



Exploring Taiwanese EFL Learners’ Lexical Avoidance Strategies in Handling Chinese Culture-Loaded Words in Chinese-to-English Translation

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APA Citation: Wang, T. (2026). Exploring Taiwanese EFL learners' lexical avoidance strategies in handling Chinese culture-loaded words in Chinese-to-English translation. <i>LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network</i> , 19(2), 999-1016. https://doi.org/10.70730/QMLX6642	
Received 08/01/2026 Received in revised form 09/06/2026 Accepted 14/06/2026	ABSTRACT Culture-loaded words are common and often pose challenges for translators seeking equivalent terms. Observations in an undergraduate translation class indicated that Taiwanese EFL learners frequently employed lexical avoidance (Schachter, 1974) as a strategy. However, a deeper investigation is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of this behavior. Therefore, the objectives of this study are threefold: 1) to analyze the types and frequencies of lexical avoidance used by students, using Blum & Levenston's (1977) model as a framework, 2) to identify any new categories of lexical avoidance that may emerge, and 3) to offer suggestions for enhancing translation training in the undergraduate EFL context. The study involved 28 sophomore EFL students at a public university in northern Taiwan. Data were gathered from a translation assignment called “translation diagnosis”, which included 28 copies of written translation for analysis. The results showed that when translating Chinese culture-loaded terms—specifically those related to body expressions and other non-social or non-body-related concepts—over half of the students (67.8%) resorted to using synonyms or paraphrasing. A smaller proportion, ranging from 3.6% to 10.7% depending

	on the term, used total avoidance (i.e., leaving the term untranslated), a new category of avoidance strategy that was not previously recognized in the adopted model. Based on these findings, recommendations for improving translation training were offered. Keywords: avoidance strategy, lexical avoidance, text analysis, culture-loaded words
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Introduction

Translation has long been recognized as more than a linguistic exercise; it is fundamentally an act of cross-cultural communication (Nida, 2001). One of the most persistent challenges translators face, regardless of the language pair involved, is the handling of culture-loaded words—terms that carry meanings deeply rooted in the social, historical, and cultural context of a particular community (Liu, 2019). Such terms often lack direct equivalents in other languages, posing significant challenges for translators who must convey not only meaning but also cultural nuance.

The difficulty of translating culture-loaded words has been well documented in translation studies (Baker, 1992; Newmark, 1998; Sun, 2003). When such terms are encountered, translators must make strategic decisions: to paraphrase, to borrow, to substitute with a near-equivalent, or sometimes to omit the term entirely (Baker, 1992). These decisions are influenced by factors including the translator's proficiency, their familiarity with both source and target cultures, and the purpose of the translation itself. For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), these challenges are often magnified, as they may lack both the linguistic repertoire and the cultural knowledge necessary to navigate such complexities effectively (Brown, 1994).

In translation practice, culture-loaded words are common and can present significant challenges for translators in finding suitable equivalents between languages and cultures. Numerous scholarly definitions have been offered to describe the nature of these terms, but generally, they refer to words, idioms, or expressions that carry specific meanings unique to a particular culture. When translating from Chinese to English, it is often observed that Taiwanese EFL learners tend to select familiar or easily recalled words, rather than those that are contextually appropriate (which may be more difficult terms). This tendency can be viewed as a form of avoidance, as opting for simpler words or avoiding complex structures helps reduce the risk of errors in the translation process (Ellis, 1994). Building on this observation and following Blum & Levenston's (1977) epic model of lexical avoidance, this paper seeks to explore how Taiwanese EFL learners employ

lexical avoidance strategies in Chinese-to-English translation, specifically when dealing with culture-loaded terms such as body-related idiomatic expressions and words denoting social status in the translation of occupational titles.

