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Interpreting Empire:English, U.S. Advisors, and Interpreters in the Korean War

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Abstract

The Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) – a relatively small unit of U.S. Army officers – developed, advised, and exerted influence over the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army from its inception in 1946 through the signing of the Korean War armistice in July 1953. KMAG advisors served down to the battalion level, working alongside South Korean counterparts in ROK Army units, causing language to be a crucial battlefield that animated American anxieties and negative racial assumptions. In a moment when few, if any, American military officers had Korean language proficiency, South Koreans with English-language capability became essential to the U.S. foreign policy project in South Korea. South Korean interpreters, too, amplified racialized concerns about the trustworthiness of ROK soldiers. This article places American understandings of language in KMAG affairs into critical focus, highlighting the cultural assumptions that came to effect material change in U.S. Army policy towards the ROK Army before and during the Korean War. It shows how language was a means of U.S. penetration into the fabric of Korean state and society, but also a target of imaginations that disturbed the U.S. military because of its consistent reminder of how language could resist American suggestion.

Keywords

KMAG (Korean Military Advisory Group) – advisors – interpreters – Korean War – orientalism – imperialism – military modernization – politics of language – U.S.-South Korean relations

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When the delegation representing the United States and the United Nations first met with Chinese and North Korean truce negotiators in July 1951 at the city of Kaesŏng, once the capital of the Koryŏ dynasty, the U.S./UN team had no qualified career service interpreter in either the Chinese or Korean language. Despite four years of a U.S. military government occupying southern Korea from 1945 to 1948 and just over a year of general warfare on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. military – which dominated the U.S./UN delegation – still lacked qualified professional linguists in its ranks who had the exceptional fluency necessary for handling interpretation at such high-level meetings. Fortunately, the U.S./UN team did not have to resort to charades or pictures when discussing prisoner of war (POW) repatriation. Kenneth Wu, a naturalized U.S. citizen who was ethnically Chinese and born in Burma, went straight out of the U.S. Army Reserve to serve as a Chinese interpreter. Richard F. and Horace G. Underwood, American brothers who were born in Seoul to missionary parents, similarly joined the negotiation team from the U.S. Navy Reserve to operate as Korean language specialists for the duration of the two-year long negotiations. Neither of the Underwood brothers were professional interpreters – they were fluent in Korean from childhood immersion – and Richard Underwood eventually left the truce talks after a year because of the "miserable time" he experienced interpreting at a level beyond his competency.[1]

In the post-World War II and Korean War era, the United States accomplished an astonishing level of penetration into the South Korean government despite the dearth of Korean language specialists and qualified interpreters in the U.S. military. From reorganizing southern Korean politics and decisively marginalizing leftist opposition during the U.S. occupation, to maintaining operational control over the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) throughout the war, U.S. military influence was pervasive. The ROK Army originated in the planning of U.S. occupation officials, emerging first as a small Constabulary that was comprised heavily of Korean veterans from the Imperial Japanese

1 C. Baker, "A Bilingual Officer Remembers Korea: A Closer Look at Untrained Interpreters in the Korean War" in *Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation, and Peace Building,* Hilary Footit and Michael Kelly (eds.) (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); Wesley R. Fishel and Alfred H. Hausrath, *Language Problems of the U.S. Army during Hostilities in Korea* (Chevy Chase, MD: Operations Research Office, John Hopkins University, 1958), 8–17; Larry LeSeur and Louis Cioffi, "Longines-Wittnauer with Horace Underwood," 16 December 1953, Internet Archive, National Archives and Records Administration, https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.95874 (accessed 11 June 2022).

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Army. By the end of the Korean War, South Korean soldiers were wearing U.S.-issued uniforms, using American weapons, and receiving training in schools based on U.S. military doctrine.[2]

Under the guidance of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), a relatively small detachment of U.S. Army officers, U.S. advisors oversaw the ROK military from its inception in 1946 and through the turbulent years of the Korean War. KMAG advisors embedded themselves throughout the hierarchy of the ROK military, from shadowing general officers to supervising South Korean unit commanders down to the battalion-level. The KMAG assigned U.S. Army officers to an ROK Army counterpart with orders to maximize the effectiveness of their Korean partner using suggestion and influence. In times of crisis, KMAG officers sometimes exerted draconian control, conscripting Korean men to fill out the ranks of a new regiment or sidelining their South Korean counterpart to issue orders directly to ROK Army units.[3]

Yet the appearance of complete and total U.S. control was illusory. Although the American advisors who headed the KMAG's efforts in the early years often painted an image of Korea as a *tabula rasa*, an underlying sense of American anxiety about the security of its position in the country and the region marked U.S.-ROK relations during this period. At the highest political levels, Syngman Rhee, president of South Korea, was far from a passive puppet. From 1945 until his forced resignation in April 1960, Rhee charted a careful path that sought to maximize American commitments while driving hard for his own goals, going so far as to undermine the U.S. position when he unilaterally ordered the release of North Korean prisoners of war in defiance of the terms for disposition of the POWs in the pending armistice agreement. For the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, maintaining operational control over the

2 Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 82–85; Il-song Park, "The Dragon from the Stream: The ROK Army in Transition and the Korean War, 1950–1953," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 2002; Bryan R. Gibby, *The Will to Win: American Military Advisors in Korea, 1946–1953* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2021), 184.

3 "Substance of Interv. Maj. [Major] Frank W. Lucas, 21 April 1954," 21 April 1954, folder "Interviews KMAG Monograph," Background Files, Records of the Army Staff, box 3, Record Group [RG] 319, Records of the U.S. Department of the Army, National Archives II [hereafter NAII], College Park, MD; "Substance of Interv. Lt. Col. [Lieutenant Colonel] Thomas B. Ross by Capt. [Captain] Robert K. Sawyer, in Rm. 1D539, The Pentagon, 15 December 1953," 15 December 1953, ibid.

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ROK military provided much-needed leverage to muzzle Seoul's rhetoric.[4] At the ground level, the most obvious obstacle that limited the KMAG's ability to change its surroundings was the language barrier. In every part of the system of American influence, *language* was the ether in which the system operated. From the minds of individual advisors to top-level elements of the U.S. military presence in Korea, language limited the influence of the American advisory group.

