# Korean *maum* vs. English *heart* and *mind*: Contrastive Semantics of Cultural Concepts

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## 1. Introduction

Knowing other cultures and understanding their cultural values and norms are critical in this era. The close link between the life of a society and the lexicon of the language spoken by that society has been validated (cf. e.g., Sapir, 1951; Wierzbicka 1997a). However, without a rigorous linguistic framework for semantic analysis, the exact meaning of culture specific concepts cannot be represented to outsiders of the culture in question because different cultures develop different psychology and different conceptualisational patterns. Consequently these concepts cannot be translated cross-linguistically without a change in their meanings. However, the NSM approach has been found to be a practical semantic analysis tool for culturally salient concepts since it is designed to be independent of any particular language or culture (cf. e.g., Wierzbicka, 1999: Goddard, 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 2001a; Harkins and Wierzbicka (eds.), 2001; Hasada, 2000, Ye; 2000, see also 2.5 for detail).

Among the different perspectives on the study of meaning, the NSM theory assumes that there are semantic invariants that are understood and communicated among the speakers of the language in question, and that meaning analysis has to be able to articulate these invariants clearly enough to insiders as well as to outsiders of the language. The NSM approach is interested in capturing the necessary semantic components of the defined concept and paraphrasing them into a simple language that is self-explanatory.

## 1.1 Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory

The NSM theory is one of contemporary approaches to semantics, and its methodology has been developed as a tool for semantic analysis. This theory has been proposed and developed by Wierzbicka (1972, 1980, 1991, 1992,1996) and her colleagues for more than three decades.

The NSM theory is built on the assumption that words have meanings that can be articulated. Although meanings are not fixed and are interpreted differently according to context, there are always some shared features, and they can be captured if the methodology is appropriate, otherwise humans could not possibly communicate with each other. Therefore, the NSM approach aims to state the semantic invariant of a word or an expression in a precise way, striving for clarity and simplicity in defining the meaning.

In order to avoid obscurity and circularity, this approach assumes a few principles. First of all, the definition of a word or an expression must be represented by the natural language of the defined words or expressions. This is because any arbitrary artificial language, such as the diagrams or formulae used in other approaches, eventually has to be translated into natural language in order to be understood. That is why these symbols, which had no

meaning at all before the meanings assigned to them, used in certain semantic analysis systems are not used in this theory. The insightful comment made by Lyons (1977: 12) on the use of non natural language is that "It is probably far more widely accepted than is was at one time that any formalization is parasitic upon the ordinary everyday use of language". Any artificial metalanguage works only in collaboration with ordinary language. Due to this drawback of artificial language, the NSM theory advocates the thesis that the metalanguage for meaning analysis has to be based on natural language.

Secondly, the NSM approach assumes that human concepts are hierarchical. This means that there are more complicated and sophisticated concepts, as well as relatively simple and intuitively intelligible concepts. Among the latter there are indefinable concepts that are called semantic primitives or primes in the NSM theory. Consequently, a more complicated concept must be able to be reduced into these intuitively understandable concepts so that the definition (often called an explication in the theory) can be clearly understood. This is the reductive paraphrase principle. According to Goddard (2002a: 5), "the reductive paraphrase method prevents us from getting tangled up in circularity and terminological obscurity".

Thirdly, a definition using the NSM approach is claimed to have substitutability. This means that a good explication can be verified by ordinary native speakers of that language as to, whether the explication and the original expression mean exactly the same thing, and therefore, whether the explication can be substituted for the expression.

Another crucial theoretical principle of the NSM theory is that semantic primitives used for metalanguage are universal, which means that these concepts must be lexicalised in any natural language. The concept of lexicalisation in the theory is used in the broad sense that primitive concepts are encoded not only in words or morphemes but also in bound morphemes and fixed phrases (Goddard, 1998a: 59). The assumption of the universality of the proposed semantic primitives is based on the idea that the "alphabet of human thoughts" (Liebniz, quoted in Wierzbicka, 1996a: 13) is innate. They are inherently clear, indefinable, and independent from any specific human language.

