

# Origin of Interpretation and Interpreting Practice

Jong Kyong Ju

Faculty of Foreign languages and Literature

Supreme Leader **Kim Jong Un** said as follows:

**“Today the demand for talent is growing with each passing day, as is the standard of talent required. Universities and colleges should produce large numbers of world-famous scholars. They should do so by setting up a rational education system that serves the purpose of training both academic and practical talents and by developing our continuous education system.”**

One of the important issues in the training of practical talents is to give a systematic analysis and assessment of the historic views and theories on translation and interpretation from the perspective of our revolution to make sure that translation and interpretation skills are fully acquired by the foreign language experts.

Translation and interpretation, as one of the oldest intellectual activities of humans that originated from the need for interpersonal communication, has been regarded as an indispensable element for ever-lasting social progress.

This paper offers an analysis and assessment of a range of views on the development of interpretation, interpreting role and interpreting practice in its historical context.

As an essential element for oral communication between two or more people who do not share a common language, interpretation was deeply rooted into human life from prehistoric times.

The remains of the oldest translation, the rendering of a text from one language into another, can be traced at least back to 3000 BC during the Egyptian Old Kingdom, in Elephantine, where inscriptions were found in two different languages. Other remains of historical documents indicate that translation used to take place for administrative purpose of the ruling authorities along the border line between Ancient Egypt and Greece where two or more languages were spoken. Around the 3rd century AD the Greeks conquered by Romans took translation practice to acquire Latin.

In the America, interpreters played a key role after the discovery of the continent by Columbus and the subsequent colonization process by Europeans. When Columbus and his party first set foot in the America, he faced over 133 tribal families who spoke over 1000 different languages that spread between the territory that today is the south of Argentina and the north of Mexico.

While planning the voyage to the Americas, Columbus - aware of the important role that interpreting would play to enable his communication with the natives- decided to take two interpreters with him on his first voyage who supposedly spoke Arabic, Hebrew and Chaldean. Unfortunately, these languages were not of much help on the American continent.

Later he realized the need to educate some natives in the Spanish language and culture and thus, he committed himself to train interpreters. When he returned to the America the second time, Columbus was accompanied by two interpreters. From 1495 to 1518, communication between the Spaniards and the Natives were enabled by a generation of Native interpreters.

Since the Spanish colonists and the Native Americans had no understanding of each other's language, interpreters' intervention was essential to communication. What characterized interpreting in this period was that it happened between two parties that did not share the same position in terms of power, status and solidarity. However these differentials never became an integral part of interpreting discourse.

It was documented that once Hernan Cortes, a Spanish colonist who conquered Aztec, an American native kingdom, required as many as three interpreters to work together: He would speak in Spanish to an interpreter, who would then interpret into Maya for the Yucatec natives, and another interpreter would interpret from Yucatec into Nahuatl for the Mexican tribes. Interestingly, a young Mexican boy who understood Spanish would listen to the second interpreter's words and see that they corresponded to what Cortes had originally said. This is evidence of the concern with the accuracy of the product and colonialists' suspicion of the natives.

In the 12th century, Christianity and Islam met in Moorish Spain. This meeting of two different languages and cultures provided conditions that fostered the development of translation: Since Western culture was considered to be inferior to the Moorish; it was an opportunity for Europeans to contact and accept new ideas and culture from the Moors.

In many European countries, on the other hand, translation of the Bible into their mother tongues was carried out by means of monarchical power. As Christianity started to spread, the role of translation changed, from a vehicle for filling the information gap between social groups that spoke different languages to a vehicle for disseminating the word of God. Many historians claim that this marked the beginning of the Eurocentrism of Translation Studies. Another reason why the sixteenth century was particularly important for biblical translation was the birth of the printing era. While the ability to print increased the number of volumes of translation undertaken, it also brought another important development in translation: the attempt to formulate a theory in many ways.

Through the history of colonization, interpreters acquired an increasingly important and specific role. Between 1529 and 1630, Carlos V, Philip II and Philip III signed a total of 15 decrees related to interpreting. The law which was passed in 1537 authorized the natives to be accompanied by a Christian acquaintance that could verify the accuracy of the interpretation. Once again, the concern for accuracy was at the center of the stage as was the case with Hernan Cortes.

In 1563, interpreters achieved professional status. As courts were established, laws were created to regulate interpreters' salaries (according to the number of questions they interpreted), as well as working conditions (hours and days to be worked and number of interpreters per court). Interpreters also had to take an oath stating that they would interpret without bias, omitting and adding nothing.

