

# **An encounter between Cameroon and Korea through a translator**

**Tchoupou Tatsabong Sandrine,**  
*University of Buea, Cameroon*

## **Résumé**

*Le traducteur, en tant qu'individu, se trouve bien souvent à la croisée des chemins entre différentes cultures dont il ne maîtrise pas toujours les contours. Le présent travail est une étude de cas à travers laquelle nous essayons d'identifier comment la présence dans le texte à traduire d'images d'une culture étrangère font d'une expérience de traduction un moment de rencontre interculturelle. Il est inspiré d'un exercice de traduction en équipe d'une courte nouvelle du coréen vers le français vécu par l'auteur ; ce faisant, il va à la rencontre d'habitudes, de gestes, routines et croyances rencontrés au cours d'une traduction qui permettent de percevoir le traducteur comme un acteur interculturel, impliqué dans cette rencontre entre cultures où il rencontre, négocie et transmet des réalités dans un espace qui se nourrit des deux cultures en présence.*

---

## **Abstract**

*Translation can be the stage of a variety of phenomena and the current work is an attempt to envision the intercultural dimension of translators' activities. The question raised here is how an experience of translation can become a moment of intercultural encounter. It draws from a personal experience of translation into French as B language, whereby the translator, a Cameroonian, had to translate and revise a Korean short-novel with a team of Korean graduate students, within the framework of KITL (Korean institute for the translation of literature). This work attempts to answer this question through an ethnographic study, mainly participant observation, whereby the translator/reviser had to convey images and features which were totally foreign to his experience. It is a case study whereby a deliberate focus on images picturing the difference met during a particular translation process makes it possible to have a glimpse into translation as a real-life intercultural experience made by the translator. The conclusions underscored that the translation team had to negotiate the communication of a set of gestures, habits, emotions or assumptions some of which were known, but many of*

*which engaged them into a different world. While negotiating, their choices and decisions could build a bridge for communication between two different cultures.*

*Key words: Translator, intercultural encounter, negotiating an intercultural space, translation Korean-French*

---

## **1 Introduction**

Just like reading a book can be a journey to another side of the world, the process of translating can open up the translator to an experience with a foreign world. Especially when faced with new realities, he opens a window that goes beyond the traditional perception of his job as simply decoding and encoding linguistic features. In the current work, we are raising the question as to how a translation experience could actually become a moment of intercultural encounter for the translator. We attempt to answer this question by analyzing an experience made by the author (a Cameroonian) during one semester of translating a Korean short novel with a team of Korean Graduate students, within the framework of KITL (Korean institute for the translation of literature). We mainly hypothesize that while working, the translator may be faced with totally unfamiliar elements or realities which require team brainstorming to be understood. Hence, such team research work can open the window to the discovery of a world of known and unknown gestures, habits and assumption. Our argument states that, as individual trying to bridge the gap between totally foreign cultures, translators/revisers also encounter, process and negotiate the unknown from which they draws new elements that enrich their cultural background, thereby contributing to a new dynamic arising from an intercultural space.

## **2 General background**

Globalization, by increasing communication and the spread of information, has not only intensified contacts between individuals, but also between the ideas and assumptions that they carry with them. In South Korea, it is more and more common to meet people of different nationalities in a classroom, with what this implies in terms of

diversity in the way they speak, behave or even in the direction of translation. Analysing discoveries made by the Cameroonian translator during a translation team exercise is also an opportunity to observe her learning to know and dialogue with Korean culture, thereby building a bridge enabling a better understanding of the foreign culture.

### ***2.1 Useful definitions***

Diversity may take the form of an encounter, around a text and a translation, with what that implies as possibilities of cultural interbreeding. In fact, Descriptive Translation Studies have made it possible to realise that translation, far from being a simple process of decoding and encoding, also involves the complexity of languages, cultures and relationships between individuals (Delisle, Woodsworth, 1995; Viallon, 2009). Based on the practice of interpretation, the Interpretive theory perceives translation as a dynamic process whereby the translator understands the *vouloir dire* (could be understood as *the meaning*) of the author before proceeding to the *déverbalisation* (*deverbalizing the message*) of that meaning, drawing from his *bagage cognitif* (*cognitive background*) (Guidère, 2008: 69). Such a process requires the translator to have a sufficiently broad general knowledge, in order to infer meaning from the context. But what happens when the background knowledge that the translator is supposed to have is embryonic, and therefore insufficient, as is so many times the case for the translation into a B language like Korean.

Far from the myth of the translator who is locked in his room or office, facing his computer with dictionaries, phones and all kinds of online resources and tools, translation from Korean to French offers a rather interesting case study of the intercultural dimension of translation. Intercultural as understood here includes the idea of “inter”, referring to a dynamic relationship with the foreign; moreover, this term in itself includes an idea of reciprocity, interdependence and dialogue within the framework of a virtual space that is supposed to exist between cultures. Understanding the interventions of the translator in this space has been a growing interest of Translation Studies, which would help professional translators and learners realise the challenges and scope of their work on their surrounding environment (Maier, 2007: 1).

Thus, translation is viewed in this work as an “intercultural” process in which the translator, as individual, is involved. As for the “culture” component of “intercultural”, it can be seen as a blanket word that we can briefly define here as different types of regularities acquired or constructed by members of social groups (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009: 15); this definition underscores the dynamic character of culture.