Finally, the NSM theory advocates the principle of 'isomorphism' of the semantic primes in terms of both lexicon and syntax: it hypothesises that in every natural human language, there must be counterparts of the proposed semantic primitives with the same expressive power, existing as a subset of the language. This can be seen as a mini-language and is theoretically capable of being transposed into any other language-based NSMs without carrying difference in meaning. This principle assumes that despite the differences in 'resonance' between two different exponents of the same prime from two different languages, the two exponents will match semantically (see Wierzbicka, 1996a for detailed discussion). Therefore, the explication achieved by using the NSM method in a certain language, let's say in English, can be translated into a Lao-based or French-based (or any language-based) NSM. Without the isomorphic principle, cross-linguistic comparison between the different semantic systems will not be possible, since "any comparison requires a common measure" (Wierzbicka, 1996a: 16). The principle of isomorphism of the NSM theory has been supported and validated by cross-linguistic investigation.

The current lexicon of NSM theory consists of around 60 lexical items. The semantic primitives are proposed by "a great deal of trial-and error experimentation in diverse areas of semantic analysis" (Goddard, 1997: 3), and are presented in the table below.

Substantives		I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE/PERSON,
Substantives		
		SOMETHING/THING, BODY
Determiners		THIS, THE SAME, OTHER
Quantifiers		ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MANY/MUCH
Evaluators		GOOD, BAD
Descriptors		BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates		THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech		SAY, WORD, TRUE
Actions, events	and	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE
movement		
Existence & possession		THERE IS, HAVE
Life and death		LIVE, DIE
Time		WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT
		TIME, FOR SOME TIME
Space		WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR; SIDE,
-		INSIDE
"Logical" Concepts		NOT, MAYBE, BECAUSE, IF, CAN
Intensifier, Augmentor		VERY, MORE
Taxonomy, Partonomy		KIND OF, PART OF
Similarity		LIKE

TABLE 1. THE PROPOSED NSM SEMANTIC PRIMITIVES (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2002)<sup>1</sup>

The proposed semantic primitives are found to be lexicalised in Korean and their grammar has been found to be feasible by a comprehensive testing (c.f. Yoon, 2003).

## 2. Explication by the NSM approach

In order to explicate selected lexical items by using the NSM approach, examples of natural linguistic usage are collected from different sources: journals, popular songs, novels, newspaper articles and corpora.<sup>2</sup> The examples used all reflect contemporary usage of the defined words among speakers of the language in question. Speculation on the basis of linguistic evidence is essential for semantic analysis using the NSM approach. The collected examples are examined first to establish preliminary explications based on the linguistic use of native speakers. As a second step, the examples are tested by being substituted for the defined expressions. The explications in this paper are proposed through this process. Nonetheless, these explications are left open to further discussion or modification as it is possible that a counterexample may stand out. The aim is for explications to be open to improvement and be compatible with all usages.

# 3. The meaning of Anglo concepts of 'heart' and 'mind'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The NSM model has changed a lot since it was first advanced in the early 1970s. In Anna Wierzbicka's 1972 book Semantic Primitives, only 14 semantic primitives were proposed and in her 1980 book Lingua Mentalis, the inventory was not much bigger. Over the 1980s and 1990s, however, the number of proposed primes was expanded greatly, reaching a current total of 60 or so. The same period also saw the development of some important new ideas about the syntax of the semantic metalanguage. Each member has been selected by various theoretical bases and put under cross-linguistic investigations. The current inventory, therefore, has been established on empirical findings

<sup>(</sup>cf. http://www.une.edu.au/arts/LCL/disciplines/linguistics/nsmpage.htm) <sup>2</sup> KIST. Retrieved November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002, from the World Wide Web: <u>http://kibs.kaist.ac.kr</u>

IKC. Retrieved October 30th, 2002, from the World Wide Web: http://ikc.korea.ac.kr/cgi-bin/kwic/kwic.cgi

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> There are also other closely related words; the Japanese word *kokoro*, the Malay word *hati*, and the Russian word *duša*, which have all been explicated within the NSM framework (see Hasada, 2000; Goddard, 2000; Wierzbicka, 1992a).

