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Translation of Chinese Culture-specific Items to English in *Romance on the Farm*

Zhang Yuxin[1], Amin Amirdabbaghian[2*]

[1,2] Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author's Email: amirdabbaghian@um.edu.my

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Abstract

Background: In recent years, the globalization of media content has increased the demand for high-quality audiovisual translation, particularly in culturally rich genres such as historical television dramas. One persistent challenge in this domain is the effective translation of culture-specific items (CSIs), which often carry unique semantic, historical, and socio-cultural meanings that are difficult to transfer across languages. **Knowledge Gaps:** Despite growing interest in translation strategies for CSIs, few studies have focused on how these elements are handled in Chinese historical dramas. **Aims:** This study explored how Chinese culture-specific items (CSIs) are translated into the TV drama Romance on the Farm. The aim of the study was divided into three specific objectives: categorizing culture-specific items (CSIs), analyzing the strategies used in translating CSIs, and exploring the condition that leads to the chosen strategies. The study used Pedersen's taxonomy of CSI translation strategies as well as his classification of CSIs. **Results:** The findings reveal that the choice of translation strategies was affected by the different types of CSIs, and the most frequently used strategy is substitution. **Implications:** These results suggest that translators need to be adaptable and aware of the cultural significance of each CSI, and they should change their methods based on the type of CSI. This is useful for making subtitles more culturally accurate and easier for viewers to understand, especially in dramas that are full of historical and cultural references. This study tries to contribute to improving translation practices in audiovisual translation by providing insights and strategies for better handling culture-specific items.

Keywords: culture-specific items, translation strategies, audiovisual translation, Chinese, English

Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, communication between different cultures has become increasingly frequent. Language plays a dual role in this process: it serves not only as a means of communication but also as a carrier of culture. According to Newmark (1988), culture is a way of life, and its manifestations are unique to a group of people who use a specific language as a medium of expression. This definition underscores the inseparable relationship between language and culture, as they continuously interact, collide, and integrate (Cao & Zhao, 2022).

Culture is a social phenomenon, a collective way of life shared by a group. More precisely, culture refers to the history, traditional culture, literature and art, ways of thinking, etc., of a country or nation. With the continuous advancement of globalization, interactions between countries have

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become closer, and cultural exchanges between the East and the West have become increasingly frequent. Consequently, terms such as "culture-specific items" have gained prominence in the fields of translation and interpretation, reflecting the growing importance of cultural awareness in facilitating effective communication (Taibi, 2021).

Audiovisual Translation (AVT), also known as Screen Translation, is a professional term that covers a range of translation methods used in the post-production field to produce audiovisual materials such as TV programs, films, videos, CD-ROMs, and DVDs. The term primarily covers two common types of language transformation: dubbing/re-dubbing (which involves a variety of forms such as lip-synching, voice-over, voice-over, and commentary); and subtitling (which includes both open captioning and closed captioning) (O'Connell, 2000). One of its unique features is that its dialogue language is vivid and improvised, which brings a lot of challenges to the translation. Some of the most common difficulties include frequent sighs and interpolations, rhyme scenes, jokes, incomplete sentences, and syntax changes (Štelemėkaitė, 2021). This poses special requirements for the translation strategies of CSIs and provides rich exploration space for translation research.

Franco Aixelá (1996) describes CSIs as elements that are concretely represented in the source text, whose functions and implied meanings create translation challenges when transferred to the target text. Translating CSIs has always been a crucial challenge for translators (Amirdabbaghian & Pour Ebrahimi, 2014). Therefore, some scholars have proposed specialized translation strategies for these terms in an attempt to address this issue. Vlahof, Florin, and Gill (1980) categorize culture-specific items into four parts: geographic, ethnographic, political, and religious. Newmark (1988) categorizes CSIs into five domains based on their origin: ecology; material culture; social culture; organization, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, gestures, and habits."

Nedergaard-Larsen (1993) also categorizes CSIs, but her classification is a little different from previous classifications. She categorizes CSIs into four parts: society, history, culture, and geography. Mikutytė (2005) stated that it should be added proper name into the category of CSIs. Jan Pedersen (2011) categorized CSIs into 12 parts: weight and measures, proper names, professional titles, food and beverages, literature, government, entertainment, education, sports, currency, technical material, and other. Pedersen's classification is relatively recent and offers a more detailed and comprehensive analysis compared to earlier systems, making it particularly valuable for contemporary studies in cultural translation. For this reason, the study used the typology of Pedersen (2011).

Cultural-Specific Items (CSIs) are a complex concept that cannot simply be translated by direct translation but must be understood and considered their cultural connotation. For this reason, many scholars proposed different translation strategies. Nedergaard-Larsen (1993) stated that some problems in translating CSIs cannot be settled based on the present strategy. Therefore, she proposed six translation strategies: transfer or loan, exploitation, direct translation, omission, paraphrase, and adaptation. Similarly, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) suggested six strategies that share notable similarities with Nedergaard-Larsen's framework, including transposition, calque or literal translation, explicitation, cultural adaptation, generalization, and loan. While these two classifications overlap in several aspects, other scholars have proposed different categorizations.

