

Translation Strategies of Chinese-English Culture-Specific Items: the Case of Translation Test from CET4 and CET6

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Abstract

Culture-specific items (CSIs) constitute a critical component within the realm of cultural translation, particularly evident in the context of China's widely participated CET-4 and CET-6 (College English Test Band 4 and Band 6). These examinations have garnered increasing scholarly attention due to their substantial influence on language education and international communication. Drawing inspiration from Nida's (1945) cultural criteria and Newmark's (1988) translation strategies, this comprehensive study delves into the intricacies of CET-4 and CET-6 CSIs spanning the decade from 2013 to 2023. The findings reveal that diverse types of CSIs necessitate distinct translation strategies, influenced by political, economic, sociocultural factors, and translation purposes. Moreover, a majority of these CSI employ a combination of translation strategies to fulfill their translation objectives. In essence, this study analyzes CSIs in China's CET-4 and CET-6 English tests, enhancing the understanding of cultural translation and improving the cultural translation skills. It reveals that different CSIs require distinct translation strategies influenced by various factors, providing valuable insights for translators, students and educators.

Keywords: CET4 and CET6, Chinese culture, culture-specific items (CSIs), cultural translation strategies, source language, target language, translation test

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Introduction

Cultural translation is a field of study that focuses on the transfer of cultural meanings and concepts from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Stuart Hall believes that certain concepts are indispensable despite their traditional connotations, so we must use them under erasure until we develop an adequate language (Hall, 1980). Bhabha (1995) sees cultural translation as a method of carefully negotiating various discourses either through literal practice and action or the production of literature, culture, media, analyses, and knowledge-making. Bassnett (2003) believes translation is not just a linguistic transfer, but also a cultural one.

According to Aixela (1996), CSIs refer to elements within the text that are linked to specific concepts in the foreign culture, such as history, art, and literature, which may be unfamiliar to readers of the target text. CSIs denote constituents, entities, practices, or abstractions that manifest within a distinct cultural milieu and may encounter challenges in comprehension or valuation among individuals hailing from disparate cultural contexts (Blažytė & Liubinienė, 2016). Such items evince a profound entrenchment within the cultural fabric, frequently encapsulating substantive connotations, symbolic representations, or historical import germane to that specific cultural milieu (Strathern, 2023).

Translating cultural-specific items (CSIs) in the context of CET-4 and CET-6 exams involves handling unique cultural elements found in English-speaking countries, including idioms, colloquialisms, and cultural references that lack direct Chinese equivalents. To effectively translate CSIs, students need a deep contextual understanding and recognize nuances, historical references, and idiomatic expressions. This process also entails adapting cultural elements for Chinese readers by replacing foreign references with equivalent Chinese cultural context or explanations. Achieving success in CSIs translation necessitates a high level of English language proficiency, along with a strong command of the Chinese language. The significance of the research lies in recognizing that adept translation skills encompass more than linguistic competence; they encompass the comprehension of cultural nuances and specialized vocabulary. This proficiency is not only vital for excelling in assessments, but it also plays a critical role in facilitating effective cross-cultural communication. These skills extend beyond the realm of examinations, serving as a means to ensure precise and refined global interactions. By minimizing misunderstandings and encouraging intercultural exchanges, this competence holds enduring value. Consequently, the mastery of culture-specific translation contributes not only to enhanced linguistic prowess but also to the advancement of broader intercultural comprehension (Strathern, 2023).