Translation and the translator, more broadly speaking, are frequently tethered to the circumstances that have motivated the translation itself. The translation and importation of English has been a particular historical problem that has peppered studies of Euro-American imperialism, globalization, and international law.[5] In South Korea, English was and still is a language of power in the country, serving as a controversial gate of admission to elevating one's social status. Western-educated and English-speaking Koreans dominated politics during the presidency of Syngman Rhee, which set a tone for the social capital that English-speakers could claim. The preferment of the ability to translate to and from English is emblematic of the politics and power rooted in language; it highlights the importance of the figure of the translator and the interpreter as part of that hierarchy of power. The language itself may have power, but the bilingual speaker is a key individual in the relationship between languages. It is for this reason that during the Korean War, U.S. military advisors and military command paid special attention to language and interpreters, actively planning and enacting policies connected to a broader project of American intervention on the Korean peninsula.

With U.S. involvement in Korea immediately after the end of World War II and during the Korean War, the grand structures of power and global security that American officials envisioned in the halls of Washington, D.C. met the reality of military deployments abroad. Korea was neither the U.S. Army's first foreign deployment nor its first advisory mission. But it was the first of a series

4 Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (Winter 2009/2010): 158–96; Stephen Jin-Woo Kim, *Master of Manipulation: Syngman Rhee and the Seoul-Washington Alliance, 1953–1960* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001). For Syngman Rhee's statement to General Mark W. Clark upon releasing North Korean prisoners of war, see The President of Korea (Rhee) to the Commander in Chief, United Nations Command (Clark), 18 June 1953 *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS* with appropriate year], *1952–1954*, *Korea* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 15, Part 2: 1197–98.

5 James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Lydia Liu, *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

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of new military advisory groups in Asia under the auspices of the Cold War, with subsequent missions following in Southeast Asia and across the globe. Building a local national army in Korea was directly tied to American geopolitical interests that first sought stability in the ruins of the Japanese Empire and a counterbalance to postcolonial revolution, then to contain and even rollback communism as the ideology of the Cold War became a more pervasive mindset. It is in the details from a ground-level view of American military missions that cultural and racial nuances of U.S. foreign affairs emerge, carried on the backs of the personnel who enacted policy. The perspectives of U.S. personnel on language and interpreters reveal how Koreans situated in their own worldviews, in turn hinting at common cultural assumptions that undergirded their own role as KMAG advisors.

Understanding how KMAG advisors interacted with Korean interpreters and Korean military personnel, and how advisors thought about English and Korean as languages, provides a window into the global American power that enabled them and the ideology that motivated them. The theory of the "everyday" that sociologist Henri Lefebvre pioneered and Thomas Holt articulated further is a valuable mode of analysis here. While grand strategy and global structures can seem larger than life, everyday people are brought to specific confrontations and prepared to interpret their encounters due to the intersections of everyday experience and societal forces. It is only through the collective decisions of ordinary individuals that a global structure of power can exist.[6] KMAG advisors may not have been entirely "ordinary" individuals – although many advisors were U.S. Army Reserve officers and led civilian lives at home – but they occupied one of the lowest rungs of U.S.-Korean interactions in a military context. Some advisors assumed a framework that positioned Koreans as mental and linguistic inferiors; this assumption manifested in everyday interactions and reflections. Individual attitudes of superiority were a microcosm of the ideology behind U.S. objectives in Korea, where the United States assumed that Korea required American tutelage to set foot on the path to modernity. The testimonies of U.S. military officers, how they spoke of Koreans and the capabilities of different cultures, also shaped the lessons that the U.S. military took from its Korea experience, creating a particular discourse about how making war and making race were connected. Their daily experiences contained the genetic code of U.S. foreign policy in the region as a whole.

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6 Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*100, no. 1 (February 1995): 1–20; Henri Lefevbre. *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, vol. 2, John Moore (trans.) (London: Verso Books, 2002), 140.

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How U.S. personnel talked about language, made assumptions about the activities of interpreters, and understood their own position in relationship to non-English speaking people exposes how language was embedded in the process of American penetration into Korean society. The story of the KMAG inevitably returns to the question of language barriers and interpreter work, which reflected the attention that U.S. Army researchers paid towards the issue. The Operations Research Office at Johns Hopkins University, funded by the Department of Defense, published several studies on KMAG advisors and language problems after the Korean War and based its conclusions on a series of interviews and questionnaires with active and former KMAG personnel. Similarly, the Department of the Army sponsored research by a Captain Robert Sawyer about the KMAG, which Sawyer also based largely on interviews and questionnaires with advisors immediately after the war. Both studies were interested in language problems – from an operational rather than a cultural standpoint – and probed for how KMAG personnel dealt with the language barrier and interpreters to draw lessons for future advisory missions.[7] With a critical reading of the answers to interview questions and the reflections of KMAG advisors themselves, one can reconstruct the lived experiences of American personnel and examine the implications of their actions regardless of the interviewees' own self-awareness.

This article does not analyze the worldviews or intentions of the South Korean interpreters who worked alongside KMAG officers. It does, however, put American imaginations of interpreter work into critical focus. It highlights how language was a means of American penetration into the fabric of Korean state and society, but also a target of imaginations that disturbed the U.S. military because of its consistent reminder of how language could resist American suggestion. This article first examines the politics of English in South Korea in relation to the KMAG's affairs and shows how U.S. officials hitched the promise of Koreans as soldiers to their English-language proficiency. It then scrutinizes South Korean interpreters who served alongside KMAG advisors. Interpreters became crucial figures in boosting U.S. influence into the ROK Army, but they also found themselves to be a target of suspicion from Americans when

7 Alfred H. Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor: Roles and Problems of the Military Advisor in Developing an Indigenous Army for Combat Operations in Korea* (Chevy Chase, MD: John Hopkins University Operations Research Office, 1957); Fishel and Hausrath, *Language Problems of the US Army during Hostilities in Korea*; Robert K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1962).