In order to highlight the intercultural dimension of the translator's work, we will start with a brief introduction of the team that translated the Korean short novel into French. Following is a discussion around a selection of excerpts met during the translation process which confronted the Cameroonian translator to the unknown.

### **2.2. The translation team: from French into Korean**

Choi, M. presents the translation from Korean into French as staging the kind of reciprocal cultural, technological and economic exchanges which are henceforth taking place between what she calls the *grandes langues de communication* (languages that are widely being used to communicate) and the *langues rares* (rare languages or less widely spoken) (Choi, 2006). She also explains that, in order to translate pieces of literature from Korean into French, translators have no other choice than working into their language B (which is French here). This interesting case is a consequence of the scarcity of native speakers of French who have a perfect mastery of both French and Korean, on the translation market. Consequently, as long as native speakers of French with perfect mastery of both languages are not yet available on the market, Korean translators have to work into French which is their non-native language or acquired language.

Given the above-mentioned scarcity of translators, translating from Korean into French is necessarily carried out within the framework of a team. Such a team generally made up of a tandem of Korean translators and a reviser who has French as mother tongue. Yet, in this case, the French reviser has only a weak knowledge of the source language, and sometimes a downright approximate knowledge of the culture. He therefore absolutely needs to collaborate with the Korean co-translators in order to avoid making only a unilingual revision, as

explained by Choi: “*son rôle ne se limite pas à la révision proprement linguistique, comme c’est le cas dans une révision unilingue, mais il participe aussi au transfert du contenu culturel*” (His assignment is not limited only to revising the quality of the language, as would be the case in a unilingual revision; he is also participating to the transfer of cultural content. ) (2006).

### **2.3. Working methodology**

Since translation lies at the borders of interdisciplinarity, the methodology used in this work borrows from participatory observation as used in intercultural ethnographic studies (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009: 272-273) whereby the researcher is both participant and observer. Such an observation is similar to the “think-aloud protocols” used in translation studies from the 1980s in order to try to capture the “black box” of the translator. However, the objective here is not to capture what is happening in the spirit of the translator, but rather to capture the felt encounter with social difference. It is therefore appropriate to present the elements of the observation.

This work draws from observations gathered during the researcher’s experience as the reviser of a translation team working from Korean to French during the translation of *동일한 점심* (translated into French with the title *Le Menu A* (or *A Menu(our translation)*)), a short novel written by Pyun Hye-young. The translation exercise lasted one academic semester, corresponding to more than 4 months. The team was made up of three students going through their final year at the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation of Ewha Womans University. The translation was generally carried out as a process, in three phases as follows: the first stage consisted in Korean translators making a first draft translation into French which they sent to the translator/reviser. To prepare for the second step, the translator/reviser also had to read the novel in Korean on its own, before engaging in checking what he understood under the light of what was written by the students. While comparing, the translator/reviser proceeded to a first series of edits. As for the second stage, the reviser and the students would come together, every week, in order to discuss the changes made by the reviser to the first draft. Working sessions varied from

two to three hours. They quite often led to very heated debates when faced with misunderstandings or comprehension challenges either by the reviser, or by the students. But interestingly, such debates became a whole experiment geared at better understanding and rephrasings of the translation. It is also worth mentioning that translators and reviser did not only belong to different cultures given their nationalities, Cameroonian on one side and Korean on the other, but they were also both using a foreign language to communicate.

#### **2.4. Limitations**

It is worth mentioning that the cultural difference, whether in how to communicate or how to manage face, could affect the mood of the translation team, and the resulting quality of the translation.

In fact, this translation exercise was carried out during two semesters with two different teams of Korean graduate students. In one of the teams, the researcher experienced huge cultural differences that led to a breach in communication between the Cameroonian reviser and Korean students. This situation totally disrupted the translation process itself, and the absence of smooth dialogue could be felt on the quality of the translation. However, this paper is not studying that case. Such mention is made only to underscore how both parties were interdependent; consequently, poor communication would have been a major bottleneck, given that on one side, the Cameroonian reviser would not understand all the nuances of meaning in Korean which would lead to poor transfer of meaning, and on the other side, Korean translators who, as graduate students, understood very well the nuances of their language but could not re-express them in acceptable idiomatic French. Thus *동일한 점심*, was chosen for this paper analysis because dialogue between the Cameroonian revisor and the team of translators went on very smoothly and was reciprocally beneficial. The researcher could realise how much smooth communication within the team was an essential ingredient to produce an acceptable or a good quality translation.

Beyond the cultural difference, another limitation of this work could be difficulty inherent to the use of personal data (private diary, notes,

etc.), namely what has been commonly termed as the *observer's paradox*, which refers to the complex position of the researcher who is at the same time observer. In other words, he runs the risk of being influenced either by his own *cultural* background while reading and analysing events or by the kind of relationship gradually built with other team members belonging to the other culture. Overcoming as much as possible this possibility of being biased, by decentralising herself from the research, at the moment of observation was therefore a constant challenge for the researcher.