Literature Review

The Concept of CSIs

Raymond Williams (2020) once proposed a “social” definition of culture, arguing that culture is the description of a particular way of life. Tangible factors such as diet, clothing, customs, religion, law, politics, and values of a country or region are all included in the category of culture. Among them, the language system is the carrier for storing and exporting culture, and vocabulary, as the primary language unit, directly reflects cultural factors (Evans & Levinson, 2009). Within the realm of Translation Studies, the aforementioned allusions have garnered diverse nomenclature, including cultural references (or referents), cultural elements, culture-

specific items, culturemes or culture loaded words. (Nida, 1945; Moles et al., 1977; Nord, 1994; Aixelá, 1996)

Collectively, these terminologies endeavor to elucidate a notion that possesses a certain degree of intuitive apprehensibility, particularly within the purview of translators and scholars engrossed in the study of translation. Nida (1945) divides cultural factors in language into five categories: (1) Ecological culture (2) Material culture (3) Social culture (4) Religious culture; and (5) Language and culture. Ecological Culture relates to the environment. Material Culture involves tangible cultural objects. Social Culture includes societal structures and relationships. Religious Culture covers religious beliefs and practices. Language and Culture explores the relationship between language and its cultural context. These categories are key to understanding cultural nuances in language for effective translation and communication. This taxonomy devised by Nida constitutes a foundational framework for the systematic categorization of linguistic components rooted in diverse cultural contexts. Newmark (1988) introduced a categorization framework comprising five distinct domains for the classification of the foreign cultural lexicon: Ecology Culture (physical environment), Material Culture (cultural artifacts), Social Culture (social structures and relationships), Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, and Conceptual Terms (societal functioning aspects), and Gestural Representations and Habitual Practices (non-verbal communication and routine practices). These domains aid in understanding and translating culture-specific items effectively.

Nord (1994) believes that culture-loaded words are culturally unique, and she defines culture-loaded words as “cultural phenomena that exist in culture X but do not exist in the same form in culture Y”. “Culture-specific items” was first proposed by Spanish translator and translation theorist Aixelá (1996). Aixelá observed eleven translation methods of culture-specific items in three Spanish translations of detective stories by American authors (Toppol, 2021). He pointed out that culturally specific items are “ideologically or culturally incomprehensible or acceptable to general readers or anyone in power in the target culture” (Aixelá, 1995). Although the definition of CSIs in academic circles is different in expression and has its own emphasis, it generally covers two major characteristics of culture specific items. One is that the meaning of words can reflect the unique customs of the nation. and cultural characteristics, and the second is uniqueness and lexical vacancy, so it is necessary to combine cross-cultural translation and reporting skills to achieve equivalent transformation of vocabulary (Li & Yi, 2023).

Translation Strategies for CSIs

CSIs can reflect the unique culture of a certain nation, and the exact corresponding vocabulary expressions cannot be found in other cultures, thus forming a phenomenon of semantic vacancy (Leon et al., 2023). As a bridge between two languages and two cultures, translators should constantly explore suitable and effective translation strategies to reduce the reading barriers caused by semantic gaps to readers. Important representatives of the cultural approach in translation studies include Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), who attached great importance to the role of culture in translation, the social background, the influence that cultural tradition imposed on translation, and the subjectivity of translators. Newmark (1988) introduced different translation strategies. These are 1) Transference; 2) Neutralization; 3) Cultural equivalent; 4) Functional equivalent; 5) Descriptive equivalent; 6) Componential analysis; 7) Synonymy; 8) Calque or loan translation; 9) Shifts or transpositions; 10) Modulation; 11) Recognized translation; 12)

Compensation; 13) Paraphrase; 14) Couplets; 15) Notes (Newmark, 1988; Valencia & Asmarani, 2016).

The academic research on the translation of CSIs focuses on the field of published literary works, Davies (2003a) delves into the translation of CSIs in Rowling's Harry Potter series. It identifies diverse translation strategies employed by different translators and evaluates their effectiveness in addressing specific challenges. Petrulionė (2012) examines the translation strategies for CSIs in Joanne Harris's novels and their Lithuanian translations. It analyses Davies's seven translation strategies: preservation, addition, omission, globalization, localization, transformations, and creation. Localization emerges as the most common strategy (Petrulionė, 2012). Sasaninejad and Delpazir (2015) employ a descriptive-analytical corpus approach to investigate the strategies employed in translating CSIs from English to Persian. Focusing on Howard Fast's "Spartacus" and its Persian translation by Ebrahim Yunesi, the analysis reveals a predominant use of a target-oriented approach. Notably, the translator relies heavily on the substitution strategy to bridge cultural gaps during the translation process. Zeghar and Benlakdar (2022) seek to examine the translation methodologies during the process of rendering culture-specific elements within Herman Melville's literary work, "Moby-Dick," into Arabic. Mansour Amini (2023) underscores the importance of grasping Chinese culture, history, and language to maintain the original poetic essence, particularly given the challenge of intertextuality in Chinese poetry translation.