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hiccups in interpreter work unveiled the limited ability of advisors to effect change. Interpreters amplified existing concerns about the loyalty and trustworthiness of South Koreans. The question of language between KMAG advisors and their South Korean counterparts, consequently, becomes tethered to the nature of the power dynamics between the U.S. military and the military of the quasi-sovereign Republic of Korea (ROK).

The importance of English to American power in South Korea was an exhibition of the commonalities in imperialist projects. In the process of exerting control over a colony and reshaping colonial societies according to the needs of the colonizers, language is frequently bound to the ideology of the imperialist's civilizational superiority that subsequently justified their domination. In moments of translation, it is frequently the disadvantaged party that must scramble together neologisms that can bridge the gap between the untranslatable words of bothlanguages.[8] The language of the colonizer became the language of government, of law, and of the upper-class in local society. For those who were colonized, learning the language of their colonizer offered limited opportunities to receive recognition of their own status as good subjects and representatives of the civilizing influence of empire.[9]

Korea already was the site of such a history of language and conflict. The translation, reinterpretation, and deployment of Western political and legal ideas helped Japanese empire-builders pave the road to the formal annexation of Korea in 1910. By the 1930s, Japan had implemented assimilationist projects in Korea, which included instituting Japanese as a primary language for Koreans. Assimilationist projects were, on the one hand, intended to enable Koreans to become more unified to the imperial metropole and, on the other, were racialized with the imperial Japanese belief that learning Japanese would be a civilizing process for the barbarous and unclean Korean.[10] In a dual politics of assimilation and inclusionary racism, Japan's deployment of the Japanese language in Korean education was part of an effort that

8 Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp. 57–62; Liu, *Tokens of Exchange*, pp. 127–38.

9 The notion of the racial politics of recognition between the colonizer and the colonized comes from Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

10 Douglas R. Howland, *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Takahashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 103.

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simultaneously justified the superior mandate of Japanese rule over Korea and signaled the possibility of the Japanese Empire assimilating Koreans equally in the mosaic its subjects.

In the case of southern Korea, the end of Japanese colonial control in August 1945 did not lead to national independence, but an American presence under the auspices of a military occupation until the Allies could decide on how to reunify the peninsula. The U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) heralded the germination of English's dramatic influence in South Korea. U.S. Army officers, almost all without any proficiency in Korean, had to confront the task of transitioning Korea from Japanese control, maintaining social order, and building a native government amenable to American interests.

The commanding officer of USAMGIK was Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, a decorated soldier of the Pacific theatre in World War II who was poorly prepared for the task that confronted him upon his arrival in South Korea in September 1945. With almost no Korean linguists in the U.S. Army and only Japanese-language specialists available, Hodge's military government naturally gravitated for advice and support towards educated Koreans who spoke English or held degrees from American universities.[11] The best Korean-English interpreters had an outsized influence on the policies and decisions of the U.S. military government. Yi Myo-muk, for example, was Harvard-educated, a staunch anti-Communist, and later became Hodge's personal interpreter, where he was able to help influence the USAMGIK to reject cooperation with left-leaning political parties in Seoul.[12] English was a valuable, semi-rare skill for a Korean to possess, and the U.S. occupation rewarded those who had it. In the crucible of Korean independence and nationalism, U.S. Army Japanese-language linguists were far from ideal. South Korean-English interpreters thus became the essential link that tethered the USAMGIK to the top levels of the southern Korean elite.

The USAMGIK moved to create a new security force in southern Korea, initially describing it as a lightly armed "Constabulary" for internal security purposes. In January 1946, the U.S. military government authorized a handful of American officers to convert a former Japanese infantry barracks northeast of Seoul into a training ground. Initial efforts included assigning two U.S. Army officers and a Japanese-language interpreter to each province in southern

11 James I. Matray, "Hodge Podge: American Occupation Policy in Korea, 1945–1948."*Korean Studies* 19 (1995): 17–38.

12 Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. I: *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 193,141.

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Korea to disperse recruiting efforts. A series of camps and schools devoted to training a new Korean military slowly emerged, and when the ROK declared its independence in August 1948, the Constabulary was the nucleus of the new ROKA, while preliminary U.S. advisory efforts formalized as the KMAG on 1 July 1949.[13]

English language facility was important in the nascent South Korean military. English was more than a pathway to easier communication between KMAG advisors and Korean soldiers; it functioned as a marker that benefited and supercharged the careers of Korean recruits, and even subliminally served as an indication of a Korean's capacity or intelligence. Intelligence, too, was a category that qualified or disqualified South Koreans in the eyes of their American counterparts. In the opening chaos of the Korean War, some American officers later would say that they chose the most "intelligent-looking" when selecting platoon and squad leaders from the newly drafted South Korean conscripts that the ROK government dragooned off the streets.[14] In the limited time frame of both the occupation period and in the war, U.S. advisors naturally relied on assumptions and personal heuristics to attempt to identify quickly those Koreans who could become officer-material in a rapid time frame.

The link between English-proficiency and one's intelligence (and thus capacity for a leadership role) was subtle, but there certainly *was* such an association in the minds of many of the KMAG's early advisors. Providing support for this connection was the recollection of Lieutenant Colonel Martin Sorenson, an advisor to an ROK Army cavalry regiment from 1948 until October 1950, from before the Korean War:

> From the briefest sort of analysis of the Korean soldiers [*sic*] background, it was evident that he lacked an understanding of even the most fundamental terms in military language which the average American soldier takes for granted. As an example, the word "squad" or the words "machine gun" and most of the common military terms had to be exhaustively explained and taught before the application and principles in usage could be applied.[15]

13 Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, pp. 14–17.

14 "Substance of Interv, Lt. Col. Thomas B. Ross by Capt. Robert K. Sawyer, in Rm. 1D539, The Pentagon, 15 December 1953," 15 December 1953, folder "Interviews KMAG Monograph," Background Files, Army Staff Records, box 3, RG 319, NA II.

15 "Substance of Interview, Lt. Col. Martin O. Sorenson by 1st Lt. Robert K. Sawyer, 17 December 1952," 17 December 1952, ibid.

