

# Culturally Specific Items and Translation Strategies for Them: A Case Study of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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**Abstract:** This essay conducts an analysis of CSIs and the translation strategies for them in Kazuo Ishiguro's (2018) *Never Let Me Go*. A qualitative method was employed as all the CSIs that were rendered in the original version of *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro were found, as were the frequencies of translation strategies used in its Chinese translation. The results revealed that preservation had the highest percentage and transformation the lowest.

**Keywords:** CSI; translation strategies; Kazuo Ishiguro; *Never Let Me Go*.

## 1. Introduction

Literary translation is considered to be an essential part of the translation field. It also plays an important role in the transmission of cultures because literature encompasses cultural customs, rituals, beliefs and ideas in a particular area. Jiang (2000) stated that culture would be impossible without language, while Dehbashi Sharif and Shakiba (2015) stated that translators may find the translation of culturally specific items (CSIs) to be challenging when translating literary works that tend to be embedded in the source culture. Hence, not only does analysing CSIs and the translation thereof in literary works shed light on the intricate relationship between literature and culture, it also provides new insights for translators of literature. This essay provides an analysis of CSIs and the translation strategies for them in Kazuo Ishiguro's (2018) *Never Let Me Go*.

A qualitative method was employed in this research because all the CSIs that were rendered in the original version of *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro were found, as were the frequencies of translation strategies used in its Chinese translation, 别让我走, by Quji Zhu. The novel and this translated version were chosen for two main reasons, the first being that the original story was typically set in England, which means that many CSIs pertaining to England could be found. Secondly, the chosen translated version has had a good reputation since its publication; thus, it is worth discussing and analysing. The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1 Which types of translation strategies have been used most frequently in the process of translating Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* from English into Chinese?

2 What are the potential reasons for the results?

## 2. CSIs and Translation Strategies

Ranzato (2013) proposed that networks of associations rooted in a culture are unique to the culture and are the result of CSIs. The importance of CSIs is evidenced by the countless research studies related to them. Table 1 shows that a variety of categorisations of CSIs have been proposed by scholars; of these categorisations, anthroponyms, toponyms, flora, lifestyles, houses, leisure, literature, food, idioms and local institution were adopted in this research. Davies's (2003) approach was chosen for the analysis of translation strategies

for translating CSIs in the present study; specifically, the translation strategies of preservation, addition, globalisation, localisation and transformation were selected.

**Table 1.** Classifications of CSIs Proposed by Different Scholars

Newmark (1988)	Tomalin and Stempleski (1993)	Espindola and Vasconcellos (2006)
1. Ecology (fauna, wind, flora) 2. Material culture (artefacts, transport, clothes, food, towns, houses) 3. Social culture (work, leisure) 4. Organisations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts 5. Gestures and habits	1. Ideas (beliefs, values) 2. Products (customs, lifestyles, food, habits, dress) 3. Behaviours (literature, folklore, art, music)	1. Toponyms 2. Anthroponyms 3. Forms of entertainment 4. Means of transportation 5. Fictional characters 6. Legal systems 7. Dialects 8. Local institutions 9. Religious celebrations 10. Measuring systems 11. Scholastic references 12. Food and drink

## 3. Text Analysis and Findings

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher first identified all the CSIs in the source text (ST) based on the CSI taxonomies adopted in this study, and then found their Chinese equivalents by reading the translated version. Finally, the translation strategies that were used were identified after comparing the original and translated CSIs in the ST and in the target text (TT). Following a careful reading of the ST, the researcher located eighty-one CSIs, including eighteen anthroponyms, twenty-two toponyms, five flora, five

lifestyles, two houses, one leisure, nine literature, two food, sixteen idioms and one local institution. Overall, toponyms were the most frequent because numerous places in the UK are mentioned in the novel, while leisure and local institutions were the least frequent. Part of the reason was that many of local institutions that appeared in the novel were the writer's inventions instead of being real institutions. Of note, repetitions of CSIs using the same translation strategies were only counted once.

In order to present the process of analysis clearly and concisely, the explanations for some of the typical CSI examples found by the researcher and the translation strategies adopted by the translator are given below:

### 3.1. Examples of *preservation* used by the translator

Preservation, as the name suggests, means preserving the original term in the source language when no equivalent can be found in the target language. This strategy is used frequently when translating CSIs. Unlike English, Chinese is not an alphabetical language; thus, preservation in translations from English into Chinese of CSIs is mainly accomplished via transliteration. Transliteration refers to the process of using a term in a different language to replace a term in the original language with the aim of preserving the phonology of the source language in the target language to the greatest extent possible (Mammadzada, 2020).

Example 1: ST (Hailsham); TT (黑尔舍姆).

Example 2: ST (Judy Bridgewater); TT(朱迪·布里奇沃特).