In recent years, the research content has been more focused on exploring the application and practice of translation, such as legal texts, technical texts, foreign propaganda texts, film and television subtitles texts, classics texts and other texts and translations of culturally specific items in interpretation types. Huber and Kairys focus on CSIs in audiovisual content and their adaptation strategies within the Lithuanian dub of "Shrek the Third" and aims to explore the relationship between synchronization requirements in dubbing and the localization of culture-specific items. Additionally, it includes a survey to assess differing opinions on the importance of lip synchrony in dubbing, a topic that remains a subject of debate among scholars (Huber & Kairys, 2021). Amenador and Wang examine the translation of CSIs in a Chinese-English food menu corpus. Results indicate a preference for the neutralizing strategy over foreignization and domestication, with factors like metonymical/metaphorical usage, brand, polysemy, cultural significance, and context influencing translation choices (Amenador & Wang, 2022). Adawiyah addresses the challenges of translating culture-specific items (CSIs) in the Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap movie. It categorizes 60 CSIs based on Newmar's classifications, encompassing socio-culture, organization, material culture, and others. Examining 18 translation techniques, literal translation stands out with 16 instances. The dominant translation norms include literal, adaptation, and generalization methods, reflecting the close correspondence between source and target languages (Adawiyah et al., 2023).

Methods

This study has undertaken a classification analysis to comprehensively analyze the characteristics and translation strategies of Chinese CSIs. 20 representative CSIs from CET-4 and CET-6 exams are selected based on Nida's (1995) cultural classification (1. Ecological culture; 2. Material culture; 3. Social culture; 4. Religious culture; and 5. Language and culture), specifically

targeting those with notably high translation error rates. These 20 CSIs are analyzed by Newmark's (1988) translation strategies framework (1. Transference; 2. Neutralization; 3. Cultural equivalent; 4. Functional equivalent; 5. Descriptive equivalent; 6. Componential analysis; 7. Synonymy; 8. Calque or loan translation; 9. Shifts or transpositions; 10. Modulation; 11. Recognized translation; 12. Compensation; 13. Paraphrase; 14. Couplets; 15. Notes) aiming to enhance the core of translation education. These findings hold implications for educators, students, and underscore the importance of nurturing cultural competence among English learners in translation contexts.

Results

Ecological culture

Table 1. CSIs of Ecological Culture from CET-4 and CET-6

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	山水 shān shuǐ	Landscape	Functional Equivalent
2	世外桃源 shì wài táo yuán	Shangri-la or Arcadia	Cultural Equivalent
3	黄土高原 huáng tǔ gāo yuán	Loess Plateau	Recognized Translation
4	妙极自然, 宛自天开 miào jí zì rán, wǎn zì tiān kāi	Artificial as it is, the garden must look ingenious and natural	Descriptive Equivalent

1. 山水 (Shān shuǐ) - landscape

The translation of “山水” into “landscape” primarily uses the strategy of functional equivalent. “山水” is used to refer to a style of traditional Chinese painting that involves or depicts scenery or natural landscapes. This term is often translated into English as “landscape”. However, the concept of “山水 (Shān shuǐ)” in Chinese culture is much more complex and profound than the English term “landscape”. The English term “landscape” can be used to convey the same concept in a way that's understandable to English speakers, even though it doesn't capture all the nuances of the Chinese term. It's worth noting that Chinese-to-English translation is not always a one-to-one process, and sometimes nuances or connotations in the source language might not be fully captured in the target language (Chan, 2004). The goal is to convey the intended meaning as accurately and naturally as possible.

