# Head or tail?

## Preserving the original's sequence as an underrated but crucial task for adequate literary translation from and to Korean

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### 1. Introduction

One secret of producing good English — at least according to what Koreans are often taught by gurus who promise to fix their notorious difficulties with the global language — is to speak or write in an inverse way, contrary to their native intuition.[1] This wisdom ultimately has its linguistic base in what is called "directionality." In the case of English, this directionality is "progressive," whereas it is considered to be "regressive" in the case of Korean. While these terms are very problematic (isn't one bound to "progress" when speaking, in any language?) there is another distinction that uses more satisfactory terminology: here, English serves as the archetypical example of a "head-initial" language, whereas Japanese is often pointed to as the antithesis, i.e., "head-final." When a person who is familiar with Korean looks at the sentence examples usually provided for an illustration of this distinction, it becomes very clear that Korean is just as much "head-final" as Japanese. Head-final means that, in terms of sequence, the "head" comes only after the parts that depend from this head. So, if we take the phrase *Madang ŭl naon amt'ak*, the title of a bestselling book by Hwang Sŏn-mi, we see that the "final" word *amt'ak* (the hen) is the "head," whereas the "initial" words *Madang ŭl naon* (the yard [accusative marker] having left) are dependent from this head, being mere constituents joined to this head. Since the hen is the "head" and comes last, this is a "head-final" structure. A conventional translation from Korean into English, however, would tend to invert this and put the hen up front: *The hen who left the farm*. For the native speaker of English this might feel like reinstating a natural order, putting correctly on its feet something that was originally standing uncomfortably on its head, topsy-turvy. On the other hand, the Korean speaker might resent that English forces the title to balance on its head, when it had been standing perfectly fine on its feet.[2]

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[1] 거꾸로 말하면 영어가 된다. This conception also exists the other way round, to the degree that learners of Korean sometimes assume that Koreans themselves "listen to the end" before making sense of what is said (perhaps based on the Korean saying "한국말은 끝까지 들어봐야 한다", i.e.: "in Korean you have to listen until the very end"). In her book *Thinking Korean Translation* (Routledge 2018), Jieun Kiaer thus makes it a point to state very clearly: "[…] native speakers of Korean do not rearrange the order of a sentence but aim to understand what is given, following the presented order. This is also what learners of Korean should be aware of. It is intuitive to build meaning as one goes on, instead of rearranging information." (52) See also: "Although the order of structures are [sic] opposite between Korean and English, learners of Korean do not need to fear flipping over long sentences. If they understand the meanings and functions of particles, they can understand the extensive sentences easily." (57) However, Kiaer does not delve more deeply on this point.

[2] In fact, the title was changed in English by the publishers to: "The hen who dreamed she could fly."

The fundamental difference between head-initial and head-final construction has vast implications for translation between languages on opposite sides of this dichotomy. Thus, translating between Korean and English means constant inversion. Even the most basic simple phrases are turned upside down: "ch'aeg-ŭl ilkta" becomes "to read a book."[3] Translation is a game of weighing priorities, gauging the relative importance of the various aspects at play, and making sacrifices according to level of priority.[4] A notorious case in point is the conflict between the preservation of rhyme and the preservation of meaning, even more exacerbated in the very special case of a poem which explicitly refers to the existence of rhyme in its text.[5]

In the case of literary translation from Korean to English and vice versa,[6] we see that sequence — i.e., the order (of words *and ideas*) in which the message is gradually disclosed — is too often neglected, at the expense of rhetorical effect and thus ultimately also of meaning. (This pertains beyond literature, of course, applying to the translation of any rhetorically ambitious utterance.) To sum up this point, I borrow — and could not agree more with — the following words from Jutta Muschard, the result of her close study of German translations of English literature:

> The sequence of information given within an utterance is of considerable importance and by no means incidental […]. Non-preservation of this important feature detracts from relevance […].[7]