Literature Review

Definition of Culture-loaded Words

In Chinese, the address “guzhang (姑丈; uncle)” indicates one’s father’s brother-in-law, i.e., the husband of one’s father’s sister. Whereas in English, the closest corresponding word of “guzhang (姑丈; uncle)” is only one word- “uncle” to call all the male relatives that enjoy the same status as one’s parents in the family, without being able to pinpoint precisely like Chinese on whose side this uncle could be. Besides, many other Chinese expressions prevalent in Taiwan, such as “sajiao (撒嬌; seeking comfort while acting cute)” and “guimao (龜毛; extremely picky and indecisive)” have no exact equivalent in English. Therefore, culture-loaded words are “words, phrases or idioms used to express something unique to a culture. These words reflect that in the long history, each ethnic group gradually accumulates a unique way of activity different from other ethnic groups” (Liu, 2019, p. 841).

Sun (2003) holds that words that have rich cultural connotations can be considered culture-loaded words to include slang, dialects, adapts, and idioms. Culture-loaded words are also known as vocabulary vacancies, a term referring to lexical gaps where the source language contains culturally specific information for which no corresponding expression exists in the target language (Yu, 2018).

For translation scholars, however, culture-loaded words do not always suggest the missing puzzles between cultures. Rather, Baker (1992) sees culture-loaded words as words in the source text that deliver entirely new concepts to the target culture. No matter abstract or concrete, the concepts delivered are culture-embedded, signaling different degrees of cultural connotations to be decoded and interpreted. Newmark (1998) sees culture-loaded words as words, “be it single-unit lexemes, phrases, or collocations that are particularly tied to the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its expression” (cited in Lin & Qin, 2018, p. 64). Nida (2001) believes that for translators, words are a carrier of culture and that mastering two cultures is even more important than mastering two languages. In short, culturally-loaded words are culturally specific.

Classification of Chinese Culture-loaded Words

Given the abovementioned perspectives, different scholars approached Chinese culture-loaded words with different categorizations. For example, Chen and Tan (1993) divided these words into as many as 24 categories to include art, plant, animal, figure, military, health, natural phenomena, geography, traffic, number, etc. Lian (1997) grouped these words into as many as 26 types to include color, animal, plant, euphemism taboos, proverbs, idioms, allusions, etc. Wang (2002) narrowed down these categorizations and made a more concrete yet epic classification into eight categories to cover animal (e.g., *haiqunzhima* 害群之馬; black sheep), color (e.g., *baohong* 爆紅; to go viral), food (e.g., *yuebing* 月餅; mooncake), human body (e.g., *xierongting* 洗耳恭聽; all ears), legends and myth (e.g., *nianshou* 年獸; an ancient Chinese monster that appears only at the turn of the year), social life (e.g., words marking one's social status and occupation like *wulai* 無賴; rascal), politics (e.g., *lixiangzhuyi* 理想主義; idealism) and other words (e.g., *diepoyanjing* 跌破眼鏡; to knock one's socks off), whose classification is adopted in the present study.

Wang's (2002) framework was selected for this study for three reasons. First, unlike Chen and Tan's (1993) 24 categories or Lian's (1997) 26 types, Wang's eight-category model offers a more manageable and operationally practical classification for analyzing student translations within the scope of a single study. Second, Wang's categories are mutually exclusive and clearly defined, reducing ambiguity in coding culture-loaded terms. Third, the framework has been widely adopted in Chinese-English translation research, facilitating comparison with previous studies.

It is worth noting that among these categories, the classification of certain terms may not be immediately apparent to readers unfamiliar with Chinese. For instance, the term *baohong* (爆紅; to go viral) is categorized under "color" because the character 紅 (*hóng*) literally means "red" in Chinese. The expression draws on the cultural association of red with popularity and success, hence the classification under color-related culture-loaded words.

Definition of Avoidance and Its Classification

Avoidance is a common phenomenon observed among EFL learners, who often choose simpler words, phrases, or sentence structures in translation to facilitate smooth communication within a short time frame while minimizing the risk of errors (Ellis, 1994). Although avoidance may reduce the likelihood of mistakes, it can also have negative consequences,

such as preventing learners from acquiring and mastering new vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures in the target language (Blum & Levenston, 1977; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993).