In his book Subtitling Norms for Television, Pedersen (2011) evaluates previous translation

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strategies. He argues that the combination of culture and subtitles does not necessarily result in a suitable taxonomy. Additionally, he criticizes Newmark for listing the same category multiple times, failing to separate strategies from the translation problems themselves, and treating combined strategies as two separate additional categories rather than one.

Based on his research into other translation methods, Pedersen (2011) identifies a pattern for translation strategies: a model must have a baseline category, such as source-oriented or target-oriented strategies. He believes that the model should include at least six categories. Accordingly, he proposes his translation strategies: retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, omission, and official equivalent.

Numerous studies have investigated the strategies used in translating CSIs in AUT translation (Leksananda & Manusu, 2023; Chai et al., 2022; Lau et al., 2022). Some research indicates that translators often adopt source language-oriented strategies rather than target-oriented ones (Pagrandytė & Astrauskienė, 2021; Štelemėkaitė & Dimavičienė, 2021). Furthermore, other studies demonstrate that the target texts generally emphasize accommodating the target audience's receptivity, making sure that the translation is easily understood and accepted by viewers from the target culture (Alfaify & Pinto, 2022; Vrancken & Delesalle, 2023).

Current research on the translation of Chinese CSIs into English is scarce, and most of them concentrate on literary works (Zuo et al, 2023; Liu, 2022; Zhuang, 2020). There are also a few studies focusing on cultural terms in other areas, such as the analysis of menus and exams (Niu et al, 2024; Amenador & Wang, 2022). Although research on the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) has made significant progress in various fields, studies in the field of audiovisual translation, particularly on the translation of Chinese cultural terms into English, remain scarce. Existing research tends to focus more on literary translation or other text types, with insufficient exploration of the translation strategies for CSIs in film subtitles.

Moreover, Pedersen's classification of cultural terms has been rarely adopted in current research. Compared to other commonly used classification methods, such as Newmark's (1988) classification, Pedersen's (2011) typology is more detailed and provides a more precise categorization of CSIs. This allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the translation strategies applied to different types of terms. However, the application of Pedersen's classification in Chinese-English translation remains understudied.

This study aims to utilize Pedersen's classification of CSIs to deeply investigate the translation strategies for Chinese CSIs in the field of audiovisual translation. By doing so, it seeks to address the research gaps and provide new theoretical perspectives and empirical insights into audiovisual translation research.

Film and television work play a crucial role in disseminating cultural heritage and shaping the national image. China has a long history and profound cultural heritage, which provides rich materials and unique advantages for the creation of film and television works. Film and television play a particularly prominent role in passing on and promoting Chinese culture as well as shaping the country's image (Ren & Yao, 2023). Since 2017, China's film and television industry has seen a remarkable rise, which is not only reflected in the record-high domestic box office but also in the continuous enhancement of its international influence (Zhai & Caiga, 2020).

Based on this, this study takes the Chinese TV drama *Romance on the Farm* as the research object. As an ancient agricultural light comedy, the drama contains a large number of CSIs related

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to traditional Chinese agricultural society, such as ancient measurement methods, specialty foods, and social customs. Based on these terms, this study focuses on the following three research questions:

1. What types of culture-specific items (CSIs) are found in *Romance on the Farm*?
2. How are these CSIs translated into English based on Pedersen's strategies?
3. What are the conditions leading to particular strategies chosen for the translation of CSIs found in the data?

Through qualitative analysis of the Chinese and English subtitles in the drama, this study attempts to explore the handling of CSIs in subtitle translation and reveal the motivations behind translation strategy choices. This not only has theoretical significance for the field of AVT but also provides a reference for the translation practice of Chinese film and television dramas in cross-cultural communication.

Method

The study selected the TV drama, *Romance on the Farm*. As the first TV drama adapted from a novel about farming in China, it has broken 9,000 views since its 8th day of broadcasting, continued to be No. 1 on the iQIYI hot broadcasting overall list, and has also been released overseas. The original Chinese subtitles and corresponding English-translated subtitles of each episode of the series were obtained by watching the episodes on the iQIYI platform using manual transcription. In the obtained Chinese and English subtitle texts, CSIs were filtered out by comparing and analyzing them sentence by sentence. Culture-specific items were divided into the categories proposed by Jan Pedersen's (2011), including weights and measures, proper nouns (personal names, geographical names, institutional / brand names, professional titles, food and beverages, literature, government, entertainment, education, sports, currency, technical material, and other. Then, translation procedures were analyzed based on Jan Pedersen's (2011) taxonomies of translation strategies, which include retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, omission, and official equivalent.

