

Language, Power and Integration: The Translator as Gatekeeper in the Korean Business Community in London (UK)

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In this paper, based on in-depth interviews, narrative studies, discourse analysis and participant-observation, I will consider the strategic use of language in power relations within the community of Korean expatriate businesspeople and entrepreneurs in Southwest London. In particular, I will focus on the case of a single translator, “Mrs Park”, and how she has used her English language skills as a means not only of gaining power within both the Korean community, but to mediate between the Korean business community and non-Korean enterprises in London, and also to consolidate for herself a role as “gatekeeper” between the two. I will also consider her role as “privileged insider” within both Korean and non-Korean businesses, and the way in which she is able to build up a degree of power through using her position as the possessor of a rare linguistic skill.

Moving out into the wider community, I will compare and contrast Mrs Park’s experiences with those of other Korean entrepreneurs outside of the translation industry, and how they employ both their English and Korean language skills to further their strategic positions: how command of English is used as a symbol of integration and/or globalisation in different situations, and how Korean is used as a symbol of shared experience, common culture and solidarity. I will also consider the wider role of language and translators, within the Korean business community in general, in terms of defining the community, and negotiating power

relations with the outside world. Through the case of Mrs Park and the comparison of her experience with that of other Korean businesspeople in the UK, I will build up a picture of the role which language and translation play in power relations and the definition of identity in a community of transnational businesspeople.

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INTRODUCTION

Although translators are frequently socially marginal individuals, they also wield considerable power in business settings, as they interpret not only language, but culture, between different parties in cross-cultural management situations, and thus have the power, through this knowledge-management role, to define and shape business cultures and communities in the eyes of both outsiders and their own members. In this paper, I will consider a single narrative-based case study, that of “Mrs Park,” a Korean translator in London (UK), and consider the way in which she engages in discourses of power and definitions of community through her linguistic skills, her ability to transfer or withhold factual and cultural knowledge, and her “liminal” social status.

The Symbol Life: Translation, Knowledge Management and Power

In this section, I will briefly consider the literature on language, culture knowledge management and power relations with a particular view to how it applies to translation and the social role of the translator.

The impact of ‘intangibles’ on knowledge transfer has been acknowledged by a number of influential writers. Buckley and Carter hold that identity and culture can be key to whether, and how, knowledge is transferred. In a 1999 paper, they say that ‘gaining value from the intangible assets a firm possesses is a key component in achieving the strongest possible competitive stance’ (1999: 80). In a later paper, they refer to ‘knowledge boundaries’ which include ‘differences in language, social norms and identities, types of sense making and so on,’ which, consequently, impact on the structure of the firm (2002: 39). Other writers have picked up on the idea that culture impacts upon knowledge management (e.g. Alavi et al. 2005/6). While there are few detailed studies of how this actually takes place in lived experience, then, intangible things such as intergroup power relations appear to affect knowledge transfer, and such aspects of knowledge transfer may be best discerned through qualitative study.

One of the most visible intangible factors in knowledge transfer is language, and, specifically, translation from one language to another. Nigel Holden, in his seminal work *Cross-Cultural Management: A Knowledge Management Perspective* (2002), draws parallels between the two activities, arguing that both include similar problems, such as interference, misunderstandings, the lack of equivalent terms or concepts, and so forth (244-5; 266-8). Furthermore, Holden argues that translation, as well as being the vector for the transfer of cross-cultural knowledge, is also a form of cultural knowledge transfer as well; translators do not only interpret the language, but also the culture which goes with it (244-5). To take an example not used by Holden, the translator must not only convey the literal meaning of the words “fish and chips,” but also the social meaning which, in the Southern English context, is placed upon the dish; who eats it, where and when, its associations with social class and gender, and so on. Holden and von Kortzfleisch thus argue that “translation... is by far the oldest universal practice of conscientiously converting knowledge from one domain (i.e. a language group) to another” (2004: 128-9); translation is thus “a kind of knowledge conversion which seeks to create common cognitive ground among people, among whom differences in language are a barrier to comprehension” (129). Communicative competence, and the ability to translate, is thus not only key to successful transfer of knowledge, but also an integral part of the transfer of knowledge, and translators thus play a distinctive role as the mediators of knowledge and culture.