## 2. Grammatically correct, rhetorically incorrect

The perceived need to adapt word order to what is considered congenial and "natural" to the target-language community often hampers an adequate rendering of rhetorical effect in translation. This becomes very obvious when we study translations of texts that are notably informed by classical ideas about the production of rhetorical effect. The most notorious mistake that is made in such cases is the shifting of the rhetorical climax. When the climax or punchline is disclosed in the original at the very end of the sentence, in an obviously well-calculated way, then changing this in translation should be a no-go. However, looking at Korean translations of famous English texts, we encounter precisely

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[3] Interestingly, there appears to be less linguistic distance between Korean and German than between Korean and English, at least in this regard. See Maria Polinsky (2012): "Headness, again." *UCLA Working Papers in Linguistics, Theories of Everything* 17: 348–359. For example, ch'aeg-ŭl ilkta ("to read a book") becomes in German: "ein Buch [a book] lesen [to read]." According to a five-part typology by Maria Polinsky, Japanese and English are extreme opposites linguistically, with Korean on the same level as Japanese (as "rigid head-final languages"), while German falls just on the next level, i.e., closer to the middle (as a "non-rigid head-final language"). In another forthcoming paper, I argue that this advantage is not exploited effectively in translations from Korean to German.

[4] Patrick Zabalbeascoa (2006): "Priorities and Hierarchical Accounts of Translation." *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* 33: 89-103.

[5] The problem of translating Christian Morgenstern's humorous poem "Ein Wiesel / sass auf einem Kiesel / inmitten Bachgeriesel" is a prime example. Here, the English version "A weasel / sat on a pebble / in the midst of a ripple / of a brook" sacrifices the rhyme for the sake of the original meaning (at least the 'face-value' literal meaning), while "A weasel / perched on an easel / within a patch of teasel" makes the much better choice. After all, the poem goes on to say (paraphrased): "Do you know why? The shrewd animal did this for the sake of rhyme," making it very clear that 'good sense' was not intended. See Ernst Gutt (1991): *Translation and Relevance*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 106-121.

[6] I would make this claim for German as well, even though German is not so rigidly head-initial as English.

[7] Jutta Muschard (1996): *Relevant Translations: History, Presentation, Criticism, Application*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 153.

this mistake all the time. For example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech "I have a Dream" — a powerful and modern-classic example of the art of rhetoric — contains this sentence:

> But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not **free**.

In a Korean anthology of landmark speeches and texts by "36 Celebrities,"[8] this is translated as follows:

> 그러나 1 백년이 지난 오늘날 우리는 흑인들이 아직고 **자유스럽**지 못하다는 비극적인 사실에 직면해 있읍니다.[9]

In the original, the emphatic "punchline" (which the speaker clearly created in a deliberate and calculated way) is disclosed — as is typical of punchlines — in the very last words: "not free". Peculiarly, the Korean translation does not bother about this, but anticipates the punchline in the middle (as visualized above using bold type); the translator obviously ranked and valued the (taken-for-granted) "natural" word order of Korean more highly than faithfully conveying the dramatic effect. The anthology from which this example is taken contains many similar instances of poor choices, faithfully rendering syntactic structure at the expense of equivalence of rhetorical effect:

> As a publisher, I am acutely aware of the many disputes between the media and their **critics**.
> 신문발행인으로서, 필자는 보도매체와 그 **비평가들** 간의 여러 논쟁을 잘 알고 있다.[10]

> The daily news tells us again and again that, with all his knowledge and with all his refined ways, modern man remains **the wildest animal**.
> 매일같이 전해지는 뉴스들은 현대인들이 그 모든 지식과 그 모든 세련된 방법을 가지고서도 **가장 난폭한 동물**의 상태에 머물러 있을을 거듭 우리에게 말해주고 있는 것이다.[11]

> I believe the reflective portion of mankind is divided into two groups: those who are interested in people and care about them; and those who are interested in **ideas**.
> 나는 사상가들이 두 부류로 나누인다고 한다. 하나는 사람에 관심을 두고 사람을 배려하는 부류이고 다른 하나는 **사상**에 관심을 두는 부류가 그 것이다.[12]

> The reading public has learned how to consume even the greatest fiction as if it were **a can of soup**.
> 아무리 훌륭한 소설이라도 일반 독서대중들은 그것이 마치 **하나의 수프 통조림**인 양 소비해 버리는 방법을 배워왔다.[13]

The objection might be raised that a sentence in canonical word order should not be translated into a sentence with a conspicuously non-canonical word order. But if this requirement leads to the destruction of meaningful sequence, then it should be ranked subordinate.