### 2.5. Summary of the short story

The short story written by Pyun Hye-young and entitled *동일한 점심* *Le Menu A* ( or *A menu* (our translation)) is hovering around the life and sometimes the thoughts of an anonymous man known only as *사ㄴㄹ* (*guy*); in Korean *사ㄴㄹ* is a word that can refer to any *guy* you would meet anywhere while walking in the street. From the beginning till the end, without knowing neither his name nor his real identity, the reader can nonetheless gather some overlapping events of his life. He works every day in a reprographics service center located in the basement of a similarly anonymous university, where he spends the whole day making photocopies. His parents died one after the other in somewhat stupid and unfortunate accidents. His life seems to be nothing but the repetition of an almost deadly routine and he seems to be living alone in the world; his sole companion seem to be his lunch, the invariable *A Menu*, of the university canteen. He is always right on time to eat this menu, without failling and without appetite. It looks more or less like he is eating from a survival instinct. This seemingly unending routine is turned upside down by a scene of suicide that takes place in the subway; the suicide of another *guy* whose identity is not given to the reader. We equally don't know much about the person who committed suicide, except that he is also a *사ㄴㄹ* (*a guy*). From our perspective, this story seems to raise more questions than it answers and the *guy* who committed suicide might equally be the same *guy* who is working in a reprography center : Who is this man, who are all these "*guys*" who are all living a seemingly meaningless life governed

by an underling routine, and who might as well jump under the subway one day and commit suicide?

### **3 Analysis: A Cameroonian translator meeting the unknown in Korean**

From this section on, we are trying to analyse a selection of excerpts, seemingly not that striking, but which nonetheless led the researcher to meet the cultural difference during the translation process. They are series of images from the Korean society which could be seen as subtle and sometimes surprising, yet all strangely real; they were an opportunity to rediscover South Korea, through a translation exercise and the efforts of the translation team to carry such peculiarities from Korean culture across the cultural barrier as smoothly as possible. It is important to mention that the point of view adopted here is that of a Cameroonian francophone translator who is discovering subtle gestures, routines, beliefs, imaginations from a totally foreign culture.

#### **3.1 Unfamiliar gestures: meals**

One of the images met in the text that had a subtle foreign flavor was linked with Korean meals. During the translation, understanding and choosing an appropriate word to express the different elements composing the *A Menu* required a lot of debates. Discussing within the team helped in understanding the peculiarity of Korean food culture.

##### **3.1.1 Rice as the main dish**

반찬이 달라졌지만 밥과 국, 김치를 제외하고 세 가지 반찬이 나온다는 게 같았다/ *Ce menu se composait invariablement de riz, de soupe, de kimchi et de trois petits plats d'accompagnement, lesquels changeaient d'un jour à l'autre* (This menu invariably consisted of rice, soup, kimchi and three small side dishes, which changed from time to time (our translation) (Pyun, p. 65).

The above sentence may sound quite simple, but it contains the essentials of a typical Korean meal. In everyday normal Korean meal, you invariably find at least rice, a bowl of soup and a small dish filled with *kimchi*; additional dishes can be added, but they are only



considered as *반찬*, which was consensually translated as simple “*plats d’accompagnement*” ( *side dishes*), despite the feeling of loss. Actually, the discussion that arose during the translation revolved around the following questions: Why are they calling rice “main dish”, and what does rice keep coming back as part of everyday meal (breakfast, lunch and diner)? This doesn’t sound normal, especially while considering Cameroon eating habits where normally the menu should change everyday day. Thanks to discussions translator came to discover that for Koreans, *rice* is a key element of their daily food menu.

In fact, rice should be viewed here as central to Korean culture and it is the main course. It is unfailingly present whether for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Aside from rice, any other food on the table is just considered as a mere “*side dish*”. Actually, when Korean literally say: “*Did you eat rice?*” / 밥 먹었 어요?, it simply means *How are you?* During the translation process, the translator came to understand that such an expression refers back to their past of extreme poverty and famine. In times of famine, being able to eat only a small quantity of rice, even without anything else (hence; *side dish*) meant that one was *doing well*. This memory from their history seems to have fossilized in the language; consequently, rice continue to occupy an almost sacred place that defied the cultural assumption associated with rice that the researcher had.

Actually, if rice is considered *main course* in Korea, in Cameroon it is only one of many possible *side dishes*. There is a popular Cameroonian expression: eating *the (medical) prescription* which refers to *eating rice thrice a day (breakfast, diner, lunch), for three days*; people use that expression to mean that they struggling financially and it derives from the fact that rice is one of the cheapest cereals on the market. Hence, you can resort to it when you are broke. The team discussion made it possible to realise the difference between *rice* as a *simple side dish* for a Cameroonian and rice as *main course* in Korea, where whatever comes with it is ultimately is just a *반찬*

*side dish*. More interesting though, is the whole culture around the way to cook rice.

### 3.1.2 *How rice is cooked*

The following excerpt which talks about how cooked rice is looking like, is more interesting than it may seem at first sight: “*커다란 찜통에 찐 철기 없이 푸석한 밥*»( / *pour manger ce riz cuit à la vapeur, sans consistance et sec/ ce riz trop cuit/ ce riz raté*) ( *to eat this steamed rice, without consistency and dry/ to eat this overcooked / failed rice (our translation)* (Pyun, p. 66).

Behind these words, we discovered a whole culture on how to cook rice. In this passage, rice is actually cooked, but the result is bad. According to the Korean translator, different nuances could be associated with this poorly cooked rice. Its poor texture (hence *without consistency and dry*) could remind of an academic context where rice was steamed in huge pots which produced a poor result. It might also refer to a certain era where this essential part of the Korean meal was done carelessly, without respecting the art of cooking rice.