2. 世外桃源 (shì wài táo yuán) - Shangri-la or Arcadia

The translation of “世外桃源” into “Shangri-la” or “Arcadia” primarily uses the strategy of cultural equivalent. This strategy involves replacing a cultural word or phrase in Chinese, in this case, with a word or phrase in English with a similar connotation or impact. “世外桃源” is a Chinese idiom that refers to an unspoiled wilderness paradise, hidden from the outside world and full of peace and happiness. The English terms “Shangri-la” and “Arcadia” convey similar concepts. “Shangri-la” is a fictional place described in the 1933 novel “Lost Horizon” by James Hilton, where people live in peace and harmony. “Arcadia” is a term used to refer to an idyllic vision of unspoiled wilderness. This translation strategy is often used when there is no direct equivalent for a particular term or concept in the target language. By choosing a term that shares similar connotations in the target culture, the translator can convey the meaning of the original text while making it accessible and understandable for the target audience.

2. 黄土高原 (Huáng tǔ gāo yuán) - Loess Plateau

The translation of “黄土高原” to “Loess Plateau” is a good example of recognized translation; this strategy is used when the translator uses the official or the generally accepted translation of any institutional term. “黄土高原” is a well-known geographical term in China, referring to a plateau region located around the Wei River valley and the southern half of China's Shanxi Province. It is named for its extensively deposited loess soil. The English term “Loess Plateau” is the recognized translation for “黄土高原” in geographical and scientific contexts. However, some Chinese students translate this term literally into “Yellow Soil Plateau”. The term “loess” is more specific than “yellow soil,” as it refers to a specific type of soil that is composed of wind-blown silt. the choice to translate “黄土高原” as “Loess Plateau” instead of “Yellow Soil Plateau” reflects a desire to accurately convey the specific geological characteristics of the region in question.

4. 妙极自然，宛自天开 (Miào jí zì rán, wǎn zì tiān kāi) - artificial as it is, the garden must look ingenious and natural

The translation of “妙极自然，宛自天开” to “artificial as it is, the garden must look ingenious and natural” is a great example of the application of Descriptive Equivalent. In this case, “妙极自然，宛自天开” is a Chinese phrase that describes a garden that, despite being man-made, appears incredibly natural and ingeniously designed. The English translation captures this sentiment effectively. The phrase “artificial as it is” acknowledges that the garden is man-made, while “the garden must look ingenious and natural” conveys the idea that it should appear natural. The English phrase describes the concept expressed in the Chinese phrase. It captures the idea that a garden, despite being artificially constructed, should give the impression of being a natural, ingenious product.

Material culture

Table2. CSIs of Material Culture from CET-4 and CET-6

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	八宝饭 bā bǎo fàn	eight-treasure rice pudding	Functional Equivalent
2	刀枪剑戟、斧钺钩叉 dāo qiāng jiàn jǐ, fǔ yuè gōu chā	swords, spears, two-edged swords and halberds, axes, tomahawks, hooks, prongs	Synonymy
3	湖笔、徽墨、宣纸、端砚 húbǐ, huīmò, xuānzhǐ, duānyàn	hubi, the writing brush produced in Huzhou, Zhejiang province; huimo, the ink stick produced in Huizhou, Anhui province; xuan paper, a kind of paper produced in Xuanzhou, Anhui province; and duanyan, the ink stone made in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province (Zhaoqing was earlier called Duanzhou)	Couplets, Notes
4	紫禁城 zǐ jìn chéng	the Forbidden City	Modulation

1. 八宝饭 (bā bǎo fàn) - eight-treasure rice pudding

The translation of “八宝饭” to “eight-treasure rice pudding” is an example of Functional Equivalent. “八宝饭” is a Chinese dish that consists of glutinous rice with various ingredients such as red bean paste, jujube dates, lotus seeds, and other sweet or savory fillings (Li & Hsieh, 2004). The term “eight-treasure” refers to the eight different ingredients used in the dish, while “rice pudding” is a general term used in English to describe sweet or savory dishes made with rice. The term “pudding” conveys the idea that “八宝饭” is a type of food that's typically served as a dessert or sweet dish.