The term “avoidance”, first introduced by Schachter in 1974, has since been widely discussed and developed. Schachter outlined four key characteristics of avoidance: 1) the learner is aware of a particular structure, 2) the learner is uncertain about how to use the structure, 3) the learner recognizes the need to use the structure in a specific context, and 4) the learner chooses an alternative structure. Since then, avoidance has been expanded to encompass various forms, including lexical avoidance, syntactic avoidance, phonological avoidance, and topic avoidance (Blum & Levenston, 1977; Brown, 1994; Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Dulay, 1982; Ellis, 1994; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Li, 1996; Tarone, 1980, 1981). However, there is no consensus in the academic community regarding the precise situations that qualify as avoidance, given its complex nature (Chen, 2022).

This study, therefore, focuses specifically on one aspect of avoidance—lexical avoidance—by adopting Blum & Levenston's (1977) balanced and epic model of classification, which is particularly concerned with lexical avoidance in written language, especially in translation. Their model identifies five categories of lexical avoidance used by EFL learners during translation: 1) superordinate, 2) approximation, 3) synonym, 4) transfer, and 5) paraphrase. The superordinate category involves replacing a specific term with a more general concept, such as substituting “professor” with “teacher” or “physician” with “doctor”. The approximation category involves using a word that closely resembles the unknown term, such as replacing “handcuffs” with “chain”. The synonym category includes using words that convey the same meaning without altering the original message, like “lawyer” and “attorney”. Transfer refers to the influence of the mother tongue, as seen when Chinese-speaking EFL learners translate “huangsexiaohua” (黃色笑話; “dirty jokes”) as “yellow jokes”. Finally, paraphrase involves rephrasing the original term, as in replacing “fever” with “elevated temperature” or “descendant” with “children and grandchildren”.

Given the existing literature and varying viewpoints on lexical avoidance, this study argues that previous research could have drawn more conclusive insights, particularly regarding the treatment of culture-loaded words in Chinese-to-English translation within the undergraduate EFL classroom context. Furthermore, this study hypothesizes that, by applying the five existing categories of lexical avoidance, one or more additional categories might emerge that have not been accounted for in the current model. In light of this, the following three research questions are proposed for further investigation:

1) Based on Blum & Levenston's five categories on lexical avoidance, which of them was most frequently used, and what were the categorical proportions observed in treating Chinese culture-loaded words by EFL learners?

2) In addition to the existing five categories on lexical avoidance, were there new categories observed?

3) What training suggestions can be given to translation teachers based on the findings?

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to collecting and analyzing 28 copies of in-class assignment termed translation diagnosis from 28 sophomore EFL students at a public university in northern Taiwan to investigate how students used lexical avoidance in the handling of Chinese culture-loaded words in the context of Chinese-to-English translation.

Respondents

This study was conducted with 28 Chinese-speaking Taiwanese sophomore EFL students enrolled in the compulsory one-semester module Introduction to Chinese-to-English Translation. All participants were English majors. The department offers four specialization tracks—literature, linguistics and language teaching, cross-disciplinary applications, and translation and interpreting—and students are required to select two of these tracks as they move onto their third and fourth year to fulfill their degree requirements. As such, participants' academic backgrounds varied depending on their chosen tracks before they graduate. Prior to this course, they had completed a semester of Introduction to English-to-Chinese Translation as a prerequisite, also a compulsory module taken in the first semester. This prerequisite module included one session (two class hours) dedicated to exploring cultural differences between English and Chinese, with a focus on culture-loaded words. As a result, the students had acquired a foundational understanding of culture-loaded terms, as well as basic translation practices and skills, before proceeding to Introduction to Chinese-to-English Translation in the second semester.

Data Collection

This study used a Chinese article on the social issue of the “divorce boom in Asia” as the source text. The excerpt, adapted to contain 212 Chinese characters, was taken from a bilingual digest of an article in *Times*

magazine, with the English translation provided as a reference. In this article, seven culture-loaded words were identified using Wang's categorization, and these terms were carefully analyzed in a later stage of the study. Students were asked to translate this text into English as the target text for data collection within 50 minutes during the first class session of the module. This in-class assignment, referred to as a "translation diagnosis", was designed to help the instructor identify potential translation challenges faced by students at the start of the semester. The results would allow for adjustments in the training goals and weekly syllabus content as needed throughout the semester. During the translation task, students were permitted to consult relevant information, either online or offline, as long as they completed the task within the allotted time.