Wierzbicka (1992a) claims that the two concepts are highly culture-specific and their semantic equivalents are not found in all languages yet people use the two terms as if they are universal. The followings are suggested as the meanings of the two concepts:

mind

- (a) one of two parts of a person
- (b) one cannot see it
- (c) because of this part, a person can think and know

(Wierzbicka, 1992a: 45, line order added)

heart<sup>4</sup>

- (a) a part of a person
- (b) one cannot see it
- (c) one can imagine that it is a part of a person's body [in the middle of the upper half of the body
- (d) one can hear its movements]
- (e) because of this part, a person can feel good things and bad things
- (f) because of this part, a person can feel good things towards other people

## (Wierzbicka 1992a: 48, line order added)

According to Wierzbicka, the concept of 'mind' is "a characteristic feature of Anglo-Saxon culture, not necessarily of Western culture in general" (1992a: 43). However, the "English ethnopsychological categories are often mistaken for 'Western' ethnopsychological categories and construct" (1992a: 40).

The concept of 'heart' is seen in English as the organ of emotions, not necessarily as a seat of all emotions but only of emotions which are seen as either 'good' or 'bad' on the ground of the awkwardness of such expressions as 'His heart was full of surprise/amazement/interest' (1992a: 47).

The proposed explications are the semantic invariants that can be the essential part of the meaning. They illustrate the semantic components constructed in the defined concepts. Since they are in universal human concepts, the meanings are transposable into other language based NSM, and virtually understandable without the change of meaning.

### 4. The meaning of Korean concept of maum

The high frequency of use of *maum* indicates that this concept is at the centre of Korean life. The importance of this concept is reflected in various combinations of this word with other words, such as predicates and attributives, and also with a number of set phrases. The following are some of the established metaphorical expressions.<sup>5</sup>

- 마음이 가다 (maumi kata: lit. maum goes): tend to be attracted
- 마음이 나다 (*maumi nata*: lit. *maum* comes up): want to do something something)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The explications of 'mind' and 'heart' are formulated in an earlier version of NSM, that they use some elements which have since been superseded, e.g. 'imagine', 'feel towards', 'and'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> In the dictionary Kumsengphan Kwuke Taysacen (1991:919-920), there are 30 idiomatic expressions which are in combination with all the different predicates.

There are also a great number of attributive words, including those containing moral values, which are readily used in combination with *maum* as shown below:

- 편한 마음으로 (with a relaxed *maum*): comfortably or without tension or agitation
- 어두운 마음으로 (with a dark *maum*): with anxiety

The word *maum* is used symmetrically to *mom* (body). The customary contrast between *maum* and *mom* in colloquial everyday use, as well as in the literature of various fields including psychology, suggests that they are considered as two parts of a person. For instance, there is a huge body of literature written on the subject '*mom* and *maum*' (body and *maum*). The following are some selected book titles that have been published in Korea in the last decade  $(1990-2002)^6$ .

- thunthunhan mom kenkanghan maum: The healthy body and the healthy maum
- momkwa maumuy sayngmwulhak: The biology of body and maum
- momuy poyak maumuy poyak: Healthy medicine for body and maum

Owing to the symmetrical use of *maum* and *mom* (body), one may think that *maum* is something similar to the English concept of 'mind' because of the predominant Anglo symmetry of 'body' and 'mind'. Also the conventional translation of *maum* into either the 'mind' or the 'heart' has had an influence on many people so that they are not aware of the function of *maum* as the same as either of them. In order to ascertain what the concept of *maum* is for Koreans and what *maum* does in a person, one needs to closely examine exhaustive examples of its use.