Knowledge transfer of this sort also involves a degree of power relations. Some researchers, particularly anthropologists working in the area of symbolism, ritual and power, have flagged up this relationship, and how this is expressed through communication, stories and performances. Anthropologist Ivo Strecker (1988), in his work on power relations and symbolism, considers how the way in which people present themselves and interact with each other, the impressions which they hope to give out and/or undermine, all form part of the way in which power is negotiated in society; as these interactions are inevitably going to involve the transfer or withholding of knowledge, then, it would seem that knowledge management does have an impact on power. Bloch (1974), similarly, considers how the way in which speeches and ritual events are phrased and structured involves the restricting of discourse in favour of those controlling the event in question. Fairclough (1989) also discusses the pervasive influence of power in language, discussing the ways in which ethnic minorities are systematically excluded and marginalised through the ways in which narratives are culturally and ideologically shaped (49). While there is little literature on translation in these contexts,

Nigel Barley (1983) speaks briefly of the role of translators in the fieldwork process, and the extent to which the success of the anthropologist's data-gathering depends on the trustworthiness and reliability of translators, even if the anthropologist has a degree of fluency in the relevant language. If one considers the transmission of knowledge and culture as including the control and expression of symbols, the role of the translator thus takes on a significance analogous to that of Bloch's traditional ritual specialists.

On the business front, Moore (2006) considers how knowledge transfer is instrumental in power relations between expatriate and locally hired staff in a banking organisation, as both groups give or withhold information from each other depending on how they feel it would give them a strategic advantage, and Krakel's 2005 paper looks at the benefits, for individuals and groups, of withholding knowledge in organisations. MacDonald and Piekkari consider how individual networks, connections and power relations in and outside of a particular company affect the transfer of knowledge (2005). Vaara et al (2005), in a study of merging organisations, argue that "corporate language policies should not merely be treated as a practical means to solve inevitable communication problems; rather, they should be viewed as exercise of power" (596). They also argue that "The traditional view emphasizes that specific discourses and practices empower particular parties and disempower others. From a more radical perspective, languages and discourses can also have power over people in ways that are not obvious in everyday social interaction. One can also take a postmodern view and see language, knowledge and power as intertwining elements in the social construction of identities and subjectivities" (597). Piekkari and Zander note that language is never merely instrumental, but always has connotations of power relations, and that "using English as a shared language may lead to false assumptions of a common context or similar preferences" (2005: 7). I would thus argue that a similar power situation is the case with translators: they are viewed as a necessity, and their translations taken as a more or less literal interpretation of what has been said, while who the translator is, their relationship with the community, and how their role affects the way the parties involved in the cross-cultural encounter, are seldom considered. The translator thus has a potentially important role with regard to knowledge transfer.

Language and translation are also, however, used in the definition and construction of community. Anthony Cohen in particular has detailed the way in which symbols, including language use and particular expressions, are used in this way, most notably in *The Symbolic*

Construction of Community (1985). Cohen proposes that membership in social groups is defined by, and expressed through the use of, commonly held symbols, both in ritual and in everyday life. Although the interpretations given to the symbols vary from individual to individual, Cohen argues, key aspects of these interpretations are shared by all group members, due to their common experience of socialisation. Denison describes how language is used by members of the trilingual central European community of Sauris to symbolise changes in context, using different languages in the public and in the private domain (1971). If language is used in this way, then community and identity are being constructed as part of the process of knowledge transfer.

To this we can also add the concept of liminality, that is to say, people, places or things which are neither one thing nor the other, a mix of different, normally separate categories (van Gennep, 1960: 20). According to Douglas, liminal beings have the power to disturb through their boundary-crossing nature, to cause people to think about the separate categories represented, and the boundaries between them, thus helping them to define what is considered to be “normality,” and where the boundaries in their society exist (1966: 54-5). In the case of national and ethnic cultures, liminal people can be said to be those who mediate between different social groups, such as Burton, Dyson and Ardener’s bilingual and bicultural women (1993), or Pico Iyer’s “global souls” (2000). Translators, being people who mediate between language and culture, thus occupy a powerful, but disturbing, position through which the defining traits, and boundaries, of particular communities are defined by a process of knowledge transfer.

Methodology

The fieldwork on which this paper is based was part of a twelve-month-long pilot study undertaken in 2006 and 2007, which involved collecting narratives from individuals in the Korean business community of New Malden, London, with a view to expanding into a wider programme of study of Korean expatriates and entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom. The aims of the study were to investigate the role of ethnicity and culture in network-building and the formation of ethnic business communities.

The project was primarily based around interviews, which were undertaken with about 12 individuals. These were interviewed for at least two hours each, once informally over lunch and once formally, although some interviews lasted for longer, and some participants were

reinterviewed. Shorter, informal interviews were also undertaken with others. In addition, participant observation was undertaken in the community, as one of the research team, a non-Korean, lived in New Malden, and another, though not a New Malden resident, is a Korean who is involved in Korean community activities. All names have been changed, and some details have been altered to protect interviewees' identities.

