

A TRANSLATION FOR LIVE-PLAY D&D CONTENT AND THE
MERITS OF TABLETOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

by

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A game created in the 70s, Dungeons & Dragons was at times ostracized and stigmatized but is now highly popular and profitable, with millions of players across the globe. The world of Dungeons & Dragons is one where friends come together to utilize their creativity and teamwork skills to tell a collaborative story. This unique time world can enrich the lives of many, including in the untapped market of South Korea. D&D has been shown to be beneficial for social and moral development. This kind of prosocial activity can alleviate concerns about antisocial behaviors related to high internet usage in societies such as South Korea. Since D&D has yet to be popularized in South Korea, this thesis focused on how to create interest in the game by providing access to content that promotes D&D. In the Western world, a major factor in D&D's recent success has been the development and popularity of D&D players who upload online live-streams where audiences can watch them play a real game of D&D. Creating a Korean translation for an original video using this style of content, this thesis tackles the challenge of how to adapt English language D&D content for Korean audiences, grappling with both the unique challenges of the video medium, and the major differences between the two languages.

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Thank you to the cast of *Critical Role*, for reviving the D&D community and providing the world with incredibly entertaining content that continuously influences people to play D&D for the first time.

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Video: 크리티컬 롤 같이 보자! [KRN Sub]

Introduction

What are the benefits of playing Tabletop role-playing games, and how can the introduction and promotion of TTRPGs and live-play content alleviate the detrimental effects associated with excessive online video gaming in South Korea? Table-top role-playing games, or TTRPGs, are games where players use both dice rolling and role-playing to act out fictional scenarios in fictional settings. The genre has been largely dominated by Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), a TTRPG from the 1970s which gained a devoted player base and stood the test of time. Games are historically played in person with a group of players ranging between 3-8, with sessions lasting 2-4 hours on average. There is little to no physical risk associated with these types of games, but great potential for benefits. Despite early success, D&D faced challenges over time and in some periods struggled to maintain relevance and grow its existing player base. This was mainly due to intense stigmatization of D&D players, as well as the advancement of more commercially appealing online video games. However, in recent years there has been a significant spike in the popularity of D&D, as well as the size and diversity of its player base. This has consistently been attributed to the creation and success of live-stream actual play D&D shows, where a real D&D game is played in front of an online audience in real time. South Korea is an area where D&D has yet to thrive. However, their prominent video game culture suggests both great potential for the hobby to grow, and potential need for increased opportunities for quality social connection.

This thesis will provide a Korean translation of selected English content materials from the most popular D&D live stream, *Critical Role*, and discuss how translating this kind of content can further the growth of D&D as a positive and fulfilling pastime. My goal for the translation would be to provide initial access to a new type of content and media for the Korean

population, with the eventual goal of promoting D&D in Korea. D&D is a hobby for everyone; however, it is particularly popular among teenagers and young adults. There is also significant overlap between D&D fans and fans of online video games, particularly fantasy based games. As such, my hypothetical audience would be South Korean youths and young adults who already have interest in content that is similar to Dungeons & Dragons, such as video games, media in the fantasy genre, or other kinds of tabletop gaming.

Literature Review

Research in child development suggests that role-playing and other forms of imaginative play can be very helpful in the early stages. Children obtain much of their information about the world around them from this kind of play (Morrone 2019). The nature of TTRPGs is that players are presented with hypothetical scenarios, are given full freedom to have their characters respond to these scenarios in any way, and then experience natural consequences and outcomes based on their decisions. By experiencing these things in a safe setting, role-playing can help develop social and emotional skills in children, as well as promote creativity and problem-solving. This is not just true for young children. Four groups of college students, two who did not play D&D and two who did so for the purposes of the study, had their moral reasoning measured using the revised Defining Issues Test (DIT-2). This is a test that measures moral reasoning and development by presenting participants with several moral dilemmas and then asks them to rank the issues based on importance. Tests were administered before and after a term of college, so the gaming groups had several sessions of gaming. In the results from the second test, the gaming groups showed a level of moral growth not seen in non-players, showing less personal interest and more concern for group values and norms (Wright 2017).

Even though D&D has been shown to have many benefits, it struggled to gain the same popularity as online gaming for years, due to both accessibility and reputation. The Satanic Panic of the 1980s was a time when Christians and Christian groups in the United States became increasingly paranoid about potential cases of devil worshipping and satanic cults. There was heavy backlash against D&D, with allegations that playing the game was akin to devil-worshipping, was devil-worshipping in and of itself, that players were perverted and satanic, and that the game would cause violent behaviors in children. Additionally, D&D players were often

stereotyped as pathetic white male nerds, hopeless when it came to real social relationships (Sidhu 2020). In terms of accessibility, internet video games were available to anyone with a computer and an internet connection, whereas D&D needed friends with schedules that aligned to get together and play. Also, in internet video games, the computer handled much of the complex processing, while D&D players needed to learn and remember all the complex rules of the game, a task daunting to many. Despite all this, the game has found meteoric success and resurgence in recent years. This is widely attributed to shows and live-streams which feature a real-life group of friends playing a real game of D&D live for an online audience, such as the popular Twitch stream *Critical Role*. Since the inception of *Critical Role* and other live-stream shows, profits for Wizards of the Coast, the company that owns D&D, have soared. Executives have even acknowledged this, stating they believe that the increase in player base comes from people who watched these live-streams and then decided to try playing the game (French 2023).