The concept *maum* is used to describe various psychological activities that cannot be experienced in the body. The symmetry of *mom* (body) and *maum* suggests that Koreans think that *maum* is one of the two parts of a human. The part *maum* exists exclusively in human beings not in other living creatures. Koreans believe that while *mom* (body) belongs to the physical, material world, *maum* is invisible and intangible and exists as a psychological entity. However, *maum* is conceptualised as being located somewhere inside one's chest area. These aspects can be captured in the following components:

one of the two parts of a person (one part is person's body, this is the other part) people think about it like this:

"this part is somewhere inside the middle of the upper part of a person's body people cannot see this part

because of this part, a person is not like other living things"

The part within the quotation marks indicates the general belief of Korean people about the part *maum*. In addition to the characteristics presented above, *maum* has various functions. First, it seems to be the faculty of emotion as seen in example (1). The metaphor of a place where emotions can be born and developed is also commonly used when people want to express their feelings by referring to *maum*, see examples below:

"작품에 손을 대서는 안 돼요. 미술 작품은 눈으로 보고 마음으로 느껴야 하는 거예요."
 You must not touch that piece. You should see an artistic piece with your eyes and feel with your maum. (MT: K->E, KAIST)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Although the total number of books that deal with the same subject is unknown, there are around 27 book titles containing *mom* and *maum* (body and *maum*) in the catalogue of Korea's national library alone.

The feelings born in *maum* are of various kinds but they can only be emotions, not physical sensations. Although there are such expressions as *maumi chwupta* (cold in the *maum*) or *maumi aphuta* (sick at *maum*), these are used metaphorically. The examples below show that different kinds of emotions can be felt in the *maum*:

허영심, 수치심, 질투심, 욕심 등 여러 가지 감정이 마음속에 자리잡고 있다.
 Various emotions including vanity, a sense of shame, jealousy, and greed etc are placed inside the *maum*. (MT: K->E, KAIST)

The word *maum* is often used to describe people's emotional states, mostly those feelings that can be described as 'good' or 'bad', although there is a feeling that is not specified by these terms as shown in (3):

 (3) 손을 잡을까 눈을 감아보라 할까 너무도 떨리는 내마음 조금이라도 내게 다가와 그대 이밤이 가기전에 Should I hold your hands? Should I ask you to close your eyes? My *maum* is too trembling. Come closer to me while this night is young. (MT: K-> E, First Kiss, <u>http://login.bugsmusic.co.kr/home\_login.htm</u>, 20 Sep. 2002)

The word *maum* is not used with physical sensation terms as shown in (4) although there are metaphoric expressions such as *maumi ssulita* (*maum* aches):

(4) \**maum-i kalye-we-se...* maum-NM itch-and then For *maum* is itch...

Therefore the ability of *maum* to experience various kinds of feeling, except for bodily sensations can be captured in the component <u>a person can feel some things in this part</u> when this person thinks about something. This component excludes physical processes since only emotions result from thinking.

Apart from feeling various kinds of emotions, *maum* can also desire something as seen in examples (5):

(5) 우리 국민들은 오랫동안 마음속 깊이 변화와 개혁을 열망해 왔습니다.
 We people of this nation have had a strong desire for change and revolution deep inside our *maum*. (MT: K-> E, KAIST)

There are also some fixed expressions, such as *maumi kancelhata* (*maum* is eager to), *maumul mekta* (lit. eat *maum*: decide to do something) *maumi naykhita* (lit. *maum* becomes agreeable: inclined to do something), and *maumi nata* (lit. *maum* comes up: wants to do something). This aspect can be captured in the component <u>because of this part, a person</u> can want to do many things.

In addition, one can also think in this part about something and/or someone. This is the most distinct aspect of *maum* compared to the English concept of the 'heart' although in the literature the most frequent translation of *maum* is the 'heart'. The examples below provide evidence that Koreans can think in their *maum*:

(6) 어떻게든 제가 모셔 오도록 하겠습니다. 스님은 마음속 깊이 생각한 바가 있어 진주 속가로 내려갔다. I'll do my best to bring him here. The monk went back to his family at *Cincwu* since he had a thought deep in his *maum*. (MT: K-> E, KAIST) (7) 어른들은 머리로 이해하려고 합니다, 이즈모의 어린이들은 마음으로 이해합니다. 나무를 사랑하고 푸르름을 사랑합니다.
 Adults tend to understand with their head while children of *Icumo* understand things with their *maum*. They love trees and green. (MT: K->E, KAIST)