The decision was taken at the outset of the study to focus on ethnographic methodologies, particularly the collection of narratives, as it was felt that these could provide useful data on how people make sense of their organisations, identities and communities (Tsoukas and Hatch 2001), and how people use narratives for "sensemaking," and the construction of identity and culture (Czarniawska 1997, Holden 2002: Chapter 11; in Czarniawska's words, "narrative is the main form of social life because it is the main device for making sense of social action" (2004, p.13). As ethnographic methodologies are being more and more highly regarded in international business as a way of understanding what one might term the "intangibles" of business performance (Sackmann and Philips 2004), and as they are particularly useful in considering how outside cultures affect the performance and behaviour of businesses (Martin 2002: 162-3), a primarily ethnographic study should thus give insights into the lived experiences of community members, and how the use of language and translation affect their working lives.

Social Background: Korean Expatriates, Mrs Park and the Korean community of New Malden

In this section, I will briefly outline the literature on Korean expatriates, the community of New Malden, the focus of the Korean community in London, and the history of "Mrs Park", one of its longest-established members, whose experience will form the core of this study.

Koreans as Expatriates

Relatively little has been written on Korean expatriates, as compared to expatriates from, say, Japan or Germany, and consequently there is little comparative data on their language use and community construction. One of the more comprehensive studies is Osman-Gani's study of Korean expatriates in Singapore, in which he found that most of them clustered around the ages of 30-44, the overwhelming majority (89%) were male (2000: 220). In terms of pre-departure development, he noted that Koreans tended to emphasise language training. In other areas, Dana (1999) notes that Koreans tend to settle abroad for the sake of their children's

education, returning when that education has been completed, an observation confirmed by several of our interviewees. Popular business works, such as the *Going Global Guide* (2003), often state that Korean business culture is very male-focused, and that women tend to occupy lower-status positions.

New Malden

New Malden is a small Southwest London community which grew up around the local Church of England, Christ Church, from 1866 onwards, as a “dormitory” suburb of London (Brandon 1998, p. 121). Although most of the population settled there due to the rail links to central London, Brandon reports that “this town was never served by express trains, and consequently residential property tended to be of a cheaper variety [to nearby Kingston and Norbiton]” (ibid.), a situation which continues to this day. Today, the area is fairly middle-market; generally not as attractive or expensive as other districts in the area, but far from poor and depressed, and boasting a fairly upscale district of large houses and gated communities on Coombe Hill. There are two coeducational primary schools and a girls’ secondary school in the area, and a number of well-regarded “public” (i.e., non-state-funded) schools near the area, in south Kingston.

The Korean presence in New Malden is relatively recent, dating mostly from the late 1980s, but in this short space of time it has become well-established and visible. A number of Korean restaurants, ranging from noodle bars to upmarket establishments, are scattered around the high street area, as are Japanese and mixed East Asian restaurants (reflecting, as well as London tastes generally, the fact that there is an active Korean community in Japan). There are two hairdressers with all-Korean staff (whose clientele is also almost entirely Korean), grocery stores, and fishmongers’ selling imported goods aimed at the Korean market, a small shop selling stationary, toys and accessories themed around popular East Asian cartoon characters, and Korean language novels (which has since closed down), and other shops selling British goods with strong international reputations (Portmeirion and Royal Doulton china, Aquascutum and Burberry clothing, and so forth), with Korean signage and prominent notices advertising their overseas shipping service, and as such clearly being aimed at expatriates looking for tastefully expensive prestige goods to commemorate their time in the UK. Other shops which are aimed at more general clientele, but indicating a strong Korean affiliation through their signage and advertised specials, are a newsagents’, two travel agents advertising trips to Korea, a golf shop, the Seoul Estate Agents Company, and a primarily

Korean day-care which offers Korean language lessons. There are also two rival Korean-language newspapers. Finally, there are also two churches which serve the Korean community, the Methodist Church and the abovementioned Church of England, which has a Korean vicar and Korean services. Korean inhabitants are generally visible in the area, particularly during Korean holidays, and, when the Korean football team achieved a victory in the World Cup, a number of the younger members of the community staged impromptu celebrations in the high street.

Mrs Park

Mrs Park arrived in the UK well in advance of the establishment of the New Malden community, in 1981, accompanying her husband, who was then a theology student. She and, later, her husband, began doing translations in the mid-1980s as a relatively inexpensive way to obtain money to live on. In her own words:

We had to make a living, but to do any business, you need a capital investment, which we didn't have, because we came here without any money. At the time, even, there was no Korean software and computers were very rare, this was nineteen... eighty... six, or seven, so we had a portable typewriter (laughs). But after a few months the computers began to come out, you know, Amstrad? Yes, that was innovation, and then the Korean software came out, it was very basic, but you could type Korean characters in, and so yes, but when we first started it was really very little, interpreting for the immigration, and police, and courts.