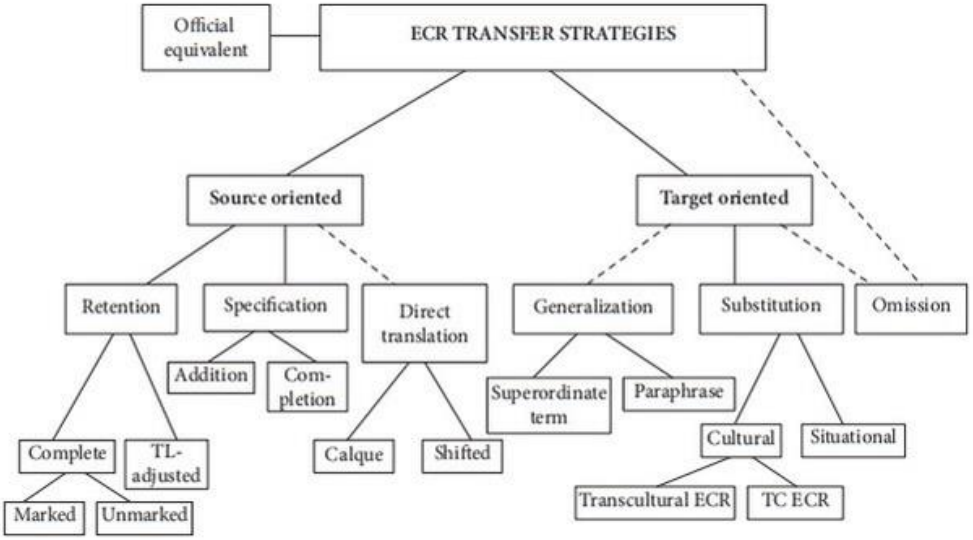


Figure 1. Typology of CSIs' translation strategies (Pedersen, 2011, p.45)

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This study obtained the original Chinese subtitles and their corresponding English translations of the TV drama *Romance on the Farm* by manually transcribing them while watching the episodes on the iQIYI platform. All data is used solely for academic research purposes, strictly adhering to copyright laws and intellectual property regulations, ensuring that the transcribed subtitles are not reproduced, shared, or disseminated beyond the scope of the research. The study explicitly acknowledges *Romance on the Farm* and the iQIYI platform as data sources, giving full respect and proper attribution to the creators, translators, and the platform.

Results and Discussion

The findings show both shared and distinct cultural and linguistic features in the use of animal imagery to describe wisdom, insight, foresight, resilience, courage, and other positive human traits. The analysis revealed a variety of semantic distinctions, cultural influences, and contextual applications of the expressions in both languages.

1. Distribution of culture-specific items in TV drama Romance On the Farm

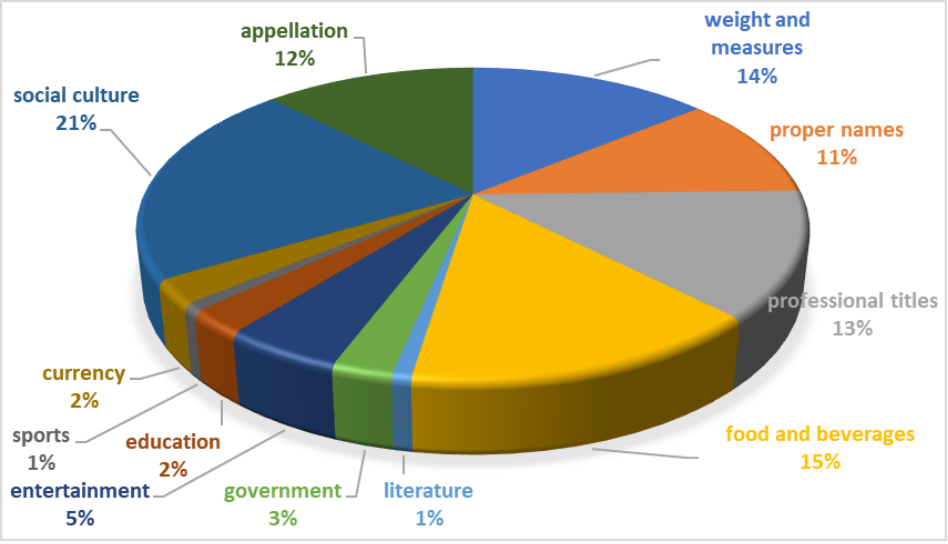


Figure 2. The percentage of each strategy

Figure 2 shows the culture-specific items strategies from the TV drama *Romance on the Farm,* which consists of 122 culture-specific items. They were categorized according to Pedersen's typology of ECRs, as follows: food and beverages (18), weight and measures (17), professional titles (16), proper names (13), entertainment (6), government (3), education (3), currency (3), literature (1), sports (1). His typology is so exhaustive that only two types have been added: social culture (26) and appellation (15). After the translation procedures were analyzed, it was found that the most frequent strategy is substitution (34.4%), followed by generalization (29.5%), direct translation (12.2%), retention (9%), omission (8.2%), official equivalent (5.7%), and specification (0.8%).

a. Weight and measures

In the category of weight and measures, a total of 17 (13.9%) cases were identified in

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the study. Among these, 9 cases employed the omission strategy, 3 adopted retention, 2 used substitution, 2 relied on official equivalents, and 1 applied direct translation. It refers to the systems and units used to quantify attributes such as weight, length, and volume. In the classification of CSIs, these units embody the productive activities, trading customs, and historical backgrounds of specific societies and cultures.