2. 刀枪剑戟、斧钺钩叉 (dāo qiāng jiàn jǐ, fǔ yuè gōu chā) - swords, spears, two-edged swords and halberds, axes, tomahawks, hooks, prongs

The translation of “刀枪剑戟、斧钺钩叉” into “swords, spears, two-edged swords and halberds, axes, tomahawks, hooks, prongs” can be analyzed using the strategy of synonymy. This strategy involves using a slightly more general word in the target language when a specific term in the source language doesn't have a direct equivalent. (Baker, 2018)

3. 湖笔、徽墨、宣纸、端砚 (húbǐ, huīmò, xuānzhǐ, duānyàn) - hubi, the writing brush produced in Huzhou, Zhejiang province; huimo, the ink stick produced in Huizhou, Anhui province; xuan paper, a kind of paper produced in Xuanzhou, Anhui province; and duanyan, the ink stone made in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province (Zhaoqing was earlier called Duanzhou).

The translation of “湖笔、徽墨、宣纸、端砚” can be analyzed using the strategies of couplets and notes. Couplets in this case involve combining two different procedures, neutralization and cultural equivalent. The terms “hubi”, “huimo”, “xuan paper”, and “duanyan” are neutralization of “湖笔”, “徽墨”, “宣纸”, and “端砚” respectively. The descriptions that follow each term serve as cultural equivalents, providing context and explanation for English speakers who may not be familiar with these specific Chinese cultural items (Davies, 2003b). Notes involve providing additional information in a translation. The notes in this case are the descriptions following each term (“the writing brush produced in Huzhou, Zhejiang province”, “the ink stick produced in Huizhou, Anhui province”, etc.). These notes help to convey the meaning and cultural significance of these items to English speakers.

4. 紫禁城(zǐ jìn chéng) - the Forbidden City

The translation of “紫禁城” into “the Forbidden City” can be analyzed using the strategy of modulation. This strategy involves changing the point of view, focus, or cognitive category in relation to the source text. In this case, “紫禁城” literally translates to “Purple Forbidden City”, with “purple” referring to the North Star (which was traditionally believed to be purple) and symbolizing the emperor's residence as the center of the universe. (Baratta et al., 2023) The term “Forbidden” is used because access to the city was historically restricted. However, the term “Purple Forbidden City” might sound awkward or confusing because the color of the Forbidden City is not Purple. Therefore, the focus shifts from the literal color and astronomical significance to the concept of being a place that's forbidden to common people. This modulation makes the term more understandable and meaningful to English speakers, as it conveys the exclusivity and majesty of the place without needing to explain the cultural and historical context behind the original Chinese term.

Social culture

Table3. CSIs of Social Culture from CET-4 and CET-6

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	中秋节, 春节, 重阳节 Zhōng qiū jié, chūn jié, chóng yáng jié	Mid-Autumn Festival, Spring Festival, Double-Ninth Festival	Functional Equivalent
2	元宵节, 端午节 Yuan xiāo jié, duān wǔ jié	Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival	Paraphrase
3	叩头 kòu tóu	kowtow	Transference
4	生(男性)、旦(女性)、净(男性)、丑(男性女性皆有) shēng (nán xìng), dàn (nǚ xìng), jìng (nán xìng), chǒu (nán xìng nǚ xìng jiē yǒu)	sheng(male), dan (young female), jing (painted face, male), and chou(clown, male or female)	Naturalization, Compensation

1. 中秋节 (zhōng qiū jié)-Mid-Autumn Festival; 春节 Spring Festival - (chūn jié); 重阳节 (chóng yáng jié) - Double-Ninth Festival

