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Translating culture-specific items from the perspective of Relevance Theory:  
the example of *The House on Mango Street*

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the research is to analyse the Mandarin Chinese translation of culture-specific items in the novel *The House on Mango Street* using Relevance Theory as the basis of analysis. Specifically speaking, this report attempts to adapt Relevance Theory to guide the analysis of the following main questions: 1) What are the translation shifts in relation to the culture-specific items in the Chinese version of *The House on Mango Street*?; 2) How did the translator deal with the translation of these words? 3) What are the possible reasons for the shifts as well as strategies and methods used by the translator?

The analysis is mainly based on Relevance Theory and the latter's core concepts of the inferential nature of any communication and the principle of relevance. The translator's strategies and methods are investigated and his possible considerations in choosing specific approaches are identified. This research tries to illustrate whether Relevance Theory in translation is able to explain how the translator chooses the translation strategies based on a consideration of cultural differences.

From the analysis of the examples, it is concluded that, in general, the translator shows considerable respect for the original text. He keeps close to the original text to keep the important foreign cultural characteristics and adds footnotes for further explanations that he considers necessary. At the same time, he is flexible in his choice of specific translation methods, taking into account the various contexts of communication.

The research concludes that as long as the methods used by the translator result in *optimal relevance* for the target audience, the translation will be valuable in making a contribution to translation practice. Moreover, because of the inferential nature of Relevance Theory, if the target readers' cognitive context is carefully assessed, there is reasonable justification for the translator to introduce shifts which are identified when the translation is compared with the original text.

## **Declaration**

I, Haiyun Guo, declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Translation. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Aim.....	1
1.2 The source text and the target text .....	2
1.2.1 Cisneros and <i>The House on Mango Street</i> .....	2
1.2.2 Pan Pa's translation .....	6
1.3 Rationale for the research .....	10
1.4 Chapter outline.....	12
Chapter 2 Literature review .....	14
2.1 Defining concepts .....	14
2.1.1 Culture.....	14
2.1.2 Culture-specific items .....	17
2.2 Relevance Theory .....	23
2.2.1 General overview of Relevance Theory and Relevance Theory in translation.....	24
2.2.2 Foreignization and domestication .....	28
Chapter 3 Theoretical framework and research methodology .....	31
3.1 Theoretical framework.....	31
3.1.1 Ostensive-Inferential Communication .....	31
3.1.2 Context.....	32
3.1.3 The principle of relevance .....	34
3.2 Research methodology.....	35
3.2.1 A close reading of the source text and selecting examples for analysis.....	35
3.2.2 The process of the analysis ---- analysis of the translation shifts .....	37
Chapter 4 Research analysis and findings .....	38
4.1 Ecological culture-specific items:.....	38
4.2 Material culture-specific items .....	40
4.3 Social culture-specific items .....	43
4.4 Religious culture-specific items.....	50
4.5 Linguistic culture-specific items.....	53
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	65
Reference list .....	69
Appendix.....	74

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to set the background for the discussion in the subsequent chapters. Basically, there are three sections in this introductory chapter. First, the research aim will be briefly presented. Second, I provide an introduction to the source and target text being examined. The third section focuses on the rationale and motivation for this research.

### **1.1 Aim**

The research report aims to analyse the translation of culture-specific items in the novel *The House on Mango Street* using Relevance Theory as the basis of analysis. Specifically speaking, this report attempts to adopt Relevance Theory to guide the analysis of the following main questions: 1) What are the translation shifts in relation to the culture-specific items in the Chinese version of *The House on Mango Street*?; 2) How did the translator deal with the translation of these cultural items? This will lead to a summary of the different strategies to provide guidance for future translation practice; 3) What are the possible reasons for the shifts as well as strategies and methods used by the translator?

Since Relevance Theory is drawn on as a theoretical framework, this research also tries to illustrate whether Relevance Theory is able to explain how the translator chose the translation strategies based on a consideration of cultural differences.

For the purposes of this study, I view culture in a broad sense which means that culture is not only regarded as a shared ‘knowledge structure or construct’ of ideas, values and beliefs (i.e. a shared cultural meaning system) (Hong *et al.* 2003: 454) but also includes the ecological environment interacting with people (see page 19-22). Since the ecological environment, to some extent, has been influenced and changed slightly or dramatically by human activities, and people live in different living

environments with a distinct historical inheritance and unique customs, people may hold different opinions towards nature. Thus, in this research, ecological culture is included in the system of culture. In Chapter 2, a discussion of the definition of culture and culture-specific items as well as the classification of culture-specific items is provided in more detail.

The fact that translation is a cross-cultural practice, dealing with culture as well as language, has been highlighted by both translators and scholars of translation studies. For the difficulties that exist in translating cultural aspects, different approaches are available to translators in their translation practice. Relevance Theory provides an appropriate basis for this research in that it highlights how readers interpret texts in relation to their existing knowledge. Relevance Theory therefore helps to examine a translator's approach as a reader, although a particular kind of reader. The research report investigates how translators into Chinese deal with foreign culture-specific elements when translating a text. A number of examples of culture-specific items in the Chinese version of the English novel *The House on Mango Street* are selected for detailed analysis in order to achieve this aim.

## **1.2 The source text and the target text**

### **1.2.1 Cisneros and *The House on Mango Street***

The source text *The House on Mango Street* examined in this research report was written by Sandra Cisneros, a Mexican American author. I deliberately chose this book because of its simple but meaningful language and the interesting stories it contains, and because of the writer's bi-linguistic and bicultural identity. She wrote the story from her bicultural experiences and uses non-standard English and sometimes even includes Spanish words in a sentence.

Sandra Cisneros is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. Her father is a Spanish-speaking Mexican and her mother is an English-speaking person of Mexican

descent. She was born in 1954 in Chicago and grew up in one of Chicago's Puerto Rican neighbourhoods, but she also travelled back and forth to Mexico with her family which meant that she was familiar with two different cultures, American and Mexican. For Mexican immigrants in America, it is very important to be accepted and assimilation is inevitable, but at the same time, the influence of Mexican culture still exists and it seems that it never vanishes. Cisneros is the person who holds two cultural meaning systems and shifts between the cultural systems. In this sense, culture is dynamic rather than static. In other words, the culture is what one can learn and actively develop rather than passively receive.

Cisneros's intention in writing the stories about what happened on the Mango Street was motivated by her thought of writing something different from her classmates when she was in a writers' training workshop at the University of Iowa. She says:

I became very rebellious there. I never liked the work that my classmates were doing, and as an attempt to move far away from their style, I stumbled upon the voice that predominates in the House on Mango Street, which is a street child's voice.

(SATZ & Cisneros, 1997: 169)

When she was studying in Iowa, she felt herself to be quite different from the other students who were all Americans. She came "from a working class background, an ethnic community, an urban community, a family that did not have books in their house". *The House on Mango Street* relates her experiences of living in a minor ethnic community as a Mexican immigrant in the United States which was the inspiration for her work, drawing on her bicultural background.

Sandra Cisneros published the novella *The House on Mango Street* in 1984. This work reflects Cisneros's personal opinions in relation to immigrant groups, females and dreams. It is Cisneros's best known book with the story of a young Latina's coming of age in a bilingual and bicultural society. It is composed of 44 independent chapters; some are several pages long and others are just two or three short paragraphs.

These chapters tell about experiences that left impressions on her heart when she was growing up: about clouds in the sky, about her mother's rosy hair, about first riding a bike with friends. *The House on Mango Street* depicts dozens of different characters living in the Latino community.

In this novel, the protagonist Esperanza and her family live in relatively poor conditions. "But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all, it's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard..." (p. 153). She dreamed of having her own house "only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (p. 279). With this dream in her heart, she wants to step out of Mango Street instead of continually repeating other people's lives.

Different from other works, such as fantasy novels that depict the fantastic world, poems that express whispers from the heart, drama which does not conform to common sense, this novella is completely oriented to everyday life. Writing in the form of a diary, Cisneros presents several "worlds". These worlds are the Chicano working-class neighbourhood of Chicago, the world of girls and women, and an imaginary world which exists in the protagonist's mind. Besides, these worlds may result in other secondary worlds and the worlds may also overlap and interweave. What is important is that the writer intends that the worlds in her text will connect with her target reader's worlds. "Moments in *The House on Mango Street* where a reader recognises an allusion is a moment of cultural contact where one of the reader's worlds has overlapped with one of the text's worlds" (Busch, 1993: 124).

Although Cisneros does not agree with viewing the book as an autobiography, she admits that she writes from her childhood experiences. "For myself, since I was going through some traumatic experiences at the time, I chose to write about my past – my childhood experiences, my mother, and especially women in the community" (SATZ & Cisneros, 1997: 170). Through Esperanza telling her stories about what happened

on Mango Street, the writer Cisneros was able to return to her childhood and her past life. Cisneros hoped that her work would resonate with the lives of her target readers who may have similar experiences.

The time when the book was published was a time when ethnic issues were highly topical among American intellectuals. This is important to note because ethnic issues often originate in cultural conflicts. With the end of the Civil Rights Movement in 1960s and 1970s, the international situation was changing rapidly. In America, the proportion of the population consisting of white people of European descent has declined significantly, and the number of new immigrants is increasing. Among these new immigrants, the proportion of Hispanic immigrants has risen sharply. According to the census in 2000 of the United States, immigrants into the United States have reached 35.3 million which account for 12% of the total population of the United States. They are mainly from Latin America and these form the largest ethnic minority in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Latino Americans, including Mexicans, have long been marginalized in the United States. Only recently have they been given more attention. They mostly speak Spanish, and their origins were in ex-Spanish colonies. More importantly, their culture is a combination of various cultures, such as Spanish, Portuguese, African, Indigenous, Indian, Catholicism, Islam, and Judaism. The fusibility of nationality and culture is its greatest feature. Huntington proposed that the United States would be separated into a place with “two nations, two cultures and two languages”<sup>2</sup> but I think this assertion might be too pessimistic given that culture is dynamic rather than static. People can be bicultural and multicultural and they can shift between cultures.

In general, this novel has been mostly acclaimed because of its accessibility to English readers and has sold around five million copies worldwide. Additionally, it has been introduced into primary and secondary schools as a prescribed book in

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. Population Challenges and Development Goals[R]. New York: 2005:33.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel p. Huntington, *Who Are We?* Xinhua Publishing House, 2005:95-97.

America. It is also notable that this novella has been translated into more than ten different languages including Chinese. The following section introduces a Mandarin Chinese version.

### **1.2.2 Pan Pa's translation**

Upon publication in Chinese, *The House on Mango Street* became hugely successful in China. The translator Pan Pa (潘帕) is well regarded as a result of what is mostly considered a good translation. Academic studies of the Chinese version in the context of translation studies are rare, however.

The translation by Pan Pa (潘帕) *The House on Mango Street* was first translated into Mandarin Chinese for the Chinese mainland market in 2006. Two other translations were published in Taiwan respectively translated by Baby Sui in 2003 and Xavier Lin in 2010. Because this research is not intended to be a comparative analysis, the differences in these three versions are beyond its scope.

Pan Pa was born in 1968 and graduated with a doctorate in biochemistry. Interestingly, he abandoned his research career and undertook other jobs seemingly unrelated to his profession such as a tailor and an amateur translator. He has translated four books up to now: *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros; *Oracle Night* (2003) by Paul Benjamin Auster; *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) by Ian McEwan; and *A Christmas Memory* (1956) by Truman Capote. These translations were published in 2006, 2011, 2010 and 2009 respectively.

Pan Pa has a great passion for reading literature and writing his own words. His decision to translate *The House on Mango Street* was promoted by one of his friends and an editor who recognized Pan Pa's talent. His friend recommended a list of books for him to read including *The House on Mango Street*. After reading, he expressed his love for the book and set about translating some paragraphs and posting them online. One editor came across his translation and hastened to contact him to persuade him to

do the whole translation. With the editor's insistence and his belief that he would produce a competent translation, Pan Pa ultimately agreed to this.

There is little information about Pan Pa from the Internet and other media currently, nor was I able to contact him directly. Apart from the translations mentioned above and a blog (<http://pampa.blog.tianya.cn>) which has not been updated since 2010, there is no further information available. But what should not be forgotten is that Pan Pa had experience of living abroad. From an article in his blog, it is written that Pan Pa once said in an interview that he temporarily accommodated himself in a mixed community where people from many foreign countries lived; they mostly spoke Spanish, but there were also Chinese, Indians and Arabs in the community during the time he was translating *The House on Mango Street*. The city he was living in then is Chicago where the Mango Street of the novel is located.

We can believe that Pan Pa's experience in a mixed community in Chicago was helpful for him to infer the author's intention and translate the novel for Chinese readers who have a different cognitive environment compared with English readers. As translation can be viewed as an ostensive-inferential process based on Relevance Theory, translators should infer the intention of communicators according to their own cognitive context and judge the expectation of readers in order to find appropriate methods to enable target texts to be better received. The translator's task is to match the original author's intention with the target text reader's expectation to make sure that the text yields adequate contextual effects with appropriate processing efforts (see page 36-39).