However, the *maum* is not the primary part for thinking. There is another body part to which all the cognitive or intellectual functions are ascribed; the *meli* (brain; lit. head). Therefore, one can think **not because of** *maum* but can think in *maum* if one wants to think sincerely, and as it were morally. Since the *meli* can think but can also miss out things such as moral or ethical aspects of a matter, thinking in the *maum* or with the *maum* (presumably in collaboration with *meli*) is highly valued in Korean culture, as shown in examples (6) and (7). Thinking only in the *meli* (brain) is not as good as thinking in collaboration with the *maum*, since the *meli* can calculate things according to self-interest. Whereas one can think without being contaminated by egoistic calculation if one tries to think with the *maum*. It is unclear whether this suggests that the *maum* is a primary good part of a person that enables a person to be altruistic. More examples are required in order to determine whether this aspect is a part of the meaning of *maum*. Nonetheless, *maum* includes being able to think and this can be accounted for with the general positive evaluation of the community: when a person thinks about something, it is good if this person thinks in this part

Furthermore, Koreans believe that they can act with *maum* when they intend to carry out various things decently, including occupational duties, craft, or even daily routines. People evaluate the result positively when someone does things with *maum* or by putting their *maum* in their deeds. People often think that good results come from one's *maum* not from experience or skill. Therefore, having *maum* through the whole process of the action is highly valued and regarded as genuine and noble. One can do many things with *maum*, including listening, making things (including crafts), or forgiving, as seen in the examples below:

(8) 칼질은 힘으로 하는 것이 아니라 마음으로 하는 거다. The action of cutting has to be done with *maum*, not with your physical strength (MT: K-> E, KAIST)

According to the above examples, doing things with *maum* seems to mean concentrating all one's psychological energy and activating one's ability of feeling and thinking. However, this is not appropriate in cases involving immorality or inhuman deeds. Not all kinds of action can be done with *maum*. One would not use the expression *maumul tahay totwukcilul hata* (stealing with one's *maum*) or *maumul tahay ssawuta* (fighting with one's *maum*). Therefore, good will comes from one's *maum*, and presumably because of this intrinsic aspect of *maum* people positively value actions done with the *maum*. Anything that comes from the *maum* is evaluated as valuable and genuine. The expression *maum kiphun kosulopwutheuy*... (from the deep inside of *maum*) may occur with appreciation, apologies, regrets, praises, respect, and forgiveness. When someone does any action or performance with *maum*, people generally recognise it positively. This aspect can be captured in the component: when a person does something, it is good if this person thinks at the same time in this part like this : "I want to do this thing well".

Someone's *maum* is often described with value terms such as good or bad, beautiful or ugly, decent or indecent, and kind or unkind, as seen in the various examples presented previously and below:

(9) 따뜻하게 이해해 주는 유라의 너그러운 마음이 그렇게 편안할 수가 없었다
 I felt very comfortable with Yula's generous *maum* with which she understands me warmly. (MT: K->E, Kim B, 1995: 25)

People's *maum* can be sometimes good and sometimes bad. If one maintains good *maum* all the time one is considered as a virtuous and righteous person. When one's *maum* is good one tends to do good things perhaps for others, while when it's bad one would behave oppositely. This aspect can be represented in the components <u>if this part of a person</u> is good this person wants to do good things, and <u>if this part of a person</u> is bad this person wants to do bad things.

It is common that people think *maum* is a secret place about which no one can know anything unless a person wants to let other people know what is in their *maum*, as seen in examples (10) below. However, it is also possible to say "even if s/he wanted to hide his/her *maum* I could read his/her *maum*". Therefore, the aspect of confidentiality of *maum* should not be included as a semantic invariant.

(10) 그러나 조용히 앉아있는 소대원들의 마음속까지 읽을 수는 없는 일이었다.
 But I could not possibly read inside the *maum* of the members of the troop (MT: K-> E, KAIST)

On the basis of the discussion of *maum* I posit the following explication:

#### таит

- (a) one of the two parts of a person (one part is the body, this is the other part)
- (b) people think about it like this:
- (c) "it is somewhere inside the middle of the upper part of a person's  $body^7$
- (d) people cannot see this part
- (e) because of this part, a person is not like other living things
- (f) because of this part, a person can want to do many things
- (g) a person can feel some things in this part when this person thinks about something
- (h) when a person thinks about something, it is good if this person thinks in this part
- (i) when a person does something, it is good if this person thinks at the same time in this part like this: 'I want to do this thing well'
- (j) if this part of a person is good this person wants to do good things
- (k) if this part of a person is bad this person wants to do bad things"