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[8] *36 Celebrities Say… / Segye ch'oego chisŏng 36-in i mal hanŭn 21-segi ŭi segye.* Sisa Yŏngŏsa p'yŏnjip kungyŏk. Seoul: Sisa Yŏngŏsa 1996. (Yŏng-Han taeyŏk mun'go, 99-100.)
[9] Martin Luther King Jr.: "I have a Dream." *36 Celebrities Say…*, p. 4–5.
[10] Tom Johnson: "A publisher reflects on the freedom of the press." *36 Celebrities Say…*, p. 56–57.
[11] Isaac Bashevis Singer: "Modern man remains the wildest animal." *36 Celebrities Say…*, p. 66–67.
[12] Paul Johnson: "The heartless love of mankind." *36 Celebrities Say…*, p. 72–73.
[13] W. H. Auden: "A short defense of poetry." *36 Celebrities Say…*, p. 82–83.

## 3. Demanding the preservation of sequence: Nothing new under the sun

Talk about translation is dominated by quarrels about the *mot juste*, i.e., the right word. By contrast, the idea that sequence is a major aspect of translation, which must be considered, seems — though not new at all — to remain on the margins, enjoying little more than precarious outsider status. While disputes over word-choice are standard fare, a debate over the *order* of words is unusual, and always threatened to be cut short by the erroneous commonplace that if things are just arranged in a different order then the content is still the same — and, above all, by the notorious cheap refutation pointing to target-language constraints that are assumed, or alleged, to be inevitable. In anticipation of this latter argument, the demand for greater fidelity to sequence usually goes hand in hand with an insistence on the hidden potentials of the target language.

Among the prominent advocates of sequence as a major factor in translation we find some famous German classical philologists of the 19th and 20th centuries:

> Almost always I discovered that, whenever I digressed from Cicero's word order, the speech lost much of its vigor; whereby I concluded that this [Cicero's] sequence was simply natural, and that Cicero would not have ordered his words very differently even if he had happened to be German[14]

> The basic error [...] is sticking to the arbitrary current state of one's own language instead of allowing one's own language to be shifted, forcefully, by the foreign language. He [the translator] should broaden and deepen his own language through the foreign [language]. Usually people have no idea the degree to which this is possible, the extent to which every language can transform itself [15]

> (…) keep the sequence of these ideas; just as, in his sentence, these ideas appear[ed] in front of the poet's eyes[16]

The famous German translator Burkhart Kroeber justified[17] his new rendering of Alessandro Manzoni's already oft-translated *I Promessi Sposi* not, as would be usual, by the previous translations' shortcomings regarding their choice of words, nor by the need to update the language, but as follows:

> I am convinced that a large part of what makes the original appealing to the native reader [...] lies precisely in the way in which the sentences are constructed — and that is how thoughts are guided, how the argument is structured, how the emotional reactions of readers are channeled (419–420)

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[14] "Fast immer fand ich, dass, wenn ich die von Cicero gebrauchte Wortfolge verliess, die Rede selbst viel von ihrer Kraft verlor; woraus ich schloss, dass diese Folge das Naturgemäße sei, und dass Cicero, wäre er ein Deutscher gewesen, die Worte wohl nicht viel anders geordnet haben würde." Friedrich Carl Wolff in his preface to *Des Marcus Tullius Cicero auserlesene Reden* (Altona: Hammerich 1805, p. VII).

[15] "Der grundsätzliche irrtum des übertragenden ist dass er den zufälligen stand der eignen sprache festhält anstatt sie durch die fremde sprache gewaltig bewegen zu lassen […] er muss seine sprache durch die fremde erweitern und vertiefen man hat keinen begriff in welchem masze das möglich ist bis zu welchem grade jede sprache sich verwandeln kann." Rudolf Pannwitz in his book *Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur* [The crisis of European culture] (Nürnberg: Hans Carl 1917), p. 193.

