A Study of Translation Errors in Korean-English Subtitles in the Korean Movie “Harmony” and the Drama “A Thousand Day’s Promise”

*Sungran Koh·Bonggyu Kim*

I. Introduction

Multimedia technology plays an important role in language teaching and learning. In multimedia settings, learners acquire new language by being exposed to the real environment of the target language. As a tool of comprehensible input, subtitling has become a common way to understand foreign multimedia and information from around the world. Subtitles are key on television and videotape, correlating with dialogue to enhance the comprehension. In this regard, subtitles are helpful to language learning because they provide ample comprehensible input. Krashen (1985) argues that learners can learn a large amount of language subconsciously through rich comprehensible input. Language acquisition only

* Sungran Koh (first author), Bonggyu Kim (corresponding author)
happens when comprehensible input is suitably delivered. However, the importance of Korean-English subtitles has been disregarded until recently. With the Korean wave ("Hallyu" in Korean), popularity of Korean entertainment and culture began in the 1990s in Asia, and, has since spread to other parts of the world. In step with it, Korean dramas and movies have become widespread, and in major immigrant centers of the Western world, a wide range of dramas have been frequently watched. However, mistranslated Korean-English subtitles can negatively affect learning for foreigners studying the Korean language and culture as well as Korean English learners. Despite this, consideration of movie and drama subtitles only began to increase in Korea during the mid to late 2000s (Kim & Jung, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the importance of the correct translation of media-related materials and to scrutinize the most common grammatical errors made by Korean translators. To achieve these purposes, the subtitle errors in the Korean movie “Harmony” (2010) and the drama “A Thousand Day’s Promise” (2010) are analyzed. Based on the analysis of data, the study hopes to help reduce the frequency of common grammatical errors in Korean-English subtitling.

II. Literature Review

In Korea, little theoretical attention has been paid to subtitling in audio-visual translation until recently. Especially, the study of Korean-English subtitling has received little attention in the field of translation. Korean-English subtitling of dramas has not been established in a systematic way, and the subtitles in most Korean movies and dramas available on Internet sites are subtitled mainly by fans. Subtitles by these non-professionals are called “fansubs.” Kim & Jung (2010) argue that “Fansubs are not subject to the norms of conventional subtitling and should be approached with a new perspective and different methodology.” Kim (2010) infers