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The connotation of the advisor's framing was that Korean soldiers were novices in military matters, and would require more training than the average American to gain command of the basics. The lack of Korean language counterparts to English technical terms was a difficulty that repeatedly appeared in advisor accounts of training and instructing ROK Army units. "Military terms in the Korean language were practically non-existent and had to be 'dreamed-up' as each new term was introduced (Machine gun: 'gun-that-shoots-very-fast')," one KMAG advisor remarked in recalling his experience in 1949. "We finally ended up introducing English words into the Korean language."[16]

Brigadier General William L. Roberts, head of the KMAG from July 1949 to July 1950, indeed had advocated that all ROK security forces adopt English as a universal language to skirt around the difficulties in commissioning Korean-English military dictionaries and eventually remove the language barrier as a problem for Americans completely.[17] Roberts's proposal never crystallized, but it did reflect American sensibilities that English was a more readily effective language for war-fighting. There was a practical element to these proposals – translation, especially accurate translations, took considerable time. During the war, KMAG officers identified that "the translation of supply directives and manuals entailed considerable time and effort, while the delays inherent in the dissemination of instructions added to the need for coordination between headquarters, resulted in frequent complications."[18] Quick and effective communication was essential to the art of war-fighting, and this directly led KMAG advisors to see English-proficiency as a key marker of an individual Korean's promise as a military man.

Consequently, American officers saw the Koreans who did speak English as more qualified for positions of responsibility, both directly due to the greater ease of communication between South Koreans and advisors, and indirectly with English-proficiency serving as a marker of a South Korean officer's potential. "Advisors," as one KMAG advisor mused, "look for a cooperative attitude on the part of ROK officers and their willingness to learn English is an indication of it."[19] Learning English was an essential aspect of the military pedagogical experience.

16 Submission from Lt. Col. Eugene McDonald to Lt. Sawyer, "Supplement to Questionnaire #2," 3 December 1952, folder "Notes," Background Files, Army Staff Records, box 4, RG 319, NAII.
17 Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, p. 65.
18 "U.S. Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea Monograph,"14 July 1955, p. 303, Background Files, Army Staff Records, box 7, RG 319, NAII.
19 Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, p. 68.

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Bilingualism had direct, material effects on individual Korean officers. "I had one ranking Korean officer removed from his job because he was uncooperative and *would not try to learn English* [emphasis added]," one KMAG advisor reported.[20] The English Language School, the first institution that the USAMGIK established with the aim of teaching "military English" to South Koreans with military backgrounds, produced 110 graduates by April 1946. Most of those who completed the program later went on to join the South Korean Constabulary and attend other U.S.-taught military schools, with 78 of those 110 graduates eventually becoming generals in the ROK Army.[21] English-speaking South Korean officers were living manifestations of how the U.S. Army sought to actively "Americanize" the South Korean military. Universalizing English language use in the ROK military was a foundational piece of the Americanization project, which was covalent with military modernization.

The high proportion of English-speaking South Korean general officers indicates that there was a filtering effect, where American officers exerted an effort to promote English-speaking, and therefore "cooperative" South Koreans who themselves quickly understood that language skills and career advancement were synonymous. U.S. military officers most clearly demonstrated these filtering efforts during the occupation period of the U.S. military government. When advisors first sent out the word that its constabulary program was looking for recruits, the qualifications for applicants were "English language capability *and* military experience," meaning that the most senior cohort of South Korean officers were almost entirely English-speaking veterans of the Imperial Japanese Army.[22] Skill in military affairs was not enough – an applicant needed the capability to learn English to join. Yi Hyŏng-Kŏn, the very first officer to earn a commission in the South Korean Constabulary, who eventually became ROK chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had the advantage of a military background in the Imperial Japanese Army and – crucially – proficient English that impressed his U.S. trainers.[23] In a period where the U.S. Army held effective command over all ROK Army units and had great influence in deciding the success or failure of an ROKA officer's career, a Korean's language skill was an integral part of the entire American perception of his effectiveness, not just an optional bonus perk.

20 Ibid.
21 Nam-sung Huh, "The Quest for a Bulwark of Anti-Communism: The Formation of the Republic of Korea Army Officer Corps and its Political Socialization," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1987, p. 148.
22 Pak Chŏng-hŭi and most of his fellow conspirators behind the successful May 1961 coup that began Pak's military dictatorship fall into this category. Gibby, *The Will to Win*, p. 30.
23 Ibid., p. 300.

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The more that a specific counterpart spoke English well, the more American officials would consider them trustworthy and reliable. The dynamic between English ability, assumptions about the speaker's intelligence, and trustworthiness also appeared outside of military contexts. In January 1950, Philip Jessup, ambassador at large for the Truman administration, met with high-ranking South Korean politicians and toured the 38th parallel that split the two Koreas. After speaking with the South Korean vice minister of Home Affairs, he later would express his belief that the official was using language as a manipulative tool. "His English is not very good and *when* he found it convenient, he was unable to understand what I said," Jessup reported. He was correspondingly suspicious of the rest of the vice minister's responses to his questions.[24] The belief that a Korean would hide behind his professed language limitations, whether deliberately to dupe the American questioner or simply to escape the pressure of questioning, indicates the presumption on the part of some American officials that clear communication was a *choice,* at least for high-ranking South Koreans. Similarly, American concerns about interpreters would reflect and amplify the notion of duplicity and trustworthiness when it came to bilingual speakers.

Many existing studies have asserted the agency of interpreters, their ability to effect change, and their importance for the institutions that they serve.[25] But beyond asserting the importance of not taking the interpreter for granted, employers and superiors naturally act *upon* interpreters as subjects. Studies of *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese American) linguists in the U.S. military during and after World War II have highlighted how American notions of the rights of the Japanese minority intersected and clashed with their value to the state. The activity of *Nisei* linguists in service to the U.S. military, many of whom the U.S. military recruited from internment camps or had families who the U.S. government interned during World War II, was a part of a delicate production that advertised an image of American liberal multicultural harmony. Providing a valued service in a time of the nation's need gave *Nisei* the opportunity to escape the gravity well of racial inferiority that had justified the elimination

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24 Memorandum by the Ambassador at Large, Philip C. Jessup, 14 January 1950, FRUS, *1950, Korea* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 7: 6.

