

Weekly Column  
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Melvin University  
and Me

### The Trap of Translation

I often visit the school library these days. I noticed a popular English book that was translated into Korean and published in Korea. Especially since there were English books, I was interested to look at them together.

However, I was a little surprised. Something didn't seem to fit. It was a little strange in translation, but I tried to force myself to understand it, saying, 'That's the way it should be in Korean.' I don't know how translations for publication are done. Is it done by the translator, or is it done by professionals and the translator is the main translator. On the other hand, I force myself to say, 'It would have been better if I hadn't read the English book, and I could have moved on.'

The easiest translation pitfall is the fear that the original English meaning is completely different, and that the Korean reader will have a concept that is almost 90 per cent different. A 20-15 per cent difference is fine, but an 80 per cent difference can be concerning. It would be very rude to use the book as a direct example here, so I don't think we need to go that far.

I've always said to people that it's better to read the original book than the translation. The idea was that you should see the so-called original.

The thing is, I think the same thing happens when a Korean book is translated into another language. Of course, when an English book is translated into another language, there will be problems just like when it is translated into Korean. In short, any translation book will have these problems. But that doesn't mean we don't see them. There are thousands and tens of thousands of translated books in libraries all over the world and in bookstores all over the world.

I don't know if this is a bit of an exaggerated example, but there is an east-west-south-north location, and if you go to the east, you can understand it if you

go to the south or north, which are nearby, but if you go to the west, which is the opposite, it is quite difficult to go back to the right place, and it is almost impossible to fix it because it is already too far away! I don't think that the translation is wrong or right, but I hope that the readers of the translation will be more careful and express the meaning of the original text to the maximum extent.

As I was thinking about this, the word 'cover song' came to mind. Sometimes on TV, we hear the introduction, 'This song is an alternate version of...' and we think, 'This is an alternate version of...' and we enjoy listening to it and singing along. In fact, most of our favourite hymns are also hymns. Sometimes we sing English hymns, but it's not a big deal. However, translations should be more thoughtful, as it is almost impossible to revise a translation once it is published and on the market.