Data Analysis

In the data collection material (i.e., source text), Wang's categorization was employed to identify culture-loaded terms, which were classified into three types: 1) words denoting social status, such as occupational titles, 2) terms related to the human body, and 3) other words, including Chinese idiomatic expressions not connected to social life or the human body. While one might argue that the terms in the first category are simply general proper nouns, this paper contends that, in the context of translating occupational titles, they differ from regular proper nouns. They often carry additional social and cultural connotations specific to the subject matter of the source text, which are not typically present in everyday usage. In other words, alongside Wang's categorization, the translation process requires students to consider deeper implications beyond the literal meaning of the words to accurately interpret these social and cultural nuances (see Table 1 for further details). For the data analysis, this study primarily utilized Blum and Levenston's classification of lexical avoidance, whose definitions were outlined earlier in the theoretical background section, to examine the proportional distribution of culture-loaded terms in the 28 target text copies, as handled by EFL learners.

Table 1

Categorization of Culture-loaded Words

Types of culture-loaded words	Pinyin of source text terms	Referenced translation
1. Social life - words denoting social status	Guwen (顧問)	Counselor
	Lushi (律師)	Lawyer

Wang (2026), pp. 999-1016		
	Chubanshan (出版商)	Publisher
	Liangxingguanxizhuanjia (兩性關係專家)	Relationship pundit
2. Human body	Zhuixincigu (椎心刺骨)	Excruciatingly painful
3. Other words - dictions not related to social life and human body	Youliketu (有利可圖)	Lucrative
	Dianfan (典範)	Role model

Results and Discussion

This section describes categorical proportions of lexical avoidance in handling Chinese culture-loaded words performed by 28 EFL learners. In the examples provided to illustrate categorical proportions of lexical avoidance and new categories observed, the participants are referred to as S1 to S28 (S is short for student). Overall, approximation and transfer were not observed among the five types of lexical avoidance defined. However, the use of superordinate, synonym, and paraphrase was present, together with the observation of two new categories- total avoidance and coining terms. Therefore, the following sections will report specific findings on these observed categories.

Superordinate as Lexical Avoidance Strategy

Using superordinates as a lexical avoidance strategy was observed only in translating the Chinese term dianfan (典範; role model). Precisely, 16 out of 28 EFL learners (57.1%) opted for the term “model” instead of “role model” to translate dianfan. When people use dianfan in Chinese, it refers to a code of conduct that brings good influence and is therefore worthy of learning by others. In this regard, the word model can be thought of as a more general or superordinate concept to replace its subordinate concept- role model.

Synonym as Lexical Avoidance Strategy

Using synonyms as a lexical avoidance strategy was observed in translating the following Chinese terms as showcased in Table 2: guwen (顧問; counselor), lushi (律師; lawyer), liangxingguanxizhuanjia (兩性關係專家; relationship pundit), youliketu (有利可圖; lucrative), and dianfan (典範; role model). In the translation of guwen, 6 out of 28 EFL learners (21.4%) used the exact wording- counselor as indicated in the referenced translation, 22 out of 28 EFL learners (78.6%) opted for synonyms such as consultant

(i.e., 21 out of 28, 75%) and advisor (i.e., 1 out of 28, 3.6%) to refer to the term. In the translation of *lushi*, 27 out of 28 EFL learners (96.4%) used the exact wording- lawyer as indicated in the referenced translation, and only one of them (3.6%) chose the synonym- attorney for translation. In the translation of *liangxingguanxizhuanjia*, none of them used the exact wording-relationship pundit as indicated in the referenced translation; however, 7 out of 28 EFL learners (25%) opted for synonyms such as relationship expert (5 out of 28, 17.8%), relationship coach (1 out of 28, 3.6%), and gender expert (1 out of 28, 3.6%) for translation. In the translation of *youliketu*, only three of them (10.7%) used the exact wording- lucrative as indicated in the referenced translation. 22 of them (78.6%) chose to use synonyms such as benefit (6 out of 28, 21.4%), profitable (14 out of 28, 50%), and profit (2 out of 28, 7.2%) for translation, irrespective of the grammatical categories of the words. In the translation of *dianfan*, only one of them (3.6%) used the exact wording- role model as indicated in the referenced translation, while eight of them (28.6%) chose the synonym- example for translation.