The turning point came around the time of the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, at a time when South Korea was achieving a new international visibility, and the Korean community was becoming more established in the United Kingdom.

In 1988 we had just one big job, it was quite important, and then we didn't have a computer, we didn't have one but an English friend, she said "oh, come use my computer any time," because she goes to work every day, and so we went in this home to use the computer, and we got Korean software, I don't know how, maybe we borrowed it, but I don't know. Anyway, somehow we managed it, and we translated something, like a manual for an aero-ship? [*Interviewer: a dirigible?*] Yes, (laughing) I didn't know the word! ...And then after that I taught Korean at SOAS. Through SOAS

we got some jobs; at the time they didn't know where to go for a Korean translator or interpreter, they were so rare.

Although Mrs Park herself tends to downplay her subsequent visibility, she and her husband have since built up their activities into a thriving small business which is probably the best-known Korean translation agency in the UK, getting work through agencies, word of mouth and, more recently, their website; their clients have included the South Korean Embassy and Buckingham Palace as well as a number of both British and Korean multinationals. Mrs Park is thus not only one of the most long-established, but also one of the most visible and well-connected members of the Korean community, with a key role in mediating culture and knowledge between the Korean community and the wider British business culture.

What follows is, thus, an exploration of the role of the translator in mediating between business cultures and establishing and defining culture and community both for insiders and outsiders. We shall now consider how the case of Mrs Park provides insights into this role.

Power and Negotiation: the Various Roles of the Translator

In this section, I will consider how Mrs Park's role as translator allows her to act as a gatekeeper, negotiator and privileged insider within both the Korean and the British cultures, through mediating knowledge between the communities.

Mrs Park, to a certain extent, acts as a gatekeeper within the community, in that she is able to control access to the community and its knowledge to outsiders, based on her ability to give or withhold her translation services:

Mrs Park: The worst is, like, somebody has a job and [says] "I want this delivered by yesterday", or something, and it is very difficult, some jargon or something. They are not very helpful sometimes; we telephone them and e-mail, [saying] "what is this, what is that, whatever"... Otherwise things are fine, very spaced out, when you have so many jobs rush in you have to turn them down.

Interviewer: How do you handle that?

Mrs Park: We turn them down, or we find someone else for them.

Mrs Park went on to acknowledge that if a client was known to be difficult, or pay too low a wage for the work, she and her husband would also turn the work down, suggesting that she was able to use her power as a gatekeeper to disadvantage clients whom she did not like relative to the Korean community. This could also happen during ongoing translation sessions:

They start out speaking slowly and then they forget and speak faster and faster, so we lie often, we make [things] up (laughs).

In this case, the fact that the client is not acting within the abilities of the translator means that, in effect, they become disadvantaged, as Mrs Park is physically unable to keep up with the translation. The translator thus, both deliberately and inadvertently, has the power to give or withhold access to the community's knowledge.

There was, consequently, a fair bit of relationship-building involved in the role of translator:

There are some [translation] firms that disappear. And that means they are outsourcing [translation work to Korea], but some [translation] agencies are still very loyal.... Two agencies merged: at the old agencies we worked at a certain rate, and the new agency, we didn't know what their rates were, so we worked on a job without even asking the rates, and now [says] "when you were A agency, you had these rates, and now you are a new agency, what rates apply?" and they were even higher! But they are very loyal.

Mrs Park was also able to build on her reputation and long-standing in the community as a means of commanding a higher rate of pay than other translators:

They say our rate is slightly high, even compared to other Korean translators in the UK; there are only about three or four, so they try to bargain (looks rueful and laughs).

At the same time, however, she also observed that a number of firms were choosing to outsource translation work to firms in Korea itself, which were less expensive, suggesting that the translator's role is one involving negotiations and jockeying for power within the

relationship with the client, not only in terms of the act of translation, but in terms of acquiring and keeping clientele.

This negotiating for power also appeared to prevail among translators as well as between translators and clients:

Interviewer: So you mentioned there are only about four or five Korean translators in the UK; do you all know each other then?

Mrs Park: Yes, yes. When we meet each other, we actually recruit each other to work for them, so we treat each other, yeah. We get on very well.

Interviewer: Do they recruit you sometimes for jobs?

Mrs Park: No, no! (laughs) We are the ones who land the big jobs. They report their clients to us once in a while because they couldn't handle it

Where Mrs Park initially appears to describe fairly egalitarian relations between translators, her second comment makes it clear that there is an informal hierarchy, with herself and her husband at the top: they are not “recruited” for jobs by other translators, but difficult clients are passed on to them by what she deemed lesser or more junior translators. This was becoming more significant because the field was becoming more competitive:

[regarding the amount of work she and her husband do in a typical month] Less than we used to do—I think now maybe more Korean people speak English now, or less people are coming [to the UK], I don't know, but there is less demand.