During the translation, a difficulty arose when the team was trying to discuss the feeling communicated in this passage, which was quite difficult to reproduce in French. Actually, the importance of rice goes in hand with the cultural way of cooking it. A Korean can therefore make the difference (probably by the way it tastes) between rice cooked according to the rules of the art and rice that was badly cooked. The Korean translator by proposing to translate *riz cuit à la vapeur sans consistance et sec* (*steamed rice, without consistency and dry*) was trying hard to convey a certain feeling or a taste of rice that seemed quite obvious to the Koreans of the team but not that clear to the Cameroonian; consequently, re-expression in French was not easy and took a lot of time. The possibility to translate it as *failed rice* was discussed but it would have meant either *overcooked* or *undercooked* which is not the point here.

In fact, well-cooked Asian rice is generally a bit sticky, glutinous, unlike the idea of a successful *risotto* with grains of rice that are not

sticky. After a lot of debates within the team, it was more or less agreed to translate as *failed cooking*, which leaves the hint of exoticism, an invitation to discovery.

### 3.1.3 Korean snacks culture

*Kimbap* can probably be considered as the Korean version of a sandwich and the following excerpt was a discovery of a whole set of habits around a quick mention of this meal.

학교 앞행상에서 사온 김밥들 점심으로 먹었다 은박  
포장을 조금씩 벗겨가며 김밥 두 줄을 다  
력어치웠다/(...) *kimbaps (rouleaux de riz) achetés sur le  
trottoir devant l'université; il avalait quand même deux  
rouleaux, jusqu'au dernier grain, après le avoir soigneusement  
extraits de leur emballage en papier alu (kimbaps (rice rolls)  
bought on the sidewalk in front of the university; he swallowed  
two rolls till the last grain, after carefully removing them from  
their paper wrapping (our translation))* (Pyun, p. 67).

*Kimbap* refers to “rice rolls” filled in the center with a stuffing that can be made up of vegetables, meat, fish, etc. Being wrapped in an aluminum foil is almost distinctive sign of this street snack which could also be seen as a healthy fast-food. The above excerpt partly portrays the life of Korean students who are sometimes so busy at mealtime, that they buy a *Kimbap* to eat it while being on the run.

Hence, *Kimbap* reminds of the sidewalks in front of universities, filled with street vendors of Korean who are cooking style snacks treats on the spot (like spicy chicken fries, rice or egg cakes, rice cakes, etc.) and buyers usually eat while standing in front of the stall, with their back facing the street. They differ from meals at the students canteen where rice remains the king of the Korean meal ritual: “오므라이스나  
김치볶음밥/choisissait soit l'omelette au riz soit le riz sauté au  
kimchi (he chose either the rice omelet or the fried kimchi rice (our  
translation)) (Pyun, p. 67). This last example, illustrating a typical

recipe, is just a hint into the difficulty of translating a culinary recipe when there is no equivalent in the target language.

Whether with *kimbap*, *rice omelet* of *fried kimchi rice*, the translator was meeting a set of Korean meal habits, most of which were translated by explanation. Yet, such a translational choice can be considered as invitation to make an imaginative step towards the foreign and taste, in order to access the real meaning.

### **3.2 Known habits and gestures with a different meaning**

Here are mentioned a number gestures, around the meal or with one's body, behind which the translator reviser discovered a deeper meaning.

#### **3.2.1 End of meal gestures**

Collecting leftovers in the bowl of soup, far from being trivial, is a way of indicating the end of the meal: “*밥을 다 먹은 그는 남은 반찬을 국그릇에 모았다*” /*Une fois son repas terminé, il a rassemblé les restes dans son bol de soupe (once his meal ended, he collected left-overs in his bowl of soup.)* (Pyun, p. 67). In this excerpt, is also hidden the fact that mixing one's food in the bowl of soup before starting to eat could be considered offensive in Korean culture. Every bowl on the table has a specific function and, generally, when they are done eating, Koreans collect the leftovers carefully in the soup bowl. The importance of this very automatic daily gesture can surface only when it is violated.

Actually, the researcher once removed rice from the bowl of rice and mixed it with other ingredients in the bowl of soup before starting to eat which violated the above-mentioned law. Then, a friend advised her not to do such a thing in front of elderly people who might consider it very disrespectful. She discovered that if you want to mix soup and rice, doing it in the large bowl of rice is more appropriate because mixing food in the bowl of soup indicates that you are done eating; therefore, collecting everything bowl reserved for the soup amounts to collecting leftovers that will be later on thrown in the trash.

Consequently, eating a mixture in the bowl of soup is almost equivalent to eating out of the trash.

Once more, the strong meaning of rice can still be felt, given that mixing food in the bowl of rice remains a noble gesture and shows that one is not yet done eating while doing the same in the bowl of soup is an indication that you are collecting leftovers. Though mentioned very quickly in the Korean text, this image is nonetheless a relatively striking cultural gesture.