The translation of “中秋节”, “春节”, and “重阳节” into “Mid-Autumn Festival”, “Spring Festival”, and “Double-Ninth Festival” respectively can be analyzed using the strategy of functional equivalent. The terms "Mid-Autumn Festival", “Spring Festival”, and “Double-Ninth Festival” are used as translations because they convey the general timing or theme of these festivals, which is an important aspect of their cultural significance. However, these translations do not convey the full meaning and cultural significance of these festivals. For instance, the Mid-Autumn Festival is associated with moon worship and family reunions, the Spring Festival marks the beginning of the lunar new year and is associated with various customs and traditions, and the Double-Ninth Festival is a day for climbing mountains and paying respects to ancestors. In these cases, the English terms convey the main idea of the Chinese term in a way that’s understandable to English speakers, even if some cultural nuances are not fully captured.

2. 元宵节 (Yuan xiāo jié)-Lantern Festival; 端午节 (duān wǔ jié) - Dragon Boat Festival

The translation of “元宵节” and “端午节” into “Lantern Festival” and “Dragon Boat Festival” respectively can be analyzed using the strategy of paraphrase. The term “元宵节” is translated as “Lantern Festival” because it conveys the festival’s main activity, which is lantern watching. This makes it easier for non-Chinese speakers to understand the essence of the festival. “Dragon Boat Festival” is a paraphrase of “端午节”. The festival is celebrated on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month and is associated with racing dragon boats and eating Zongzi (sticky rice dumplings). The English terms “Lantern Festival” and “Dragon Boat Festival” capture these key aspects of the festival, making it a paraphrase of the original Chinese term.

3. 叩头 (kòu tóu) - kowtow

“叩头” from Chinese is often transferred directly into English as “kowtow”. This is an example of the translation strategy known as transference, which involves the process of transferring a word from the source language to the target language. The term “kowtow” has been borrowed into English and is now used to refer to the act of kneeling and touching one’s head to the ground as a sign of respect or submission, mirroring the meaning of “叩头” in Chinese culture.

4. 生（男性）、旦（女性）、净（男性）、丑（男性女性皆有）[shēng (nán xìng), dàn (nǚ xìng), jìng (nán xìng), chǒu (nánxìng nǚ xìng jiē yǒu)]- sheng(male), dan (young female), jing (painted face, male), and chou(clown, male or female).

The translation of “生（男性）、旦（女性）、净（男性）、丑（男性女性皆有）” into “sheng(male), dan (young female), jing (painted face, male), and chou(clown, male or female)” involves translation strategies of Naturalization and Compensation. Naturalization adapts the source language word to the normal pronunciation and morphology of the target language. The terms “sheng”, “dan”, “jing”, and “chou” have been naturalized in English and are used to refer to specific roles in Chinese opera. Compensation is a strategy used when a concept or term in the source language doesn't have a direct equivalent in the target language, which could lead to a loss of meaning or cultural nuance. The translator compensates for this loss by providing additional information or context in another part of the translation. In this case, the Chinese terms “生”, “旦”, “净”, and “丑” refer to specific roles in Chinese opera, each with its own unique characteristics and cultural nuances. These terms don't have direct equivalents in English. Therefore, to compensate for this potential loss of meaning, additional information is provided in parentheses after each term: “sheng (male)”, “dan (young female)”, “Jing (painted face, male)”, and “chou (clown, male or female)”. This helps to convey the intended meaning and cultural context of each term to English-speaking audiences.

Religious culture

Table 4. CSIs of Religious Culture from CET-4 and CET-6

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	道教dào jiào	Taoism	Transference
2	黄帝huáng dì	Yellow Emperor	Calque or Loan Translation
3	修身养性xiū shēn yang xìng	self-cultivation	Shifts or Transpositions
4	龙lóng	dragon (or loong)	Modulation

1. 道教 (dào jiào) - Taoism

The translation of “道教” to “Taoism” is an example of Naturalization in translation. “道教” is a Chinese term that represents a philosophical and religious tradition that originated in China. The English term “Taoism” is a transliteration of this term, which provides English speakers with a phonetic representation of the original term. However, it's worth noting that while this translation conveys the pronunciation of the original term, it may not capture all the cultural nuances and meanings associated with it. This reflects one of the inherent challenges in translating CSIs. For instance, Taoism is a complex tradition that encompasses philosophical, religious, and cultural elements that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture and history (Asim, 2023).