The field itself was thus one in which, unofficially, status was attributed, maintained and negotiated, and in which power and competition were significant parts of the landscape, both when acquiring clients and in the actual act of translation.

Once a good relationship was built up with a client, however, a situation of mutual trust prevailed:

I think it's because we have built up a sort of trust, because we are happy with our job, and they have very good feedback from their clients. And they know we always check each other. Sometimes we overlook the typos; it's a problem, but... (laughs)

There was, however, a certain amount of creativity involved in terms of maintaining a positive relationship:

One English customer said "oh, your interpreting was wonderful!" [I said] "Well, you don't speak Korean, how do you know that?" (laughs)? "No, no no, I could feel it!" Because I was standing just in front of these people when he had to use the whiteboard or something, and I never realised it, but he said that if he makes this motion (demonstrates) I would do the same thing, looking at him and copying. I would do the same thing.

Mrs Park's accounts of her work as a translator thus suggest that the translator engages in strategic intercultural negotiation at all parts of the process: acquiring clients, building up relationships with them, translating and interpreting for them, and maintaining status vis-à-vis rival translators. We shall now consider the role of the translator in the Korean community.

2. The Translator within the Community

Liminality and Culture

Within the Korean community itself, Mrs Park's role was explicitly liminal. In her self-descriptions, she explicitly set herself and her lifestyle apart from those of "regular Koreans," as in her discussion of why she prefers to live in England:

It's not so busy, not so hectic, less materialistic, and Korean people are bad, very materialistic. If your next door neighbour changes her car I have to change mine; if she buys a new wardrobe I have to buy a new wardrobe. We don't have that here. You can be as you are, as you want to, and that is the best thing for me.

She also emphasised that she had few relationships with other Koreans, either in Korea or in the UK, and appears to explicitly highlight Korean culture (the “Korean way”) as a factor here:

Korean people still believe in [the] Korean way, we have very few friends, very few Korean friends (laughs); I try not to make friends!

She explicitly sets herself apart from Korean business culture when asked to describe the Korean community in the UK.

Very many businesspeople, yes, and some people, I think they are rarer... I know very very few. So that’s what it is. I am not the right person for interview, because I know so little about it!

Her narrative about her arrival and settling in the UK also emphasises the difference between herself and the “typical” Korean expatriate:

When I first came here 25 years ago we lived in Bristol, and we didn’t know much others, then we came for a visit now and again to see friends and we saw one or two Korean churches, and we were the only ones here when we first came here. And then we moved around, and we moved down here [to Southwest London] in 1995, eleven years ago, and there were quite a few, but there’s quite a lot more now (laughs). They simply expand all the time.

Significantly, given that residence in and around New Malden was a major point of identity for most Koreans in our interview sample, Mrs Park emphasised that her proximity to the area was relatively recent (and, although she did not say so, the fact that her home was in Wimbledon, relatively distant from New Malden, was another point of geographical distinction):

The only reason I moved down here was because of my mother. My mother came to live with us in 1995, and then if we go away I needed somebody to look after her. And we were living in Islington; there are no Korean people in Islington! All English. So that’s why we moved here, where there are more Koreans. She is now in a nursing

home, but until last August, if I wanted to I could always find a neighbour to come in. She was very mobile, but you don't want to leave an old lady alone. She's ninety-two, ninety-three now. You get worried to leave her alone.

Mrs Park does actually have a number of Korean friends and acquaintances, again suggesting that this distance is more a matter of emphasising and consolidating her liminal role than anything else. However, even when she discusses her Korean friends, she emphasises the unusual, and transnational, nature of their relationship:

So we are still very good friends with about three families, and she write and we go to see them and they come, it's quite fun. And now who else? Yes, I made a lot of friends at the school gate, you wait for your child to come out and you meet other mums, I made some quite good friends and we're still in touch, though our children, now, they're getting married and... but we're still very good friends, and it formed that way. And when we moved to Islington, there was one Korean family who lived there, for one or two years nearby, but then they moved to Chicago, but we are still in touch. And then, actually, that's all. Oh, and then while we were still going around, because we came here quite early as theological students, but some new theological students come over and somehow they find us. And they come and visit us, they were colleagues. And after we became friends, Korean friends. But after one or two years they all left.