Table 2

Categorical Proportions of Using Synonyms as Lexical Avoidance Strategy

Pinyin of culture-loaded words	Categorical proportions	Referenced translation
Guwen	78.6%	Counselor
Lushi	3.6%	Lawyer
Liangxingguanxizhuanjia	25%	Relationship pundit
Youliketu	78.6%	Lucrative
Dianfan	28.6%	Role model

Paraphrase as Lexical Avoidance Strategy

Using paraphrase as a lexical avoidance strategy was observed only in the translation of *zhuixincigu* (椎心刺骨; excruciatingly painful) as displayed in Table 3. In particular, 27 out of 28 EFL learners (96.4%) opted for paraphrase to address this body-related idiomatic term with a variety of alternative expressions. Yet, none of them used the exact wording- excruciatingly painful, as indicated in the referenced translation. In the source text, the term *zhuixincigu* is utilized to describe the degree of pain that divorce could bring to people. So, for example, in addressing such a culture-loaded word, S3 used “divorce is a burning pain” to refer to the idea. S4 used “the pain is going to kill them” to refer to the degree of pain. S6 used “divorce

is a heartbroken pain”. S8 used “divorce is an unaffordable pain”. S10 used “divorce is such a huge pain”. S11 used “divorce is a heart-breaking pain”. S13 used “piercing pain(s)”. S14 used “divorce is a bitter pain”. S15 used “divorce is an agonizing pain”. More specific paraphrased expressions can be seen in the following table for illustration.

Table 3

Specific Expressions of Using Paraphrase as Lexical Avoidance Strategy

Pinyin	Student	Specific paraphrased expressions
Zhuixincigu	S1	an excruciating pain through the heart
	S2	is an anguish
	S3	is a burning pain
	S4	is going to kill them
	S5	is an extreme pain
	S6	is a heartbroken pain
	S7	is a harsh pain
	S8	is an unaffordable pain
	S9	is a deep pain
	S10	is such a huge pain
	S11	is a heart-breaking pain
	S12	a heartbroken feeling
	S13	piercing pain(s)
	S14	is a bitter pain
	S15	is an agonizing pain
	S16	is a heart-soring pain
	S17	is a piercing pain
	S18	is heart-breaking
	S19	is an unbearable pain
	S20	a heart-stabbing pain
	S21	an axe that chops at their hearts
	S23	a pain in the spine
	S24	a pain like an axe that chops at heart
	S25	the pain that can chill the bone
	S26	is heart-breaking
	S27	a pain in the heart
	S28	is a piercing pain

Total Avoidance as a New Category Observed

Total avoidance was observed in the translation of the following Chinese terms as shown in Table 4: chubanshang (出版商; publisher), youliketu (有利可圖; lucrative), zhuixincigu (椎心刺骨; excruciatingly painful), and dianfan (典範; role model). Precisely, in the translation of

chubanshang, only one EFL learner (3.6%) avoided translating the term totally, while other 27 EFL learners (96.4%) used the exact wording-publisher as indicated in the referenced translation. In the translation of youliketu, three EFL learners (10.7%) avoided translating the term totally, and only one EFL learner (3.6%) avoided translating zhuixincigu. In the translation of dianfan, three EFL learners (10.7%) avoided translating the term. In the present study, total avoidance could be considered a new category of lexical avoidance not included in Blum & Levenston's classification, though this comes at the cost of losing some meaning from the original text. The reasons for why these terms were avoided during the translation process by a small group of EFL learners are unclear, but this presents an opportunity for further exploration in future studies.