During the Nuremberg trials, following World War II, interpreters once again claimed center stage. This time, however, it was not in a social setting as was the case during colonization but rather in a formal conference interpretation which served as the first "trial school" marking the emergence of simultaneous interpretation.

However, some skeptical views on whether this type of interpretation was capable of guaranteeing successful conferences of international scale were expressed and as a result it was only in the early 1970s that the simultaneous interpretation gained its way into the UN Security Council. In present times

very few international conferences are held without simultaneous interpretation.

Simultaneous interpretation is continuing process of listening and speaking which receives information in source language and transfer it into target language. What is characteristic of this interpretation is that certain amount of information in source language is comprehended, processed and transferred, which is immediately followed by another portion of information. That means a series of listening comprehension and speaking activities for two different languages taking place in a parallel way.

This activity is a prompt translation process which is made up of transmitting certain amount of information, listening and speaking for different languages in parallel, transferring source language into target language as the speaker carries on.

The sudden demands to train more interpreters resulted in interpreting gaining its way into the higher education. Universities in Europe (France, Germany, UK), Asia and Africa started to offer courses and degrees in interpretation. Several schools of higher education in the UK, Finland, Germany and former USSR established courses and programs in translation, offering doctoral programs in translation as well as masters and baccalaureate degrees.

What triggered the education of interpreters was not so much the need of communities of speakers that do not share the majority language as the need to ensure that communication between heads of state was possible. That is to say that the importance of political matters between nations accounted for the training of highly qualified interpreters.

Translation and interpretation can be carried out by foreign language speakers without professional qualifications as well as professionals with competent translation skills. Written translation particularly for conference documents and socio-political editorials are mostly done by professional translators. Conference interpretation such as consecutive and simultaneous interpretation is usually carried out by professional interpreters or language experts of the equivalent linguistic skills whereas general interpretation is often carried out by foreign language speakers in general.

The level of difficulty of interpretation which involves continuous information-processing and prompt decision-making usually depends on the speed of speech, clarity of articulation, accent and information density.

In Europe translation and interpreters became significant around 300 BC when the Romans overtook important elements of Greek culture. The Romans' role in the development of translation and the contemporary debate between translating "word for word", or, "meaning for meaning" can be traced to Cicero(B.C.106-43), a Roman politician and orator and Horace(B.C.65-8), a well-known poet. In their view, the art of translating consisted in "judicious analysis of the source-language text so as to produce a target-language version based on the principle of expressing not word for word but sense for sense. Cicero said: "If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if I compelled by necessity, alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator." This is evidence of his concern with the accuracy of the product and the role of the translator present at the time.

Etienne Dolet, one of the first writers who attempted to formulate a theory of translation laid down some principles that any translator who wished to become "good" had to observe in his short writing

titled “La maniere de Men traduire d'une langue en outré”(The method of translating one language into another) that was published in 1540. Those principles prescribed the following: 1) a complete understanding of sense and meaning of the source language; 2) a perfect knowledge of the source and target languages; 3) avoidance of word-by-word translations; 4) avoidance of non-common forms of speech; and 5) production of the correct tone.

A complete survey of the literature about interpreting process has revealed the following that the interpreters must pay special attention to. They are 1) Linguistic factors: phonological, lexical, syntactical, textual: 2) cultural factors: inter-cultural factors such as aesthetic factor and ethical influence, intra-cultural factors such as strategic orientation, period style, personal factors such as personal competence, personal attitudes (aesthetic attitudes, attitudes towards recipients' response, political and ethical attitudes, and professional attitudes).

The different attitudes to and views on the role played by an interpreter can be summarized in 3 main categories.

First, the mechanical model. This model, in line with the conduit model of communication, reduces the role of the interpreter to a tool between the sender and the receiver of a message. This model views the interpreter's role as the one that contributes as a node within a linear communication between parties that do not share a common language.

Second, an indispensable dialogic model. This model analyzes controls and influences the discourse, maintaining steadfast neutrality, but has to intervene in order to minimize her/his intervention.