### 3.2.2 Nodding (*bowing the neck*)

While translating, frequent allusions to a whole series of neck (고개틀) movements were noticed, with the ensuing differences in meaning, which were discussed between the researcher and his teammates. They unveiled a small part of the importance of silence and indirect communication as can be seen in these excerpts:

그는 사내에게 목례를 건넸다 (...)/ *L'autre lui a répondu d'un hochement de la tête / the other replied with a nod of his head ( bowing the neck)*

사내도 고개를 끄덕여주었다 (...)/ *il lui a adressé un vague salut du regard ( he vaguely bowed the neck (to agree))*

그는 머쓱해하며 고개를 돌렸다 (...)/ *Gêné, il a détourné les yeux ( embarrassed, he turned (his neck) away )*

그가 고개를 끄덕였다 (...) 이번에 고개를 저었다 (...)/ *il a acquiescé d'un mouvement de la tête (...) cette fois-ci il a hoché la tête (signe de négation) / He nodded (...) this time he nodded (nod of negation) (Pyun, p. 68, 75, 76).*

In all these three expressions, the *neck bowed*, respectively to: (1) answer a silent greeting, (2) greet without talking, (3) express embarrassment and (4) express negation. In the French translation, every time that neck bowed, different part of the face (the *gaze, the*

*eyes, the neck and the head*) were used to express that meaning. Actually, *bowing the neck* far from being a simple *nodding*, is rather particular feature of Korean society.

Bowing the neck is a formal gesture, used in different situations and more appreciated than shaking of hands, waving or hugging as signs of greetings. Koreans' greetings gesture is folding their arms in front of their chest and bowing more or less low, depending on the status of the person in front and without touching each other; they don't *bow the neck*, only to agree but also as a sign of respect. It should be remembered that Korean society values respect a lot. At the same time, this *bowing of the neck* which is used as a sign of respect, can also be used in different situations whereby meaning can be derived only from the context, as seen in the following case:

그는 책에 시선을 둔 채 무의 식적으로 한 발 뒤로  
물러서다가 바투 서 있던 뒷사람과 부딪쳐 고개를 숙여 사과했다/  
*En reculant instinctivement d'un pas, le nez dans son livre, il a heurté  
la personne derrière lui et s'est excusé en s'inclinant (instinctively  
taking a step back, his nose in his book, he bumped into the person  
behind him and apologized by **bowing**)* (Pyun, p. 72).

Here, that same *bowing of the neck* which could mean *yes, no, hi, embarrassed*, is now implying an *apology* or *sorry*. During the translation, debates were mainly to understand which nuance of meaning was implied, everytime that gesture occurred. In this case, the reviser could wonder why someone who mistakenly bumped into anyone would bow the neck instead of uttering an audible: "*Oh, sorry / I apologise.*" To her, only *bowing the neck* after bumping into someone could be rude, and audibly apologizing would have seemed more appropriate. But the team brainstorming revealed that in Korean culture, talking is not always considered polite, especially when dealing with someone you don't know. So, the culture values silence as *nounchi (the intelligence of the eyes)*, that is supposed to be more eloquent than audibly apologising.

### 3.2.3. *Naked in public and metro routine and politeness*

Why would anybody walk naked in public, when he has not lost his mind? The following image was quite an unusual encounter, especially to the Cameroonian reviser: “목욕탕엔 벌거벗고 목에 수건만 걸친 사내/ *pas ce type à poil aperçu au bain public avec une serviette autour du cou* (not that naked guy seen in the public bath with a towel around his neck) (Pyun, p. 68).

This passage would obviously hurt the sensibility from the perspective of Cameroon. Even more intriguing, is the fact that the towel of that naked man is around his neck, instead being around his waist to hide his nakedness. Yet, far from having any offensive or even sensual connotation, this image is simply referring to South Korea's *public saunas*' culture. Actually, those saunas are very public and popular because of their therapeutic and relaxing benefits. Inside public saunas, which are normally very crowded because they are quite affordable to the average citizen, the towel is not meant to cover the body; it is generally either on the head or on the neck. Contrarily to what it may seem, this naked man with a towel on his neck, is not a sensually loaded image, especially since men and women are generally sent to separate rooms in the sauna.

### 3.2.2. *Metro routines*

그는 책에 시선을 둔 채 무의식적으로 한 발 뒤로 물러서다가 바투 서 있던 뒷사람과 부딪쳐/ *En reculant instinctivement d'un pas, le nez dans son livre, il a heurté la personne derrière lui* (instinctively taking a step back, his nose in his book, he bumped into the person behind him and bowed to apologise) (our translation)(Pyun, p. 72).

If the hero had his nose in his book, which supposes that he was absorbed by his reading, why would he move one step back? And how could he bump into someone after moving only one step back? After asking such questions, the reviser was encouraged to go and consciously observe what generally happens in the Korean subway.

While consciously observing the subway, the reviser could notice a series of quasi-automatic gestures. The first one was that people almost instinctively queue while standing and waiting for the train, in a very orderly manner. There seem to be an instinctive sense of order especially mornings when the subway is overcrowded, like in the above excerpt, and many different queues seem to constantly emerge. Right before the train enters the station, the loudspeaker invariably makes a similar announcement: “*the subway is entering station X, please **take a step backwards** to stand behind the yellow line (our transcription)*”. This might explain why the hero automatically took a step backwards, obviously without much thinking. This gesture must have been instinctive, due to an automatism triggered either by the voice emanating from the loudspeaker or by the usual noise made by the train while entering the subway station. Bumping into whoever was behind him is also showing how crowded the queue was, as is normally the case early mornings in Seoul subway.

