

Painting a Picture of an Imagined Community: Mediation in the Second Language Learners' Translation Classroom

Vivian Lee

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

South Korea

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the imagined community created when student translators envisage a target reader for whom they are translating and to highlight pedagogical implications for developing awareness of language and culture in the second language (L2) classroom context. As mediators between source and target culture, language learners dealing with translation, i.e., translation studies students who are also L2 learners of at least one of the languages in the language pair, may also have a role in an imagined community—they have an imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating, and serve their roles as communicators between the imagined source and target communities. They make connections and fill in the gaps that may be found during the translation of a text from one language and culture to another.

This paper looks at the student contemplations during the process of translation in an imagined community they may imagine themselves to be in. Five Korean into English translation classes were offered to students at a university in Seoul, South Korea. Presenting qualitative excerpts from the data, this paper discusses the imagined community painted by the learners during their process of translation, and how they negotiate the identities of the target audience members with whom they are aiming to communicate.

Keywords

translation, Korean, English, undergraduate, imagined community, cultural mediation

1. Introduction

A translation task may require the translator to envisage a potential target reader for whom they are translating. As translation involves communication from one language to another, and the languages involved contain both culture and language-specific differences, the translator often takes on the role of cultural mediator between the two languages and cultures. Through such mediation, the translator enters an imagined community, where they negotiate between ideas and meanings. An imagined community (Anderson 1991) implies the ability to employ imagination to reach out beyond one's immediate environment and experience (Ryan 2006) to communicate effectively to the imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating the text (Assis Rosa 2006). While the notion of imagined community has been investigated by many in relation to L2 learning, there is still insufficient research on the application of the imagined community lens on translation pedagogy. As such, the current study aims to contribute to this area and open doors for further discussion in the field.

Five Korean-English translation classes were offered to two groups of students at a university in South Korea, which involved translation tasks of texts from news articles containing culture-specific lexis. The texts were to be translated from Korean (the source language) into English (the target language). Research was conducted at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea. Pre- and post-tasks and interviews were also carried out prior to and following the taught sessions.

This paper will look at the imagined community the translator paints for themselves while undertaking a translation task. The paper will begin by reviewing the current literature in relevant fields, and then outline the methodology used for the study. Following that, data excerpts will be presented alongside a discussion. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the key findings of the paper.