In general, Chinese readers have evaluated Pan Pa's version of *The House on Mango Street* positively. Some readers' comments are given below:

(1)		
<b>The reader's name online:</b> 范筒	<b>In Chinese</b>	大一住院的时候这本书陪了我一星期.....虽然这本书确实很小清新。潘帕的译文非常好，今天看最初的爱情 最后的仪式，译者也是他，这是一个怎样的生化学博士啊！
	<b>Translated into English</b>	The book was with me for a week when I was sick in hospital in the year as a freshman in my university. This book is really pure and fresh. Pan Pa's translation is very good. Today, the book <i>First Love, Last Rites</i> that I am reading is also translated by him. Can't believe he is a biochemistry doctor!
	<b>Time and Source</b>	2011-06-09 <a href="https://book.douban.com/subject/1794620/comments/hot?page=4">https://book.douban.com/subject/1794620/comments/hot?page=4</a>
(2)		
<b>The reader's name online:</b> Blossom Vilin	<b>In Chinese</b>	很温情，但是又很悲伤，文字很美，翻译很棒。
	<b>Translated into English</b>	It's very tender, but sad. The words are beautiful, and the translation is excellent.
	<b>Time and Source</b>	2017-11-28 <a href="https://book.douban.com/subject/1794620/comments/new?page=10">https://book.douban.com/subject/1794620/comments/new?page=10</a>
(3)		

<b>The reader's name online:</b> 维尼的蜂蜜罐	<b>In Chinese</b>	翻译得不错，语言质朴，没有让我讨厌的花哨文字。无论生活环境如何，相信每个女孩都有过这个阶段。不过本书还是不如传言的那么好看，可能是个人口味问题。
	<b>Translated into English</b>	Good translation with its plain language, and no fancy words that I hate. No matter how the living environment is, I believe every girl has had this stage. I think this book is not as good as what people say. But this may be because of my personal taste.
	<b>Time and Source</b>	2017-09-05 <a href="https://book.douban.com/subject/1794620/comments/new?p=14">https://book.douban.com/subject/1794620/comments/new?p=14</a>

Besides these comments online by Chinese readers, in one of the three book reviews edited at the end of the book (p. 299-301) entitled “那些幸福的小雨点 (*Those blessed little raindrops; my translation*)”, the author Zhang Yueran (张悦然) who is a famous contemporary Chinese writer, praises the book highly:

同时我们也许还应该感谢此书的睿智的译者，潘帕，他对原文的深刻的领悟以及高超的文字驾驭能力，都使这本书增色不少。据说他是个隐世的才子，偶有兴致，翻译些自己喜欢的文字。于是有了这本他翻译的佳作，谢谢他。

(At the same time, maybe we should also thank the wise translator, Pan Pa. Because of his deeper comprehension of the original and his excellent writing ability, this translation was glorified by many. It is said that he is a talented recluse. Occasionally, he is interested in translating some writings that he loves. Then we have a wonderful translation. Many thanks to him.)

Pan Pa as an intellectual with a doctorate has the ability to infer underlying meanings from relatively simple language and having lived in the United States understands the daily phenomena in the novella which is full of cultural information. When it is

translated into Chinese for a Chinese audience, Chinese culture is inevitably encountered in addition to the Mexican and American cultures of *Mango Street*.

### **1.3 Rationale for the research**

Because we consider translation as a cross-cultural practice, translation is not merely an activity involving linguistic issues but also involves cultural elements. In the 1990s, a “cultural turn” arose in translation studies manifested in a movement “towards the analysis of translation from a cultural studies angle” (Munday, 2012: 191). From then on, translators and scholars moved beyond language to focus on the interaction between translation and culture (Munday, 2012: 192).

As cultures encounter each other in a translating process, there will inevitably be instances where culture-related elements in the Source Language are absent or different in the Target Language. This cultural dissimilarity poses a major challenge to the translator, especially for translators between Western and Eastern cultures. Due to the significant cultural gap, especially between Eastern China and Western countries as the two poles, some Chinese scholars noticed difficulties when translating a text into a different cultural context. Because of the absence of relevant cultural background knowledge shared by the writer and his or her intended readers, especially between the original author and the target language audience, translators need to adopt effective approaches to solve this issue of “absence”. According to the definition given in the previous section in this chapter, related to the context, history, convention and the issue of cultural default encourage the translator to choose effective strategies and methods that will solve the associated problems and improve the quality of the translation. A more detailed discussion of culture and definitions of culture are included in the next chapter.

In an article entitled 《文化缺省与翻译中的连贯重构》 (*Cultural default and coherence reconstruction in Translation*, [my translation]), the Chinese scholar Wang Dongfeng (王东风) noticed that what is transparent to the Source Language reader in

terms of a cultural gap is often opaque to the Target Language reader and to the translator. He outlined five different approaches which he thinks are the most common methods that are adopted by Chinese translators: adding footnotes, expressing concepts and terms explicitly in the text, domesticating, deleting, and literal translation. Of these, the last one is the one he disagrees with and hopes translators will avoid. From this important article among Chinese scholars<sup>3</sup>, we can at least see that firstly, the culture behind the semantic representation of an utterance naturally creates obstacles for translating and is what concerns translators; secondly, strategies are needed for translating cultural elements, both on a macro- and on a micro-level.

However, it is more likely that Chinese translators tend to choose the strategies with which they are familiar, and these may be used randomly. Material available on cultural issues in translation (especially between English and Chinese) is not sufficiently detailed, so it is not practical to provide guidance for translation practice. This study will attempt to classify and analyse the culturally-specific information in the source text and compare it with the target text in order to see how the translator deals with it.

I believe that Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995) provides a descriptive vocabulary and an explanatory framework that enables me to explain how the translation activity which is included in the sense of “communication” happens. And since Relevance Theory was first applied to translation by Ernst Gutt in 1991, this research also draws on ideas from Gutt’s application of Relevance Theory. He strives to utilise the theory as a comprehensive account for all types of translation in a unified way. This research tries to illustrate whether Relevance Theory in translation is able to explain how the translator chooses the translation strategies based on a consideration of cultural differences.

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<sup>3</sup> This article has been downloaded 4510 times and cited 720 times by 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017 on the Chinese academic website CNKI.

This research therefore endeavours to contribute to the study of Chinese translation from the perspective of Relevance Theory, by analysing several passages containing obvious culture-specific elements in order to describe how the Chinese translator dealt with these in *The House on Mango Street*. The different types of strategies will provide guidance for future translation practice. By analysing the cultural elements and the strategies used by the translator the research report will make a contribution to the study of literature translated into Chinese. It will be valuable to link culture with the perspective of Relevance Theory in the field of translation.

#### **1.4 Chapter outline**

Chapter 1: Introduction – in this chapter, I start with an explanation of the aim of this research in order to express the main objectives. The following sections are the introduction of the source text *The House on Mango Street* and the target text translated by Pan Pa. The rationale for the research forms the last section in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature review – this chapter reviews the research that has been done both in western and Chinese scholarly circles. In this chapter, significantly, the concepts of culture and culture-specific items that run throughout the report as well as a classification of these words based on Nida's classification of culture are made clear. Relevance Theory in translation as a theory of cognitive pragmatics applied to translation studies is the basis of analysis in this study. In this connection various strategies and approaches, such as foreignization and domestication, are also examined.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework and research methodology– since this study draws on concepts from Relevance Theory as a theoretical tool to investigate the translation of the English novel *The House on Mango Street*, in this chapter the main significant concepts of Relevance Theory are used to frame the analysis. These are ostensive-inferential communication, the principle of relevance, and context. The

research methods in this research report are also be presented in this chapter, including the method of a close reading of the source text and target text and a method of comparison to identify shifts between the two texts.

Chapter 4: Research analysis and findings - in this chapter, several examples are extracted in the analysis to investigate the methods used by the translator and the effects of these methods. Accordingly, the reasons behind his choice of specific methods will be inferred according to Relevance Theory which views translation as a communication activity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion - in this chapter, I first synthesise what has been discussed in the previous chapters, including the different approaches utilised by the translator Pan Pa and their corresponding effects and functions within the target culture context. The chapter concludes that as long as the methods used by the translator result in *optimal relevance* for the target audience, the translation will be valuable in making a contribution to translation practice. What is more, because of the inferential nature of Relevance Theory, by assessing the target readers' cognitive context, the translator has reasonable motivations for introducing "shifts" compared with the original text.

## **Chapter 2 Literature review**

This chapter has two main aims. The first aim is to define key concepts that run throughout the report. The second aim is to discuss Relevance Theory and Relevance Theory in translation studies with a review of what has been published both in Western and Chinese scholarship. This research report endeavours to examine the translator's strategies and methods based on a consideration of cultural differences in the hope of making a small contribution to linking Relevance Theory with the translation of culture-specific items and to the study of the Mexican American author Cisneros's English novel *The House on Mango Street* translated into Chinese.

### **2.1 Defining concepts**

In this section, I define two key concepts that recur throughout my literature review.

They are:

- (a) Culture;
- (b) Culture-specific items (culturally-loaded words).

Each of these issues is dealt with briefly below.

#### **2.1.1 Culture**

There is no consensus on the definition of culture, and those definitions that do exist are diverse. Normally, the term culture can be viewed both in a broad and a narrow sense. It may refer to all the attributes of man, including material wealth and spiritual wealth created in the process of human historical practice. This is in the sense of "high culture", or culture in its broad sense, often referred to as culture with the capitalized letter "C". On the other hand, culture may merely refer to the ideology of the society, that is, the spiritual wealth, such as literature, art, education, science and so on, which can be understood as culture with the small letter "c".

In order to investigate cultural differences, from the 1980s and influenced by Gert Hofstede's (1980) cultural values framework, the difference between individualistic and collectivistic culture among nations became the core concern. For example, generally he sees many Eastern cultures as collectivistic cultures with the characteristic of emphasizing the individual's obedience to the group and contribution to the group, such as Chinese culture; he regards Western culture as individualistic culture with the characteristic of focusing on individual freedom and interests, such as British and American culture. However, this is limited within the sense of "territorial boundaries" and what is implied in such an approach is that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group and those who have been exposed extensively to two cultures are therefore not included (Yu, 2014: 84). Culture is viewed as a more static and unchanging term in this sense.

Edward Burnett Tylor, an English anthropologist writing in the late nineteenth century, provides a definition which is one of the most frequently quoted: "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society" (Tylor, [1871] 1958). This definition includes two significant elements: one is that it differentiates one group or society from others and the other is the concept of acquired or learned behaviour. The disadvantage is that because culture is an abstract concept, it cannot cover all content by listing the items and elements in it. At the same time, other items and elements that are not covered in the definition might be easily ignored. What is important to us is that his views are typical of cultural evolutionism, and highlight the fact that cultures and societies change and develop and are therefore dynamic in nature.

A similar definition is given by Samovar et al. (2000) who define culture as:

[T]he deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Culture is composed of numerous factors, such as history, tradition, religion, values, social institutions, and social customs. What is common between these two definitions is the use of lists of items and elements of culture in an attempt to provide an overall idea of what culture is and the idea that culture evolves and changes over time, which means culture is not a simple and static concept; it can be historical, inheriting, and can even develop “through striving”.

There are numerous definitions of culture as dynamic. For example, Bates and Plog (1990) argue that:

[C]ulture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.

Smith (1966: 7) states that:

Culture is a code we learn and share, and learning and sharing require communication. And communication requires coding and symbols, which must be learned and shared. Communication and culture are inseparable.

These two definitions both emphasize the essence of learning and sharing in culture. And both learning and sharing can exist among contemporary societies as well as across generations. Besides, Smith’s definition highlights the inseparable link between culture and communication. It is through communication with one another that culture can be learned and shared among peoples as well as transmitted and inherited over the course of generations. But in Smith’s definition, how culture or cultural differences influence communication is not explicitly expressed. So, how does culture or cultural differences have an impact on communication?

Spencer-Oatey (2008: 3) conceptualises culture as:

A set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a

group of people, and that influence (but not determine) each member's behaviour and his or her interpretation of the "meaning" of other people's behavior.

This definition suggests that if culture influences, but does not determine behaviour and interpretation of behaviour, then what does in fact determine interpretation or communication? In other words, how are people with distinct, or bi-cultural backgrounds likely to interpret a given utterance in a specific context? A relevance theoretical approach to communication provides one way in which this question can be answered in relation to a text and its translation.

For the purposes of this study, I view culture in a more broad sense which means that it is not only regarded as a shared 'knowledge structure or construct' of ideas, values and beliefs (i.e. a shared cultural meaning system) (Hong *et al.* 2003: 454) but also includes the ecological environmental interactions with people. At the same time, the features of culture are important. Firstly, culture is dynamic and it can be inherited and developed among people and through generations; secondly, culture is symbolic and language is the most rudimentary element of culture because communication requires the tool of language; finally, people can be bi-cultural or even multicultural and shift freely among different cultures depending on the context.