25 Lucía Ruiz Rosendo, "Rethinking the Interpreter's Agency in Wartime: A Portrait of Gottlieb Fuchs,"*Translation & Interpreting* 11, no. 2 (July 2019): 58–68; Luo Tian, "Augmenting Combat Power: Military Translation in China-Burma-India Theatre,"*Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies* 15 (November 2016): 143–61; Ruth A. Roland, *Interpreters as Diplomats: A Diplomatic History of the Role of Interpreters in World Politics* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999).

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of Japanese American civil liberties after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.[26] The interpreter himself became a subject that concerned the state.

With South Korean interpreters assigned to work alongside KMAG advisors during the Korean War, their labor and service sat in a gray area between two sovereign militaries. Their interpreter work frequently came under pressure. Their official role was to support U.S. advice and military efforts, which at times entailed going against the interests of their fellow countrymen. U.S. advisors saw good interpreters as vital to the success of their effort, but also were singularly aware that Korean interpreters, as individuals, could buck single-handedly American influence and derail U.S. projects to shape the ROK Army. KMAG officers and command elements of the U.S. Army in Korea frequently visited the topic of whether South Korean interpreters were distorting the words of American advisors when communicating with ROK personnel.[27] This section will explore the topic of interpreter work in American discourse and how it exposes KMAG officer assumptions about their own authority as foreign advisors and their cultural beliefs about the trustworthiness of South Koreans in general.

After 25 June 1950, as the United States massively increased its presence to stem the tide of North Korea's military advance, it faced the task of rebuilding and increasing the size of the tattered ROK Army. Massive conscription and recruitment drives swelled the ranks, the number of ROKA divisions ticked upwards sharply, and more and more officers were required to staff the new battalions and regiments. The KMAG, which had formed the original center of the ROK Army officer corps around those with English-language skills, could not count on its advisors having bilingual counterparts. The U.S. Army now deployed more KMAG advisors down to the battalion-level, who rubbed elbows with lower-ranking ROKA officers. Advisors who spoke no Korean needed interpreters to communicate with counterparts who knew little English.[28]

The U.S. Army did have a small cohort of its own interpreters in Asiatic languages, including *Nisei* linguists who it drafted to communicate in Japanese or limited Korean with prisoners of war.[29] But there were simply not enough

26 Fujitani, *Race for Empire*; Monica Kim, *Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); Kayoko Takeda, "War and Interpreters,"*Across Languages and Cultures* 10, no. 1 (22 May 2009): 49–62.

27 Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, pp. 68–71; Fishel and Hausrath, *Language Problems of the U.S. Army*, pp. 8–17.

28 Korean Military Advisory Group Public Information Office, *The United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea 1945–1955* (Tokyo: Daito Art Printing Company, 1955), 39.

29 Kim, *Interrogation Rooms*, p. 124.

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Japanese American interpreters for the U.S. Army to assign one to each KMAG advisor embedded into an ROK Army unit, nor was Japanese a politically acceptable common language to establish a communication bridge between the United States and the former Japanese colony. KMAG officers almost entirely relied on South Korean interpreters that the ROK Army, not the U.S. military, furnished.

ROK Army interpreters during the war were usually young men with a high school or university education who knew some English. Commissioned as lieutenants, these interpreter-officers worked with a KMAG advisor while staying on the payroll of the South Korean state. Although ROKA interpreters were technically officers, few exercised that authority. John Lee, a former university student and refugee from Seoul, applied in Taegu to become an interpreter and, after completing a two-hour language exam, got the job and became an ROK Army lieutenant "right away on the spot."[30] There were exceptions to the default arrangement of ROKA interpreters receiving assignment to KMAG officers. As mentioned before, many ROK Army officers could speak or were learning English, and so did not need interpreters. A few KMAG advisors employed houseboys – young South Korean men and teenagers who worked as servants – who knew English well enough to interpret between an advisor and his counterpart, obviating the need for an ROK Army interpreter. But the majority of KMAG advisors worked through ROK interpreter-officers, with at least 1,246 interpreter-officers serving in March 1952, when the KMAG's ranks numbered around 1,800 advisors and support staff.[31]

ROK Army interpreters had a difficult task under suboptimal conditions. English familiarity alone was not sufficient, as interpreters had to know translations for highly specialized technical and military terms. For most of the war, interpreters were largely untrained and the ROK government deployed them immediately to their units after their hire.[32] KMAG advisors consequently

30 "Interview with John Y. Lee," Korean War Legacy Foundation, Korean War Legacy Project, https://koreanwarlegacy.org/interviews/john-y-lee/ (accessed 14 June 2022).

31 Gibby, *The Will to Win*, p. 182; "Command Report, March 1952: Narrative Summary," March 1952, KMAG 8282nd Army Unit, Command Reports 1952–1953, Records of U.S. Army Operational, Tactical, and Support Organizations (World War II and Thereafter), box 1699, RG 338, Records of the Department of the Army, NAII; Wesley R. Fishel and Alfred H. Hausrath report 1,800 interpreter-officers on duty in the ROK Army at the "close of hostilities" in Korea, not including the limited number of civilian and enlisted Korean interpreters. Fishel and Hausrath, *Language Problems of the U.S. Army*, p. 32.

32 By the end of the Korean War, there was an operating interpreter school in South Korea, where South Korean students received six weeks of training before deployment. After the armistice, the school gradually increased training to twelve weeks. Chief of the Korean

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prized the interpreter-officers who had gained enough experience to be proficient in specialized English. "The battalion CO [commanding officer] didn't speak English," a KMAG advisor recounted,

> but he had two interpreters who had been with the battalion for two years and knew their stuff. They could have been artillery officers, and they knew English well . . .. They knew all the artillery terms.[33]

Interpreters worked in both combat and support units, interpreting conversations as they spontaneously occurred without any preparation and sometimes under stressful conditions that endangered their own lives.[34] Another major difficulty was that interpreters were not simply robotically communicating one set of phrases into another language; they were human beings stuck in between U.S. Army officers and their ROK Army counterparts. As the link between two ostensibly sovereign military hierarchies, interpreters were integrally part of the network of individual relationships between the KMAG and the South Korean military. Trust and cultural assumptions were all relevant factors that influenced interpreter work and how KMAG advisors understood interpreter behavior.