[16] "[…] die Folge dieser Vorstellungen, so wie sie dem Dichter in seinem Satz vor Augen kommen, nach Möglichkeit auch im Deutschen einzuhalten." Wolfgang Schadewaldt in his notes to his translation of Homer's *Odyssey* (Hamburg: Rowohlt 1958), p. 323.

[17] Burkhart Kroeber (2001): "Zu meiner Neuübersetzung der Promessi Sposi" [On my Retranslation of the *Promessi Sposi*]. *Sprachvergleich und Übersetzungsvergleich*, ed. by Jörn Albrecht and Hans-Gauger. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, p. 413–425.

> Decisive are, as far as I am concerned, not the words themselves but their order, i.e. the sequence in which they are disclosed to the reader (417)
>
> What is not merely communicated to the reader but, via the build-up of the sentences and the sequence of the elements that are disclosed, suggested — i.e. the narrative informations [sic], and these are very closely connected with syntax (420)

The outsider status of sequence-preoccupied translation is also noticeable when we look at Dieter Lohmann's (relatively unknown) effort to make teachers of Latin change their ways, so that learners of Latin would be taught to follow the sequence of an utterance, instead of the usual de- and re-construction according to the intuitive word order of the learner's own language, by which the original is turned upside down.[18]

## 4. Is it possible to make Korean more flexible?

In Korean, the canonical constituent order (word order), which is SOV (e.g., "남자가 녹차를 마셨다," the man [nominative marker] the green tea [accusative marker] drank), seems so dominant that all other options rarely come into play. In informal speech, however, all six possible orders of constituents (SOV, OSV, SVO, OVS, VSO, VOS) are, theoretically, acceptable, even if some of them occur only occasionally. Thanks to "right dislocation," Koreans can construct sentences that do not end with a verb (서술어, 동사, 형용사), adding elements *post festum*, such as, e.g., objects that are dependent on the verb, or attributive specifications.[19] Permutation is often attributed to spoken language, but the stylistic effect of emphasis ("강조와 같은 문체적인 의미"[20]) that can be produced by permutation is usually acknowledged.

> 민수를 사랑한다, 내가. Minsoo [accusative marker] love, I [nominative marker].
> 사랑한다, 내가 민수를. Love, I [nominative marker] Minsoo [accusative marker].
> 사랑한다, 민수를, 내가.[21] Love, Minsoo [accusative marker], I [nominative marker].

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[18] "Auf Neues habe ich Lust. Über die Bedeutung der Reihenfolge für das Verstehen und Übersetzen, dargestellt an deutschen und lateinischen Text-Beispielen von Ovid bis Horaz" (Referat auf einer Lehrerfortbildungstagung in Maulbronn am 6.12.2006). [https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/fc/article/view/38578/32240 (1.6.2019)]

[19] Ahn, Hee-Don and Sungeun Cho (2011): "Notes on two types of fragments." *Linguistic Research* 28: 19–35. Ko, Heejeong (2014): "Remarks on Right Dislocation Construction in Korean: Challenges to bi-clausal analyses." *Language Research* 50, no. 2: 275–310. Ahn, Hee-Don. and Sungeun Cho (2015): "Right dislocation vs. fragment: A reply to Ko." *Studies in Generative Grammar* 25: 427–446. Ko, Heejeong. 2015. Two ways to the right: A hybrid approach to right dislocation in Korean. Language Research 51: 3–40. Chung, Daeho (2015): "Some notes on Ko's hybrid approach to the Korean RDC." *Studies in Generative Grammar* 25: 735–754. 이정식(Jeong-Shik Lee) (2016): "국어 우전위 요소와 조각구" [Right Dislocated Elements and Fragments in Korean]. *Studies in Generative Grammar* 26, no. 2: 115–141. Park, Bum-Sik and Sei-Rang Oh (2017): "On the Island-(In)Sensitivity in the Right-Dislocation Construction in Korean." 언어과학연구/*Journal for Linguistic Science* 83: 135–153. For a general orientation see James Hye Suk Yoon on "Korean Syntax" in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.171). See also the paper "English-dominant Korean-speakers show reduced flexibility in constituent order" by Savithry Namboodiripad, Dayoung Kim, and Gyeongnam Kim. UC San Diego. http://savi.ling.lsa.umich.edu/publications/CLSmanuscript.pdf

[20] 최재희: 한국어 문법론 . 서울: 태학사 2004, p. 6.