### **2.1.2 Culture-specific items**

As this study deals with the translation of culture-specific items, a brief discussion of the relationship between culture, language and translation is necessary.

#### **2.1.2.1 Language, culture and translation**

First, language and culture are intertwined and shape or affect each other. According to Nida, language as a set of verbal symbols "also constitutes the most distinctive feature of a culture, which may be described in a simplistic manner as the totality of the beliefs and practices of society." For many people, language is a part of culture.

This is true because people always regard language as the most obvious element of culture that distinguishes one group of people from another as language “does reflect in certain aspects the culture of a society” (Nida, 2001: 79).

Nida further elaborates on the interrelations between language and culture and suggests eight essential functions of language in relation to culture:

Culture makes constant use of language to perform its crucial function of (1) providing information about the processes and the values of a culture (education is mastering the information regarded as essential for being a part of society), (2) directing the activity of a culture (traditionally described as the imperative function), (3) establishing and maintaining a positive emotional state for the participants within a culture (the emotive function), (4) ritual alteration in the status of participants in a culture, for example, marriage vows, sentencing of criminals, religious ritual, internment of the dead (the performative function), (5) interpersonal relations (who speaks to whom about what and in what manner), (6) cognitive activity (the most common use of language is in thinking, although some thoughts are not necessarily expressed in words), (7) recreating (the use of languages in games, for example, scrabble, crossword puzzles, word-guessing games on television, verbal challenges involving poetry and song), (8) aesthetics, the use of language for aesthetic expression, especially in poetry and elegant prose.

(Nida, 2001: 152-153)

In brief, language and culture are inseparable and interdependent. No linguistic text can exist outside of a cultural context and culture uses language as a significant method to manifest itself. As a tool, language bears cultural information in order to communicate.

Translation is basically an activity to express the source text in the target language. As language carries cultural elements, translation activity is essentially meant to transfer information from the source language culture to the target language culture. Simply, culture is integrated into translation via language. In a sense, translation is a cross-cultural activity, because “even when all linguistic symbols can be semantically translated into a system of different linguistic symbols, a text's relationships to its source culture can never be reproduced by relations between the target text and the

target culture” and “[t]his fact calls attention to the cultural factors which complicate the translation process” (Li Yunxing, 1998). An ideal translation will be able to integrate both the linguistic meaning and the cultural meaning of the source language seamlessly into the target language, so that the source language reader and the target language reader can experience a similar effect.

In a sentence, language, culture and translation are linked so that it is necessary to examine them together instead of separately.

### **2.1.2.2 Definition of Culture-specific items**

As we have seen above, culture can be a rather abstract concept, but culture-specific items are more concrete and can be specifically examined in relation to translation.

Culture-specific items or words are also called culture-bounded words or culture-loaded words in different scholars' eyes. Guozhang Xu proposed the concept of “文化负载词” (culturally-loaded words) in his article *Culturally Loaded Words and English Language Teaching* as early as 1980. Liao Qiyi defines culturally-loaded words as referring to “那些标志某种文化中特有事物的词、词组和习语，这些词汇反映了特定民族在漫长的历史进程中逐渐积累的、有别于其他民族的、独特的活动方式” (Culturally-loaded words are words, phrases and idioms that “mark something peculiar in a culture... These reflect the activities of a nation which are gradually accumulated in a long historical process and are different from other ethnic groups and nations [my translation]) (Liao Qiyi, 2000: 232-246).

Peter Newmark distinguishes “cultural” from “universal” and “personal” language. In terms of cultural words; he says “there will be a translation problem unless there is cultural overlap between the source and the target language” (2001: 94). The cultural words are usually the cultural focus and because of a cultural gap or cultural distance between the source and target languages there is always a translation problem. It will be very difficult for the translator to find words in one culture which have exactly the

same meaning and function as the original words. And if the words are not handled properly, some ridiculous or unsatisfactory results may arise.

According to Newmark, cultural words, whether single-unit lexemes, phrases or collocations, are those which are particularly tied to “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression” (2001: 94). Although he doesn’t define the term clearly, “cultural words” are regarded by him as a particular culture’s unique objects.

In terms of the linguistic item which contains cultural information, Mona Baker states that:

The source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as culture-specific.

(Baker, 1992/2011: 18)

In the process of historical evolution, each ethnic group may form its own unique culture. With the developing culture, the creation of language will be influenced and some words and phrases will have certain cultural connotations. Importantly, the cultural words and phrases with unique and rich cultural connotations will play a role in the reflection of a particular culture.

According to the references above and especially based on Baker’s explanation, we can conclude that in a language system, culture-specific items are lexical items that embody the cultural information belonging to a society and reflect the social life of that society.

### **2.1.2.3 Classification of culture-specific items**

First of all, we look at the classification of culture. Although it is not easy to have a concrete concept of what culture exactly includes, culture can be categorized into different aspects according to certain criteria. We will make use of Nida’s

categorization of culture.

Nida said that if a translator wants to contribute a due share to cross-cultural communication, there are five types of sub-culture he or she should clearly recognize: (1) ecological culture; (2) material culture; (3) social culture; (4) religious culture; and (5) linguistic culture” (Nida, 1964: 91).

Based on Nida’s classification of culture and with the intention of clearly examining the specific culturally-specific words in the translation of *The House on Mango Street*, in this research report, I classify culture-specific items into the following five categories: (1) ecological culturally-specific words; (2) material culturally-specific words; (3) social culturally-specific words; (4) religious culturally-specific words; and (5) linguistic culturally-specific words. They are briefly introduced as follows:

(1) Ecological culture-specific items:

Nida has stated that “the fact that a language may have a proportionately high number of terms in particular domains is an important index to the focus of a culture” (Nida, 80). Because of distinct natural and geographical environments among nations or regions, there are expressions which are related to ecological culture information. Ecological culture-specific items are words with ecological elements. Specifically, animals, plants, climate, mountains, etc. are all in this category. There are examples given such as “For example ... the Anuaks of the Sudan have hundreds of terms for different kinds and features of cattle, and the Quechuas of the Altiplano of Peru have scores of words for different kinds and forms of potatoes” (Nida, 2001: 80).

People living in different environments with a distinct historical inheritance and unique customs may hold different opinions towards nature. In other words, the natural environment influences the psychological features of a nation. Thus, we can say that ecological culture-specific items play an important role in cultural communication, because they not only reflect the climate, the features of a certain

language community's natural and geographical environment but also reflect people's thinking patterns and so on.

For the translation of such ecological culture-specific items, different translators will adopt different strategies. Literal translation is one of the most used methods. The collection of ecological culture-specific items and expressions in *The House on Mango Street* are presented and their translation is demonstrated and analysed in Chapter 4.

(2) Material culture-specific items;

This type of culture-specific item includes words about everyday materials, such as food, clothes, tools, equipment, products, medicine, measurements and so on. Simply, it involves almost all aspects of daily life. People's eating habits and ways of dressing may differ greatly. For example, in this study a product brand name in the novel *The House on Mango Street* and its translation in the Chinese version are analysed. The rendering of the culture-specific word may well reflect how cultural differences affect the translator's translation.

(3) Social culture-specific items;

People's social life often creates certain words with distinct cultural meaning. These words and expressions are called social culture-specific items which are influenced by a society's own folk customs, lifestyle, and patterns of behaviour. For instance, people from different nations may have very different opinions in relation to numbers, colours and so on. Even though these have the same denotative meaning, the connotative meaning and associations may vary.

(4) Religious culture-specific items;

Religion is closely linked to the concept of culture. We are all familiar with the fact that different nations have different beliefs and religions. Religion plays an important

role in people's life and it can deeply influence people's thinking and acting. In the western world, Christianity is the most common religion, while in China, the strongest influence is that of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. "Taoism and Buddhism are thought to be the three roots of Chinese culture, which attribute a lot to the enriched and splendid civilization of China" (Zhou Yi, 2003:35). Therefore, a translator needs to adopt appropriate translation strategies to convey religious cultural connotations so that they achieve optimal relevance.

#### (5) Linguistic culture-specific items.

This type of culture-specific word contains words and expressions whose features can be seen in terms of phonetic and grammatical systems.

To conclude, the connotation of culture-specific items will influence the way in which the words are translated. The classification and categorisation of types of lexical items is based on Nida's classification of culture. This classification assists in the analysis of how culture influences both communication and translation and the corresponding method used by the translator.

## **2.2 Relevance Theory**

Relevance Theory has been a widely discussed theory in the field of cognitive pragmatics over the last three decades; it is a theory of communication based on cognitive principles. Relevance Theory is used here because as a pragmatic theory it is helpful in explaining how communication takes place. It will therefore help in answering the question posed above: how do culture or cultural differences impact on communication?

Relevance Theory can assist in investigating communication processes taking into account both the addresser's and the hearer's behaviour in the process; it is therefore adopted as the theoretical framework and methodology in this research. It is therefore

useful to provide an overview of the relevance theory and its application to translation.

### **2.2.1 General overview of Relevance Theory and Relevance Theory in translation**

Relevance Theory was put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their work *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986/1995) in the 1980s. As a pragmatic theory, Relevance Theory pays attention to communication and cognition which is naturally valuable to translation studies. Many scholars have since applied the theory to translation practice and research, such as Olsen (1992), Kovacik (1994), Tirkkonen-Condit (1992), Hjort-Pedersen (1996) and Unger (1996).

In 1991, in his work *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, Ernst-August Gutt applied the theory to translation and provides a relevance-theoretic account of translation. His analysis is interested in cross cultural communication and highlights the inferential process and importance of context in the translation process. “Ernst-August Gutt started one of the greatest translation debates of the past ten years when he suggested that Relevance Theory holds the key to providing a unified account of translation” (Smith 2002: 107).

Based on Relevance Theory, translation can be viewed as an ostensive-inferential process. Translators should infer the intention of the communicator according to his or her cognitive context and judge the expectation of readers in order to find appropriate methods to ensure the optimal reception of the target texts. The translator’s task is to match the original author’s intention with the target text reader’s expectations to make sure that they yield adequate contextual effects with appropriate processing efforts.

In *Translation as Secondary Communication – The Relevance Theory Perspective of Ernst-August Gutt*, Kevin Smith attempts to clarify Gutt’s objectives and statements as well as clear up some misunderstandings in interpreting Gutt’s ideas in applying Relevance Theory to translation studies. He mainly analyses direct and indirect

translation from Gutt's perspective in terms of formal and functional equivalence and in addition, shows how Relevance Theory also makes a contribution to translation practice: "If empowering translators to make right decisions is Gutt's primary contribution, his input on the translation of implicit information, especially figurative language, is a major secondary contribution" (Smith, 2002: 115). He noted that between the two methods in translation, direct translation endeavours to convey all the assumptions conveyed by the source text, and indirect translation may settle for conveying only those assumptions of the original text that are most relevant to the target audience (Smith, 2002: 109-110).

Christopher Fotheringham proposes a taxonomy of shifts based on cognitive-pragmatic models of the translation process (Fotheringham, 2017). He proposes this model for the analysis of shifts to improve the quality of descriptive case studies in translation research. Fotheringham proposes "decoding shifts" and "recoding shifts" in the translation process as two categories of shifts within the framework of cognitive models. Between the two "decoding shifts" are shifts "where the translator fails to accurately understand the referential meaning of a word" and "recoding shifts" are shifts "that can be considered deliberate strategies on the behalf of the translator who makes a judgement regarding what he expects his projected reader to be able to understand" (Fotheringham, 2017: 90).

In this study, Relevance Theory as a tool for analysing and examining how the translator translated a text with various culture-specific items for a target audience which has a different assumption schema inhabiting a different contextual world is particularly valuable for translation studies in Chinese. Chinese scholars' investigations relating to Relevance Theory and Relevance Theory in translation are presented below.

He Ziran (何自然) and Ran Yongping (冉永平) hold the opinion that Relevance Theory is the basis of Cognitive Pragmatics (He Ziran & Ran Yongping, 1998: 94). Their essay is one of the earliest pieces of research on Relevance Theory in Chinese

academia. They emphasized the importance of the principle of relevance in Relevance Theory. Because of the inferential nature of any kind of communication, people involved in the communication process are always looking for the greatest possible effects for the smallest possible effort or they are seeking adequate effects for no unjustifiable effort. They state that the former is called “most relevant” which is relating to people’s cognition and the latter is called “optimally relevant” which is relating to people’s communication, according to their understanding of Sperber & Wilson’s principle of relevance. However, because they were introducing Relevance Theory into Chinese academia in a wider sense, they did not focus on translation studies. I believe Relevance Theory provides a valuable angle for analysing the translator’s two roles which means he not only needs to have complete cognition of the original text but also needs to communicate effectively to his target audience.