While translating, another image from the subway generated a lot of debates. It seemed out of place because of the difficulty for the reviser to link farming with the subway. But once more, the dilemma was solved by observing the morning subway:

열차의 문이 열리면 물길을 터주듯 그는 출입구의 왼쪽으로,  
 사내는 오른쪽으로 비켜섰다. 거리를 두고 선 구와 사내  
 사이로 승객들이 쏟아져 내렸다/ lui se rangeait à gauche de  
 la porte dès son ouverture, l'autre type à droite, comme pour  
 ouvrir la voie aux personnes qui descendaient là ( he stood on  
 the left of the door as soon as it opened , and the other guy stood  
 on the right (our translation) (Pyun, p. 70).

Though it does not transpire in the translation, the Korean expression **물길을 터 주듯** is borrowed from agriculture. It refers to the gesture made while ploughing with a hoe. Actually, while waiting for the train to enter a station, the majority of passengers are calmly queuing while few others would normally be sitting on public benches. But once the noise announcing that the train is about to enter the subway station is



heard, those sitting on benches would almost automatically jump to form two rows, one to the left and the other to the right of the door of every wagon, as if they were trying to escort the outgoing customers. This automatic gesture, made almost instinctively by many people at the same time, is what is likened here to “ploughing”; it is also indicative of a kind of implicit norm whereby, those waiting outside have to build an opening, like what is done with a hoe, on both sides of the wagon, in order to await the complete exit of all those who arrived at their destination.

After entering the subway station, the train opens its doors which could actually look like a “mouth” that is opening and starting to vomit passengers in-between the two rows mentioned above. If a passenger happens to try entering the train when it hasn’t finish vomiting its existing customers, someone else could silently stand on his way without saying a word; this would be a silent reaction to a violation of this silent norm. Yet, people scarcely fight their way into the train before the complete exit of passenger who are always in a hurry when the leave which obviously helps maintaining order, considering how crowded the subway usually is. This habit (or implicit norm) is generally well respected in many subways within South-Korea, when overcrowded early mornings subway comes to vomit its crowds before swallowing the next ones. Hence, if our hero was pushed by outgoing passengers, it definitely suggests that he had forgotten to move either to the left of to the right row as the train was vomiting exiting passengers:

내려선 사람들이 멍하니 서 있는 그를 밀치고  
출구쪽으로 붓불처럼 빠져나갔다/ *Ceux qui étaient descendus  
l’ont bousculé en se ruant vers la sortie tandis qu’il restait planté  
l’air absent/ (those who were stepping out pushed him when  
rushing to the exit while he remained on the same spot, absent-  
minded ) (our translation) (Pyun, p. 84).*

The probability that he stood on the way of exiting passengers is high, which explains why instead of dodging him, they would push him around, apparently without anyone apologizing? It seems important to

mention here that in the subway, being pushed around without receiving a word of apology in this context has nothing to do with being harsh or rude. Is it not just a picture of people in a hurry, or another face of the 빨리/빨리 (very fast, fast) Korean culture? Which led the researcher to discover differences in understanding the codes of politeness.

### 3.2.3. Politeness

In the following passage, the reviser meet a particular feature of Korean culture that led him to wonder whether looking down at one's feet is being polite or rude: “무례하게 누군가를 뵈히 쳐다보지 않았단다”/ *il s'épargnait l'embarras de croiser les regards de personnes qu'il aurait pu connaître* (he avoided the embarrassment of meeting the eyes of people he might know) (Pyun, p. 66).

In this specific case, there was a discussion around why it would be embarrassing for our hero to meet the gaze of an acquaintance; the author wondered why would “meeting the eyes” of anyone be problematic when you don't feel guilty about anything concerning that person? Which one is more polite between, looking at someone straight in the eyes or looking at your feet when someone is talking to you? Here, we were given the explanation that looking or staring straight at someone, even if it is because you find them attractive, is considered rude and impolite. This was totally contrary to our idea that shying away from looking straight at someone would be a sign of guilt or might mean that you are hiding something. Looking downright to your feet here could actually mean, remaining polite.

During the translation, the reviser also did not understand the reference to the toilet made in the following passage. Why knock on a toilet, especially a public toilet, unless something suspicious happened inside.?

화장이 아닌데 똑똑 두 번 두 번 두드려 노크를 하기도 했다.  
그는 무의식중에 마주 노크를 하기 위해 손을 뻗었다가

헛되이 내려놓았다/ parfois même toquaient comme s'ils se trouvaient devant la porte des toilettes ( and sometimes even knocked as if standing in front of the bathroom door) (Pyun, p. 67).

Here once more, the explanation was given that this is common practice in public toilets and the person inside is expected to knock back as an answer (like to say *Is there anyone in? is this toilet busy... Yes*). If this came as a surprise for the reviser, it was quite banal for this context. She also made new discoveries linked with the beliefs

### 3.3 Men and their beliefs

Here we encounter sign picturing an aging society, an alternative medicine and another belief system

#### 3.3.1 An aging society

This translation was also an encounter with **아주머니는** *adujmas*, or elderly women, who manage the Korean family economy, are believed to be stronger than both men and women; hence they do a lot of physically demanding activities as follows :

**아주머니는** 매번 그에게 신문을 내밀었다/ Il y avait aussi cette **dame coiffée** d'un chapeau qui distribuait des gratuits à l'entrée du métro( There was also this **elderly lady** wearing a hat who handed out freebies at the entrance to the metro )

교문 앞 항상 **아주머니는** 김밥을 아령처럼 들고 지나가는 사람들을 향해 방금 집에서 싸 온 거라고 소리쳤다/ Il y avait cette femme assez âgée qui vendait des rouleaux de kimbaps qu'elle tenait à la main comme de petites haltères tout en criant qu'elle venait juste de les préparer (there was this elderly woman who was selling rolls of kimbaps which she held in her hand like small dumbbells while shouting that she had just cooked them) (Pyun Hye-young, p. 69).