Third, a cross-cultural model. Here the interpreter is seen as the one who collaborates to bridge the cultural gap between the two languages as well as their linguistic differences. He is no longer to be seen as a tool or a conduit, but rather as an active co-participant in the communicative event. The previous view which tended to reduce the interpreter to a simple “mechanical tool” or “invisible being” was rejected and more emphasis was put on the interaction between speakers and interpreter as well as the successful process and result of the discourse. It is believed that the aim of discourse is realized not by an active communication of interlocutors using the interpreter as a “tool”. Rather it is realized by the interpreter’s active role in facilitating the communication and interaction.

What is important about the role of interpreter is that apart from the linguistic knowledge, the interpreter is supposed to possess intercultural awareness and ensure the maximum effectiveness of translation with an insight into cultural differences imbedded in two different languages since interpretation is influenced and restrained by cultural differences. Susan Bassnet, an English linguist claims that the linguistic and cultural elements would hardly be dealt with separately in the same way as a surgeon operating on a patient’s heart would hardly neglect what is happening to other parts of the body. Many other translation experts including Susan Bassnet maintain that a successful translation is guaranteed by an in-depth knowledge about source and target language cultures as well as linguistic knowledge since translation or interpretation itself is a process of two cultures interacting with each other– a translator, in its real sense, needs to become a cultural expert as no languages have their value and significance out of their cultural context. Without adequate understanding of the socio-cultural background of the language, the language can hardly be understood in its genuine sense: what the translator needs to deal with is not so much its words and phrases as its cultural context in which the

language is spoken. This cultural approach and views indicate that translation and interpretation as a tool for social communication and information exchange represents a typical cultural communication which is made up of cultural dialogues.

Another important aspect of interpreting role is that the interpreter must maintain neutrality and accuracy in the practice. In other word, he is not allowed to add or omit anything in what the parties say, maintaining the appearance of impartiality and neutrality, avoiding unnecessary contact with the parties.

What could be considered positive in the previous views on the role of a translator is that the translator is no longer seen as a simple tool or invisible being and his role is relatively less marginalized or neglected – the translator is now considered an essential and active element which decides the successful outcome of the discourse. He is believed to contribute to facilitating the effective and successful communication by helping bridge the gap between the two different cultures as well as languages.

Korea with a time-honoured cultural tradition which dates from 5000 years ago has a long history of translation and interpretation studies.

As early as in 372 A.D there used to be a “Taehak”(Higher learning institute) led by doctors in Koguryo, a medieval kingdom of Korea. Paekje, a neighboring kingdom of Koguryo, also appointed doctors in the similar institute whereas Silra in the year 682 set up „Kukhak“(State learning institutite) for which doctors were appointed in 746.

In times of Taebongkuk(a short-lived feudal kingdom of Korea in the 10th century) established by Kungye “Sadae”(a State academy) was installed to undertake foreign langage eduation and translation. Historical records say that Koryo government(the first unified feudal kingdom of Korea from 918 to 1392) sent 10 young boys to its neighbouring country named Kitan for language learning in 995. In 1276 “Tongmungwan”, a government agency for foreign language teaching and translation was established to teach foreing langages to the government officials concerned. Later this agency was expanded to be called “Sayokwon” which served for nearly 500 years up to the late 19th century as educational and research centre for Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese and Machurian Nuchen languages while training translators and interpreters required for diplomatic activities on a regular basis.

It was only after the national liberation by President **Kim Il Sung** and under the wise leadership of Chairman **Kim Jong Il** that the genuine Juche-oriented translation and interpretation study was able to undergo its booming era in Korea. Since the establisment of national translation agencies, translation work aimed at internationally publicizing the true realities of the socialist system has been carried out on a higher level.

In keeping with the increasing foreign relations and international solidary for the Korean revolution the regular research institutes of simultaneous interpretation and training center for interpreters were established so that a range of international conferences and celebrations can be held at the highest level.

Our interpreters, as diplomatic agents for the Party, are faced with honorable and responsible task to give world-wide publicity to the greatness of President **Kim Il Sung** and Chairman **Kim Jong Il** and advantages of the Juche-oriented socialist system which shines all over the world under the wise leadership of Supreme Leader **Kim Jong Un**.

On the principle of giving an absolute priority to the prestige of the party and the leader accuracy,

truthfulness and clearness should be fully guaranteed in translation practice aimed at giving a full publicity to the advantages of socialism of our style and its true reality.

By further enhancing the research into translation theory and its practical issues in accordance with the development of times we should make an active contribution to the training of competent revolutionary personnel who are capable of carrying forward the foreign policy of the party.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, interpretation, interpreter