She also, unlike other Korean expatriates in our sample, made a point of not visiting Korea, except on business or, on another occasion, to accompany her daughter:

In the last 25 years we have been back to Korea only twice. He [her husband] has been there twice on a job; our customer took him for interpreting. In my case, I went home with my daughter once and then two years ago on my own on a job. We have a very good customer in Glasgow, a whiskey distillery, and they took me there because they had a very important meeting. They had a Korean interpreter brought by their Korean client but they didn't like him.

Finally, although a regular churchgoer, she eschews the churches in New Malden in favour of a predominantly non-Korean one in Wimbledon. Mrs Park thus casts herself as liminal,

setting herself up as a mediator between British and Korean cultures by virtue of distinguishing herself from, and yet belonging to, both groups.

Liminality and Gender

Mrs Park's gender role is also unusual for a Korean woman, as described here:

Korea would be quite different. In Korea of course the husband won't go in the kitchen, they won't go to shopping. In England it is different. In England even the businesspeople will help their wives. It's funny, they [Korean expatriates] will do the washing up, help with children, and the funny thing is once they go back to Korea they land on Korean soil and change back to the old way. It's funny. But no, my husband has been very helpful. But they are very different when they are there or they are here. And there are times, when you go to interpret, like once I was in court, it was in Birmingham, and I was employed by an English solicitor but his clients are Korean. Three Korean gentlemen, and I walked in and said, oh, "I am the interpreter and you must be from this company," because I couldn't find the solicitor yet. And you know what they said, when I was right in front of them? Quiet but loud enough for me to hear, (stage whispering) "do you think this woman can do *any* kind of translation?!" Then the proceedings started and after that they change their attitude (laughs) But that is the attitude of Korean men.

Interviewer: Do you get a lot of that from Korean men?

Mrs Park: No, now it is very unusual, but sometimes you get, you do get. I think it happened about ten percent, but otherwise, especially slightly older people, otherwise. There was one case where I went to Switzerland to interpret a seminar; it was a business school in Lausanne. And the audience was all Korean journalists (gesturing and grimacing to the general effect of a tough crowd), and one of the Korean journalists actually came up and said, "you are the best interpreter I have ever listened to." We get that now and again. Even the English are very happy with us, they say you don't get complete recognition but the emotion is there.

In this exchange, Mrs Park highlights, first of all, that the role of women in the Korean expatriate community is more powerful, and gender relations more egalitarian, than in Korea;

she then distinguishes herself as somebody who plays what Koreans would consider a non-traditional gender role, and takes her success in this role as a point of professional pride. Mrs Park's unusual status allows her to adopt a non-traditional role, and, at the same time, her non-traditional role highlights her status as not being a "normal" Korean woman.

Mrs Park thus casts herself as implicitly liminal: not of the community, and having quite different experiences of arrival, of London life, of gender and family relations, and of relationship to her business partners as "normal" Korean expatriates. We shall now consider what her experiences tell us about the role of language in defining the wider Korean community.

3. Language as Defining the Community

In this section, I will consider the ways in which language is used to define the community, the way in which Mrs Park's experiences compare with others, and how translation can be used to define community boundaries.

The Use of English vis-à-vis Korean

Among Koreans, fluency or proficiency in English was generally taken as an indicator of integration into the UK, and/or cosmopolitanism. Male expatriates frequently told us that their wives did not learn much English, beyond what they needed to cope with daily life in London, and beyond that managed mostly by confining themselves to the New Malden area, where, with the prevalence of Korean-owned shops, daycares, churches and newspapers; if necessary, they recruit husbands and children to perform translation services. As women are frequently cast in the roles of keepers of tradition and community in expatriate groups (Jeffery 1976), the fact that this core of Korean-speaking, New Malden-resident individuals is female is significant. Here, two symbols of Koreanness—residence in New Malden and a lack of fluency in English—combine of necessity, to define a kind of solid core to the community.

However, the use, or lack of use, of English also defines power relations between the expatriate group and the host culture. The case of "Ms Kim," a hairdresser, stands in contrast to that of Mrs Park. Like Mrs Park, Ms Kim is an entrepreneur who set up in business on her own rather than operating as a member of an MNC; unlike Mrs Park, however, she has had some difficulty integrating into London outside of the Korean community. A significant part of this narrative involves her relative lack of fluency in English: her stories about being

exploited or cheated by customers frequently include a critique of her own language skills, along the lines of “if I spoke better English, I wouldn’t have been fooled.” Her English is actually relatively fluent, suggesting that an ability to speak English is taken as a marker of social integration (her problems with non-Korean clients being symbolised by language problems), and also that it forms part of a system of power relations (those who do not speak English well open themselves up to exploitation by non-Koreans). This echoes Piekkari and Zander’s observation that “equality of languages can never be taken for granted in international companies” (2005: 5); in this context, English is not only the “universal language of business,” but also the native language of the host culture, meaning that the Koreans are expected to come to them, rather than vice versa.