Pedersen (2011) stated that they are often closely tied to regional and cultural identities, reflecting unique local characteristics. Retention is an effective strategy for preserving the source text's cultural atmosphere (Peter Newmark, 1988), often by leaving terms unchanged or minimally adapted in subtitles. Therefore, the translator used the retention strategy to translate several terms (3), such as "一斗 /yi dou/ (one fight)" → "one dou", "四合 /si he/ (four combine)" → "four he". ["斗 /dou/" is a unit of capacity, where 10 liters equal 1 dou; It is a unit of capacity, where 10 spoons equal 1 he. [According to Xinhua Dictionary (12th Edition), published by Commercial Press, 2020.] These terms are traditional Chinese measurement units that are more than simple capacity units. They embody the production methods and trading practices of ancient Chinese agricultural society, reflecting unique cultural characteristics. At the same time, they directly refer to specific measurement units with clear practical significance, used to quantify attributes such as weight, length, and volume.

However, more units do not carry actual meaning in this study, such as "根/gen/ (root)", "颗/ke/ (grain)", and "声/sheng/ (voice)". They were all omitted in the target text. ["根/gen/ (root)" is a measure word, used for something long, such as wood and hemp rope; "颗/ke/ (grain) is a measure word, often used for circular or granular objects; "声/sheng/ (voice)" is a measure word, used for voice. (According to Xinhua Dictionary (12th Edition), published by Commercial Press, 2020). They are used in conjunction with specific things, serving as a grammatical device in language. Typically, they do not carry direct practical measurement significance. Their primary function is to assist nouns in achieving quantification, modification, or structural requirements within a sentence. In English, numerals (including the indefinite article "a") are often used directly with countable nouns without measure words, while in Chinese, measure words are often used (Zhang, 2009). This is why, when translating measure words, the strategy of omission is usually used.

b. Proper names

Proper names were subdivided into four categories by Pedersen (2011): personal names, geographical names, institutional names, and brand names. It appeared in 13 cases (10.6%) and was strongly associated with the retention strategy, which was used 6 times.

Zhang (2009) argues that transliteration is one of the important methods for translating proper nouns, such as personal and geographic names. For example, "连蔓儿/lian man er/ (and tendril son)", the main female character of the TV drama, was translated into "Lian Man'er". The names of other characters in the play are also retained in their phonetic form, such as "春柱/chun zhu/ (spring column)" → "Chunzhu". A personal name is often closely tied to their language and cultural background. Therefore, in the subtitles, most character

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names have been retained in their original form (Vrancken & Delesalle, 2023). Personal names often carry symbolic cultural identity, and keeping the original names allows the audiences to sense the characters' cultural background, enhancing the authenticity of the story and its cultural atmosphere.

There were some cases of retention + direct translation. Retention combined with direct translation is a strategy that retains the phonetic form of the original name while simultaneously translating functional elements. For example, "青山县沈家村/ qing shan xian shen jia cun/ (blueness mountain town shen family village)" was translated into "Shen Village, Qingshan County". Here, "Shen" and "Qingshan" are retained in their pinyin form, preserving the cultural identity and phonetic characteristics of the place, while "Village" and "County" provide functional clarity regarding administrative divisions. Similarly, "锦阳县 /Jin Yang Xian/ (brocade sun town)" was translated as "Jinyang County," where "Jinyang" retains its phonetic identity, and "County" makes the geographical context clear for the target audience. Retaining the phonetic form through pinyin ensures that the cultural and linguistic essence of the original name is preserved, aligning with the argument of Ren, Mao, Ma &Wang (2020). They stated that, according to national English-Chinese translation guidelines, the translation of geographical names should follow the principle of transliteration for specific names and free translation for generic names to ensure the accuracy and applicability of geographical names in wide-ranging applications. Therefore, combining retention with direct translation resolves potential confusion caused by similar names.

c. Professional titles and social culture

Social culture (26) and professional titles (16) are the most frequently occurring categories of terms identified in the data. Professional titles represent designations of jobs, roles, or positions that define a person's identity and responsibilities within a specific society, culture, or organization. Social culture, on the other hand, encompasses terms closely tied to traditional customs and habits. Among the translation strategies employed, substitution emerged as the most commonly used approach for these two categories. This strategy involves replacing the source text CSIs with alternative expressions that are more familiar or understandable to the target audience. The substitution was applied in 42 instances overall, with more than 50% of these cases targeting social culture (13) and professional titles (10).