Here, having *adjumas* as street vendors, was quite unusual to the reviser because of her background. Actually, in Cameroon, those selling on the streets or giving out freebies are mainly young people, since it requires too much physical energy. Seeing elderly women or *아주머니* who are shouting to attract customers and sometimes even running after them seemed out of place. But having so strong *아주머니* *adjumoni* is also a clue enabling to envision an aging society, which explains why the elderly are very active. Actually, she learned that they are said to have such a legendary strength that they are also referred to as a third sex.

### 3.3.2 Loneliness

How can possibly an owner of photocopiers who is working on a university campus, build a clientele without ever bonding with people who are around him? It must be said that, in a Cameroonian environment, selling is necessarily bonding with people; for the sake of selling or keeping a clientele, people talk a lot while bargaining prices and even wooing passers-by. But the same image does not hold true in our text:

그는 언제나 학생들이나 강사 같은, 실제로 친분이 전혀 없는 타인들 사이에 있었다. 마루런 관계가 없었기에 교의 의무도 없었다/ *Il vivait au milieu d'étudiants et d'enseignants dont il ne savait rien. Il n'avait donc aucune raison particulière de nouer des liens avec eux (He lived among students and teachers of whom he knew nothing. So, he had no particular reason to bond with them) (Pyun, p. 73).*

The above image is just a normal one in Korea, though difficult to understand for the reviser. For her, a person who “*knew nothing*” would have long gone bankrupt or lost his customer. But, in this context for the hero to try to have deep talks with his customers could have been disrespectful because of the need respect people’s private space, and not interfering with customers’ private life.

In addition to the possibility of living without any relation with other people, in the next passage, can also be seen the possibility that there exists a notion of Korean "personal space"; such a space would refer to the distance that should automatically be maintained while dealing with others, especially those who are neither part of our kinship nor close friends:

인간이란 타인과 최소한 2미터 이상의 거리를 가져야만  
아는 존재인지도 몰랐다/ *L'homme n'était sans doute pas fait  
pour vivre à moins de deux mètres des autres* ( *Man was  
probably not made to live within two meters from others*) (our  
translation) (Pyun, p. 73).

This idea of “living within two meters from others” is almost impossible in Cameroon; hence the historical difficulty to keep any social distancing measures, even after such a pandemic as Covid 19. Such a space is almost non-existent in Cameroon where it is rare to meet people living alone.

The differences mentioned so far, do not exclude the possibility of common points such as the presence of a traditional medicine in both countries.

### **3.3.3. traditional medicine and beliefs**

Hiking is an appreciated and common hobby for a certain segment of the elderly population as well as youth. It can be done, at the first level, to keep but also to maintaining a certain community culture in a changing society, as Korean generally go hiking in groups. Yet, the mountains also host many medicinal herbs:

아버지는 잘 알지도 못하는 약초를 개려고 무리해서/  
*Il tentait de cueillir ce qu'il croyait être des plantes  
médicinales* (He was trying to gather what he believed to be  
medicinal plants) (...)같이 동행한 분에게 나중에 들은  
얘가로는 아버지가 개려던 것은 약초가 아니라 도라지라고

했다/ *aux dires de son compagnon, ce n'était même pas des herbes médicinales, mais de simples campanules (according to his friend, they were not even medicinal plants but simply weeds).*

양약으로 충분했다/ *Jusqu'à présent, il s'était satisfait des médicaments occidentaux (So far he had been satisfied with Western medicines) ( our translation) (Pyun Hye-young, p. 79, 80).*

In the three preceding excerpts, reference is implicitly made to the existence of an (*Eastern*) medicine besides the western medicine. The cohabitation between both kinds of medicine seems peaceful, given the fact that the above-mentioned character also enjoyed western medicine.

The following two excerpts give an insight into a set of beliefs or a certain culture surrounding death, which is different from that of western Christianity:

사람이 죽으려 그 사람에서 남은 빛이 바깥으로 새어나온다고 했다/ *Il avait entendu dire que, lorsqu'on mourait, un reste de lumière s'échappait de notre corps (He had heard that when we died, a remnant of light escaped from our body)*

이모화 함께 아버지 산소에 다녀오는 길이었다/ *Elle était morte sur l'autoroute au retour d'une visite à la tombe de son mari en compagnie de sa sœur (she died on the highway after returning from a visit to her husband's grave with her sister ) (Pyun Hye-young, p. 82).*

The importance of regularly taking care of dead people or their grave here is a hint to the existence of annual celebrations of dead people. This family visit to a graveyard reminds of the celebration of the New

year according to the lunar calendar (설날/Seolnal). Soelnal is even considered as a minimum of one-week national holiday whereby Korean organize a set of rituals for the dead, generally done in the privacy of the family. We can therefore understand that a visit paid by the hero's mother and aunt here was the one supposed to take place during this important yearly celebration, when family members gather around the grave or ashes of a deceased person. Like in many Cameroonian tribes, the deceased seems to continue to be part of the family.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Discovery and intercultural space