However, *learning* Korean was portrayed as a form of intelligent cosmopolitanism, as well as of strength within the Korean community. At the time that my second interview with Mrs Park took place, for instance, signs advertising a GCSE (secondary school qualification) in Korean were visible in the New Malden High Street. Mrs Park described it thus:

I saw it from the Korean paper there [i.e., in New Malden]. There was a friend who came over with her daughter about thirteen years ago, fourteen years ago, and she started up a small school. She was trying for that time for the Korean GCSE. I don't know if she had anything to do with this because we've lost contact now. Actually she came over and ten years ago I was approached by all sorts of people to help build this GCSE course but I did not, I went away from Korea too long to know any. But that should be good, they should be able to help us extra.

Mrs Park also speculated, when we were discussing this, that a certain number of the children of Korean expatriates make use of their biculturality and bilingual skills, to become themselves culturally liminal individuals, international managers with either Korean or British MNCs, mediating between both cultures, like Goodman’s “international youth” in Japan (1993) or the children of German expatriates elsewhere in London (Moore 2007). Korean is thus defined partly as a cultural option, but partly in terms of gaining power, through cultural knowledge, in international business.

Korean thus gains legitimacy as a language option for students, presumably with a view to its use in an international career or to emphasise to their families that they retain a connection to

the country of origin, rather than as a language of business in its own right in the British context.

The Role of the Translator

Mrs Park's liminal status, and her definition of herself as slightly apart from the community, also, paradoxically, defines it. Her activities with outsiders, her geographic position outside New Malden, her choice of English, all mark out what is considered normal for Korean expatriates-- speaking Korean, living in or near New Malden, and networking with other Koreans-- as well as what is normal for English people—living outside New Malden, speaking English, and remaining outside the Korean community. This is borne out by the activities of others in our sample who emphasised their separation from what they saw as the core Korean community: residence outside of New Malden, predominantly non-Korean social networks, and/or proficiency in English. Mrs Park is not ashamed of her Koreanness or trying to be an ersatz-English person; indeed, since she makes a living off her Koreanness, this is a part of her business identity. However, her liminal position allows her to operate in both cultures, and mediate them both to each other.

Nonetheless, Mrs Park also appeals to external institutions to provide legitimacy. While she is modest about mentioning the high profile of some of her clients openly, her website contains film clips of her translation activities for the South Korean Embassy, and her personal narrative also mentions the fact that she taught Korean at the School of Oriental and African Studies for eight years, even though, by her own admission, “the pay was terrible,” and she describes her students slightly disparagingly as “businesspeople... and diplomats, and... the undergraduates and sometimes the MAs; some [anthropologists]... and why they wanted to learn Korean I don't know.” Establishing her role as a legitimate interpreter of language and culture thus requires maintaining a balance between signs of inclusion and signs of liminality, both marking the boundaries between cultures while at the same time negotiating the placement of these boundaries.

Mrs Park's position and role within the community, her use of language, and her means of establishing legitimacy thus allow her to symbolically negotiate between cultures, and also to both establish and question the boundaries between them, through the transmission and withholding of different sorts of knowledge. I shall now consider a few implications of Mrs Park's case for the way in which we view language and translation in transnational business.

Analysis and Conclusions

In the final section, I will consider what this necessarily brief case study suggests for the role of translators in ethnic/business communities and knowledge management in multinational business settings, as well as the importance of liminal status in the definition of social boundaries and the role of language and commerce in defining communities.

The Status of the Translator

The role of the translator is paradoxical. On the one hand, it is usually taken by the socially powerless, as was the case for Mrs Park and her husband, who took on their work as students (as were many of the other Korean translators she mentioned). Translation is, in fact, a fairly common occupation for students, recent immigrants and other socially marginal groups with connections to non-native languages and cultures, being work which requires little more than a good knowledge of the relevant language, and which allows time for other activities. Even now that they have a fairly prominent role in the community, Mrs Park still spoke of occasionally having to take jobs with less-than-congenial clients in order to make money. At the same time, however, the translator plays a powerful role, because of his/her ability to mediate knowledge. This was also apparent when conducting the field research for this project, when some of the interviews had to be mediated through a translator, leaving the two non-Korean-speakers on the team at a relative disadvantage, having to listen to and interpret the translator's interpretation of what the interviewee had said rather than engaging in free interactions with the interviewee. The translator thus has the power to ensure the success or failure of a meeting, an interview or a written work, but at the same time frequently is in a marginal or semi-marginal social situation.