Two prominent examples of social culture are "申时/shen shi/ (shen hour)"→ "late afternoon" and "豪绅/hao shen/ (rich gentle)"→ "local elite". "申时/shen shi/ (shen hour)" refers to the time from three o'clock to five o'clock in the old-fashioned method of timekeeping in ancient China. "豪绅/hao shen/(rich gentle)" refers to a local gentleman who oppresses the people relying on feudal power. A prominent example of professional titles is the "知县 /zhi xian/ (knowledge town)"→ "magistrate". "知县/zhi xian/ (knowledge town)" refers to officials from the central government who were often used as county officials in the Song Dynasty (according to the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th

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Edition), published by Commercial Press, 2016).

These examples represent Chinese characteristic vocabularies which are deeply rooted in China's unique social and cultural background and are rich in cultural connotations, reflecting the social characteristics of specific historical periods (Zhang, 2016). Zhang (2016) categorized these Chinese-specific vocabularies into two types: those with cultural correspondence and those with cultural non-correspondence. The former includes terms whose cultural imagery is shared between Chinese and Western cultures and can find equivalent expressions in English. The latter encompasses terms unique to China, whose cultural imagery cannot be directly translated into English.

In the category of social culture, there are many terms rich in profound cultural heritage, which are often difficult to find precise corresponding expressions in English. For example, the term "豪绅/hao shen/ (rich gentle)" reflects the class structure of Chinese society, but it is difficult to find a corresponding vocabulary in English that can reflect their social status and cover their specific historical background. Similarly, the unique timing method in ancient China, such as "申时/shen shi/ (shen hour)", is difficult to find a direct corresponding expression in English due to its cultural connotations and historical background. In addition, given that the story background of the sample TV drama is set in ancient China, most of the professional titles involved have the characteristics of ancient China, and it is also difficult to find precise translations for these titles in English. Wang (2020) suggested that in the case of complete cultural non-correspondence; to help audiences better understand the cultural connotation embedded in the vocabulary, the main strategy is to replace the original culture-specific item with a culture-specific item that is familiar to the audiences. Therefore, when translating social culture and professional titles, substitution emerged as the most frequently employed strategy to ensure comprehensibility while addressing the cultural and linguistic gap.

d. Food and beverages

Food and beverages are a significant category in the data, reflecting the diversity of culinary traditions across different countries. A total of 18 terms related to food and beverages were identified, among which 11 were translated using source-oriented strategies, including 2 cases of retention, 1 case of specification, and 8 cases of direct translation. Notably, direct translation emerged as the highest used source-oriented strategy in this category, with 15 CSIs overall (12.2%). This strategy involves only language change, with no semantic alterations made to the original terms.

Of these 14 cases, 8 belong to the category of food and beverages, such as "清炖鱼/qing dun yu/ (stewed fish) → stewed fish", "蒜香花生/suan xiang hua sheng/ (garlic peanuts) → garlic peanuts", and "江米酿鸭子/jiang mi niang ya zi/ (river rice brew duck)→ brewed duck with rice". The ingredients, cooking methods, or characteristics of the food can be directly reflected through direct translation. Although sometimes audiences may not understand the real meaning of the words through direct translation, they can intuitively understand them through the appearance of the food presented in the TV dramas. Saleh (2011) concludes,

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"Concerning food terms translation, direct translation is a successful choice since the food names usually consist of short terms and phrases without a sentence structure."

There were some cases of direct translation + retention. For example, "郴州果儿/bin zhou guo er/ (bin state fruit son)" was translated into "Chenzhou fruits". As language is the carrier of culture, specific local dish names reflect the food culture of a region and often have significant regional characteristics. "Chenzhou" is directly preserved in pinyin form, highlighting local characteristics and reflecting the regional culture contained in local dish names. "果儿/guo er/ (fruit son)" is directly translated as "fruits", conveying the basic semantics of food characteristics in the original dish name to the target audience clearly.

e. Literature

Literature, which occurs only once (0.8%) in this study, encompasses artistic expressions conveyed through language and writing, reflecting ideas, emotions, and cultural themes. It includes various genres such as poetry, novels, drama, essays, and more.