In his thesis entitled 《关联理论对翻译的解释力》 (*The explanatory power of Relevance Theory to translation*; my translation) the author Zhao Yanchun (赵彦春) claimed that under the umbrella of Relevance Theory, the debate around translatability/ untranslatability and the principle of equivalence has remained inconclusive and has been unnecessary. The reason is that on the one hand, the inferential nature of communication naturally leads the translator to infer the intention of the original communicator (the original author) and there must be a result of the intention based on the cognitive environment – the issue of untranslatability is therefore not realistic. At the same time, in terms of equivalence, according to Relevance Theory, the translator who bears in mind the addressees (the target readers) and their cognitive environment will achieve equivalence to the original text, not only linguistic equivalence and meaning equivalence, but also functional equivalence. From this study we can see that Relevance Theory places adequate emphasis on the target readers’ context and reaction which will also be important in analysing a translated text.

In 《关联理论对翻译解释的局限性》 (*The limitations of Relevance Theory in interpreting translation*, my translation), the scholar Wang Bin (王斌) holds an opposite opinion and points out that Relevance Theory, as a theory of language communication, depicts the inherent property of language communication within a culture. However, it fails to give an adequate explanation of translation as a cross-cultural language communication on account of its incompetence in showing how to transplant the cultural default. He concludes that a translator with the relevance principle as a guide will neglect the effect of cultural elements and cultural default<sup>4</sup> in the source text for the original readers, and only take the target readers' cognitive ability into consideration. Accordingly, Wang Bin claims that a translator only taking the principle of relevance into consideration will adopt a domesticating translation method. This has been a controversial claim among theorists. In order to see whether with the principle of relevance a translator will only adopt a domesticating strategy and neglect foreign otherness, this study focuses on the analysis of culture-specific words and expressions.

In contrast to Wang Bin, Zhao Yanchun in his thesis entitled *Relevance Theory and the nature of translation* (2003) states that Relevance Theory has the most powerful explanatory power up to now as regards translation. He argues “default is inevitable in translation due to the limited processing power of the human brain on the one hand, and cultural idiosyncrasies on the other, and more importantly, due to the optimal relevance in communication; if resources permit, a translation should converge to the original as much as possible” (Zhao Yanchun, 2003: 117). His main idea of this statement is that culture gap results in the absence of linguistic expressions in translations because, simply speaking, there are no equivalent cultures nor are there equivalent languages. Moreover, it is the inference nature of Relevance Theory that tells a translator he is able to infer the intention of the original author and bring the

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<sup>4</sup> The term “cultural default” was first put forward by Wang Dongfeng (王东风) in 1997 in the thesis titled with 《文化缺省与翻译中的连贯重构》(*Cultural default and coherence reconstruction in Translation*, my translation). Its meaning has been explained in the “Rationale” of this Research Report.

translation closer to the original.

In this research, the translator's translating strategy and method are investigated and his possible considerations in choosing specific approaches are analysed. Foreignizing and domesticating approaches are discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Foreignization and domestication**

Since the term "strategy" and "method" vary according to different researchers, to be concrete in this research, we adopt Jääskeläinen's (Chesterman, 1997: 90) distinction at two levels: at the more general level we have "global strategies", while at the more specific level we have "local strategies", which may lead to a choice among many translation methods such as borrowing, transliteration, transposition, paraphrase, etc. The relationship between the two levels of strategies is that the former guides the latter. To avoid confusion, in this research, translation strategy at the global level is still termed a "strategy" whereas translation strategy at the local level is termed a "method".

As far as translation strategies are concerned, we have word-for-word translation vs. sense-for-sense translation, literal translation vs. free translation and domestication vs. foreignization. In this research, however, the emphasis is on domestication vs. foreignization.

In the history of translation practice, either source-oriented or target-oriented strategies have been used by translators according to their personal consideration for centuries. In translation studies scholarship, as early as in 1813, the German theologian and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher claimed that "there are two methods of translating: either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (Lefevere, 1977: 74). The two methods of affecting the reader's understanding of the foreign author are generally

called foreignization and domestication.

Inspired partly by Schleiermacher's idea of the *valorization of the foreign*, Venuti advocated the method of foreignization in his influential book *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008). He argues "domestication" is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home" (Venuti, 2005: 20) He holds the view that domestication erases the cultural differences in foreign texts and results in the invisibility of translators because of the easy readability and transparency of foreign cultural elements.

The illusion of transparency is an effect of a fluent translation strategy, of the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning. But readers also play a significant role in insuring that this illusory effect occurs because of the general tendency to read translations mainly for meaning, to reduce the stylistic features of the translation to the foreign text or writer, and to question any language use that might interfere with the seemingly untroubled communication of the foreign writer's intention.

(Venuti, 2008: 1)

From the statement above, we can see that Venuti is concerned about the stylistic features of a text being erased by a fluent translation strategy; in contrast, foreignization is a method that keeps foreign elements reflected in the receiving language. "Foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language" (Venuti, 2008: 15).

I want to suggest that insofar as foreignizing translation seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others.

(Venuti, 2008: 16)

What should be noticed is that Venuti examines foreignization in the context of postcolonial views and advocates foreignization in order to resist the hegemony of English language and culture. But for other experts, like Nida, who advocates “dynamic equivalence” in the translation process, he prefers the strategy of “domestication” to provide the target readers an equivalent way in which to understand the source text. However, there is little research on investigating these two strategies of “domestication” and “foreignization” from a Relevance Theory perspective. So I believe linking these methods with Relevance Theory could be extremely valuable.

From Gutt’s point of view, the inferential nature of any kind of communication, including translation, needs and makes it possible for the reader to make efforts to explore and infer. The translator trusts the readers’ ability to explore the exotic elements of the original text from the translation so that the translator uses foreignizing translation as a way of rejecting compromise for a target audience. In the meantime, the optimal relevance principle allows readers to acquire adequate cognitive effect without having to make excessive inferential efforts. So a domestication approach in a specific situation is important for reducing readers’ unnecessary inferential efforts. We can safely say that foreignization and domestication, as two translation strategies, do not conflict with the concept of Relevance Theory.

In this study, several examples are selected and analysed to explore the specific situation and the translator’s strategies and specific methods, including foreignization and domestication, in each example.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical framework and research methodology**

### **3.1 Theoretical framework**

This study draws on concepts from Relevance Theory as a theoretical framework to investigate the approaches adopted when a translator is translating a text rich in cultural elements for an audience in a very different context. Within the scope of Relevance Theory, the following main concepts are used in this research to be applied to examine the translation of the culture-specific items of the original text and its Chinese version of *The House on Mango Street*.

#### **3.1.1 Ostensive-Inferential Communication**

In Relevance Theory, in the process of translation ostension and inference are two aspects. For the communicator, communication is a behaviour which makes manifest an intention, and it is ostensive. For the addressee, communication is an inferential process, in which the addressee should infer the communicator's intention conveyed by the communicator's ostensive behaviour. Therefore, a complete characterization of communication combining the two sides is ostensive-inferential communication.

Ostensive-inferential Communication combines code model and inferential model, makes manifest to an addressee one's intention to make manifest a basic layer of information. It consists in informative intention and communicative intention. A communicator speaks intentionally by ostension in order to produce a certain stimulus so as to fulfill an informative intention. And by communicative intention, the communicator makes it manifest to addressee that he has his informative intention.

(Sperber & Wilson, 2001:198)

As to translation, the inferential nature of this special type of communication requires the translator to seek a good understanding of the intended interpretation of the original and have a good grasp of the cognitive environment of the receptor audience

in order to make the communication succeed. Gutt has stated the importance of “context” accordingly. He proposes that the meaning of an utterance depends, not only on its semantic content, but crucially on the context in which it is interpreted or, more technically, on the contextual information with which it is inferentially combined. “One rather obvious point of this illustration is that the success of communication can depend very much on whether the audience uses the right, that is, the speaker-intended, context” (Gutt, 1998:42). The next concept “context” of communication in Relevance Theory is presented below.

### **3.1.2 Context**

“Translations are not made in a vacuum. Translators function in a given culture at a given time. The way they understand themselves and their culture is one of the factors that may influence the way in which they translate” (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990: 15).

Bassnett and Lefevere go beyond language and focus on the interaction between translation and culture, on the way in which culture impacts and constrains translation and on “the larger issues of context, history and convention” (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990: 11). They examine the image of literature that is created by forms such as anthologies, commentaries, films adaptations and translations, and the institutions that are involved in that process. Thus, the move from translation as text to translation as culture and politics is what Mary Snell-Hornby (1990), in her essay in the same collection, terms “the cultural turn”. It is taken up by Bassnett and Lefevere as a metaphor for this cultural move and serves to bind together the range of case studies in their collection, which includes studies of changing standards in translation over time, the power exercised in and on the publishing industry in pursuit of specific ideologies, feminist writing and translation, translation as “appropriation”, translation and colonization, and translation as rewriting, including film rewrites (Munday, 2012: 192).

Sperber and Wilson defined context as “the set of premises used in interpreting it” (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 15). According to them it is a psychological concept: “a context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 15). According to the definitions, in Relevance Theory, context does not only include parts of the external environment of the communication partners, but also includes the text preceding or following an utterance, situational circumstances, cultural factors and so forth. Relevance Theory views context as the place, time and situation in which an utterance is produced, all the information assumed to be true by a hearer at any moment and the hearer’s memory, all of which feed into possible interpretations of the speaker’s utterance based on the hearers’ assumptions (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 15).

Gutt mentions three elements which are interdependent in fulfilling an optimal relevance condition.

In cognitive terms, the optimal relevance condition entails the following cause-effect interdependence relations between message, stimulus and context:

1. If the message is given, then the stimulus and the context must be such that the condition of optimal relevance is fulfilled.
2. If the context is given, then the message and the stimulus must be such that the condition of optimal relevance is fulfilled.
3. If the stimulus is given, then the message and the context must be such that the condition of optimal relevance is fulfilled.

(Gutt, 2000: 163-164)

In terms of the Chinese translation examined here, the context of the target audience is significant for the translator. Briefly speaking, before beginning the translation, the translator Pan Pa can try to determine in advance how communicable the message of the original is likely to be by examining the cultural context of the receptors. If the communicability conditions seem unlikely to be fulfilled in some respects, the translator can anticipate communication problems and look for appropriate measures to avoid these problems.

### 3.1.3 The principle of relevance

It is a commonplace that the translation process is complicated by the contextual and cultural universe separating the source-text and the target-reader. The translator is tasked with narrowing the gap. In Relevance Theory terms, this might be described as rendering the target-text *optimally relevant* to the target reader

(Fotheringham, 2017: 81)

According to Relevance Theory, communication is a cognitive process in which “the communicator produces a piece of evidence of her meaning – the ostensive stimulus – and the addressee infers her meaning from this piece of evidence and context” (Sperber & Wilson, 2006: 176), and “human cognition is relevance-oriented; we pay attention to information that seems relevant to us” (Wilson, 1994: 45).

The central claim of Relevance Theory is that human communication crucially creates an expectation of optimal relevance. According to Relevance Theory, these two preliminary conditions formulated by the definition of relevance:

- 1) An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large;
- 2) An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 125)

These two important aspects of optimal relevance are used to analyse the translation text in this study. In other words, the investigation of contextual effect and processing effort shape the analysis of the selected segments of the Chinese version of the text. It is a clear fact that there are two different audiences in distinct contextual environments. The translator needs to make choices in using specific translation methods to achieve these two linked requirements in order to render the text optimally relevant for his target readers.

To sum up so far, Relevance Theory in translation guides the descriptive and

explanatory analysis. In this study, several segments with different culture-specific items to the Chinese translation are analysed from the perspective of Relevance Theory, especially within the principle of relevance of *Optimal Relevance*. I tend to categorise some concrete strategies that the translator might have consciously or unconsciously considered from the perspective of Relevance Theory.

## **3.2 Research methodology**

### **3.2.1 A close reading of the source text and selecting examples for analysis**

As a close-reading is very important in studies of literary translations, I focus on carefully studying the source text, and, in particular, on analysing some obvious cultural references in the source text. Based on the in-depth reading of the whole text, certain examples were selected in terms of culture-specific items. The different kinds of culture-specific items rich in cultural information reveal many aspects of the status of life in American Mexican communities: the ethnic issues and female social position problems and so forth through the protagonist's narration of her family and her neighbours' life on Mango Street.

The novel *The House on Mango Street* was published in 1984. The background for Sandra Cisneros creating the work was significant. From the 1840s, a large number of Mexicans moved to the United States and began to start new lives there. Until the 1960s, ethnic issues still stood out and the problem of racial discrimination regrettably continued to exist in American society. The new Mexican immigrants always felt themselves to be in a dilemma: Mexico is their home on the one hand, but it is hard for them to find a better life there because of the crisis that their motherland was suffering from; the United States is unfamiliar on the other hand, and although a better living environment could be waiting for them, it was not easy to integrate into the local culture.

“You want a friend, she says. Okay, I’ll be your friend. But only till next Tuesday. That’s when we move away. Got to. Then as if she forgot I just

moved in, she says the neighborhood is getting bad”.

(Pan & Cisneros, 2015: 162)

This is one paragraph in the fifth segment titled “Cathy Queen of Cats” which is a statement from Cathy who is a white girl and whose family was planning to move away from Mango Street because of the coloured immigrants and the fact that they believed “the neighborhood is getting bad”.