This sort of ‘learn-by-example’ method of introduction to D&D, where viewers get a vibrant glimpse of what a real D&D game is like, is much more accessible than reading through the 300+ pages of the *Player’s Handbook*. Moreover, these popular live-streams have done much to rehabilitate the game’s image, promote diversity and inclusion, as well as foster a welcoming fan community that encourages newcomers instead of shunning them. The creators of these live streams are often successful comedians and actors who are very charismatic on camera, offering a very different image of a D&D player than the stereotypical ‘lonely nerd living in a basement’. Furthermore, popular live-streams such as *Critical Role*, *Dimension 20*, or others prominently feature female players, players of color, and players of various sexualities. These diverse features then carry over into their game, where even a traditional Western fantasy setting is allowed to have diversity that reflects modern society. This creates a welcoming atmosphere and challenges

previous beliefs that D&D is a white man's game. Players in popular live-streams may even be new to D&D themselves, serving to further break down the barrier to entry and show viewers that you don't need to be experienced or an expert on the rules to enjoy a game of D&D.

With the advancement of technology, a growing concern in many societies is the effects of online video gaming, particularly when done to excess. In South Korea, a country with a highly developed and profitable market for video games, this is a particularly pressing issue. Adolescents and young adults are the main demographics considered when discussing this issue. An increasing number of youths in South Korea appear to spend excessive amounts of time on video games, to their potential detriment. The documented negative effects of video gaming can be split into two categories: physical detriment and mental health concerns. The physical concerns mainly come from spending long stretches of time sitting or facing a computer. This behavior can contribute to issues of posture and vision or cause increased risk of cardiovascular disease. Video games can also be harmful for those with epilepsy or similar conditions. (Wattanapisit 2020). In the most severe manifestation of physical risks, South Korea has seen multiple cases of deaths related to excessively long gaming sessions (Kim 2019).

In terms of mental health, Korea has a high youth suicide rate that continues to climb. It has been found that those who have excessive video game habits are more likely to have mental conditions such as ADHD and depression. Previous discussions of video game habits proposed that video game or internet game addiction be considered a mental disorder itself, causing symptoms similar to ADHD and depression. However, many suggest that instead of pathologizing the behavior as an illness, it may be that video gaming is a habit formed out of response to mental health issues. (Kim 2019). As a recreational activity, video games are often described as a form of stress relief. It may then be true that those with mental health concerns, or

those buckling under the weight of South Korea's rigorous educational system would turn to video games. It is an incredibly popular pastime, especially due to the rise of eSports, and a very accessible form of recreation for adolescents and young adults, particularly in South Korea with the existence of PC cafes.

Modern online video games have a shared history with TTRPGs. Many of the first multiplayer online games were created based on popular TTRPGs such as D&D. As such, there is a large overlap within the consumer base. Despite South Korea's booming industry in video games and e-sports, there has been little success for TTRPGs in the country over the years. As the overall success of Dungeons & Dragons grew over time, their company Wizards of the Coast began to further the spread worldwide by authorizing official translation of the rulebooks into other languages. This included a deal struck with the company Gale Force 9 in 2019 to license foreign translation and distribution of various D&D content. This included a Korean translation. These materials were created and distributed, but this did not go smoothly and culminated in Gale Force 9 suing Wizards of the Coast for breach of contract. The details of this case are not particularly relevant to my thesis project, though it is relevant to note that the lawsuit states "Wizards alleged that GF9 breached the 2017 Agreement through the actions of TRPG Club (GF9's Korean translation and distribution subcontractor). Wizards alleged that certain unidentified products translated into Korean and distributed by TRPG Club were of low quality, including translations that were poorly done and included inaccurate, missing, and offensive translations. Wizards' breach notice went on to further allege that TRPG Club failed to provide adequate customer service to consumers of Dungeons & Dragons materials" (Tenkar 2020). In the lawsuit, GF9 refutes these claims, however various social media posts online can suggest that Korean consumers were dissatisfied with the products. Overall, the TTRPG and D&D scene in

South Korea is small. Some TTRPG cafes do exist in cities, and their patrons are a mix of native Koreans and foreign expats or visitors (Roos 2024). Notably, Korean players seem less interested in D&D specifically but enjoy playing Call of Cthulhu, a horror TTRPG that gained significant popularity in Japan. This suggests that there is potential for the growth of TTRPG as a pastime in South Korea, if the proper motivation and access is provided. Wizards of the Coast is one of the largest companies currently producing TTRPG content and has the most resources to put towards globalizing their content. Continuing to popularize the TTRPG genre, D&D in particular, may provide an additional outlet for recreation and peer socialization among South Korean youth. Many of the negative effects associated with online video games are caused by social isolation. Improved access to collaborative social-based games such as D&D could mitigate these effects.