For example, "二师兄 /er shi xiong/ (second teacher brother)", a major character in the book *Journey to the West*, was translated into "piggy" through the strategy of substitution. He is a unique character with a complex personality that includes laziness, gluttony, lust, yet courage and resourcefulness. Although the translation of names typically employs retention, in this case, substitution was chosen. The term "piggy" captures his characteristic laziness while also ensuring accessibility for foreign audiences who might lack familiarity with the cultural and narrative context of the source text. This strategy effectively balances cultural adaptation with audience comprehension, aligning with Nida's (1964) principle of functional equivalence.

f. Government

Government refers to entities such as government agencies or terms associated with them. In the data, there are totally three terms about government: "县衙/xian ya/ (town ya)" → "magistrate", "衙门/ya men/ (ya men)" → "government office", and "朝廷/chao ting/ (morning yard)" → "government". These three terms refer to administrative institutions with different levels and functions. "县/xian/ (town)" is an administrative unit, led by a province, autonomous region, municipality, etc. In the old days, "衙/ya/" referred to an official office. "衙门/ya men/ (ya men)" refers to the organ in which the official's office worked in ancient China. "朝廷/ya men/ (ya door)" refers to the place where the monarch held hearings during the monarchical era. It also refers to the central ruling body headed by the monarch.

Obviously, "县衙/xian ya/ (town ya)" was translated into the completely wrong meaning. It is not only a place for officials to handle lawsuits but also the center of local politics, economy, and culture. However, the target text refers to a local administrative

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official, not specifically to an official office. According to Nida's principle of functional equivalence, translation should aim to recreate the original text's meaning and function in a way that is accessible to the target audience. Thus, translating "县衙/xian ya/ (town ya)" as "county government" would ensure both cultural fidelity and functional clarity. Since these terms are deeply rooted in ancient Chinese culture and lack direct equivalents in English, approximate translations with contextual adaptation are often used to convey their meanings.

g. Appellations, Entertainment, and Education

People are addressed differently across various parts of the world, and there are many terms (15) about the appellation. Therefore, I added appellations to the category. Among these, 10 cases employed the generalization strategy, and 5 cases employed the substitution strategy. Entertainment refers to places of entertainment or related programs. It occurs 6 in this study, with 5 cases using the generalization strategy and 1 using the substitution strategy. Education encompasses the education system, educational institutions, and related aspects. It only occurs three times in the study, and 2 of them used the generalization strategy. The generalization strategy was predominantly used across these categories, translating the target text more generally than the source text. It can also be done by paraphrasing the source text (Pedersen, 2011).

Romance on the Farm is set in ancient China, so many terms are related to ancient Chinese culture. For example, in the category of appellations, "糟糠妻/zao kang qi/ (lees bran wife)" → "a poor wife" refers to a wife who shared in the hardships of poverty. (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 2016). In the category of entertainment, "踏歌/ta ge/ (stamp on song)" → "group dance" is an ancient art form of dancing while singing. During the dance, people would sing and dance in groups, stepping on their feet with linked arms, accompanied by slight arm movements. (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 2016). In the category of education, "科考/ke kao/ (course exam)" → "imperial exam" is a system of selecting officials through departmental examinations at the imperial court from the Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Qing Dynasty (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 2016).

These terms reflected the social characteristics of this period in ancient Chinese society. Their cultural imagery still shares commonalities with Western culture and is a case of cultural partial correspondence. Like the term "糟糠妻/zao kang qi/ (lees bran wife)", it embodies the universal value of loyalty and resilience in /marriage. In the category of appellations, these terms involve addressing specific personal identities or social roles. They are used to represent a specific role or status of an individual in society, family, or marriage, such as "娘娘/niang niang/ (mom mom) → emperor's concubine". ["娘娘/niang niang/ (mom mom)" refers to an empress; an imperial concubine of the first link.] These terms carry rich cultural connotations and represent individuals of different identities and statuses in Chinese history and culture. But it can also find some similarities or analogies in identity attributes in Western culture.

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Wang (2020) suggested translators should retain the connotation of CSIs as much as possible in the case of cultural part-correspondence so that they can be conveyed to the target audiences without causing comprehension difficulties. To better express their connotations and for those who are not familiar with Chinese culture, translators can translate them by using a more general term or their superordinate terms. They can also be done through the use of a paraphrase.

h. Sports

It refers to sports-related terms, encompassing various types of ball games and other activities. The only example in the study is "捶丸局 /chui wan ju/ (beat ball bureau) " → "golf game". It refers to a ball game in ancient China, similar to the modern sport of golf. Its predecessor was the Tang Dynasty's step ball, which was similar to modern hockey and had a strong confrontational nature. It was translated into its superordinate term---golf game through the strategy of substitution. Golf is a globally recognized modern ball game, particularly in the English-speaking world. Its rules, scenarios, and cultural connotations belong to the realm of modern Western sports and are distinctly different from the traditional context of the source text. However, it can provide a sense of functional and visual equivalence, quickly reminding target language audiences of a familiar form of sport.

i. Currency

Currency means the legal tender used in a country or region and its associated terminology, including the name of the currency, its unit, its denomination, and the cultural expressions associated with it. It occurs three times in the study: "铜板/tong ban/ (copper board)" → "gold", "银子/yin zi/ (silver)" → "money", and "喜钱/xi qian/ (happy money)" → "wedding money". Each of them used a different strategy.