[21] Ibid., p. 6–7.

It is, however, striking that these potential constructions are so little used when it comes (as shown above) to the translation of aphorisms, jokes, or rhetorically challenging literature.
In the following example, taken from the KBS Gag Concert, disclocation is, in a very basic way, the element on which the shtick relies:

> 아까비: 썸남이랑 주말에 여행을 갔어요. [(Female comedian:) With my crush I went on a weekend trip.]
> (오~) [Oh!]
> 아까비: 처음엔 집이 엄해서 안된다고 했죠. 걔가. [Initially, there was the usual line that mummy and daddy are too strict and there is no way. His.]
> (하하하하...) [Hahaha…]
> 아까비: 여행지에 도착하니 마침 불꽃놀이 중이라 목마를 태워 줬어요. 내가. [When we arrived at the place there was a fireworks display going on and so a ride on the shoulders was given. (By) me (to him).]
> (하하하하...) [Hahaha…]
> 아까비: 그리고 호숫가에서 야경을 바라보며 로맨틱하게 오리배를 탔죠. 따로. [And then, on the lake, looking at the stars, a romantic duck-boat-ride was taken. Separately.]
> (하하하하...) [Hahaha…][22]

The role of dislocation in contemporary Korean literature is perhaps underestimated. Some writers certainly relish the expressiveness made possible by a sentence structure that postpones the disclosure of the grammatical object:

> 나는 느낄 수 있었다. 시간이 흐를수록 마치 맥주가 익어가듯 조금씩 효모가 퍼져가는 부장의 숨소리를. 그리고 그 알콜 기운이 번져가는 심장의 떨림을.[23] [I could feel (it). This (…) breath. And this (…) heartbeat.][24]

> 두려웠다. 유서처럼 배달되는 이 책들이 어느 날 그쳐버릴까봐.[25]
> I was afraid that those books which were delivered like last testaments might one day cease [not be delivered anymore].
> (Literally: "I was afraid. Those last-testament-like delivered books one day [they] they might cease.")

> 생각하지 않을 수 있다면 얼마나 좋을까. 그러니까 우리가 대학에서 만난 1998 년의 세상을.[26]
> How wonderful it would be if I could stop thinking about the world we had faced as university students in 1998.[27]

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[22] Gag Concert / 개그콘서트 2018.12.01 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M92maZhcFLA [starting at 0:40]). Retrieved 15.5.2019.
[23] 박민규 (2005): "고마워, 과연 너구리야." In: 카스테라, p. 61. English translation: Park Min-gyu (2007): "Raccoon World." Transl. by Jenny Wang Medina. *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature & Culture* 1: 193–214.
[24] In English, indeed, it seems impossible to produce a comprehensible equivalent of Korean "premodification," and this greatly limits the potential to replicate what the Korean dislocation achieves here. Jenny Wang Medina translates this passage relatively freely as follows: "I could feel the effects of the alcohol. As time passed, I could hear the manager's breath gradually growing thicker, like the yeast swelling in beer as it ferments. That, and the beating of his heart as the alcohol spread through his veins."
[25] 김성중: 상속 (2018 현대문학상 수상소설집), p. 16.
[26] 김금희 / Kim Keum-hee: 체스의 모든 것. K-Fiction 16. Seoul: Asia Publisher 2016, p. 84
[27] Ibid., p. 87.