Pan Pa’s spending time living in Chicago to seek a similar living environment to that of the Mango Street is of great value. To some extent, exposing oneself in the source culture at least for couple months will be helpful for a translator’s practical translation activity. Nida has expressed that

For truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function...This is one of the reasons why most programs for the training of translators and interpreters require that students spend at least six months to a year in each of the countries where the student’s acquired languages are spoken.

(Nida, 2001: 82)

This research report also selects segments for analysis in terms of the female perspective of the source text.

The translator himself said in his blog on Internet that: 最大的麻烦是我无从体验少女的心思。她们跳过的皮筋，她们穿过的裙子，她们拌嘴，她们卖乖。她们怎样学习成长？比如“髌骨”，比如在“猴子花园”里男孩子们和萨莉玩的“游戏”，她们一定得经历我们不曾有过的尴尬。(The biggest difficulty is that as a man, I can't experience a girl's life. They play the game of skipping rubber bands, dress in skirts, they squabble, and they are cute. How do they learn to grow? For example, the segment in the source text "Hip", the games played by the boys and Sally in the segment "The Monkey Garden"; they must have experienced what we have never experienced [my translation]).

Faced with this difficulty, the translator is trying to conceive of what the little girls conceive, comprehend what the little girls comprehend, and express what the little girls intend to express. In Relevance Theory, the translator, as a special reader, made use of pieces of evidence, stimulus and context to infer the meaning of the communicator, that is, the original author.

### **3.2.2 The process of the analysis - analysis of the translation shifts**

Through examining the existing translation and its original text, this research report aims to uncover the motivations that give rise to “shifts” (the small changes which occur in the source text/ target text pair in the translation process). More importantly, the analysis will identify the methods used by the translator in this translation to deal with cultural elements and this will make a contribution to translation practice.

In summary, in this chapter, three main significant concepts of Relevance Theory were used to frame this analysis. These are ostensive-Inferential Communication, context and the principle of relevance. The research methods, including the method of a close reading of the source text and target text and a method of comparison to identify shifts between the two texts, were presented in this chapter. In the next chapter, a number of examples are selected and analysed in detail to reveal the shifts between the two texts and the strategies and methods used by the translator as well as the possible reasons for the shifts, strategies and methods.

## **Chapter 4 Research analysis and findings**

In this chapter, several examples are analysed and classified into five categories based on the classification approach described in the last chapter: (1) ecological culture-specific items; (2) material culture-specific items; (3) social culture-specific items; (4) religious culture-specific items; and (5) linguistic culture-specific items.

### **4.1 Ecological culture-specific items:**

In *The House on Mango Street*, the natural living environment is not good. Mango Street is only a narrow street, in which most of the houses are old and dark. The protagonist's house at the end of Mango Street is very small and ordinary. Moreover, most of the residents living there are immigrants or members of minority ethnic groups; there are Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and African Americans. On Mango Street, houses no longer represent comfortable homes or safe spaces; more often they are symbols of patriarchal traditional values towards women. Women's bodies and minds are both restricted in the houses and hard to escape.

But there are also some natural scenes full of charm, such as "The Monkey Garden" (p. 262). It dismisses the gloom and brings bright colours to Esperanza's life. The plants in the monkey garden include sunflowers, peach trees, and thorn roses as well as all kinds of insects: bees and beetles, yellow spiders, ants. The translator Pan Pa keeps these flowers, trees and insects just as they are in the original text. He once lived in a poor community in Chicago similar to the environment of Mango Street, so he might understand that "The Monkey Garden" is the place that witnesses Esperanza's growth.

In another chapter, Cisneros wrote that Esperanza thinks she is like the "Four Skinny Trees" (p. 240) planted by the city in front of her house. Even though the four trees are elms which are not commonly seen as trees planted by cities for municipal

greening purposes in most cities in China, the translator Pan Pa keeps the elms and does not replace them with trees such as poplars, willows and Chinese Phoenix Trees, in order to respect the source text and its foreign setting.

Of course, cultural background deeply influences a translator in the way he or she appreciates the surroundings. In terms of Pan Pa, he interprets the original text based not only on his Chinese cultural background but also his bilingual and bicultural background. His experience in America helps him in understanding Cisneros and her novel; his Chinese background supports him in successfully rendering his translation for his target readers. However, the factor that determines the communication between the original writer and the target audience is optimal relevance based on Relevance Theory.

Simply, there are two rounds of communication in a translation process and these are relevant to each other because of the translator's function as a mediator and link. First, the translator communicates with the original writer, and second the translator communicates with the target audience. In each round, it is optimal relevance that functions as the principle of successful communication. In other words, the principle of successful translation is the transfer of optimal relevance from the original text to the target text, and the translator seeks the optimal relevance from the original text and retains it in his translated text. A translator's task is to make sure that his translation is faithful enough to the original text in terms of optimal relevance, which offers the readers enough contextual effect without expending unnecessary processing effort.

To sum up, from the examples of translating ecological culture-specific items above, culture acts as a "background" function in the process of translation; the principle of optimal relevance determines the activity of transition as a kind of communication. The translator's role as a successful bridge between the source and the target text lies in his close attention to the principle of relevance in the process of translation. That is, his rendering of the source text is determined both by his knowledge of the cognitive

environment of the target readers and his consideration of what is relevant to them. Optimal relevance requires the translator to take the contextual effect and the target readers' processing effort into consideration in order to produce a successful translation.

#### 4.2 Material culture-specific items

It was stated in Chapter 2 that material culture-specific items include words about everyday materials; the following example focuses on two American brand names known to nearly all Americans and the translator's translation of them for his Chinese audience.

##### EXAMPLE – Chapter Nineteen: A Rice Sandwich

<b>Source Text</b>	And I said yes and could I please have a <u>Kleenex</u> ---- I had to blow my nose.
<b>Target Text</b>	我说好的，可以给我一张 <u>面纸</u> 吗？——我要擤擤鼻子。
<b>Back translation of Target Text</b>	I said yes and can I have a <u>tissue</u> ? ---- I want to blow my nose.

Kleenex is a brand name which belongs to an American company called Kimberly-Clark. It manufactures a variety of paper-based products, such as facial tissue, bathroom tissue, paper towels, tampons, and diapers. Since it is famous for the finest and softest facial tissue with 100% original pulp, adding soft fibre in particular, the word “Kleenex” became a synonym of tissue. The brand has a Chinese name “舒洁” (Chinese Pinyin: shū jié. Meaning: comfortable and clean).

However, neither the English name, nor the Chinese name which has a totally different pronunciation of the brand, is well known in the Chinese market. By contrast, some other local brands of paper products are more popular among Chinese consumers, such as 心相印 (Pinyin: xīn xiāng yìn), 清风 (Pinyin: qīngfēng) because the policy of the Chinese government is to protect Chinese local enterprises.

In this translation, the translator chose to use its super-ordinate “tissue” to replace “Kleenex” taking into consideration the Chinese readers’ cognitive context.

In general, when translating this text, the translator is respectful of the original text. He used “tissue” instead of the Chinese name of the brand but he was still aware of differences caused by doing so. In order to reduce the loss of cultural elements compared with the original text, the translator added a footnote. The footnote is: 原文是 Kleenex,是世界上最早的面纸品牌, 因此, 很多美国人保持了把面纸叫成“kleenex”的习惯。Kleenex 品牌到了中国就是“舒洁牌”。(Back translation: In the original text, it is Kleenex, the earliest facial tissue brand in the world, so many Americans are in the habit of calling tissues "Kleenex". Kleenex in China is "舒洁牌"). In this footnote, the translator mentioned the original text to his target Chinese readers. In doing so he reminds the target readers that this is a work of translation and he is the translator. He seems to draw the target readers’ attention to his visible position as the translator. In one sentence, the consideration of the hyponymy of the word “Kleenex” and its translation into “tissue” in Chinese is based on the translator’s investigation into his target Chinese readers’ cognitive environment and level.

“Buick” is also a product brand name which appears in the chapter entitled “Hips” in the novel. However, the translator adopted a different method to translate it compared with the translation of “Kleenex”. He chose to use its transliterated Chinese name “别克” (Chinese Pinyin: bié kè) which is familiar to many Chinese people. Buick belongs to the General Motors Corporation based in the United States which established its joint venture in Shanghai in 1997. In general, 80% of Buick's global sales are in China, making China its main market. Thus, the high reputation in China of the Buick brand

means it is familiar to almost all Chinese people. This is probably one of the reasons that the translator translated “Buick” into “别克”.

More importantly, the significance of the brand of a vehicle is completely different from that of facial tissue. When people buy cars, they pay considerable attention to the brands. Buick is one of the oldest American car brands. Many Americans, especially young people, still associate Buick with old-style cars driven by their parents and grandparents. However, in the 1980s Buick was popular in many countries. 1980s is also the period when people in the world were most addicted to fast sports cars, especially the Americans. People tended to drive powerful cars with large interiors and powerful engines. Influenced by the Americans’ enthusiasm for racing cars, Buick, a comparatively conservative and old fashioned manufacturer, decided to manufacture sports cars and compete with other brands. Buick cars are characterized by high horsepower, practicality and maturity. These characteristics were in line with the expectations of people at that time.

In this chapter, the girls are talking about “hips”. These girls coming of age are ignorant of sex. The writer wrote “One day you wake up and they are there. Ready and waiting like a new Buick with the keys in the ignition. Ready to take you where? ” (p. 205) as the opening paragraph of this chapter. The “hips” is connected with “a new Buick” from the girls’ point of view and an analogy is drawn between the attractiveness of the car brand and the young adolescent girls. Accordingly, the Buick brand name is significant in this chapter. The translation of it into “别克” is based on the translator’s careful consideration of both the original text and the Chinese audience. Besides, his footnote, “Buick is an American auto brand which is characterized by its wide body and in the process of moving its backside will sway slightly”, allows Chinese readers to associate it with a swaying “hip”.

Both “Kleenex” and “Buick” are brand names. Facing a similar problem in the translation process, the translator chose different ways of dealing with it. The reason is that context can vary. A slight difference in the target readers’ cognitive

environment will result in different translations. Thus, the translator needs to be conscientious and careful at all times.

### 4.3 Social culture-specific items

The following is an example of the translation of social culture-specific items. Because culture is quite abstract, as discussed earlier, the analysis of the translation of the more concrete culture-specific items will be useful to see the relation between culture, communication and translation.

#### EXAMPLE - Chapter Four: My name

<p><b>Source Text</b></p>	<p>In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday morning when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.</p>
<p><b>Target Text</b></p>	<p>在英语里，我名字的意思是希望。在西班牙语里，它意味着太多的字母。它意味着哀伤，意味着等待。它就像数字九。一种泥泞的色彩。它是每到星期天早晨，爸爸刮胡子时播放的墨西哥唱片，呜咽似的歌。</p>
<p><b>Back translation of Target Text</b></p>	<p>In English, my name means hope. In Spanish, it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It's like the number nine. A muddy color. It's a Mexican record that is played on Sunday morning when Dad shaves his beard, songs like sobbing.</p>
<p><b>Footnote to "letter"</b></p>	<p>英文单词 letter 既可以作字母解，也可以作“信”解。太多的信，意味着等待。通过这层隐义，句子前后意义得以贯通。</p>
<p><b>Translation</b></p>	<p>The English word letter can be interpreted either as a letter of an alphabet or as a "letter". Too many letters means waiting. Through this</p>

	hidden meaning, the meaning of the sentence is coherent.
<b>Footnote to “nine”</b>	作者说，9 是 10 之前的那个数字，是变化之前的数字。她选用这个数字来传达一种等待的意味，因为“我”，是一个即将成年的孩子，在等待改变，等待成熟和绽放。
<b>Translation</b>	The author says that 9 is the number before 10, the number before the change. She chose this number to convey a sense of waiting, because "I" was a child turning into an adult waiting for a change, waiting for maturity and blooming.

In this vignette, Esperanza shares what her name means in English and in Spanish, and explains how the name was chosen for her by her parents and tells how much trouble everyone at school has pronouncing Esperanza. She even wanted to change her name. This vignette also narrates the story of the protagonist Esperanza’s great grandmother from whom Esperanza inherited the name “Esperanza”.

The reflection of "identity" is one of the author’s major concerns. The characters in the novel mostly have dual identity: they are descendants of Mexico immigrants, born in the United States, and have become American. Although very simple language is used in the novel, a variety of different cultures are interwoven in the narrative. The completely different meanings of the protagonist’s name “Esperanza” are a good example.

Her name in Spanish is “Esperanza” which can be translated as “hope” in English but because she thinks the many letters in this Spanish name are inconvenient and cause her much unfulfilled waiting that can be viewed as sadness. “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting.” For the translator, how he could reflect the difference would be a question that he needs to answer. Fortunately, he can stick to the original text without changing any information due to the quite straightforward and simple language of the sentences

and then his target Chinese readers may not have any problem in understanding the completely different connotations of the name “Esperanza”. He was very faithful to the original text here in this paragraph. We can discern his foreignization strategy from the above analysis and from the following analysis which is about the metaphor in this paragraph, “it is like the number nine”.