2. 黄帝(huáng dì) - Yellow Emperor

A calque or loan translation is a type of translation where each element or part of a word or phrase in the source language is translated literally into the target language. In this case, “黄帝” is made up of two characters: “黄”, which means “yellow”, and “帝”, which means “emperor”. These are

translated literally into English as “Yellow Emperor”. This strategy allows the original term to be understood by English speakers while preserving its original structure and components. It’s a common strategy used for translating names and titles across languages. (Klaudy & Heltai, 2020)

3. 修身养性 (xiū shēn yang xìng) - self-cultivation

The Chinese phrase “修身养性” is translated into English as “self-cultivation” using the strategies of shifts and transpositions. As for shifts or transpositions, this involves a change in the grammar from SL to TL. In Chinese, “修身养性” is a four-character phrase where “修身” means to cultivate oneself and “养性” means to nurture one’s nature. In English, this concept is condensed into the two-word phrase “self-cultivation”, which represents a grammatical shift from the source language to the target language. In terms of parts of speech, “修身养性” is a verb phrase in Chinese. It describes the action of self-improvement or self-cultivation, both physically and mentally. However, “self-cultivation” could be interpreted as a compound noun made up of the reflexive pronoun “self” and the noun “cultivation”. This represents a transposition in parts of speech from the source language to the target language.

4. 龙 (lóng) - dragon (or loong)

In terms of modulation, the translation of “龙” into “dragon” or “loong” involves a change in perspective from the source language to the target language. Modulation is a translation technique that involves changing the point of view, focus, or cognitive category in relation to the source text. The Chinese character “龙” represents a mythical creature in Chinese culture that is often associated with power, strength, and good luck. The creature is typically depicted as a serpentine entity with scales and is deeply embedded in Chinese mythology and symbolism. When translated into English as “dragon”, the term often brings to mind a different set of cultural connotations, as dragons in Western mythology are often depicted as large, winged, fire-breathing creatures. The term “loong” is sometimes used in English to refer specifically to the Chinese dragon, maintaining a closer connection to the original cultural context.

Language and culture

Table 5. CSIs of Language and Culture from CET-4 and CET-6

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Translation Strategy
1	横、竖、撇、捺、折 héng, shù, piē, nà, zhé	“一” (the horizontal stroke), “丨” (the vertical stroke), “丿” (the left-falling stroke), “㇇” (the right-falling stroke), and “乙” (the turning stroke)	Transference, Paraphrase, Notes
2	土豪tǔháo	tuhao	Neutralization, Componential Analysis, Modulation
3	大妈dàmā	dama	Neutralization, Componential Analysis, Modulation

4	自强不息、青出于蓝、厚积薄发 zì qiáng bù xī, qīng chū yú lán, hòu jī bó fā	ziqiangbuxi (make unremitting efforts to improve oneself), qingchuyulan (bluer than indigo), and houjibofa (success comes with time and effort)	Neutralization, Descriptive Equivalent
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1. 横、竖、撇、捺、折 (héng, shù, piē, nà, zhé) - “一” (the horizontal stroke), “丨” (the vertical stroke), “丿” (the left-falling stroke), “㇇” (the right-falling stroke), and “乙” (the turning stroke). Chinese characters, also known as Hanzi, are logographic in nature, meaning that each character often represents a specific concept or word, and the way they are written can provide insights into their meaning. Adding stroke shapes to a translation can help convey these nuances and provide a more accurate representation of the original character. Therefore, the Chinese terms “横、竖、撇、捺、折” are transferred directly into their stroke shapes as “一, 丨, 丿, ㇇, 乙”. Moreover, notes are used to provide additional information in a translation. In this case, the notes are the English translations and descriptions provided for each term like the horizontal stroke, the vertical stroke, the left-falling stroke, the right-falling stroke, and the turning stroke. These notes help ensure that the concepts are understood correctly by readers who might not be familiar with these strokes.