Trust between KMAG advisors and their interpreters was a sticky subject, one that attracted and stuck to a potpourri of other problems. American advisors, by and large, expected South Korean interpreter-officers to function like dictionaries with *accurate* translations. But when interpreters themselves had no advanced training, the language barrier was a slippery beast that frustrated the Americans, who sometimes took extra measures to try and verify the accuracy of what the translator had interpreted. "Some advisors used two interpreters at one time in order that agreement could be reached," a U.S. Army colonel recalled, "but usually these [interpreters] got into terrific arguments and

Military Advisory Group, "Summary of Study,"*Experiences and Lessons Learned in Training the ROK Army,* 1954, Classified Organizational History Files, Records of United States Army, Pacific, 1945–1984, box 99, RG 550, Records of the U.S. Department of the Army, NAII.

33 Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, p. 69.

34 By December 1950, of the 976 interpreter-officers who had received commissions in June 1950, 71 had become casualties (killed, wounded, or missing in action) – a not insignificant ratio of 7.3 percent. Eighth U.S. Army, Korea, *Monograph: Special Problems in the Korean Conflict* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1952), 32, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library Digital Library, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4013coll11/id/1695/rec/1 (accessed 14 June 2022).

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nobody understood what the advisor was talking about."[35] Here, the American attempt to verify accuracy of a Korean-English interpretation backfired, as the interpreters argued over precise meanings, causing more problems than had existed before. *Accuracy* was exceptionally difficult when, as one interpreter recounted, "translating English into Korean and interpreting American words into Korean was no less than creation."[36] As quoted before, prewar advisors noted that interpreters "dreamed up" some Korean versions of American military terms on the spot, a series of neologisms composed from hodgepodge components and necessity. And while some KMAG personnel recognized the difficulty of the interpreter job, others suspected that ulterior motives were in play when communication difficulties arose.

American concern that Korean interpreters merely may be inexperienced was only one flavor of the stew that upset relations between the KMAG and its interpreters. At times, KMAG officers could not trust that their interpreter was transmitting the English message to their Korean counterpart faithfully, or that their interpreter was telling the American dutifully what his South Korean counterpart had said in Korean. At least a third of the interviewed KMAG advisors in a survey near the end of the war considered the problem of interpreters *purposefully* distorting English-Korean interpretation to be serious or very serious.[37] When interpreters were subject to the administrative and disciplinary authority of higher-ranking ROKA officers, a significant number of American advisors suspected that interpreters would be unlikely to communicate accurately in order to preserve their own relationship with an ROK Army officer. One KMAG advisor provided an explanation for the South Koreans providing inexact translations:

> The language problem is the biggest problem with advising. Interpreters pull the same old stunt; they *misinterpret* in order to keep from offending. The interpreters figure that when [the Americans] go, they've "had it" if they alienate their ROK commander.[38]

35 "Interview, Col. W.H. Sterling Wright, 5 January 1953," 5 January 1953, folder "Interviews KMAG Monograph," Background Files, Army Staff Records, box 3, RG 319, NAII.

36 Ipyong Kim, "회고록 (10) 미군과한국군의사소통의가교역할톡톡히."김일평교수의 블로그" ["Memoir Entry 10: Serving as a Bridge in US-ROK Military Communications"], Professor Kim Il-Pyong's Blog, 11 July 2012, https://ilpyongkim.wordpress.com/2012/07/11/%ED%9A%8C%EA%B3%A0%EB%A1%9D-10/ (accessed 14 June 2022).

37 Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, p. 71.

38 Quoted in ibid., p. 70.

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Far from important information being "lost" in translation, KMAG advisors were worried about the possibility of the translator actively throwing their influence out the window.

Another advisor's testimony demonstrated the complexity of the interpreter-advisor-Korean officer relationship. "The interpreters," he explained, "are often considered [by ROK officers] to be schoolboys and the officers expect the interpreters to protect them and not to tell the truth to their boss, the advisor."[39] The interpreter was the subordinate of two separate authorities – the ROK Army commander and the American advisor – and this caused problems when the two had disagreements. The fact that some ROK interpreters could modify or distort American advice was not only an obstacle to the KMAG's mission; it was a repudiation of the KMAG officer's authority.

We can speculate as to why interpreters might "distort" what an advisor had spoken to a counterpart and vice versa. Lack of training and familiarity with the proper translations is one possible explanation, causing interpreters to search for the nearest possible translation that came to mind. If an American advisor worded an admonishment strongly or emotionally, an interpreter might choose to temper the tone of his translation to avoid reinforcing the intensity of the advisor's words and make his superior officer believe it was the *interpreter* who was being aggressive. An observation from one Korean interpreter, working with a U.S. military police unit, illustrates the difficulty of this dynamic:

> The interpreter is always in the middle. If a Korean doesn't succeed in convincing a US MP [military policeman] of his story, he will say to the interpreter: *You* are Korean; why don't you interpret right? Why don't you understand Korean customs! You see, he doesn't blame the MP; he blames the Korean interpreter.[40]

South Korean interpreters thus found themselves regularly in situations where they could not avoid blame for discord between KMAG advisors and ROK Army officers.

Loyalty is another possibility that could have affected some interpreters. KMAG advisors indeed rotated in and out of Korea on temporary deployments. Choosing to distort the words of an American so as to maintain a friendly dynamic between themselves and their superior officer may have been more

39 Quoted in ibid.
40 Quoted in Fishel and Hausrath, *Language Problems of the U.S. Army during Hostilities in Korea*, p. 191.

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important in terms of an interpreter-officer's long-term career aspirations or their own beliefs of their duties as a subordinate to a superior. There is little evidence, however, that loyalty and career aspirations were a source for distortion in interpreter work beyond the speculations of KMAG personnel. Few if any ROK Army interpreters, conversing with U.S. Army researchers, writing in memoirs, or speaking to oral historians, alluded to distortion in their interpreter work at all and simply attributed communication difficulties to the nature of their job. Yet what is significant is that many KMAG advisors *believed* purposeful distortion existed and imagined the agency that interpreters held.