This again leads back to the question of how to popularize D&D in Korea, and why to focus on D&D. As previously noted, there are other types of TTRPGs that already have some amount of success in Korea. The reason I did not choose to focus on one of these games, such as Call of Cthulhu, is because that side of the market has already been tapped. The source materials for the game have already been officially translated into Korean, and the player community has even begun creating and sharing its own original Korean content (Ford 2023). In contrast, D&D is an untapped market in Korea. Despite reigning supreme in the Western world, it remains less popular in Eastern countries like South Korea. Despite being the original inspiration for a genre of video game many South Koreans currently enjoy (fantasy MMORPGs), it has curiously failed to pique interest, potentially due to failure to properly localize and market the game. As a company with large resources and a trove of content for global players to engage with, promoting D&D in Korea could help to bolster the entire TTRPG community. Due to the lack of previous success with translated rulebooks, I decided to take a different approach towards

popularizing the game. I previously described how live-stream D&D content has been found to be uniquely successful at attracting new players. The kinds of platforms that host this content, such as Twitch and YouTube, are also popular in the Korean gaming circle. By introducing Koreans to D&D through this kind of fan content, my goal would be to increase visibility and interest in Dungeons & Dragons, so that eventually there can be more demand for official Korean D&D translations. The hope would be that after building this interest, there would be more success in future translations. To do this, I began my project of creating a video about *Critical Role's* D&D content. Geared towards attracting potential new Korean players of D&D, such as video game fans, fantasy fans, or fans of other TTRPGs like Call of Cthulhu, this project aimed to showcase D&D in a way that would make viewers want to continue to engage with *Critical Role* or other forms of D&D live play content, as well as engage with the game itself.

Methods and Discussion

VIDEO CREATION

The focus of my research was the creation, translation, and subtitling process of a video from English language to Korean language. The video was of my own creation, made up of clips from early episodes of the D&D live stream *Critical Role's* second campaign (season), and has a total length of 48:33. The style of the video is that of a trailer, in which various clips from the show were compiled and displayed one after the other. The goal in creating the video content was to showcase the appeal of *Critical Role*, but also the ways it makes D&D seem appealing and fun. By doing this, I would then be able to introduce D&D and its many benefits to a new population. Clips were selected based on their ability to fulfill one or more of three criteria: showcases the close bond and friendship of the cast, showcases not only the compelling narrative of the game (including humorous as well as dramatic or emotional moments), and showcases the technical rules of D&D being discussed explicitly. In addition, clips in the beginning segment of the video were chosen to give a baseline introduction to the character and players of *Critical Role*. For viewers with no TTRPG experience, the video would offer them a look at a new world, though one that may have some aspects of familiarity for avid video gamers. For established fans of other TTRPGs, the video would almost serve as a sales pitch for why they should consider investing time in this new game, instead of only playing their previous ones.

Critical Role is the name of what is now an independent company specializing in creating content related to the viewing of real playing of tabletop role-playing games, Dungeons & Dragons in particular. This content is initially available on the live-streaming platform Twitch, and then regularly re-uploaded to both YouTube and various music streaming platforms in video and podcast form respectively. Although there are different types of shorter form content

available through *Critical Role* (such as stand-alone videos or mini-series) the main and most popular type of *Critical Role* content are their Dungeons & Dragons campaigns. In D&D terminology, a campaign refers to a sequence of play sessions using the same player characters that spans multiple quests or adventures and often involves connecting or overarching storylines. *Critical Role*, at the time of writing this thesis, had three completed campaigns. Being most familiar with the content of the second campaign, as well as it being the campaign that gained *Critical Role* the most success, I decided to focus only on content from this campaign. However, it was not realistic to use the entire campaign as the scope for my video. One episode, or session, of *Critical Role* could range from between 3 to 7 hours (though seven being largely an outlier, as it was the season finale) and totals over 500 hours. As such, I further limited my scope to the first 26 episodes of *Critical Role* campaign 2. This specific number was chosen due to the finale of episode 26 being a very important moment in the campaign often considered a major turning point and which could serve as an interesting ending to the video. Even this limited scope covered a significant amount of content. In order to avoid rewatching all 100+ hours, I used a different method for selecting clips. After initially compiling the introduction clips of all characters, the show's opening theme, and the clips from the episode 26 finale that I wanted, I took a few notes on moments from the show that I could remember from episodes 1-26. This way, I could start thinking about standout and memorable clips from the show that would be good to include. Additionally, I knew that I wanted a variety of narrative, real life, and game related moments. In order to find these, I consulted the fan-created timestamps of various episodes. These are comments under the videos in which a fan (in the case of *Critical Role*, a specific fan and dedicated viewer known for this work) has separated the episode into various moments and left a timestamp that viewers can click on to skip to that moment. These

timestamps describe briefly what is going on in that moment. By reading through them, I was able to skim through various combat scenes or comedic/dramatic moments, and then select which ones I wanted to include in my video.