Although *동일한 점심/Le Menu A*, as a short story was only about 20 pages long, the translation exercise which lasted one semester was a tremendous encounter with many nuances informing about Korean culture. They arose when facing a translation difficulty that led to a brainstorming session in the quest for meaning. Communicating a cultural nuance was a team exercise whereby the francophone reviser and the Korean translators had to discuss different level of interpretation before finding a consensual agreement on how to re-express it without loss as much as possible. Needless to say, that such discussions were insightful and interesting because they open up a door to encounter the foreign both ways and choices were made through discussion and collaboration. Translating thus became an opportunity for the intercultural translation team to experience the negotiation of meaning, not within a single culture, but in a space situated that the team had to create, at a crossroads between cultures. For the reviser to be effective in his work, she had to investigate the new culture by asking questions in and out of the team, go on the field to observe the phenomenon, and discuss as a team while fostering cooperation for the sake of understanding.

This experience portrayed cooperation as necessary to transfer meaning. While translating this piece of literature, translators as well as reviser were involved in the process of linking languages and cultures; thereby finding themselves in a space where they had to rely

on teamwork to negotiate not only the understanding but also the interpretation of the meaning of foreign images so as to make decisions regarding possibilities of reexpression. In so doing, the exercise of translating became the stage of an encounter with the foreign, via the translator. An encounter inside a space where altogether, Cameroonian reviser and Korean translators, were discovering how different they could understand a particular image (like the possibility of being naked in public without being offensive). For communication to be possible they had to acknowledge their mutual dependance, in the building of meaning, and the need to cooperate beyond their own cultural background assumptions.

#### *4.2 A constructive dynamics*

The translation of *동일한 점심* also gave us a glimpse into the kind of dynamic exchange that could take place within what we have called an intercultural space. At times, long discussions and concertation were necessary before finding a mutually acceptable translation, considered understandable by a French reader. Reviser and translators were therefore not just in a quest for possible “equivalents or correspondences” but also at a crossroad of giving and receiving. Hence, being able to understand what is foreign was an implicit requirement, though we will not elaborate here on the concept of “French reader” which might be difficult to define, given the broad diversity it entails. Nevertheless, the francophone reviser, who in this case was a Cameroonian, also had to “choose” words and reexpressions that would ultimately penetrate her own culture. This is, to say the least, a huge responsibility lying on the shoulder of revisers/translators given that, they have to associate words to enable new realities to penetrate their own cultural environment, through readers of this short novel. Such negotiations, could also, be influenced by their convictions or preferences as to what should take place or filter from this “intercultural space”.

In the present work, a deliberate choice to study attitudes and gestures that were foreign to the Cameroonian translator/ reviser, whether explicitly or implicitly, was made. In so doing interculturality was seen as referring not to a static state, but to a space that is open to



difference, negotiation and to a constructive dialogue. Given that translators/revisers were involved in building or rebuilding meaning, it would be difficult to presume that this space is neutral or not. Nevertheless, it is obviously the stage of a dynamic process whose fruitfulness derives from a convergence of realities from both sides. If such an encounter could first have looked confrontational, especially when the reviser could not understand images from Korean culture, inputs from team discussion, dialogue and field investigations incited a dynamics with translators sharing their understanding of specific images. Challenges could thus usher a dynamics that helped grasping new realities, conceptions, assumptions while opening up one of the possible doors to communication. We can therefore conclude by agreeing with Pym (2010) that the translator is an intercultural being who is nourished by the dialogue taking place at a crossroads between realities and readers of the source and target texts.

In our increasingly globalized world, translation needs are on the rise due to the economic needs and even conflicts resolutions, etc. arising between societies and culture in contact (Bassnet, 2011: 95). Translation therefore can now be seen not only a window to foreign realities, but as a bridge used by translators to connect beyond national identities while also enticing a new intercultural dynamics; a case in point could be the ongoing dynamics developed around the Covid-19 pandemics, whereby in some environment access to restrictive measures have to be translated in order to sensitize literate classes of the population.

### **Bibliography**

Bassnet Susan (2011), « The Translator as Cross-cultural Mediator » in *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies*, Oxford University Press, 95-135p

Choi Mikyung (2006), « La traduction littéraire en B du coréen vers le français. Quelques conditions de réussite » in *Meta*, 51(3) 524-535p.

Delisle Jean et Woodsworth Judith (1995), *Les traducteurs dans l'histoire*, éditions UNESCO, Ottawa, Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa.

Guidère Mathieu (2008), *Introduction à la traductologie*, Paris, Bruxelles, De Boeck Université.

Pyun Hye-young, *동이한 점심* (*Le Menu A* : non-published draft translation).

Maier Carol (2007) « The Translator as Intervening Being » in *Translation as Intervention*, dirigé par Munday Jeremy (Editeur), Continuum Studies in Translation.

Pym Anthony (2010), *Exploring Translation Theories*, Routledge.

Spencer-Oatey Helen and Franklin Peter (2009), *Intercultural Interaction: A multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication*, Palgrave Macmilan.

Viallon Virginie (2009), « Communication interculturelle : le rôle du traducteur et de l'interprète ». Consulté à <http://www.bdue-fachverlag.de/download/mdue/765.html>.