In fact, the latter example shows how insensitive translators can be when it comes to rhetorical effects. After all, it should have been the translator's top priority to emulate the specific impact of the Korean original's eye-catching dislocation. This is possible, and would read more or less as follows: "*Stop thinking* — to be able to do this: how wonderful that would be. I mean, [stop thinking] about the world of 1998 (…)." But if this is too radical, the following 'minimal solution' would at least preserve the essential point: "How wonderful it would be if I could stop thinking. [That is, thinking] About the world (…)." By way of example, the language of Korean songwriters is full of such deliberate dislocation, using this device not only to create singable phrases, but also to create tension and impact:

> 그러나 우린 알 수 있었지[But we knew it, didn't we,]
> 너와 나의 둘만의 느낌[yours and mine, both of us, our feelings][28]
>
> 난 알아요 이밤이 흐르고 흐르면[I know, after this night is over,]
> 누군가가 나를 떠나 버려야한다는[somebody has to leave me and ditch me]
> 그 사실을 그 이유를 [This fact, the reason for it]
> 이제는 나도 알수가 알수가 있어요[now I too can understand it][29]
>
> 언제나 그 말은 하지 못했지 [Never this word I was able to say:]
> 오래전부터 사랑해 왔다고[since long ago I have always loved you][30]

There is the peculiar effect here that even in this line-by-line translation, the English version does not always convey that a dislocation occurs. Amongst the examples above, the only really striking case might be: "This fact … now I can understand it." But all the above examples postpone something that in conventional (canonical) Korean grammatical order would be placed either first, or somewhere in the middle, but not last.
The examples given above are in fact simple, as the dislocation merely "postpones" an object which — in textbook grammar — would have to precede the verb:

> 달콤했었지 / 그 수많았던 추억속에서 [(Sweet it had been, hadn't it / (being) within all those many memories][31]
> ('Textbook-wise':) 그 수 많았던 추억 속에서 달콤했었지
>
> 그리워하고 있니 / 오래전오늘 우리의 사랑이 / 너무나 포근했던 / 그 겨울 눈부신 하늘을 [Do you miss it? / Long ago our love / (was) much too cosy / (under) this winter's dazzling heaven][32]
> ('Textbook-wise':) 오래전 오늘(,) 우리의 사랑이 너무나 포근했던(,) 그 겨울(의) 눈부신 하늘을 (너는) 그리워하고 있니

We see clearly how dislocation creates very interesting rhetorical effects stemming from the linear or chronological order in which we apprehend the elements of the utterance. These effects increase, of course, the more complex the dislocations are. As we can see below, poetic creativity can shuffle the sequence in many ways, going far beyond the simple postponing of an object:

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[28] 벗님들: 둘만의 그낌 (1986).
[29] 서태지와 아이들: 난 알아요 (1992).
[30] 신해철 넥스트: 인형의 기사 (1992).
[31] 나미: 나의 슬픈인연 (1985).
[32] 강수지: 혼자만의 겨울 (1995). The tentative translation provided here is meant to reflect sequence. With grammar as the leading criterion the rendering should be along the lines of: "Do you miss it, that winter's dazzling heaven [of those days] when, long ago, our love was much too cosy."

세상을 너무나 모른다고 ['This world too much ignoring':]
나보고 그대는 얘기하지 [Looking at me you said (these words above about me),]
조금은 걱정된 눈빛으로 [slightly sorrowful glances throwing at me][33]

In prosaic "textbook" order these lines would be whirled around: 그대는 조금은 걱정된 눈빛으로 나보고 세상을 너무나 모른다고 얘기하지.

What we may see here is an arsenal of syntactic possibilities, that could not only be put to good use in the 36 rhetorically sophisticated essays quoted above, but would also be helpful in the translation of aphorisms and jokes, and — ultimately — the translation of any rhetorically ambitious utterance. Translators of Korean (into English), however, refrain from exploiting these linguistic possibilities because sequence ranks low in their hierarchy of priorities. Likewise, Western translators are seemingly convinced that all other concerns simply overrule sequence — as will be shown in the following.