TRANSCRIPT CREATION

I began my translation by inputting the English source material into a document. This was done by going to the English transcript section of *Critical Role's* YouTube videos where I had sourced my clips and copying the official transcript into my document. This ensured complete accuracy in the eyes of the original creators for my source material. Due to the nature of *Critical Role's* transcript and closed caption format, this meant that my transcript would be excluding a few filler words and discourse markers. I found this acceptable, since slightly streamlining the subtitles would leave more room to translate the main messages. The source material also included transcripts for some sound effects, which is standard in closed captions but not considered necessary for subtitling. I decided to maintain this part of the original transcript. I wanted to match the intention of the original creators for what captions and subtitles should look like. However, I did change one aspect of the original English transcript. A unique feature of the genre of live-play D&D is that when watching or listening to the show, it is highly important to keep track of who is speaking. If someone at the table asks, "What did you say just now?" it could be the player asking that question in real life, or their character speaking in the narrative. The distinction is important both for the other players in the game, and for the audience watching at home. Even D&D players, including the *Critical Role* cast, sometimes make mistakes in these situations. One of the main ways players and listeners distinguish between player and character is with character voices. Players often put on a different accent for their character or may alter the pitch or pattern of their speech. Since the players of *Critical Role*

are voice actors, they are very skilled at this. However, some have character voices that are more subtle than others. While one player may put on a very obviously different accent and pitch, others may only slightly adjust their normal voice. This can be difficult enough for native English speakers to detect and may be even more problematic for Korean listeners who are not as attuned to English speaking patterns or accents. In addition, this shorter form content gives a viewer less time to familiarize themselves with the subtle differences between a player's speech and their character than someone who watches the full show would get. My subtitles incorporate the name of whoever is speaking at a given time, just like how *Critical Role's* English captions do. However, my subtitles also differentiate between the name of the actor/player and the name of the character. This did put some limitations on my translation, as it added more characters to the screen when a player switched from in character speech to out of character speech. This could be considered more cumbersome to read and potentially could have taken room away from the rest of the translation, but I felt that the benefits outweighed the risks. In total, this was the one area I chose to deviate from *Critical Role's* official transcripts, as I felt it was making up for the loss of being able to easily distinguish character voice and player voice.

Choosing to mark both player and character speech did present additional difficulties. As previously stated, determining the difference between character and player speech can be difficult even for native English speakers, as players might retain their character accent even when saying a sentence they don't mean to be saying within the narrative. Therefore, I used my own best judgement to determine if it seemed like a line being said was canonical to the fictional universe and narrative of the show, or simply something the player was saying in real life. In general, this was determined by thinking about if other characters responded in game, or if the statement affected the in-game world in any way. One specific example where this became

complicated was when the player Sam cast the ‘Message’ spell early on to send a message to the player Liam’s character Caleb. The other players at the table were not completely familiar with the exact parameters of the spell and were not sure if Caleb would be able to send a response back. Liam spoke in what seemed to be an in-character moment about how he was proud of Nott for casting the spell, but didn’t know the spell himself and therefore couldn’t respond. Sam then appeared to speak out of character, since he used his real voice, and clarified that Liam/Caleb can respond. However, Liam continued to respond in character as Caleb, acknowledging Sam as a speaker, and then continued to respond to Nott’s ‘Message’. I chose to keep the speech marked as Caleb and Sam respectively for this exchange, as I felt that the humor in this segment was based on the idea of a 4th wall break. Showing the character Caleb speaking with the real person Sam maintained this aspect of the comedy. Later on in the scene, several players spoke very clearly out of character to clarify the usage of the spell, and here I reverted the speaker tag to Liam.

TRANSLATION PROCESS

Vital to beginning my translation process was to first do more research on translation theory and the history of translation. I utilized two main sources for informing and developing my personal approach to this project: *The Routledge Course in Korean Translation* by Jieun Kiaer, which provided information about challenges in translation specifically between English and Korean, as well as *The Translation Studies Reader* 2nd edition edited by Lawrence Venuti, which contained various essays from scholars in the translation field from the 20th century.

The Routledge Course in Korean Translation was largely useful to me in the ways that it discussed Korean-English specific aspects of translation. For example, it thoroughly discussed the topic of the Korean honorific system and use of grammatical structures to encode politeness

and tone, which does not occur in English. I heavily referenced the book when choosing honorifics for different characters' speech and when implementing various verb endings. It also brought up some topics I had not previously thought about. The book explained that there are three main types of vocabulary words in Korean: Sino-Korean, Native Korean, and Anglo-Korean words. Since Anglo-Korean words are most often used by younger generations, and are associated with globalization and modern times, they may conflict with the historical fantasy setting of *Critical Role*. As such, I decided to try and limit my use of Anglo-Korean words in my translation when dialogue or narration was occurring within the world of the game. This was not possible for certain words, particularly for the names of monsters or species from Western fantasy genres, but I tried to maintain Sino and Native Korean usage when possible. For example, the word 'table' is used several times, particularly in the character introduction section of the video. Although the Anglo-Korean word '테이블' is an acceptable and understandable term, I opted to use '탁자' instead since the more modern word '테이블' might have clashed with the setting. A similar thing occurred when deciding on the translation of 'sandbag' where when choosing between the options of '샌드백' and '모래 자루', I chose the latter since it is a Native Korean word. Later in the same scene, the word trebuchet was used. This is a kind of historical siege weapon that does not have an exact translation in Korean. I was able to find an Anglo-Korean word for it, '트레뷰셋'. However, there is a Korean word for catapult, '투석기'. Catapults are similar to trebuchets in the kind of motion used to launch the artillery, and in the scene the word trebuchet was being used to describe the motion of how a character threw the sandbag. As such, I felt it was appropriate to replace the Anglo-Korean word for trebuchet with the more traditional Korean word.