The protagonist thinks the number nine is not quite a two digit number, so it gives a sense of being incomplete and waiting for completeness and maturity. However, in Chinese culture people have a totally different idea about numbers. Among the numbers, nine means complete rather than incomplete. The number nine, being the highest of the single-digit numbers, was historically associated with the Emperor of China. Ancient Chinese Emperors loved the number nine and used it to show their great power, hope for longevity, and the eternal reign of their empires. For example, the Emperor's robes usually had nine dragons embroidered on them; the dragon, the totem of China, has nine children in Chinese mythology. Besides, nine has the same pronunciation as another character 久 (Pinyin: Jiu; meaning: everlasting). So the cultural meaning of everlasting and completeness linked to the number nine is rooted in the thoughts of every Chinese person. The translator Pan Pa is a Chinese translator who is very familiar with Chinese culture. However, he did not change the metaphor of the number nine according to the Chinese readers' cognition. He kept the original metaphor but added a footnote to explain it to the Chinese audience for fear of any misunderstanding. He takes into account both the target reader's different cognitive context and the cultural exchange between cultures.

In this chapter entitled “My Name”, the protagonist ends by expressing her wish that she would like to baptize herself under a new name, “I would like to baptize myself under a new name” (p. 160), a name which is “something like Zeezee the X will do”. Different from other Chicanas, Esperanza does not want to grow up in line with people's expectation of traditional Mexican women by saying that “I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window” (p. 160). First of all,

the word “baptize” is an important word in this sentence. Baptism is a Christian sacrament of admission and adoption into the Christian Church almost invariably with the use of water. Many Christians baptize their children soon after they are born when the priest uses Holy Water on the forehead of the children with and a personal, or Christian, name is given on this occasion of a Christian baptism. Here narrated in this chapter Esperanza does not know how to deal with her name which is inherited from her great-grandmother, because the cultural differences bring her a sense of identity loss. Influenced by the dominant American culture in the United States, she wanted to change her name to one which would fit in better with the dominant culture.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister’s name – Magdalena – which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

(p. 160)

The sense of ritual is important in the word “baptize” used in this paragraph. It is not only associated with the Christian religion, but with resistance, change and the new life of a Latina girl in America. However, the sense of ritual is lost in the Chinese version. The translator replaced the word “baptize” with “取” which means take or have (a name) and has nothing to do with religious ritual or with a sense of replacing Esperanza’s current identity as a relatively poor Latina girl. I think the translator wanted to use a strategy of domestication here, but it results in a loss of meaning. I would suggest an alternative translation “我想受洗重新取一个新的名字” (Back translation: I want to be baptized and get a new name. “受洗” is referring to be baptized or accepting baptism.). I think this translation could keep the sense of ritual of the word and provide a sense of exoticisation.

In an interview with SATZ in the year 1997, Cisneros expressed her purpose when writing the chapter “My name”. Cisneros wants the new name that is chosen by the

protagonist as “ZeeZee the X” to be seen as a metaphor for a new life and shaping the identity of a Latina, a feminist writer herself.

CISNEROS: *ZeeZee the X* came from my own love affair with the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I loved the X in Malcolm X and the idea of his choosing that as a name. I am and always have been enamored with exotic names and names that begin with letters of the alphabet like X or Y or Z, those strange letters. And so the name came out intuitively. But yes, you are right. I’ve had to be filling in that blank. And for Esperanza it’s so nice to have a name with a Z in it because it lends a sense of flair. There’s a zest to it. It sounds exotic and wild. So it’s not just X. There’s a wildness to Z.

(SATZ & Cisneros, 1997: 171 – 172)

From the above, we can see that Cisneros explained the reason why she chose a name such as *ZeeZee the X* for Esperanza to baptize herself with a new name. It is obviously not a common name in English and was invented by the writer. The translator translated *ZeeZee the X* into “泽泽 X” (Chinese Pinyin: zé zé X). A name with an alphabet letter in it is not common at all in Chinese naming culture. The translator kept the foreignness in order to convey the exotic cultural elements and provide an opportunity for cultural communication between source text readers and target text readers. Thus, we can see that in general, the translator adopted the strategy of foreignization in order to render something different to his target Chinese audience. However, with reference to the word “baptize” analysed above. I think the translator should have reconsidered his strategy in order to avoid the loss of foreign cultural elements.

#### **EXAMPLE** – Chapter Twenty One: Hips

**Source text:** You gotta get the rhythm, and Lucy begins to dance. She has the idea, though she’s having trouble keeping her end of the double-dutch steady.

It’s gotta be just so, I say. Not too fast and not too slow. Not too fast and not too slow.

We slow the double circles down to a certain speed so Rachel who has just

jumped in can practice shaking it.

I want to shake like hoochie-coochie, Lucy says. She is crazy.

I want to move like heebie-jeebie, I say picking up on the cue.

The word “Hoochie-coochie” reminds people of a musical band popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most popular song of the band is *Hoochie-coochie man* which is a blues standard written by Willie Dixon and first recorded by Muddy Waters in 1954. As a song of classic of Chicago blues, it represents hoodoo folk magic elements; but most importantly, the band members’ rocking and shaking actions while performing is the reason used by Lucy saying that “I want to shake like hoochie-coochie”. Many English-speaking readers still know this band and this song. As for the word “heebie-jeebie”, it is English slang for referring to a feeling of anxiety, apprehension or illness, which often involves a shaking movement. In the novel, the protagonist said “I want to move like heebie-jeebie”.

Now let us see how the translator dealt with these two words. He translated “hoochie-coochie” into “呼哧库哧” (Chinese pinyin: hū chī kù chī) which is an onomatopoeic word often used to describe the sound of crying or wheezing, such as the deep and intent sound of breathing after strenuous exercise. The following could account for the translator choosing this word. For one thing, it has a similar pronunciation to the original English word “hoochie-coochie”. Moreover, they both contain the content of moving, exercising and other similar actions. Although “呼哧库哧” may not express exactly the rocking and shaking action, it keeps the onomatopoeic function of the original word. Therefore, it is naturally reminiscent of an image of a girl in a rope skipping game – tired but excited. Additionally, the translator added a footnote to help his target readers have a better understanding. The footnote is: Hoochie-coochie, 上世纪六十年代中期流行的一支布鲁斯乐队, 其主打歌曲 hoochi-coochie men 是广泛流传的布鲁斯经典曲目。(Back translation: Hoochie-coochie, a popular blues band in the mid-60s of the last century; its main song *Hoochi-coochie Men* is a widespread classic blues song.) Obviously, here the

translator was not domesticating; the English words even appeared in this footnote even though most Chinese people have no idea of the English words. He was not just trying to get his Chinese readers to read his translation, but give them a chance to get to know the original text.

Regarding “heebie-jeebie”, the translator translated it as “希比吉比” (Chinese pinyin: xī bǐ jí bǐ). However, this expression does not make any sense. It is not an already existing expression but an expression that has been coined by the translator himself. His possible reason for using this word is to have a similar pronunciation and have the same function of rhyming as the original word “heebie-jeebie”. Regardless of the non-sense of the Chinese expression, it has a partial functional equivalence to the original text. At the same time, a footnote is added to the word to help the Chinese readers to have a better understanding. The footnote is: Heebie-jeebie, 一支摇滚乐队名。Heebie-jeebie, 俚语, 指起鸡皮疙瘩, 或头皮发麻的感觉。这支乐队演唱时, 伴唱动作常呈摇摆或颤抖状。(Back translation: Heebie-jeebie, a rock band name. Heebie-jeebie, slang, refers to the feeling of having goose pimples or scalp numbness. When the band is performing, musicians were often swinging or trembling.) Based on what I have found on the Internet, I can only get information that The Heebie-jeebies Band was formed in 2011 which is much later than the year of 1984 in which the first edition of *The House on Mango Street* was published. Let us leave the accuracy of the footnote regarding “heebie-jeebie” aside for the moment. What is important is that the translator carried out some research ahead of the translation process. He pays considerable attention to the cultural elements in the original text, and he hopes that the readers can have a greater chance of communicating with the original readers regarding interesting and valuable cultural elements.

Also in this chapter, he translated “double-dutch” (usually “double-Dutch”) which is a game with two skipping ropes into “荷兰绳” (Chinese Pinyin: hé lán shéng; meaning: the rope of Holland; 荷兰 is Holland and 绳 means rope). This translation, of course, will confuse the Chinese audience because “荷兰绳” is not a common expression in

Chinese and the meaning of the rope of Holland does not make any sense. Some readers may think “荷兰绳” is a kind of rope made in Holland which is a misunderstanding. The translator did not add any footnote or glossary to explain it. Pan Pa is the translator who is more familiar with Chinese culture because he is Chinese and he spends most of his time living in China. Nevertheless, because of his lack of relevant knowledge, he did not understand the significance of “double-dutch” and did not transfer the item to the target text in a way that allows the target reader to understand that it is a skipping game. Alternatively, he could have added a footnote, as he has done elsewhere in the text.

#### 4.4 Religious culture-specific items

Religion plays a very important role in people’s lives. Since Chinese people and people in America generally follow different religions, it is of value to look at the translation of the religious culture-specific items.

#### EXAMPLE - Chapter Six: Our Good Day

<b>Source Text</b>	But I like them. Their clothes are crooked and old. They are wearing shiny <u>Sunday shoes</u> without socks. It makes their bald ankles all red, but I like them.
<b>Target Text</b>	可是我喜欢她们。她们的衣服又皱又旧。她们穿着锃亮的 <u>礼拜天的鞋子</u> ，却没穿短袜。鞋子把她们的光脚踝擦得红红的。我喜欢她们。
<b>Back translation of Target Text</b>	But I like them. Their clothes are wrinkled and old. They are wearing shiny Sunday shoes without socks. The shoes rubbed their ankle red. I like them.

“Sunday shoes” is an expression in English referring to the best pair of shoes worn for church on Sundays. According to Christian culture in the English-speaking world, people wear their best shoes for church to show respect to God and to impress people as well. However, when this term is literally translated into Chinese without

paraphrasing or explaining, it is likely to cause confusion for Chinese readers. The reference to Sunday shoes, therefore, becomes a cultural element in the translation process that creates a challenge for the Chinese audience.

In China, Christianity is not so influential in China compared with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Daoism) which are the three major religions in China. Confucianism is the cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture; Taoism is the only indigenous Chinese religion; and Buddhism has had a great influence on Chinese society from the Han Dynasty through to modern China today, while Islam and Christianity are minority religions in China and have less influence on Chinese culture. Moreover, as the People’s Republic of China is a country under the government of the Communist Party of China, people mostly do not belong to any religion and do not believe in God.

Now let us look at the translator’s translation. In Chinese we have two ways of naming the each day of the week; for instance, Sunday can be both 星期天 (xīng qī tiān) and 礼拜天 (lǐ bài tiān). Both of them are general expressions used every day.

Monday	星期一 (xīng qī yī)	礼拜一 (lǐ bài yī)
Tuesday	星期二 (xīng qī èr)	礼拜二 (lǐ bài èr)
Wednesday	星期三 (xīng qī sān)	礼拜三 (lǐ bài sān)
Thursday	星期四 (xīng qī sì)	礼拜四 (lǐ bài sì)
Friday	星期五 (xīng qī wǔ)	礼拜五 (lǐ bài wǔ)
Saturday	星期六 (xīng qī liù)	礼拜六 (lǐ bài liù)
Sunday	星期天 (xīng qī tiān)	礼拜天 (lǐ bài tiān)

The only difference is that “星期天” is more formal than “礼拜天” and is more often used in written language. However, in this written translation, it seems likely that the translator deliberately chose to use “礼拜天” rather than choosing randomly.

In other parts of the novel, the specific week days are all translated into “星期” instead of “礼拜”. The use of “礼拜” in the sentence above is the only exception in this novel. It is therefore important to seek the reason from the original meanings of the two phrases. “星期” relates to the cycle of stars but “礼拜” connects with the religious services. So the translator chose the more appropriate expression shown in the segment above by investigating the derivations and analyzing the cultural elements carefully. In addition, the modifier “锃亮的” prior to the word “礼拜” which means *shiny* helps with the understanding of what “礼拜天的鞋子” is for Chinese readers so that they do not expend excessive effort in interpretation. At the same time, the Chinese readers also have a chance to learn and understand this specific foreign cultural element and realise and feel the poor living conditions of the little girl and her family.

Sandra Cisneros once said “if I were asked what it is I write about, I would have to say I write about those ghosts inside that haunt me”; these ghosts – of poverty, sexism and racism – populate *The House on Mango Street*. The poverty of Mexican American families is reflected in the novel from the little girl’s angle. In this segment, Esperanza’s friends’ crooked, old clothes and that pair of shiny Sunday shoes are in such sharp contrast that their difficult life is revealed. From the translator’s direct translation without any redundant explanation using footnotes or paraphrasing, the Chinese audience is able to experience Esperanza and her neighbours’ tough life in the immigrant community on Mango Street.