## 5. Literary translation examples

### 5.1 Giving away the punchline

윤교수는 이런 얘기도 해주었다. 루쉰이 일본 유학생이었을 때 일본인 선생이 참배할 것이 있다며 루쉰을 비롯한 학생들을 뒤따르게 했는데, 데리고 간 곳이 오차노미즈에 있는 공자 사당이었단다.[34]
The professor also said that when Lu Xun was a student in Japan, he had a Japanese teacher who took all of his students, including Lu Xun, to a Confucian shrine in Ochanomizu.

Very obviously, the English translation here gives away the rhetorical goal of the original text. Clearly, the rhetorical climax is at the end of the sentence, when the original states, if we translate literally: "… but where he took them, this place was a (in-Ochanomizu-located) Confucian shrine." So there is, indeed, a clear build-up of tension, that ends with a kind of punchline. In German, at least, this could be replicated very well,[35] but English also has the linguistic tools to keep much closer to the original, and thus also closer to effective storytelling. After all, let us not forget that the purpose of staying close to the original is, in this regard, not an end in itself, but a means to be rhetorically apt.

### 5.2 Order of words vs. order of ideas

어린시절 **거짓말을 할 때마다** 코가 길어지는 아이의 이야기를 읽은 적이 있다.
Back when I was a child, I once read a story about a boy whose nose grew longer **every time he told a lie**.[36]

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[33] 들국화: 그것만이 내 세상 (1985).
[34] Example from: 신경숙: 어디선가 나를 찾는 전화벨이 울리고. Seoul: P'aju 2010, p. 182–183. English Translation: Kyŏng-suk Sin: *I'll be right there.* New York: Other Press 2013, p. 157.
[35] "Professor Yun gab auch die folgende Geschichte zum Besten. Als Lu Xun in Japan als Auslandsstudent war, meinte ein japanischer Lehrer einmal, es gelte jemandem eine Reverenz zu erweisen. Lu Xun und andere Studenten forderte er zum Mitkommen auf, wohin er sie aber führte, das war ein in Ochanomizu gelegener, dem Konfuzius gewidmeter Schrein."
[36] This example is the first sentence of "Kodog-ŭi palgyŏn," a short story by Ŭn Hŭi-gyŏng (Eun Hee Kyung). The English translation, "The discovery of solitude," is contained in *Beauty Looks Down on Me.* Transl. by Yoonjin Park, Craig Bott, Sora Kim-Russell, and Jae Won Chung. Champaign, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press 2017.

The English sentence is, in fact, admirably effective, and builds up well to culminate in a rhetorical climax. But nevertheless, it is legitimate to ask: Would it equally be possible to follow the sequence of the Korean original? Yes, but only by means that "break" smooth syntactic progression:

> A childhood memory: With every lie his nose became longer – this was the fate of a boy whose story I read in those days.

Does fidelity to sequence make up for the loss of fidelity in terms of syntactical relations? After all, what was attributive in the original, in typically Korean pre-modification (*k'o-ga kirŏjinŭn*: [its]-nose-longer-getting-[child] = a child whose nose got longer), becomes a main phrase ("his nose became longer"), and what was the main clause (*iyagi-rŭl ilgŭn chŏg-i itta*: I once read a/the story) becomes a relative clause ("whose story I read"). But translating means pondering priorities and sacrificing the lesser for the greater good. I argue that in literary translation the attempt at (approximate) replication of the original sequence should be — not automatically, but more often than not — prioritized above the attempt at preservation of syntactical, grammatical relations. After all, sequence means the cognitive order in which the reader encounters the elements of the sentence or utterance, one after the other.

### 5.3 Cognitive sequence

> 해안촌 혹은 중국인 거리라고도 불리는 우리 동네는 겨우내 북풍이 실어나르는 탄가루로 그늘지고 거무죽죽한 공기 속에 해는 낮달처럼 희미하게 걸려 있었다.[37]
> Our neighbourhood was Seashore Village to some, while others called it Chinatown. The coal dust carried in by the winter northerlies settled over the area like a shadow, blackening the sky and leaving the orb of the sun looking more like the moon.