2. 土豪(tǔ háo) – tuhao, 大妈(dà mā) - dama

The translation of “土豪” into “tuhao” and “大妈” into “dama” can be analyzed using the strategy of Componential Analysis. This strategy involves comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning but is not an obvious one-to-one equivalent, by demonstrating first their common and then their differing sense components. Moreover, their meanings are heavily influenced by cultural context and can be fully understood only within that context and pronunciation. The Chinese term “土豪” originally refers to local tyrants or wealthy landlords that has the same reference in English. In modern Chinese usage, it often applies to spendthrifts who like to flaunt their wealth. When translated into English as “tuhao”, the term carries with it these cultural and social connotations, providing a perspective on a specific class of people in contemporary Chinese society.

Similarly, the term “大妈” in Chinese literally translates to “older ladies” and is often used to refer to middle-aged women. But now it specifically refers to Chinese women who purchased large amounts of gold when its prices dropped not too long ago and often involved in public dancing activities in parks after their retirement. In both cases, the translations capture not only the literal meanings of the terms but also their cultural connotations and social implications, demonstrating the effectiveness of componential analysis in translation.

3. 自强不息、青出于蓝、厚积薄发

Idioms are established and accepted by constant usage and common practice. Most Chinese idioms consist of four characters. For example “自强不息”, “青出于蓝”, and “厚积薄发”. They are translated into English as “ziqiangbuxi”, “qingchuyulan”, and “houjibofa” respectively. Neutralization is a strategy that involves reducing or eliminating elements in the source language that have no direct equivalent in the target language. By translating these phrases into their pinyin forms, it neutralizes the cultural specificity. Moreover, a descriptive equivalent involves explaining the meaning of a culture-specific item or expression in several words. Each Chinese

phrase is paraphrased in English to convey its meaning: “自强不息” is paraphrased as “make unremitting efforts to improve oneself”, “青出于蓝” as “bluer than indigo”, and “厚积薄发” as “success comes with time and effort”. These descriptions help ensure that the concepts are understood correctly by readers who might not be familiar with these terms.

Discussion

The equivalent translation strategies, such as functional equivalent, cultural equivalent and descriptive equivalent are often adopted in the translation of eco-cultural words because it's relatively easier to find equivalent words that can convey the same meaning in the target language (Matsumoto & Van de Vijver, 2010). However, translators might need to employ other strategies, such as recognized translation, descriptive or componential analysis, to provide a more consistent and more comprehensive understanding of these terms. The translation of material culture words, social culture words and religious culture words can indeed be quite complex due to the unique characteristics and cultural contexts associated with these words (Hodder, 1994). In such cases, translators may need to employ other strategies, such as synonymy, paraphrase, couplets or notes and modulation, etc. It should be noted that when translating CSIs, it's often the case that multiple translation strategies may be applicable, and the choice among them depends on various factors, like context in which the word is used, the number of words and the purpose of the translation. More importantly, given the significant differences between English and Chinese, both in terms of linguistic structure and cultural context, a single translation strategy is often insufficient when translating language and culture words. In many cases, a combination of multiple translation strategies is needed to achieve an accurate and culturally sensitive translation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research on translating CSIs from Chinese to English for CET4 and CET6 exams holds significant theoretical and practical importance. The findings play a crucial role in shaping test preparation materials to address the specific translation challenges of these exams, benefiting individuals preparing for them. Beyond standardized testing, the insights empower both students and professionals to craft translations that are accurate and culturally sensitive, reducing the risks of miscommunication and enhancing cross-cultural communication. The research also contributes to translation theory, deepening our understanding of translating CSIs and advancing the discourse on effective cross-cultural communication. This emphasis on cultural nuances aligns with the evolving landscape of global communication, fostering a nuanced and inclusive approach to language exchange. Moreover, the improved translation quality resulting from this research enhances linguistic and cultural exchanges, contributing to mutual understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.

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