American officers had different ways to counteract the perceived problem of interpreter distortion. Going outside the ROK Army hierarchy and relying on individuals who were firmly under American authority was one way. One KMAG officer used his Korean chauffeur, "who was a fair interpreter," to try to verify if his assigned interpreter-officer had translated a conversation between the American and his Korean officer counterpart accurately. "Often I would be informed that the interpreter did not convey my thoughts to the Korean counterpart," he recalled.[41] In a moment when the ROK-supplied interpreter-officer was suspect, the KMAG advisor relied on verification that came from the mouth of a "trusted" South Korean – a direct employee who was his clear subordinate. "I had a good interpreter; he made polite but accurate translations," stated another KMAG officer. But how did this U.S. officer know the translations were accurate? "I could check on this through an American sergeant who spoke some Korean," he explained.[42] In this instance, the American was happy and satisfied that his interpreter was qualified, but he only was satisfied because he sought out the supervision of someone else within the U.S. military hierarchy who he could trust to verify accuracy.

The perception of South Korean interpreters as duplicitous and purposefully subverting American authority was a piece of an intercultural puzzle that had larger tendrils twisting through U.S. foreign relations with East Asia. *Duplicity,* the opposite of accuracy and honesty, was attached to American cultural assumptions about oriental men, with deceitful and conniving oriental villains frequently gracing Hollywood screens in the early 20th Century. In a cultural moment when manliness was linked with assertive and direct action, the notion of "duplicitous orientals" matched other views of East Asian societies as feminine, backwards, and ineffective. Only a Korean, unlike a good American officer, would let their concern about "losing face" interfere with doing their job. Oversensitivity about one's "face," in the American view, was emblematic

41 Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, p. 70.
42 Ibid,, p. 69.

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of the frivolity of backwards East Asian masculinity that explained their duplicity.[43] American officers by and large saw the issue of losing face as an oriental custom that contrasted and even counteracted Anglo-American values. Face, duplicity, and assumptions about oriental societies were all relevant factors for how the U.S. Army believed a military should operate and overcome its cultural backwardness. While some advisors learned to operate and respect the contours of Korean notions of dignity, command and research elements in the U.S. Army drew different conclusions about the issues of "Koreanisms."

Experiences and Lessons Learned in Training the ROK Army was a 1954 study that the KMAG composed for the Headquarters of the Eighth U.S. Army. The document explored, in assiduous detail, all aspects of training the ROK Army and presented reflections on the advisory group's experiences. Although the study explicitly stated that "[t]here is no evidence of any inherent lack of aptitude" in Korean soldiers and officers, it devoted several paragraphs to the problem of face. The study described it as a cultural problem that made the process of training Koreans difficult:

> The national philosophy having the greatest influence on training is the oriental concept of "face". The [Korean] fear of losing "face" often results in deficiencies being concealed, going so far as to give false information to do so.[44]

Face alone was not the problem. Rather, the central problem, in the KMAG's view, was the propensity for Koreans to be duplicitous and mislead because of their obsession with face.

A parallel study that the Operations Research Office, an investigative team that the U.S. Army funded, prepared was similarly concerned. "Magnified by the Korean emphasis on face, such a discovery [of a mistake] on the part of an advisor and the counterpart's own superiors," it concluded, "might seem severely humiliating to a ROKA officer."[45] Fear of losing face provided an explanation for American cultural assumptions about devious Orientals. Oriental men only could try to make up for their incompetence in military affairs with duplicity and an allergy to the criticism that would otherwise expose their

43 Richard A. Oehling, "Hollywood and the Image of the Oriental, 1910–1950—Part I," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 8, no. 2 (May 1978): 33–41; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

44 Chief of the Korean Military Advisory Group. *Experiences and Lessons Learned in Training the ROK Army,* 1954, pp. 31–36.

45 Quoted in Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, p. 73.

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inferiority. This applied to interpreters as well. The conclusion of many KMAG advisors that their interpreters were distorting advice to protect their superior officer was connected to assumptions about Korean oversensitivity to their own dignity. Even non-ROK Army interpreters were susceptible, as one U.S. officer in the Korean Civil Assistance Command described the problem with using former Korean houseboys as interpreters:

> Too often, these boys don't have the background to enable them to understand the full import of your question. But "face" is so darned important to them that rather than admit that they don't understand, they'll try to "bull" through. And the result then is either a garbled response from the man you're talking to, or else a false or inaccurate one, because your question hasn't actually been asked.[46]

A piece of Korean culture therefore was responsible for tripping American attempts to build a modern, Westernized military. There was an edge of cultural superiority that undergirded American aspersions that Korean interpreters were duping their own superiors and KMAG advisors deliberately.

Although the 1954 study did admit that American language deficiencies had to shoulder some of the blame for communication difficulties, it was primarily Korean interpreters that the ROK Army furnished who more often became the target of suspicion. "As the advisor is limited in his power of passing on information and influencing his counterpart by the ability of the interpreter to convey his ideas," explained the study,

> the effectiveness of an individual advisor depends to a large degree upon the ability of the interpreter. In many cases this ability is only satisfactory. This is particularly true in the lower echelons. Loss of confidence between the advisory group and their counterparts can be attributed to the interpreter difficulties *more than any other single item*.[47]

An incompetent interpreter undoubtedly made life difficult for American advisors and their South Korean counterparts. But the elevation of the interpreter as the most important negative factor in damaging the advisor-counterpart relationship put language – and those who wielded it – at the heart of

46 Quoted in Fishel and Hausrath, *Language Problems of the U.S. Army during Hostilities in Korea*, p. 170.

47 Chief of the Korean Military Advisory Group, *Experiences and Lessons Learned in Training the ROK Army*, p. 33.

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American anxiety over how to exert influence in the ROK military. KMAG advisors, isolated in their status as a sole American in a South Korean military unit, were inexorably dependent on the information that ROK Army personnel willingly furnished to them. When difficulties arose with interpreter work, KMAG officers had few options for recourse. The efficacy of the American military and nation-building project in South Korea, with its advisory system, rested on whether it could deal with the language barrier and minimize the American influence that would be lost in translation.