The distance between the two languages involved means that it is not possible to follow the original's "order of ideas" unless there is a willingness to abandon the ambition to preserve the syntactic structure of the original. Normally, as we can see also from this example here, the emulation of syntactic structure is considered to be of utmost importance for translational equivalence. But if we are willing to give up this ambition to reproduce syntax, we attain a result that delivers the right psychological impact in terms of narration:

> Seashore Village or Chinese Street, as it was called – this was our village, where all winter long the north wind carried along coal dust that made for a murky and darkish sky, in which the sun, vague like a moon in daylight, drooped down.

## 6. Conclusion

Inherent in all languages we find the basic principle[38] that things have to be told one after another, with relative freedom on the part of the speaker to choose — within the (often

[37] Example taken from Oh Jung-hee: Chinatown / 오정희: 중국인 거리, published together with the translation as volume 11 of the Bi-lingual Edition Modern Korean Literature (p. 12 and p. 13 respectively). Translation by Bruce und Ju-chan Fulton, first printed in: *Korea Journal* 30, no.1 (1990): 49–64.

[38] It is exactly this aspect that in the science fiction movie *Arrival* distinguishes human languages from the non-linear language of the ultra-intelligent aliens, who communicate in written statements that are produced all at once.

very broad) limits of his or her language — what to start with, what to go on with, and how to end. This "order of words" (or rather, order of *ideas*) is a crucial matter in narration. However, while we are used to paying attention to the order of how a story is told on the macro-level, it is not so common to be aware of the mini-dramas going on within individual sentences. But these mini-dramas matter. It matters how a sentence starts and how it ends, because for the reader, the sequence of even a small portion of text, be it only a sentence, often entails an adventurous cognitive journey. Reversals of the original sequence, arising from a trained habit on the part of translators to 'turn things upside down' for (presumed) better understanding — or because of the (perceived) differing tendencies of the target language — can do major harm to the cognitive experience that the writer intends to trigger in the reader's mind. And this is why literature, in particular, is especially vulnerable to the prevalent insensivity regarding sequence.

[Abstract]

When translating Korean into Western languages, and vice versa, reshuffling maneuvers that turn the source text's sentences "upside down" are routinely performed. Translating between distant languages inevitably requires "head and tail" inversion, changing the order of the phrase's elements and re-arranging what comes first, next, and last — or at least this is a generally accepted truism. Justifications invoked are differences in grammar and the irrefutable fact that rhetorical sensibilities and norms are not universal.

What is thus overlooked, however, is that in literary translation, the re-creation of a carefully crafted sentence is a task that concerns the very essence of narration: sequence. After all, creating a narrative is about consecutive discursive presentation: A story's events are conveyed in the storyteller's calculated order, often diverging markedly from chronology. Some information may be relayed in advance, while other crucial information may be withheld. Some backstories are disclosed early, while others are purposefully only revealed at the very end. This basic principle applies not only to the narration as a whole but (and this is what tends to be forgotten) also to its smaller constitutive units — as we can see when a novel's sentences are ingeniously constructed in terms of what is said first, next, and last.

The empirical basis for my exploration consists of numerous examples collected over a period of some years. The point of departure is my observation, confirmed again and again, that Korean translations of aphorisms, jokes, poems, and rhetorically elaborate essays tend to prioritize syntactical fidelity — i.e., preserving the grammatical relationships between words — at the expense of commitment to sequence. The cognitive surprise-effect of the original punchline is thus squandered for the sake of the target language's habitual word order (which should be regarded as the lesser good).

But my main focus is a mirror image or complementary phenomenon to this first one: Western translations of Korean fiction tend to diminish the importance of sequence within a single sentence, thereby sacrificing effects of suspense, and failing (in extreme cases) to convey the author's chosen narrative strategy. An approach that favors functional equivalence over imitation of grammatical structure would allow the reader to process the given information at a pace that is analogous to that of the original.

The present paper argues that sequence deserves more attention as a meaningful dimension of language. Beyond practical consequences for the translation of Korean literature, this insight should also relativize and complement the typological approach that is usually adopted when comparing Korean with Western languages.