The Translation Studies Reader was useful for developing my personal philosophy around translation for this project in particular. Since I was translating from my native language to a second language, as well as translating content that I was highly familiar with, I knew that my intentions would likely skew towards preserving the integrity of the source material and its style. Some of the readings in this book discussed ways in which early translations often sanitized their source material in order to make it more palatable to the new audience that came along with the new language. This was something that I decided to avoid in my translation.

Critical Role is certainly not a family friendly show. The cast swears freely, and often makes references to sex, alcohol, and drugs. In my compilation video alone, there is swearing, references to male genitalia, and references to sex work, all stated very openly and bluntly. Although swearing and sexual references can be seen as more taboo topics in Korean media, I did not want to water down the content in *Critical Role*, as it would be misrepresenting the content. In consuming translated media, we inherently agree to immerse ourselves in another culture, even though we are consuming it in our native language. I did not want to conceal the inherent modern Western culture and the culture of live-stream media that allowed *Critical Role* to be so explicit in the first place. In one of the essays, the theologian Schleiermacher was referenced as saying, “a translation can move in either of two directions: either the author is brought to the language of the reader, or the reader is carried to the language of the author” (Venuti 60). As a native English speaker, I have an inherent bias towards the conventions of the English language. I also have a vast knowledge about the subject matter of my source material as well as the material itself. As such, I decided to lean into these biases and take the approach of moving the reader to the language of the author. Especially since my project is a subtitling project as well as a translation progress, I had no interest in concealing the nature of *Critical*

Role as an American and English creation. Although my goal was for the translation to be very much understandable to Korean speakers, I also wanted it to still feel like Western media.

One final approach I took from my reading of *The Translation Studies Reader* came from Vladimir Nabokov's essay "Problems of Translation: "Onegin" in English". In it, he states that to describe a translation as 'readable' would actually be more of an insult than a complement (Venuti 71). Throughout the essay, Nabokov suggests that literal translation is preferable to other loose or interpretive forms of translation, even suggesting that additional footnotes with lengthy explanations are to be desired. Certainly, I could never fully take this approach with my project. Footnotes or additional information are only barely possible, given the time and space constraints of subtitles on screens. However, I was moved by the idea that a translation may not necessarily have to be 'readable'. I had previously stated that I wanted my translation to be understandable to Korean speakers. After reading Nabokov, I moved to amend this statement to the following: I wanted my translation to be understandable to Korean speakers only to the extent that it is understandable to English speakers. The reality is that *Critical Role* can be quite confusing. If a viewer is unfamiliar with gaming terms or D&D specific terms, it may be easy to get lost in certain scenes. Furthermore, the unscripted nature of the show means that dialogue is littered with mistakes. Cast members may speak in long run on sentences, fragmented sentences, or simply trail off and never arrive at their point. As such I decided that not only was it okay for my translation to sometimes seem confusing, but that it needed to be confusing. I did occasionally break long and complex sentences down into multiple sentences of Korean. This was due to the fact that sentence structure differs between languages, and I did not always find it possible to continue the sentence in Korean. However, I kept them as long as I could, and did not try to condense or refine them unless necessary for rationing space on the screen. Overall, although my

translation likely has far less notes and direct translation than Nabokov would support, I can proudly say that it is just as confusing to read as the original English.

During the process of translating, I used a variety of resources for translating specific words or phrases. For creating translations of terms specific to D&D, one of my main sources was a variety of online Korean gamers who had posted live-streams where they played the video game *Baldur's Gate 3*. *Baldur's Gate 3* is a recent and popular video game that is set in the official universe of Dungeons & Dragons, known as the Forgotten Realms. In addition to using the official lore of this universe, the mechanics of the game itself are a nearly perfect replica of the rules of Dungeons & Dragons but adapted to a single player online game setting. The game even includes simulated dice rolling. Since the game has an official and popular Korean localization, I was able to note what professionals and consumers alike consider to be the official and accepted Korean counterparts to different English D&D terms. Due to the controversy surrounding the Gale Force 9 Korean translation for official D&D materials, I did not reference any of that content during my translation process.