Examples 1 and 2 illustrate the preservation of CSIs via transliteration. Hailsham, which is a town in East Sussex, England, has been translated as ‘黑尔舍姆’, pronounced “hei er she mu”, which is similar to its English pronunciation. Judy Bridgewater, which is a person's name, has been translated and pronounced as ‘zhu di bu li qi wo te’. In fact, all the toponyms and anthroponyms were translated via preservation and transliteration in this study.

### 3.2. Examples of *addition* used by the translator

Addition is a translation strategy that is used when readers would not be able to understand the referent clearly if the translator were to only translate the CSIs literally. It is common for writers of STs not to explain CSIs in detail; thus, literal translations in the TT may confuse target readers from different cultural backgrounds, and waste their time by necessitating a search for information and decreasing the pleasure of reading. However, some scholars have expressed concern that such additions may affect the flow of reading. Therefore, it is essential that the additional information does not affect the original style of the writing or the cohesion of the text. Short adjectival or adverbial expressions are preferable to sentences or notes (Hickey 1998).

Example 3: ST (*bumper crop*); TT (“大丰收”牌子); Back Translation (the brand *bumper crop*).

Example 4: ST (Oxfam people); TT (牛津饥荒救济委员会的人); Back Translation (people working in the Oxford Committee for famine relief).

In the researcher's view, Examples 3 and 4 are outstanding examples of addition. In Example 3, ‘bumper crop’ is italicised in the ST, and refers to a brand of fertiliser. Translating ‘bumper crop’ literally and adding ‘brand’ is not only close to the original meaning, but also explains the

concept clearly to the readers without affecting the cohesion of the text. In Example 4, the translator did not translate the name ‘Oxfam’ directly, but translated it by adding information about the function of the organisation, thus giving readers a clearer picture.

### 3.3. Examples of *localisation* used by the translator

Localisation generally refers to the technique of translating CSIs by identifying a close equivalent in the culture of the target language. Localisation is a sound strategy when translating CSIs in order to make the text more natural and to integrate it into the target culture; it is similar to domestication to some extent, as both strategies place more emphasis on the target culture audience.

Example 5: ST (bracken); TT (从蕨); Back Translation (bracken patch).

In Example 5, a common form of flora in English was localised during the process of translation. Specifically, ‘bracken’ refers to ‘European bracken’ in the ST. However, instead of translating it as ‘European bracken’, the translator rendered it as ‘bracken patch’, which is more reminiscent of the Chinese natural environment.

### 3.4. Example of *globalisation* used by the translator

Globalisation refers to a translator translating CSIs without focusing on either the ST or the TT, but by providing a more neutral equivalent.

Example 6: ST (nuts and bolts); TT (基本知识); Back Translation (common sense).

In Example 6, ‘nuts and bolts’ is an idiom that means the practical aspects of something. The translator combined the use of the phrase and the context, and globalised the idiom by rendering it as ‘common sense’, which is easier to understand; if the translator had adopted a word-for-word translation approach, the phrase would not have made sense in the Chinese context.

### 3.5. Example of *transformation* used by the translator

Transformation means that the translation is beyond both globalisation and localisation, and is more like a distortion or change of meaning of the original.

Example 7: ST (nooks and crannies); TT (所有冷僻、隐藏的杳杳晃晃的小路); Back Translation (all small tracks and roads that are secluded and hard to find).

Example 7 is a typical example of transformation. In the ST, ‘nooks and crannies’ may refer to all hidden places, but the translation was altered to mean ‘tracks and roads that are hidden’. Thus, the translator's slight alteration of the original meaning by adding a creative interpretation resulted in better work.

The frequencies and percentages of these strategies are shown in Table 2. The results revealed that preservation had the highest percentage and transformation the lowest. This may have been because toponyms and anthroponyms, which were the main types of CSIs in this study, were rendered via preservation. In addition, translators tend not to use transformation because it can be viewed as a violation of the original text, and localisation is preferred to globalisation because localisation is considered to be a better way of ensuring the target audience's satisfaction.

**Table 2.** Frequencies and Percentages of the CSI Translation Strategies Used by Quji Zhu

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Preservation	40	49.38%
Addition	12	14.81%
Globalisation	7	8.86%
Localisation	20	24.69%
Transformation	2	2.47%

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, this research aimed to study the translation strategies that were used to render CSIs in the Chinese version of a novel. The research questions were answered successfully.

Nonetheless, there are still some unavoidable limitations that can be improved in the future. For example, professional data collection tools were not used in this study; as the researcher was engaged in the time-consuming procedure of reading 794 pages to locate CSIs, the manually obtained data may lack a certain degree of reliability. In addition, as the researcher was not a native English speaker, some CSIs may have been overlooked unintentionally, which would also decrease the validity of the findings. Therefore, new questions related to this topic can be raised: If a researcher whose native language is English were to redo the study, would the results be different from the findings of the present study? Which translation strategy for CSIs is most frequent in other literary genres, such as poetry, drama and prose? These questions can provide avenues for future studies.

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