A DISCOURSE BASED STUDY ON THEME
IN KOREAN AND TEXTUAL MEANING
IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Most linguistic communities have textual resources for organizing experiences into coherent text. The way that the resources are used may not be the same but vary from one language to another. This variation can be a source of translation difficulty in rendering a natural-reading translation. This thesis investigates the question of how the choices of Theme, which is one of the main textual resources, have an impact on textual meaning in translation between English and Korean.

The premise underlying the study is that a translation that is not inaccurate in lexical choices may still read as unnatural to the target readers if a careful consideration is not given to Theme choices at the clause level and Thematic development at the text level in the source and target texts. This assumption is derived from systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory, which postulates that Theme at the clause level plays a critical role in constructing a text into a coherent linear whole at the text level. This brings in another equally important question of the study: how Theme works in Korean. No research has been done to investigate the system of THEME in Korean from a systemic functional point of view or on the basis of extensive discourse analysis across a range of registers. Therefore, this study investigates the THEME system in Korean using a corpus consisting of a number of authentic Korean texts in three different text types.

These two coherent questions are investigated in five self-contained journal articles included in the thesis. Two of them have been published (Chapters 2 and 5), one has been submitted for publication (Chapter 6) and the other two will be
submitted (Chapters 3 and 4). The journal article format for thesis has recently been introduced at Macquarie University as an approved alternative to the traditional thesis structure.

Chapter 1 introduces a number of preliminary issues for, and information relevant to, the study such as research questions and background, the corpus, the underlying theoretical assumption and anticipated contributions to this area of research. Chapter 2 is a report of a pilot-project that motivated the current study. It discusses how to use text analysis based on systemic functional grammar to analyze translation errors/issues and provides systematic explanations relating to such issues. Chapter 3 reviews issues that have been raised by Korean linguists in relation to the study of Theme in Korean and provides suggestions on how to resolve these issues drawing on systemic functional theory. Chapter 4 describes the features of Korean THEME system based on the analysis of clausal Themes and thematic development of 17 texts of the corpus. Chapter 5 is a discussion about the pedagogical efficiency of using systemic functional text analysis for translator education with a particular emphasis on the textual meaning in translation. Chapter 6 attempts to analyze the readability issue of community translations in Australian context. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis with a number of suggestions for further study.

As the research investigates the question of textual meaning in translation, which has not been rigorously studied, and the question of Theme in Korean, which has never been studied on the basis of a corpus and of discourse analysis, it is anticipated that this work will make considerable theoretical and practical contributions in both fields.
Acknowledgements

I never imagined that the journey of research could be so full of excitement and joy when I decided to change my career path from professional interpreter and translator to teacher and researcher in 2000. The journey would have been otherwise if I had not had support from so many wonderful people who accompanied me on the journey. I would like to use this space to thank them.

My heartfelt thanks go to Anne Burns and Christian Matthiessen, my supervisors and mentors, who have shaped me as a researcher and academic. Anne has been my constant source of comfort, wise advice and clear guidance. She is my role model in many ways, especially in time management. In spite of her extremely busy schedule, she has always found time to read drafts of every single chapter and sent me her valuable feedback in a few days, which helped me not to lose the momentum of progress throughout the journey. Christian has patiently taught me what linguistics is. He thoroughly read all the chapters, giving me his insightful and critical comments and suggestions in a gentle and encouraging manner. He has been and will be an inspiration in my newly discovered exciting journey to linguistics. I thank them both for leading me to academic and personal levels of achievement.

I have benefited hugely from a number of systemic functional linguists who helped me in different stages. Kazuhiro Teruya and Elizabeth Thomson found hours of time to help me with tricky issues involving the analysis of Korean texts during the initial data analysis period. Jim Martin’s Friday seminar at Sydney University in 2006 was very helpful for me to understand fundamental concepts of SFL theory. Geoff Thompson gave constructive feedback on my papers at the International
Systemic Functional Congress in 2006 and 2007. Virginia Steward-Smith, my friend and colleague, proofread Chapters 2, 4 and 5 and made some useful suggestions on the presentation of data. My thanks go to them all.

I also thank my colleagues at Macquarie University, in particular, Jemina Napier, who had faith in me as a researcher and happily reduced my teaching load in the first semester of 2007, which was the critical period of thesis writing, and Adrian Buzo, who kindly offered to read through the whole thesis with a personal interest in my research. I owe a debt of gratitude to my Translation and Interpreting students over the years. They have been enthusiastic and excited to learn new findings from my research and at the same time critically pointed out some issues of practical application. Sharing research findings with them in our mutual learning process about translation has been a real joy and pleasure.

My gratitude also goes to editors and anonymous reviewers for their comments on the published papers (Chapters 2 and 5).

My warmest thoughts and thanks go to my family. Thanks to my parents’ generous help during their stay with us in 2006, I was exempted from house work and concentrated wholly on my study. In addition, their constant prayer has sustained me spiritually. I also appreciate the understanding and encouragement of my parents-in-law throughout the years. My lovely children, Peter and Liz, have so generously and patiently understood their preoccupied mum and respected her own time and space even when they were very young. My last thanks go to my husband, who has been my supporter and encourager ever since we first met 20 years ago. Without his love and support, I would never have considered embarking on a PhD. Thank you, Francis!
I hereby certify that the work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution, and also that the sources of information used, and the extent to which the work of others have been utilized, have been indicated in the thesis.

Mira Kim

September 2007
To my parents
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Romanization System Table

In this thesis, the Yale romanization system is employed when phonetic transcriptions are needed.

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