These streams were used to identify Korean counterparts for various terminology specific to D&D. This included the spellings of the names of various fantasy races such as tiefling, orc/half orc, halfling, goblin, etc. Additionally, there were mechanical terms such as a check, also known as an ability check or skill check. An ability check is when a player rolls a 20-sided dice and lets the score determine how well they can perform a certain task, with the possibility of bonuses to their score depending on the skills of the character. There are different subcategories of skill checks, such as perception or sleight of hand. For both the term 'skill check' as well as the terms for specific types of skill checks, I once again chose to use the Korean translations used in *Baldur's Gate 3*. Another unique term used multiple times in my video was 'natural 20'. It refers

to when the maximum number of 20 is rolled on a 20-sided dice. As previously stated, dice rolls in D&D are often followed by bonus points added based on character skills. The modifier ‘natural’ is used to clarify that the score of 20 was achieved in the initial dice roll, and not simply through additional bonus points (often referred to as a dirty 20). Initially, I translated this phrase more literally, as ‘자연의 20’, however in reviewing *Baldur’s Gate 3* streams, I noted that they used the phrase ‘대성공’ to express that a rolled score of 20 is a major and complete success. In the video game, a player can see the dice being rolled on the screen and understand that the big success is due to rolling the highest number possible. However, when watching *Critical Role*, viewers cannot clearly see the dice being rolled or what number they land on, relying only on what the players report. Therefore, although I adopted the phrase ‘대성공’, I also chose to add ‘(20 점)’ during the first instance of its usage. This was to clarify for a viewer what score is considered the maximum ultimate success. In addition to these phrases, there were also terms which have a very easily understood meaning in English, such as turn, damage, roll, healing, or hit. Despite being understandable, these terms still have many synonyms, and therefore many possible translations in Korean. Therefore, I continued to reference the language used in *Baldur’s Gate 3*’s Korean localization to ensure that I was using terminology that Korean gamers would be accustomed to, and that would match the currently available official translations for Korean D&D content.

There were some terms that I did not manage to come across during my viewings of *Baldur’s Gate 3* streams. It is possible that the terms appear in the game at some point but simply were not shown in the videos that I watched or were not shown clearly enough for me to notice them. In either case, it was necessary for me to decide myself how to translate these terms. There were two main D&D terms that I had to create my own translation for. The first was the term

‘disadvantage’. It exists as the counterpart to advantage. Both terms involve a player rolling two dice when they would normally roll only one. In the case of advantage, the player used the dice that had the higher and better roll, and in disadvantage the player must take the lower and worse roll. I decided to translate the term disadvantage by adding the adjective modifier ‘단전 있는’ to the word for skill check. This would generally translate to a skill check ‘with weakness’, with my intention being to represent that disadvantage occurs when a player has some sort of handicap or extra level of difficulty associated with the skill check. Although the counterpart term was not needed, I would have likely translated it in a similar manner, using a modifying phrase with a meaning related to adding strength. The second term was ‘initiative’. Initially the word was transliterated, but I didn’t feel like it was an understandable enough word even in the original English so it was changed to ‘전투 차례’ [the order of battle], which represents the intended meaning better. Although initiative isn’t 100% obvious in the original English, I felt that transliterating it made it even less obvious, and it was better to get a little closer to the meaning.

One final source that I used for more general assistance in English to Korean translation, was the translation website Papago. Papago is a Korean owned machine translation service, which I used as reference for specific vocabulary words or small phrases that I did not yet know in Korean. My usual process when doing this would be to start by typing the word in my source language of English. Papago generally provides multiple synonym options when available, as well as additional info such as definitions or words used in example sentences. I used these features to attempt to ensure that the Korean word I chose was the most accurate to the usage of the original English word. Furthermore, after choosing a Korean term I would often re-check my choice by translating it back into English. Another strategy to check my chosen Korean term was to type it into Google or Google images, and check if the search results matched my intended

meaning. These were some of the main ways that I evaluated my initial translation before moving onto revisions with a fellow Korean speaker.

A large point of focus in my translation was the use of the Korean honorific system. In Korean, every sentence involves grammatical encoding of respect and familiarity between speaker and recipient. This is not something that exists in English. Therefore, every sentence of my translation needed to include careful consideration of the personal dynamics between characters, and how they would choose to speak to each other. A major factor that goes into the Korean honorific system is age, and the age difference between speaker and referent. Since age is not as salient a factor in American/Western society, it is not something made particularly clear about the characters in *Critical Role*. The age of the actors is public knowledge but not something that the cast pays much attention to either. The cast is a close-knit group, and as such I established in my translation that the cast would use using very casual and informal speech with each other unless a specific alternate reason arises (examples: comedic effect, speaking to players but also audience at the same time). For the characters, there are some signs that can signal who is younger and who is older. However, some of these are more obvious than others and some only become clear at certain points of the series. For example, Nott is first described as a “little goblin girl”. At a later point in the series not covered by my video, the audience finds out she is actually a full-grown halfling woman with a husband and child. Whether this is due to the player having not fully developed the backstory yet or it being an intentional mislead is unclear. Regardless, the point is that I as the translator was not able to know for sure the exact ages of every character and instead decided to make my choices for what formality level characters should use based on closeness of the character relationships as well as the general personality of the character. Most of the characters begin as strangers and become friends throughout the story.