It is significant that some KMAG officers thought that the best solution to problems stemming from interpreters was to assert their authority explicitly and forcefully. As one study synthesized from the comments of advisors, the interpreter "must be indoctrinated by his American 'employer' with the idea that he must translate sharply worded phrases addressed to an officer of his own nationality senior to him exactly as it has been said."[48] Regardless of the beliefs or preferences of South Korean interpreters who sometimes found themselves in between the authority of American and South Korean superiors, the only solution, from the KMAG's perspective, was for individual advisors to change how interpreters treated their work. When confronted with the possibility of South Korean duplicity and distortion, some KMAG advisors believed that indoctrinating their interpreter was the only path to break through cultural barriers and inch towards the success of their mission.

Different U.S. Army and Department of Defense researchers after the Korean War drew varied conclusions and prescribed different solutions to the language and interpreter problem in South Korea. For future military advisory missions in Asia, the Operations Research Office suggested changes to the military's language training schools, offering more instruction in Asiatic languages to beef up the number of qualified linguists serving in the U.S. Army. The preference was to seize the language barrier by the horns through the efforts of interpreters who owed their allegiance and professional careers to the U.S. military. Another study doubted the benefits of exchanging ROKA interpreters for interpreters directly attached to the U.S. military advisory unit, as the central problem would remain of the KMAG needing to ensure that a stubborn counterpart was *following* an advisor's directives, not just understanding advice. Instead, it recommended training all American advisors in rudimentary Korean to obtain a basic vocabulary even if complete fluency was highly improbable.[49] The KMAG's 1954 study that it prepared for the Eighth U.S. Army

48 Quoted in Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, p. 123.

49 Ibid., pp. 72, 133; Fishel and Hausrath, *Language Problems of the U.S. Army during Hostilities in Korea*, pp. 2–3.

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perhaps described the best solution of language problems. "The large number of Korean officers that now speak English have, to a degree, lessened the problem," it observed.[50] English was well on its way to becoming a dominant force in South Korean society. Soon enough, the American military could dispense with concerns about the effectiveness of interpreters, confident that it was allied to a competent, modern, English-speaking South Korean military.

By viewing the politics of English in South Korea and interpreter work through the eyes of KMAG advisors, it becomes easier to understand how conceptions of culture and race directly impacted notions of military effectiveness. Furthermore, language was a key instrument that was crucial to achieving American objectives of exerting influence over the ROK Army and its officers. Language was also an obstacle that opened opportunities for miscommunication and suspicion, exposing the consequences of the U.S. Army's lack of trained linguists. The KMAG naturally gravitated towards English-speaking South Korean officers, setting the tone for who the next generation of ROK Army and political leaders would be. English held practical and ideological value, satisfying the American cultural notion that the South Koreans who spoke English were naturally more competent and trustworthy.

Performance and competence undoubtedly affected whether an American advisor could trust his counterpart and interpreter. But the mental frameworks of many U.S. personnel meant that it was easy to ascribe duplicity and frivolity to Korean men, reinforcing the belief that the United States should be a big brother to a foreign population that struggled to rise above its cultural limitations. The structure of U.S.-Korean relations benefited from a racial understanding of military effectiveness that a discourse about culture and language expressed. Warfighting ran parallel to the process of creating a particular racial conception of what did or did not signify a capable South Korean.

U.S. advisory missions after the signing of the armistice in Korea in 1953 replicated in varying degrees the problems Americans previously associated with interpreters and language barriers in South Korea. In Vietnam, South Vietnamese interpreters filled the communication needs of American advisors and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) officers. Even in El Salvador in the 1980s, where the U.S. military initially deployed a small 55-man detachment of Special Forces advisors to support the military junta during its civil war, there was need for local interpreters because not enough American advisors spoke Spanish. And leading up to and in the aftermath of the U.S. military

50 Chief of the Korean Military Advisory Group, *Experiences and Lessons Learned in Training the ROK Army*, p. 33.

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withdrawal from Afghanistan, political debate raged about the responsibility of the U.S. government to provide protection for Afghan translators and interpreters for coalition forces who face reprisals from the Taliban.[51] Indeed, it often has been the everyday, personal relationships formed between interpreters and coalition personnel that has improved their chances of gaining visas. Language is a fundamental aspect of the American military's deployment overseas, and the policies and actions it has taken with respect to language and interpreter work leave behind broader consequences that go beyond military affairs.

In Korea, one can see the impact of the American presence on how some South Koreans themselves understood the politics of language in a short anecdote that Paik Sun-yup told in his memoirs. At the start of the Korean War, he was the ROK Army commander of the 1st Infantry Division. Paik eventually would become the ROK Army chief of staff and the first four-star general in South Korea by the end of the war. On 20 August 1950, Paik's unit was defending the city of Taegu when a U.S. Army regiment of soldiers arrived as reinforcements. The American colonel of the regiment happened to speak Mandarin and asked Paik if he also could speak the language. Paik answered in the affirmative. The colonel, perhaps believing that Paik would be more comfortable interacting verbally in an Asian language, suggested that they converse in that common vernacular in the future. "Let's stick to English," Paik replied. Yet, former officers who worked with Paik later reported that the general only spoke "broken" English in the early 1950s.[52] Anytime he needed to communicate with American officers in detail, he relied on an interpreter – an unseen, undescribed, and unwritten figure in Paik's memoirs.

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51 Robert D. Ramsay, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2011; Sarah Blake Morgan, "As Violence Soars, Time Runs Out for Afghan Interpreters," *AP* [Associated Press] *News*, 7 January 2020, https://apnews.com/article/f0944262eb4db65e98487aaef4b2eb41 (accessed 15 June 2022).

52 Paik Sun-yup, *From Pusan to Panmunjom: Wartime Memoirs of the Republic of Korea's First Four-Star General* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1992), 42; Kim, "회고록 (10) 미군과한국군의사소통의가교역할톡톡히."김일평교수의블로그."

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