"铜板 /tong ban/ (copper board)" was translated into "gold" through the strategy of substitution. It refers to the coins made of copper. It was commonly used from the end of the Qing Dynasty until the War of Resistance against Japan. (According to Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th Edition), published by Commercial Press, 2016). The source text has a different meaning from the target text, although the target text can be easier to understand and accepted by target language audiences. If the source text is directly translated into its pinyin form ("tong ban") or translated into "copper coin", it is likely to be unfamiliar or difficult for audiences to understand. Therefore, while the strategy of substitution proves effective in making the text more accessible and comprehensible for the target audience, it is crucial to strike a balance between accessibility and the accurate transmission of the source text's cultural and historical significance.

"银子/yin zi/ (sliver)" was translated into "money" through the strategy of generalization. It is a kind of currency. (Modern Chinese Dictionary,2016). It refers to a white sliver and was used in ancient times. It was translated into its superordinate "money". It is a term that can quickly make it clear to the target audience that it refers to "currency" or "money". However, this simplification may undermine the cultural connotations. "Money" in modern English is a general term for currency and lacks the specificity to reflect the

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distinctive economic system in which silver served as the primary medium of exchange in ancient China. Notably, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, silver was not only a crucial medium for domestic transactions but also played a significant role in international trade. Therefore, it is better to translate it into "silver".

It is a more appropriate approach to use direct translation or retention when translating currency. This perspective aligns with the findings of Vrancken and Delesalle (2023). They argue that retaining the source culture's currency, such as the franc, instead of rendering it to the target culture's "dollar" or "pound," helps preserve the unique cultural flavor of France and avoids confusing the target audience with mixed cultural elements. Similarly, keeping the source language's currency names not only allows the target audience to better understand the cultural background of the story but also avoids diminishing the authenticity and cultural nuance of the source text through excessive localization.

2. Strategies of culture-specific items translation in TV drama *Romance On the Farm*

According to Pedersen's typology, there are a total of 122 culture-specific items classified into different categories. His typology was very useful and exhaustive as most of the types required were listed, except for the technical material. Only two others were added: social culture and appellation.

Table 1. Correlation of translation strategies and culture-specific items

	retention	specification	direct translation	generalization	substitution	omission	official equivalent	
Weight and measures	3		1		2	9	2	17
Proper names	6		3	3	2			13
Professional titles				6	10			16
Food and beverages	2	1	8	4	2		1	18
Literature					1			1
Government					3			3
Entertainment				5	1			6
Education				2	1			3
Sports					1			1
Currency			1	1	1			3
others/social culture			2	6	13	1	4	26
others/appellation				10	5			15
total	11	1	15	36	42	10	7	122
percentage	9.00%	0.80%	12.20%	30%	34%	8.20%	5.70%	100%

The table above shows two major findings. The first one is that different types of culture-specific items (CSIs) necessitate distinct translation strategies. For instance, retention is the most commonly used strategy in translating personal names and geographical names, and also correlates with food and beverages. It is a uniform result with the findings of Vrancken & Delesalle (2023). Their study also used Pedersen's classification of ECR, which allows for comparison. They found that all the personal names were retained, and most of the food and geographical names were also

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retained. The finding also aligns with previous studies by Zuo, Syed Abdullah, & Toh (2023), Leksananda & Manusu (2023), and Niu, Ng, Abdul Halim, & Farhan (2024). They all focused on the Chinese-English translation of CSIs and claimed that different types of CSIs significantly affect the translation strategies chosen by translators. Leksananda & Manusu (2023) stated that transliteration is commonly employed in translating substances and sociocultural elements, whereas literal translation is typically utilized for rendering organizations and ideas.

Another example is that retention is the highest used strategy when translators render food and beverages. This finding is contrary to previous studies, with different results. Chai, Ong, Amini, & Ravindran (2022) found that direct translation was not used in translating English subtitles. However, a study based solely on one film is insufficient to support such conclusions, and different film genres may have a significant impact on the choice of translation strategies, leading to different research results.