This would mean that as time progresses in-game, they would generally begin to use more casual language with each other. There is the exception of a few pre-established relationships of varying degrees. Caleb and Nott were written as having been close companions for a while prior to the start of the campaign. Molly and Yasha were both part of the same travelling circus and therefore knew each other already (only for a few months but they considered each other close). Beau, Fjord, and Jester had very recently become travelling companions, though they were not necessarily friends. As part of my process, I carefully considered the personality traits and personal histories of each main character in order to establish a distinct voice for them.

Fjord, played by Travis Willingham, is a responsible, stoic, and even stern character, though still capable of making jokes and having fun. Fjord's background is that of a sailor, which is a job that would have a strict hierarchy. Additionally, since he is male, I considered it appropriate for his speech usage to lean towards more formal speech and the formal and polite present - 습니다 verb ending. In addition to this being a generally more masculine style, it would suggest his attempts at professionalism and putting distance between him and other characters. However, in certain moments where he is letting loose, I allowed for more friendly speech and verb endings. In addition, during a conflict with another character I allowed for more casual speech to suggest that he was not respecting the other person at that moment.

Beauregard (or Beau), played by Marisha Ray, is a character who explicitly chafes under and rejects authority. Although she would likely be hesitant to call the group friends early on, often wanting to seem cool, or uncaring, it would not make sense for her to use many formal language to create emotional distance, since it could also show deference or respect. Rudeness, aggression, and rubbing people the wrong way is repeatedly established as character flaws for her, so I felt

having her use largely casual language, especially in situations where that may seem inappropriate, would fit with her character.

Caleb, played by Liam O'Brien, is a character with a (later revealed) military background, and someone who is very reserved and aloof. Outside of Nott, he is not particularly interested in being or making friends. As such, I wrote him as using mostly formal speech with characters other than Nott at first. He begins to use casual speech when showing that his guard is down or he is starting to trust others, as well as when he is heatedly arguing with another character and would not be as precise or respectful as usual. Additionally, there is a scene where Caleb has an extended monologue as he tells Beau and Nott a story from his past. In order to represent the storytelling aspect of the scene, I chose to write him as using the -습니다 form the entire time, only reverting back to casual speech with Nott when he is finished.

Nott, played by Sam Riegel, is a very fearful and anxious character, who does not easily trust others outside of Caleb. However, she is generally more willing to joke around with other characters and have casual interactions. She is also at times casually or jokingly rude towards other characters and more willing to engage in banter. These things, combined with her being one of the female characters, let me to decide that her speech style would be more casual, though perhaps a bit abrasive at times.

Jester, played by Laura Bailey, has a very childlike personality and wants to be friends with everyone and make jokes and make people laugh. She is also a very blunt and upfront person. I felt that she would likely use very close and friendly language to people. She does not often intend to be rude, however even in the narrative this can cause her to come off poorly. As such,

even if her use of casual language, even towards strangers, may seem off-putting in Korean, this would be consistent with her personality.

Molly, played by Taliesin Jaffe, is a rebel, and someone who likes to draw attention. He does not pay any care to look or act 'normal'. Charismatic and a performer, he would likely use performative closeness. As a character he is often very friendly with strangers and even overly familiar. He is essentially pretending that they are already friends. This is a strategy that he seems to use in his business practices. In his opening sequence where he is trying to attract customers for his circus' performance, he attempts to quickly establish a friendly relationship with the other characters to entice them. As such, Molly's dialogue was written to seem friendly towards the other characters from the very beginning.

Yasha, played by Ashley Johnson, is a soft spoken, strong silent type character. She is very introverted, awkward and has a hard time connecting with people even though she wants to. She is also a warrior from a tribal background. In addition to using more formal language, similar to Fjord, her speech is often simpler and more concise, rather than flowery or rambling like characters such as Molly or Jester.

One of the other major factors I considered in my translation was the different levels or spheres of reality and interaction occurring during *Critical Role*, and how I would represent these through Korean verb conjugation. There are three main types of interaction going on during *Critical Role* streams.

The first would be in character or in game speech. In these interactions, players are fully acting and speaking as if they were their characters. Their speech is directed entirely towards other fictional characters. The players will generally adopt different speech patterns during these

moments, using a different accent, adjusting the pitch of their voice, or other factors. Verb conjugations and honorific usage would need to vary based on character personality and relationships as described in the honorifics section and should sound like natural spoken productions.

The next type would be out of character or real-life speech. This means that the players are speaking as their real-life selves and are speaking either towards the other people at the table or potentially to the audience. As previously stated, since all the players are close personal friends of several years, they use very casual language with each other. When addressing the audience, more formal language can be used, however, to show respect.