“According to Relevance Theory, communication not only requires encoding, transfer and decoding processes, but crucially involves inference in addition” (Gutt, 1998: 41). The inferential nature of communication means that the translator should infer the original author’s intention and transmit it to the target audience. Relevance Theory holds that the meaning of an utterance depends not only on semantic content, but more on context, technically, the contextual information. In other words, the same expression can have several different meanings in different situations. Gutt notes that

“the success of communication can depend very much on whether the audience uses the right, that is, the speaker-intended, context” (Gutt, 1998: 42). Therefore, because translation is a special and complex type of communication, the translator’s cognitive environment and the target audience’s cognitive environment should not be neglected.

In the example above, the translator sacrificed the use of the informal expression “礼拜天” but successfully brought the Chinese audience to the alien cultural context with a cognitive effect equivalent to that of the original text.

According to Relevance Theory, the pursuit of optimal relevance is the central factor that makes a communication successful. An utterance is optimally relevant (a) when it enables the audience to find without unnecessary effort the meaning intended by the communicator and (b) when that intended meaning is worth the audience’s effort, that is, when it provides adequate benefits to the audience (Gutt, 1998: 43).

#### 4.5 Linguistic culture-specific items

In literary works, linguistic aspects are undoubtedly significant. As for linguistic culture-specific items in the source text, two examples of metaphors and others of words and references containing cultural information are analysed and discussed.

#### EXAMPLE - Chapter Three: Boys & Girls

<b>TARGET TEXT</b>	Target Text	有一天，我会有一个我自己的、最好的朋友。一个我可以向她吐露秘密的朋友。一个不用我解释就能听懂我的笑话的朋友。在那之前，我将一直是一个红色的气球，一个被泊住的气球。
	Chinese Pinyin of the Target Text	Yǒu yī tiān, wǒ huì yǒu yī gè wǒ zì jǐ de、zuì hǎo de péng yǒu。 yī gè wǒ kě yǐ xiàng tā tǔ lù mì mì de péng yǒu。 yī gè bú yòng wǒ jiě shì jiù néng tīng dǒng wǒ de xiào huà de péng yǒu。 zài nà zhī qián, wǒ jiāng yī zhī shì yī gè hóng sè de qì qiú, yī gè bēi bō zhù de qì qiú。
	Literal translation of	One day, I will have a friend of my own and the best. A friend I can confide secrets to her. A friend who can

	the Target Text	understand my jokes without my explanation. Before that, I would have been a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor.	
	MESSAGE	STIMULUS	CONTEXT
	Same as those in the source text	<p>1) Same metaphor as the original. In other words, the translator did not change the metaphor.</p> <p>2) But a footnote was added by the translator to explain this metaphor to his Chinese readers.</p>	<p>1) Chinese readers are familiar with family responsibility.</p> <p>2) Chinese readers are not so familiar with Mexican immigrants' lives in the USA.</p>
<p><b>Footnote:</b> 在这个故事里，气球是向外逃逸的象征，而“被泊住”的状态暗示了某种束缚，比如她与蕾妮的关系意味着家庭责任。</p>			
<p><b>Translation of the footnote:</b> In this story, the balloon is a symbol of outward escape, and the state of being anchored implies some kind of bondage; for example, her relationship with Nenny means family responsibility.</p>			

In the novel, the protagonist Esperanza has two brothers and one younger sister. According to Mexican culture, she has the responsibility to take care of her younger sister Nenny. She is raised in accordance with men's expectations and the traditional concept that women should only stay at home to look after the family and manage the household. In this example above, the metaphor "a balloon tied to an anchor" is used to describe her state of having the duty to look after her younger sister, representing a constraint on her activities. From the later chapters, the readers would know that her dream is to have her own house which represents independence.

The example above is extracted from Chapter Three which is about Esperanza's brothers and her sister. The sentences prior to the example segment are "Nenny is too young to be my friend, she's just my sister and that was not my fault," "and since she comes right after me, she is my responsibility." (p. 157-158). With these narrations coming first, the Chinese readers will have no difficulty in interpreting the "red balloon" metaphor. And the description in the very sentence "tied to an anchor" is significant in assisting understanding of the metaphor. What is more, regarding the target readers' cognitive context, since China is a family-centred society Chinese contemporary readers are familiar with family responsibilities and have strong feelings about this aspect of family life. Before the implementation of the one-child policy in China in the 1980s, parents often had many children. Among them the older ones were required by the parents to look after the younger ones carefully. Accordingly, I believe the connotation of the metaphor concerning family responsibility is not difficult for the intended target Chinese readers to understand.

However, the translator added a footnote for the metaphor. Is this footnote unnecessary or not? In terms of the necessity of this footnote, I do believe that the translator has his own reason.

Firstly, the translator may have intended to make the theme of the novel clear to the target audience. One of the themes in this novel is the dream of a young girl wanting to have a house of her own and escape from the family's old life style like a balloon from an anchor line. The translator uses the footnote to reduce the interpreting effort regarding this important theme of the novel. In other words, the explanation in the footnote would guide the audience to search his memory and existing knowledge for the intended referent and hence considerably ease his processing load. To be consistent with the principle of relevance, an utterance must achieve adequate contextual effects without the hearer having to make an unjustifiable effort. The translator Pan Pa decided to make "family responsibility" clear in the footnote in order to help the Chinese readers with their understanding of the theme "dream"

without them having to spend too much effort in achieving corresponding cognitive effects. At the same time, from the footnote we can see that although the translator did say some words about family responsibility he did not refer to the responsibility of women, or women's social position. He leaves that to the readers and does not over-explain.

One of the themes of the novel is female life, especially Chicano women's family and social position. The writer Sandra Cisneros put these words on the front page: "A las Mujeres. To the Women". However, it is not in the translated Chinese version, either omitted deliberately by the editor or unintentionally by the translator. By contrast, a poem was added by the editor as a note preceding the translated text which does not have any gender orientation. The poem is *The Rain*<sup>5</sup> by Jorge Luis Borges in Chinese translated by Chen Dongbiao (陈东飏). The editor of the Chinese version gives the reason why that poem was chosen to be included at the beginning of the novel:

所以要用博尔赫斯的诗句来做题记，一是因为《芒果街》的西班牙语文学源流；二是因为诗人博尔赫斯同时也擅长制造诗歌与小说的混血文字，而《芒果街》正是一部具有诗歌属性的小说；更因为，那许多个短篇，如一霎一霎细雨，洗亮了读它的人的记忆庭园。

The reasons for using Borges's poem as a note preceding the main translation text are, firstly, because of the Spanish literary origin of *The House on Mango Street*; secondly, because the poet Borges is also good at making a mixed text of poetry and fiction and at the same time, *The House on Mango Street* is a poetic novel; what is more, those short chapters are like intermittent light rain polished the "memory gardens" of those who read it. (My translation)

From this explanatory paragraph, we get the idea that it is these three similarities between *The House on Mango Street* and *The Rain* that inspire the editor. These three similarities are: they have a common Spanish literary origin; they both have poetic attributes; more importantly, they both care about memory; one is about rain in the past and the other is about growth in the stories that once happened on Mango Street.

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<sup>5</sup> The poem *The Rain* is attached at the end of this report.

In fact, many Chinese readers only view the text as a beautifully written book rather than necessarily appreciating its deeper meaning. The exquisite language and delicate description of a little girl and her neighbours' lives are particularly valued by the Chinese readers. On the Douban<sup>6</sup> Website, a large portion of the short comments on the book are about its beautiful language and the description of youthful memories. As the translation was published in 2006, contemporary Chinese readers are more likely to seek sunlight and comfort from this novel instead of focusing on interpreting the heavier feminist issues.

Secondly, the footnote is intended to explain the meaning of the metaphor “a red balloon tied to an anchor”. This metaphor is not a typical metaphor in Chinese, although metaphors should be creative in any literary text. The translator decided not to replace it with a different one, for example a tied kite, which could be more familiar for Chinese readers, but kept this metaphor by translating it literally. The idea and method that used by the translator here is “foreignization” which has been explained by Venuti as “foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting cultural codes that prevail in the translating languages” (Venuti, 2008: 15). The foreign element was kept by the translator and this is very important for retaining the characteristics of the beautiful language in this novel. In the meantime, the Chinese readers are able to understand it without spending too much cognitive effort. So within Relevance Theory, we can say that the translator takes full account of the relation between the cognitive effort and contextual effects when choosing a strategy of foreignization.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the translator was constantly taking his target readers into account in the translation process. In terms of Relevance Theory, he took into account the receptor's cognitive context, and the effort required to infer the intended meaning and so forth.

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<sup>6</sup> Douban is the main review based social network site in China. It is a Chinese SNS community for users to share opinions and create content related to books, movies and music.

According to Relevance Theory, the meanings the communicator intends to communicate can be conveyed in two ways: through explicatures and implicatures. (Gutt, 1991/2000: 80). Implicatures are more context-based. In other words, the readers' cognitive environment matters when they read a text. In contrast to an American audience's sensitivity to issues relating to Mexican immigrants, race and feminist ideas, Chinese contemporary readers prefer to see this novel as a pure coming-of-age story which reminds them of their memories of the past.

Since a successful communication has to be consistent with the principle of relevance which is context-dependent, hearers' existing knowledge is very important to a communication. "Communication is not just a matter of finding the right stimulus for what one wants to say – it crucially involves determining what one can communicate to a given audience, and that will depend on their background knowledge" (Gutt, 1991/2000: 81). In terms of applying this idea to translation, a successful translation needs to follow the principle of relevance, which means that the translator not only needs to respect the original but also needs to take his target audience into account. As long as what has been translated by the translator is relevant to his target audience, the translation is meaningful.

**EXAMPLE** - Chapter Seven: Laughter

<b>Source Text</b>	Our laughter for example. Not <u>the shy ice cream bell's giggle</u> of Rachel and Lucy's family, but all of a sudden and surprised like a pile of dishes breaking. And other things I can't explain.
<b>Target Text</b>	比如我们的笑声。不是拉切尔和露西一家人那样 <u>羞涩的傻笑</u> ， <u>像冰淇淋铃声</u> 一样，而是突然的、吃惊的笑，像一叠盘子打碎了的感觉。还有其他一些我没法说清楚的地方。

<b>Back translation of Target Text</b>	For example our laughter. It's not the shy giggle of Rachel and Lucy's family, like the ice cream bell, but all of a sudden and surprised like a pile of dishes broke. There are other things I can't tell clearly.
<b>Footnote</b>	在美国，冰淇淋车几乎已经成为一种文化象征。销售员们会敲响铃铛在大街小巷招徕生意。
<b>Translation of the footnote</b>	In the United States, ice cream cars have almost become a cultural symbol. The salesmen will ring bells to attract business in the streets and alleyways.

In this paragraph, “ice cream bells” combined with the “shy giggle” is a very puzzling expression to Chinese readers. Although respectively what “ice cream” and “bells” mean is clear and definite, the cultural background and connotation of “ice cream bells” becomes a barrier that the Chinese audience needs to cross. The Chinese readers may have a question about why an ice cream might have a sound of ringing bells. It is not easy for them to imagine and get an idea that the bells’ sound is from the ice cream van with the purpose of wanting to prompt children and adults alike to come running. In the English speaking world, especially in the United States, people love ice cream very much. The salesmen who sell ice-cream traditionally play a very distinctive tune which is soft and simple to attract customers. Accordingly, in many places the sound of music from an ice-cream vehicle becomes the sound of summer and thereafter “ice cream bells” became a familiar expression with cultural elements to all British and American citizens and other people influenced by English culture.

The Chinese translator Pan Pa knew his target audience well when he was translating this paragraph. He literally translated the expression “ice cream bells” into the corresponding Chinese words and also chose to add a footnote to tell his Chinese

readers the cultural background behind it: In the United States, ice cream cars have almost become a cultural symbol. The salesmen will ring bells to attract business in the streets and alleyways. This footnote obviously shows the translator's consideration for his Chinese audience who are in a very different context. On the other hand, what should not be ignored is that this footnote does not only provide interesting background knowledge, but also promotes the exchange and communication of the two cultures by the introduction. However, the translator was very careful not to over explain by describing what the bells sound like, such as clear and melodious or long lasting and so on. He tried to find a good balance in translating this paragraph, neither absence or over translation. He left the task for the readers to explore how "ice cream bells" sound. The process of exploring it is interesting, because the Chinese readers need to uncover the meaning by reading the co-text and comparing laughter "all of a sudden and surprised like a pile of dishes breaking" with "the shy ice cream bell's giggle". He trusted his target audience who may have the ability to understand that the "ice cream bell" laughter should be a soft and shy giggle. The writer contrasts the shy giggle with the louder and more explosive laughter in Esperanza's own family.

