of them about playing a role, performing a piece of music, or "riding piggyback" on the speaker's words seemed intriguing, though perhaps undefined, glimmers of ideas for future research.

Cultural Factors

While it is true, as I noted in the concluding sections of Chapter V, that intercultural misunderstandings and problems of communication may be magnified to my eyes, as a long term resident "foreigner" in Korea, it is also true that a lot of what many Koreans think they know about the English-speaking world is gathered from the reality they gather from imported television shows and movies. Though it may be argued how great the effects of not having a good understanding of Western or English culture have on Korean English interpreters, it does appear that more educators and researchers are looking into the challenges of intercultural communication, both in Korea, as well as in Korean interpretation.

I suppose it was to be expected that my conversation partners saw cultural differences in terms of what Westerners lack compared to them, such as the Korean concept of *jeong*, but that also helps explain why I can see the opposite factors – what Koreans lack that Westerners expect. While there are a large number of texts to help those from Korea adjust to Western culture and vice versa, I think there is still room for more to be done looking at the communication challenges of culture between the Korean and the English language. It's possible to work around jokes that don't translate well, and a surmountable

challenge to avoid other unpleasant types of language such as cursing, but from my time here in Korea, I am sure there is more that is missed between the two languacultures than unimportant details than can be covered by just learning the language.

There are many other Korean emotional concepts that are difficult for those from other cultures to understand in addition to *jeong*. Many of them have connections with the relationship between the individual and a group, such as *chemyeon* (a sensitivity not to cause oneself or others to lose face), *nunchi,* (a highly-valued attention to others' feelings or desires, often before a word has been uttered), and *han*, a word for a sadness or depression connoting both despair of past injustice and acceptance of such matters as part of the Korean experience. Though these ideas have been explored to some degree by intercultural scholars, there is still great misunderstanding and lack of clarity about their importance to the Korean psyche. The fact that So-ra, the experienced high-level veteran conference interpreter with long experience in Western Culture, talked so emphatically about Westerners' lack of *jeong* make it clear that this is worth looking into more deeply.

Concluding Thought

Curiosity about the world of Korean English interpreter/translators got me started on this project. My main focus was in letting some of them tell me about their experiences in life, work, and in learning, which I have attempted to share in the preceding pages. Though my personal interest in interpretation/translation gave the study its start, I continued to see more and more obvious applications to those studying or working in the field. Perhaps less obvious were its application to everyone, because of Korea's current, and continuing, prominence in world affairs.

In line with my initial curiosity, the core of this study is in what the interpreter/translators had to say about their work and lives. I think what my conversation partners told me about their experiences was not only interesting, but valuable knowledge, for anyone who wants to better understand the messages being received and transmitted between South Korea and the English-speaking world. Both in Korea, and in the world outside, I hope this study serves to help at least one person understand those messages better and improve the connection with this important part of the world.

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All wisdom is plagiarism; only stupidity is original.
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Appendix A -- Text of E-mail request for interview participants

Greetings,

I was referred to you by Prof. ------------ as someone who might be interested in and interesting for

my current research project.

I am teaching advanced English and issue discussion at GSIT, and am now working on my

dissertation for a doctorate in English Rhetoric and Linguistics. My research interest, which was

sparked by the students where I teach, is in the field of interpretation and translation. I am

interested in translators' educational, apprenticeship, and professional experiences. In short, I want

to talk to translators about what they do. I'm especially interested in how translators see their work,

their profession as a whole, their clients, and themselves.

I want to study translators from their point of view. While I have no special knowledge or expertise in

translation apart from my current position, I think my background in language and linguistics, along

with former work as a journalist, will fit well together to help me make something of this project.

I would like to talk to you for an hour or so, at your earliest convenience, about the project, and what

you think about your work, your field, and any insights you can offer into the life of an

interpreter/translator. I can explain more when we meet or by phone. Please feel free to reply to this

message or call any time.

Jon Bahk-Halberg (contact info was included in the original message)