The final type of speech is in-game narration. Either a player or the Dungeon Master, Matt Mercer, speaks about what is happening in the game in a narrative fashion as if writing a fantasy novel. This may include describing character actions, or aspects of the setting and what is currently taking place. In order to create the effect of a fiction novel, the plain form -는다/다 verb ending was used, which would be the standard for novels and other forms of written language in Korean. Although using the plain form for what is technically verbal communication may be unorthodox, it is my opinion that during this kind of narration, the cast members (Matt in particular) are intentionally trying to express a more storylike and immersive prose style. The ultimate purpose of D&D is collaborative storytelling, as is often described to others as ‘writing a story with your best friends’. As such, using the plain form seems appropriate, even though it is normally reserved for written communication.

SUBTITLING PROCESS

In order to create timed captions for my video, I began by uploading the file to YouTube and utilizing their self-created caption feature. This allowed me to add captioned segments and manually adjust when they would appear in the video and how long they would remain on the screen for. The YouTube interface was also consistently faster and easier to use than captioning the video directly through an editing software such as Adobe Premier Rush or Premier Pro. This is the same style of closed captioning that the official *Critical Role* channel uses for both their English and non-English subtitling. However, since YouTube's feature is technically closed captioning and not subtitling, viewers have the option to hide the captions from view. Since my translation is inherent to my project, I wanted the subtitles to be directly embedded onto the video. Therefore, after creating my subtitles in YouTube, I downloaded the file of my timed subtitles, converted the file to an SRT file, and imported my subtitles into Premier Pro. I then modified the style of the subtitles to match the YouTube style, which is white text overtop of a black box background. I wanted to use this style both to match what is traditionally used by *Critical Role*, but also since I found that the black box background made the subtitles consistently easier to read.

During the process of timing the dialogue on the screen, I adhered to the standard suggested by Darcy Paquet, a professional translator for the Korean film industry, and kept all subtitles to a maximum of 2 lines and 37 characters. If a single sentence exceeded this maximum, I would either revise the sentence if possible or split the sentence into further segments. Since there are many long, run on sentences in *Critical Role*, this second method was utilized more often. This act of further separating lines from my original transcript to match when the dialogue occurs, known as spotting, provided a few additional challenges. There are times in *Critical Role* when

speech occurs very rapidly. Due to the casual and unscripted nature of the show, members of the cast often interrupt each other, talk over each other, or simply speak very quickly due to excitement. If a single person was speaking very quickly, I simply tried to keep the subtitles as concise as possible, since it would only be able to be kept on the screen for a short amount of time. However, if a quickly spoken sentence was not immediately followed by more dialogue, I occasionally let the subtitles linger on the screen for a few extra moments. In cases of interruption or crosstalk, I tried to fit both lines of dialogue on the screen when possible. This sometimes involved trimming down the lines of dialogue to be more succinct in order to remain within the limit of 2 lines and 37 characters. However, if I began to feel that the lines were so shortened that meaning was being lost, I reverted to separating the lines. Other moments in the show and video were quite the opposite, where cast members would speak very slowly and make many pauses, either for dramatic effect or because they were searching for the right words. If a pause was not particularly lengthy or significant, I occasionally used ellipses to indicate it. However, if a pause was particularly long, or was used for dramatic and suspenseful effects, I would split the subtitle as well. Sometimes it was possible for this split to occur at the same counterpart word or area in the sentence as the English. However, due to differences in Korean and English sentence structure, this was not always the case. During such cases, I simply tried to split up the line of dialogue that seemed natural for a pause to occur in Korean. Additionally, I tried to ensure that the first part of the sentence or phrase would reveal or make obvious the latter half of the sentence. In order to preserve the original dramatic effect, I wanted to make sure that the ending of the sentence wouldn't be easily guessed.

Conclusion

Dungeons & Dragons is a game that has much to offer the world. It is an activity that prioritizes connection, cooperation, creativity, and joy. It is commonly said in D&D communities that you don't win the game by defeating the villain or saving the princess. You could completely fail your quest and still 'win' the game, because the true measure of success in D&D is fun. If everyone enjoyed themselves and created a story that was entertaining, then everyone wins. *Critical Role* is a group that embodies this mindset fully, and it is their commitment to unabashedly enjoying themselves and writing stories together that has drawn so many new people to develop an interest in D&D. It is my hope that by giving South Korean audiences a point of entry for *Critical Role*'s content, interest in Dungeons & Dragons can continue to develop in Korea. With greater interest and greater engagement, more and more people can begin to experience the positive effects of D&D. South Korea in particular faces issues related to social isolation and internet usage to a pathological extent. D&D and tabletop gaming provide an alternate form of recreation and encourages players to develop real-life friendships. Audiences love *Critical Role* not just because the characters are compelling, or because the plotlines are entertaining, but because the cast members are true friends and have such wonderful rapport with each other. People remember iconic moments of the show where a dramatic backstory was revealed, or a fearsome villain was defeated, but they also remember moments where cast members joked around with each other or did nice things for each other. People's fondest memories related to D&D can come not simply from the game itself, but from the real relationships you build by playing with other people. In our increasingly online world, D&D may be able to provide a lifeline to people all across the world and keep us tethered to what matters most: each other.

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Supporting Materials

Video: 크리티컬 롤 같이 보자! [KRN Sub]

<https://youtu.be/ibj0SnaoBW8>