This novel is narrated from a little girl's view and it is also categorised as a children's book. There are several chapters describing the children's life around Mango Street. Now let us look at another example;

**EXAMPLE** – Chapter Thirteen:

There was an old woman  
She had so many children  
She didn't know What to do

For many English readers, this title should be familiar, because it is from a very popular English language nursery rhyme. The whole text is:

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.

She had so many children, she didn't know what to do;  
She gave them some broth without any bread;  
Then whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.

In terms of the title here, the writer extracted the first part of the rhyme and “who lived in a shoe” was omitted. Even so, the English readers are able to link the title with the popular nursery rhyme which has been prevalent for around one hundred years. So the seemingly easy title here contains rich cultural elements. However, the target Chinese readers in a very different cognitive context do not have the ability to recognize this nursery rhyme. Because of the absence of relevant cultural background knowledge shared by the writer and his or her intended readers, especially between the original author and the target language audience, translators need to adopt effective approaches to solve this issue of “absence”. Accordingly, a footnote is necessary to provide supplementary information for the Chinese readers. Unfortunately the translator did not add a footnote or a glossary to explain the reference to his Chinese audience so that the meaningful culture behind it is lost.

In this nursery rhyme, because the rhyming words are “shoe” and “do”, the absence of the attributive “who lived in a shoe” in the title makes it not rhyme at all. Here is Pan Pa’s translation of this title: 有一个老女人,她有很多孩子,不知道怎么办. (Back translation: There was an old woman; she had so many children; didn’t know what to do.) On a linguistic level, the Chinese translation is very faithful to the original text. But from the above analysis we know the cultural meaning behind it is lost. Translation is a serious task which has a high requirement for the competence and capacity of the translator. That means the translator should recognize this nursery rhyme and provide an equivalent communication for the target text and the target readers compared with the original text and the original readers.

Sandra Cisneros is the daughter of Mexican immigrants, but she is also deeply influenced by British culture. From this novel, we can see the influence of British

children's literature and folk literature on her. For example, she mentions the story of *Alice in Wonderland* twice in this book. She says, "one day I memorized all of 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' because I wanted Ruthie to hear me" (p. 233). 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' is a poem from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass and What Alice Found There*. In addition, in the fifth chapter "The Cathy Queen of Cats", the name of her character, Cathy, the cats, and the Queen are also influenced by Carroll's work. The translator Pan Pa added footnotes to both these cultural elements to help his target Chinese readers to have a comprehensive understanding of the original text and the foreign culture and literature. The question here is why the translator did not add a footnote to the title which is taken from an old nursery rhyme? We can only guess the translator was not sufficiently familiar with English literature and that he did not recognise the nursery rhyme.

This research also selected segments for analysis in terms of the language of the source text, that is the non-standard English used by the author in both dialogues and narrative. Moreover, not only the words, but the use of tense and punctuation are often non-standard. The impression is given that this is a spoken story, not a written one. The story teller is a young child expressing her spontaneous thoughts as they occur without pausing to arrange them into carefully thought out sentences. More importantly, the English of the Chicano teenagers in the work is worth researching, and it can be regarded as a resistance and rebellion against mainstream American culture. The non-standard English includes ungrammatical use, some Spanish words inserted in sentences, extremely short expressions (for example, using "Me" to replace "As for me") and so on. Despite all of this, the stories are beautiful and evocative, even those that must have been painful.

Now let us see how the translator dealt with the non-standard language in this work. Several examples are presented and discussed below.

**EXAMPLE:**

You mother know you got shoes like that? Who give you those?

(p. 195)

I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life.

(p. 179)

Both sentences are ungrammatical. In standard English the first sentence should be “Does your mother know you have shoes like that? Who gave you those?” and the second should be “I know. She is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life”. What should not be ignored is that the translator translated the sentences into standard Chinese. From this point of view, the particular resistance and freshness against the dominant American culture brought by non-standard Chicano language is lost in the Chinese version.

In addition, several inserted Spanish expressions (although they are not categorized here in “Non-standard language”) also make the novel unique. Below are some examples:

I want to be Tahiti. Or *merengue*. Or electricity.

(p. 207)

Your *abuelito* is dead, Papa says early one morning in my room. *Está muerto*, and then as if he just heard the news himself, crumples like a coat and cries, my brave Papa cries.

(p. 215)

There are several other sentences with Spanish expressions inserted in the text that are not listed here. But what is important is that, in terms of those Spanish words, the translator translated them into Chinese and also added footnotes to let his Chinese readers know they were Spanish words in the original text.

In his blog on the Internet, the translator Pan Pa says in an article:

In the work there are many Spanish expressions. I tried but finally I gave up. I even wanted to replace the Spanish expressions in the original with one dialect of Chinese in the translation. But the Shanghai dialect and

Cantonese which I know do not have that aggressive feature which means they do not have distinctive characteristics representing a lower class in society. (My translation)

The translator did not keep the Spanish words as in the original or replace them with one of the Chinese dialects, for example Cantonese. He translated those words into standard Chinese with respective footnotes to remind his Chinese audience that they are Spanish in the original text. As we can see from his article in the blog quoted above, the reason he tried but finally gave up using one Chinese dialect to replace those Spanish words appeared in the English text is that there seems no suitable dialect of Chinese that can reflect the life of the lower class as Spanish does in American society in general. According to the universally accepted definition in the United States, Hispanic descent refers to those from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba and other Spanish speaking areas in central and Southern America continent.

China is not a nation of immigrants either historically or contemporarily, so to find a language within the nation which has a similar position to Spanish in the United States is almost impossible. It is therefore reasonable that the translator translated those Spanish words into Chinese together with footnotes.

To summarise, the translator first translated the non-standard English in this novel into standard Chinese for his target readers. He did not consider carefully the importance of non-standard English in this work. The related cultural value and conflict brought by the non-standard language is lost. Ideally, the translator needs to retain the features of the non-standard language as an important aspect of the novel.

Secondly, in terms of the Spanish expressions in the novel, the translator translated them into corresponding Chinese expressions with footnotes explaining that they are Spanish words in the original text. This action is reasonable as a result of the translator's careful consideration of the options available to him.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

This research draws on Relevance Theory as a theoretical tool to carry out an analysis of Sandra Cisneros's best known book *The House on Mango Street* and its translation into Chinese. Several segments from the text are examined to investigate the following main aspects: 1) The translation shifts in relation to the cultural elements in the Chinese version of *The House on Mango Street*; 2) The translator's methods in his translation of these cultural elements; and 3) The possible reasons for the shifts and methods used by the translator.

The author describes life on Mango Street from a young girl's perspective. Given the dual identities of the author (as a descendant of Mexican and as an American born in Chicago), and her depiction of the lives of Mexican immigrants, the novel is full of cultural elements. Eight segments were selected to be analysed, and these were categorised into five aspects in terms of different types of culture-specific items which reflect the main features of this novel: (1) ecological culture-specific items; (2) material culture-specific items; (3) social culture-specific items; (4) religious culture-specific items; and (5) linguistic culture-specific items.

The analysis of the examples shows that, in general, the translator shows considerable respect for the original text. What he has done is to keep closely to the original text to retain the important foreign cultural characteristics and added footnotes when he felt further explanations were necessary. The translator added 50 footnotes in total in his translation, and most of them are included in order to explain cultural references in the text. His comprehension of the intention of the original author and his interpretation of the text makes it possible for his target audience to move closer to the foreign cultural elements in this novel. However, there are some that he did not pay enough attention to, such as the translation of "baptize" and "double-dutch". The first may result from his wish to avoid religious references and connotations, while the second may be as a result of carelessness or lack of relevant knowledge and

investigation. Alternative translations were proposed based on both respecting the original text's significant cultural elements together with the target readers' cognitive context.

According to Gutt:

I distinguish direct from indirect translation, where direct translation corresponds to the idea that translation should convey the same meaning as the original, and indirect translation involves looser degrees of faithfulness. ... I end by showing that direct translation requires the receptors to familiarise themselves with the context envisaged for the original text.

(Gutt, 1991/2000: 75)

The translator Pan Pa not only made necessary supplementary information available to his audience in the footnotes, but he also did not over explain. For instance, in Example 1, in terms of the metaphor of “a red balloon tied to an anchor”, the translation neither replaces it with a metaphor with the same connotation which is more familiar to Chinese readers nor expresses frankly the deep implicit meaning of “lower family and social status of women”. He leaves the task for the Chinese readers to explore in the foreign cultural world. Thus, Pan Pa's version has a high requirement for his target readers to familiarise themselves with the context of the original text.

In terms of the strategies used in translating *The House on Mango Street*, the translator was inclined to adopt a foreignizing strategy which means he respected the foreign cultural elements and did not domesticate or erase the distinct cultural differences. Specifically, from the examples analysed above, we can conclude that the translator mainly focused on the translation method of fairly close translation with footnotes for supplementary explanations, such as the translation of the “Sunday shoes” in the sixth chapter, “ice cream bell” in the seventh chapter and others. Generally speaking, the translator took into account his target audience's cognitive context and their potential ability to explore what is different from their culture. Furthermore, he was more flexible in the choice of specific translation methods. For

instance, both “Kleenex” and “Buick” are brand names. Faced with a similar problem in the translation process, the translator chose different ways of dealing with them. He used the super-ordinate word “tissue” to replace “Kleenex” but the auto brand name “Buick” is retained. The reason is that the context of a communication can vary. A slight difference in the target readers’ cognitive environment will result in different translations. Thus, the translator needs to be aware and careful at all times.

According to Relevance Theory, translation as an instance of normal communication is viewed as primarily an inferential process: “The central task of the communication is to produce a stimulus – verbal or otherwise – from which the audience can infer what set of thoughts or assumptions the communicator intended to convey” (Gutt, 1991/2000: 76). The central concept is optimal relevance. This Chinese version of the novel *The House on Mango Street* was well received overall in China thanks to Pan Pa’s deliberate investigation into the cognitive contexts of both the original readers and the target readers.

When it comes to answering the question of how culture or cultural differences impact on communication, we can now say that in translation (a kind of communication), cultural background deeply influences a translator in the way he or she appreciates the context and environment of the text. A translator’s interpretation of the original text and his translation for his target readers are based on his cultural background. However, the factor that determines the communication between the original writer and the target audience is optimal relevance based on Relevance Theory. It is optimal relevance that functions as the principle of successful communication. In other words, the principle of successful translation is the transfer of optimal relevance from the original text to the target text, and the translator seeks the optimal relevance from the original text and retains it in his translated text. A translator’s task is to make sure that his translation is faithful enough to the original text in terms of optimal relevance, which offers the readers enough contextual effect so that the readers are not forced to spend unnecessary processing effort.

All in all, as long as the methods used by the translator result in *optimal relevance* for the target audience, the translation will be valuable in making a contribution to translation practice. What is more, because of the inferential nature of Relevance Theory, by assessing the target readers' cognitive context, there is a reasonable justification for introducing "shifts" in the target text when compared with the original text.

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The website address for the translator Pan Pa's Blog:

[http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/view\\_blog.asp?BlogName=pampa](http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/view_blog.asp?BlogName=pampa)

## Appendix

The poem entitled *The Rain* by Jorge Luis Borges in its Chinese version translated by Chen Dongbiao (陈东飏), the original Spanish version and its English version are presented in this “Appendix” part.

### 博尔赫斯《雨》

突然间黄昏变得明亮  
因为此刻正有细雨在落下  
或曾经落下。下雨  
无疑是在过去发生的一件事

谁听见雨落下 谁就回想起  
那个时候 幸福的命运向他呈现了  
一朵叫玫瑰的花  
和它奇妙的 鲜红的色彩。

这蒙住了窗玻璃的细雨  
必将在被遗弃的郊外  
在某个不复存在的庭院里洗亮

架上的黑葡萄。潮湿的暮色  
带给我一个声音 我渴望的声音  
我的父亲回来了 他没有死去。

### LA LLUVIA

Bruscamente la tarde se ha aclarado  
Porque ya cae la lluvia minuciosa.  
Cae o cayó La lluvia es una cosa  
Que sin duda sucede en el pasado.

Quien la oye caer ha recobrado  
El tiempo en que la suerte venturosa  
Le reveló una flor llamada rosa  
Y el curioso color del colorado.

Esta lluvia que ciega los cristales

Alegrar á en perdidos arrabales  
Las negras uvas de una parra en cierto

Patio que ya no existe. La mojada  
Tarde me trae la voz, la voz deseada,  
De mi padre que vuelve y que no ha muerto.

### **The Rain**

Jorge Luis Borges  
The afternoon grows light because at last  
Abruptly a minutely shredded rain  
Is falling, or it fell. For once again  
Rain is something happening in the past.  
Whoever hears it fall has brought to mind  
Time when by a sudden lucky chance  
A flower called "rose" was open to his glance  
And the curious color of the colored kind.  
This rain that blinds the windows with its mists  
Will gladden in suburbs no more to be found  
The black grapes on a vine there overhead  
In a certain patio that no longer exists.  
And the drenched afternoon brings back the sound  
How longed for, of my father's voice, not dead.