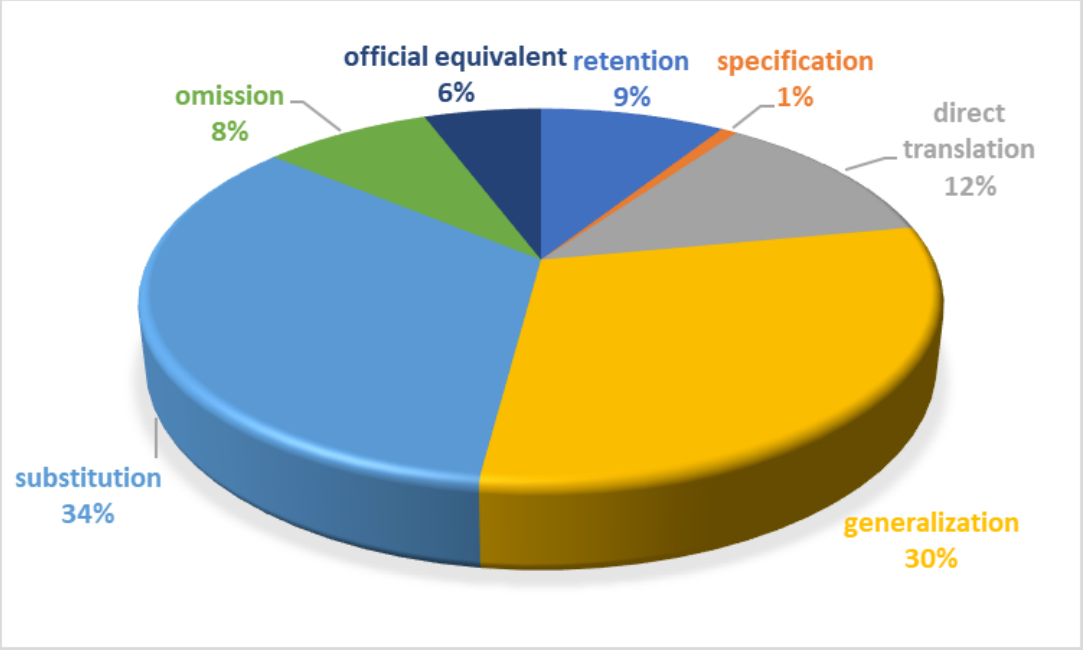


Figure 3. Percentage of each strategy

Figure 3 shows that the most common strategy adopted in the study was substitution (34%). The results are consistent with the research conducted by Zuo, Syed Abdullah, & Toh (2023), showing that substitution is the highest applied translation strategy, especially in rendering natural CSIs. According to Figure 4, it can be found that substitution and generalization were the highest used target-oriented strategies, applied total of 78 (64%) cases of the study. Therefore, the translation of the subtitle in *Romance on the Farm* is mainly target-oriented. This indicates that, compared to conveying the cultural connotations of the source text, translators tend to prioritize the audience's understanding and acceptance. The study conducted by Zhuang (2020) had a similar result. He found that domestication was a crucial translation strategy in rendering CSIs in *The Gay Genius*. Venuti (1995) points out in his work *The Translator's Invisibility* that the domestication strategy emphasizes transforming the "heterogeneity" of the source culture into the "homogeneity"

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of the target language, thereby reducing the unfamiliarity for the target readers and making the text more in line with the reading habits and expectations of the target culture.

However, the finding is contrary to previous studies, which have suggested the frequency of targeted-oriented strategies was more than source-oriented strategies (Stelemekaite & Dimaviciene, 2021; Pagrandyte & Astrauskiene, 2021). For example, Pagrandyte & Astrauskiene (2021) stated that translators preferred to choose target-oriented strategies in rendering animated films. They emphasized it was because many character names appeared in the film. To further evaluate this result, more animated films need to be included, and an in-depth study based on a larger corpus needs to be conducted.

Conclusion

Based on Pedersen's typology of ECRs, the study categorizes the culture-specific items (CSIs) that appear in *Romance on the Farm* into different types. Based on the results, there are a total of 12 categories of culture-specific items: weight and measures (17), proper names (13), professional titles (16), food and beverages (18), literature (1), government (3), entertainment (6), education (3), sports (1), currency (3). Meanwhile, Pedersen's taxonomy of transfer strategies has been proven to be highly effective and can be well applied to all CSIs in TV drama. After a detailed analysis of the translation strategies adopted for different types of culture-specific items (CSIs), the study found that different types of CSIs have a significant impact on translators' choices of translation strategies. For example, when translating professional titles, translators tend to use a substitution strategy; When dealing with the translation of weight and measures, the omission strategy is more commonly used.

However, this study focuses solely on the TV drama *Romance On the Farm*, with a relatively limited scope of data, which may not fully represent the characteristics of culture-specific items (CSIs) translation in other types of audiovisual works. Additionally, the research primarily relies on textual analysis of translations, lacking input from the target audiences regarding the effectiveness of the translated subtitles. Future research could expand the scope to include a wider range of audiovisual works, such as historical dramas, science fiction, or documentaries, to validate the applicability of translation strategies for CSIs in different contexts. At the same time, integrating audience feedback through surveys or interviews could provide a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of translation strategies. In *Romance on the Farm*, there are many terms related to ancient Chinese culture. These terms are often inadequately translated into subtitles, resulting in a loss of cultural connotations. Therefore, future research should also explore how to better translate such terms to effectively convey Chinese culture. Addressing these issues will provide deeper theoretical and practical support for optimizing subtitle translation strategies and preserving cultural integrity.

Originality Statement

The authors declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions

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of material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the author[s] have worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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