## 5. The semantic comparison of the concepts from different cultures

Similarities and differences between the three concepts 'mind', 'heart', and *maum*, can be observed from the explications presented above. In terms of similarity, *maum* is linked to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> There are several non-primitive words used in explication such as, 'middle' or 'upper' (and 'man' and 'women' in the explication of *kasum* (1)). They are semantic molecules that are used only for the purposes of economy. Their meanings are not decomposed here for it is beyond the scope of this research. According to Goddard (1998a: 254) "There shouldn't be anything surprising about this... One can presume that having recurrent semantic complexes packaged into word-like 'chunks' makes it easier for people to acquire and manipulate the huge amounts of semantic information involved. Presenting explications at the intermediate level... rather than trying to resolve them all the way down to the level of primitives, allows us to 'see' the recurrent chunks or semantic molecules appearing in the form of simple (though not primitive) words.

'mind' in that they all have the components <u>one of the two parts of a person</u> and <u>one cannot</u> <u>see it</u> in common. In other words, both are entities that are one of the two essential parts consist of human. Another similarity is that both entities have the function of 'thinking'.

The most obvious difference between *maum* and 'mind' seems to be that *maum* has the function of feeling (good or bad), while 'mind' does not. The location of *maum* is also different from that of 'mind'. While *maum* is located around the chest area (in the middle of the upper part of a persons body), 'mind' is in one's head area.

Comparing *maum* and 'heart' in terms of similarity, both entities have the function of feeling as shown in components (e) and (f) of 'heart', and (g) of *maum*. The most distinct aspect of *maum* compared to 'heart' is that it can 'know' and 'think' while 'heart' does not have these functions. In the concept of 'heart', there is a semantic component that this part is the source of good will in a person (line (f) because of this part, a person can feel good things towards other people), while in the concept of *maum*, the exclusive human quality is expressed (line (e): because of this part, a person is not like other living things). In fact, this aspect of *maum* is not found either in 'heart' or in 'mind'. However, this component can possibly exist in the English concept of 'soul'. The aspect of 'wanting something' in the concept of *maum* is seen as the faculty of all kinds of psychological activity and is used as a metaphor for a person that is distinct from both 'heart' and 'mind'.

Although the Anglo concepts, 'mind' and 'heart', are used as the translational equivalents of *maum* and vice versa, the three concepts are distinct in their meanings as illustrated above. However, the explications of those concepts show why *maum* is translated as 'heart' in some cases and as 'mind' in others. The semantic similarities and differences are identified and compared to each other since they are analysed in terms of the same metalanguage that consists of universal human concepts and universal grammar.

# 6.Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt is made to compare highly distinct concepts: Anglo concepts of 'heart' and 'mind', and Korean concept *maum* by using the NSM method. The explications of these concepts are the paraphrases in terms of a simple and intuitively understandable metalanguage. This attempt enables outsiders to see the cognitive structure of the analysed concepts through the same window as native speakers of the language in question. Without an appropriate and systematic tool of analysis, the meaning of cultural concepts will not be adequately comprehended by outsiders.

The similarities and differences of the presented concepts have been pinpointed by their cognitive content which all reflect different folk views on similar psychological entities. The overlap and the difference between these explications can explain precisely why they can serve as translational equivalents in some contexts but not in others. The Anglo concepts reflect the Anglo culture specific way of conceptualising while the Korean concept *maum* does the Korean way. The meaning analysis of *maum* appears to be essential for understanding Korean folk psychology. This is made possible only because all the concepts are described by the same analytical tool (i.e. the NSM framework).

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## Note

1. The Romanisation used in this thesis follows the Yale System without phonetic details. The listed consonants and vowels of the Yale romanisation system presented below are the equivalents of the Korean alphabetic letters that are represented by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

2. Conventions used
MT: My Translation
K→ E: Translation from Korean to English