As was noted before, however, this is the source of much of the translator's power and ability to shape and develop society. As Douglas notes (1966: chapter 6), liminal individuals are outside the two communities and/or statuses involved, but as such they can also move between them, act as mediators, question and define them. Mrs Park's ability to avoid the normal gender restrictions of her community is also part of this; it is worth noting that most Korean women in our sample said that they had more freedom in the UK than in Korea, because, although they were Korean, they were outside the Korean context, thus giving them a certain aspect of liminality. The power of liminality can also be seen in the case of the bicultural Korean-English children discussed above. Having connections to both cultures,

they use their position to mediate, like Mrs Park, in business settings, between two cultures. Mrs Park mentioned at one point that her daughter finds herself in this position as someone of Korean heritage but fully assimilated into British culture. As per Bloch (1974), the translator becomes analogous to the priest or other ritual performer: s/he tells people what has been said, and mediates its meaning to them. This study thus suggests that bicultural, liminal individuals play a powerful role in organisations, mediating, tacitly or explicitly, between different cultures and allowing the transfer of knowledge between them.

Translation as Knowledge Transfer

Mrs Park's case also clearly supports Holden's (2002) argument about translation being a form of knowledge transfer above and beyond simple information exchange. Mrs Park also acts as a vector for knowledge about the respective cultures involved:

Once I was told off by a very, very high official from Korea. No, the man for whom I interpreted didn't mind at all, but the high official, he brung lots of his people and one of them said I was enjoying myself too much, I was too excited. My voice was not proper. But it was a big room! And I enjoyed it actually.

Here, for instance, she mediates differences in what is considered acceptable behaviour in both cultures: the Koreans finding her style "too excited," but the British subject "not minding." Her unusual gender role also serves to highlight to Korean clients the fact that women's business activities are less circumscribed in Britain than in Korea. In translating for companies such as the abovementioned Scottish whiskey brewer, she would also be mediating the cultural position of Scottish whiskey in the UK vis-à-vis its associations in the Korean context. She is also, without necessarily being conscious of it, the vector for tacit knowledge about both cultures to the participants, which Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue is crucial to the development of companies as knowledge-creating organisations. Furthermore, Mrs Park does not only mediate knowledge, but she *creates* knowledge within the translation context, through introducing her own interpretations and experiences of British and Korean culture into the context. Mrs Park thus acts as a vector, not only of knowledge transfer, but of knowledge creation and the negotiation of the meaning of various cultural symbols of belonging.

Translation as Community-Definition

This last also highlights Mrs Park's tacit role in defining cultural symbols of Koreanness and Britishness. Since she is the vector of communication between Korean businesses and their host context, she helps them to define themselves in the eyes of the British, and vice-versa in the case of British businesses expanding into Korea. Companies thus rely on Mrs Park, and others like her, to present themselves and define their identities and histories to outsiders, meaning that she has a crucial role in how these companies are perceived in the host culture. The translator thus has the ability to set and define the company's role in the host culture and the community in which it is embedded.

Furthermore, as numerous writers (Holden 2002, Piekkari and Zander 2005, Vaara et al. 2005) note, translation also defines language as a symbol of belonging, understanding, community definition and so forth. We have already noted how, in New Malden, Korean identity focuses at least to some extent on shared language, and the degree of cultural assimilation and/or ability to get on in the host culture is symbolised by proficiency in English. Mrs Park's status as one of the most long-established members of the Korean community gives her some additional power in this regard; however, her role as someone who controls language gives her control over one of the key aspects of community definition. Translation and translators thus also have a crucial role in the internal self-definition of communities, and consequently their relationship to home and host country businesses.

Conclusions

This study is a necessarily brief, limited and idiosyncratic look at the role of the translator in knowledge transfer and power. More such case studies are needed to broaden and expand the hypotheses of Holden (2002) and others on the role of translators in knowledge transfer. Additionally, research on the community embeddedness of corporations (as in Hill and Cassil 2004) could draw on such studies, since translators are one of the ways in which corporations can interact with the host cultures in situations where a common language is limited or lacking. Comparative studies of translators in other communities, and/or of the role of the bicultural youth (as in Goodman 1993, Moore 2007) in cross-cultural mediation are also worth carrying out to develop my findings.

In sum, then, this study confirms and develops Holden's argument that translation is a form of knowledge transfer and cross-cultural negotiation. The case of Mrs Park suggests that translation also has a strong element of power relations, not only in terms of the transmission

and withholding of knowledge, but of the translator's ability to shape and define different communities and their relations to each other. The translator's position as liminal individual also allows them a kind of ambiguous power, to stand between communities and interpret them to each other. Translation thus involves power relations in terms of the control of knowledge and symbols, and interpretation in both the literal and figurative senses, making it a site of status and identity negotiation.

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