Table 4

Categorical Proportions of Total Avoidance

Pinyin of culture-loaded words	Categorical proportions	Referenced translation
Chubanshang	3.6%	Publisher
Youliketu	10.7%	Lucrative
Zhuixincigu	3.6%	Excruciatingly painful
Dianfan	10.7%	Role model

Coining Terms as a New Category Observed

Following the observation of total avoidance, coining terms was also spotted as a new category. It is interesting to point out that coining terms emerged exclusively in the translation of the title of the occupation liangxingguanxizhuanjia (兩性關係專家; relationship pundit). Precisely, 21 out of 28 EFL learners (75%) fell into this category, with various translated versions, and some were even distorted. None of the 28 EFL learners used the exact wording- relationship pundit as indicated in the referenced translation. For example, S1 coined the term “gender relation experts”, which is nowhere to be found online or offline in English dictionaries. S2 also coined the term “experts of gender relations” for translation. S10 coined the term “experts of gender relationship”. S13 coined the term “experts in gender relationships”. S15 coined the term “gender relations specialists” for translation. S25 coined the term “bisexual relationship masters”, with distortion, for translation. S27 also coined the term “professors of gender relations”, with warping, for translation. More specific translated versions of the term are presented in Table 5.

In this category- coining terms, it can be seen from Table 5 that some EFL learners exhibited distortion by adopting words inappropriate to the context. For example, the word “gender” and the word “bisexual” can be traced back to the direct translation of the Chinese word “liangxing (兩性)”, but not suitable to the context and, secondly, a lack of thorough understanding of the correlation between the term and the occupation liangxingguanxizhuanjia, whose strength lies in dealing with relationship issues by offering counseling services. Therefore, though students may be aware of the existence of such profession, without a comprehensive understanding of this profession in society, most students were vulnerable to coining terms and even distortion because of misinterpretation of the term, which indeed has its social and cultural connotations embedded. Also, it can be pointed out that in translating the term liangxingguanxizhuanjia, lexical avoidance with the use of easier words to form coined terms indeed “backfired” (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993) in the sense that these coined terms were nowhere to be found and they increased the likelihood of making translation mistakes.

The identification of coined terms in this study was based on dictionary verification, an objective and replicable criterion that ensures consistency in categorization. Established English dictionaries, both print and online (more timely as well), are compiled through rigorous editorial processes that document widely accepted usage across diverse communicative contexts. As such, terms absent from these references can reasonably be considered non-standard or coined, providing a reliable benchmark for identifying lexical avoidance in translation research. That said, consulting native English speakers could serve as an additional layer of validation, potentially enriching the findings by assessing the acceptability and comprehensibility of coined terms in authentic communicative contexts.

Table 5

Specific Versions of Coining Terms

Pinyin	Student	Specific translated versions
Liangxingguanxizhuanjia	S1	gender relation experts
	S2	experts of gender relations
	S3	experts of gender relations
	S4	experts in sexual relations
	S7	sexual relation professional
	S8	experts of bisexual relationship
	S10	experts of gender relationship
	S11	sex and relationship experts
	S13	experts in gender relationships
	S14	gender relation experts

S15	gender relations specialists
S16	sexual experts
S18	gender relationship experts
S19	gender relations specialists
S20	experts of gender relations
S22	experts at sexual relations
S23	gender relations specialists
S24	experts of gender relationship
S25	bisexual relationship masters
S27	professors of gender relation
S28	gender relation experts

Overall, in this study, it was observed that using synonyms as a lexical avoidance strategy was very common, perhaps the most frequent one as well, in translating Chinese occupational titles such as *guwen*, *lushi*, *liangxingguanxizhuanjia* and other Chinese idiomatic dictions such as *youliket* and *dianfan*. Total avoidance was also a notable strategy to resort to as four out of the seven culture-loaded words investigated in the present study, such as *chubanshan*, *youliket*, *zhuixincigu*, *dianfan* incurred total avoidance, although total avoidance was only employed by a small proportion of EFL learners.

To consolidate the above findings, Table 6 provides a comprehensive overview of the avoidance strategies observed for each culture-loaded word examined in this study. The table also reports how frequently the exact wording from the referenced translation was used, offering a clearer picture of EFL learners' lexical choices when handling culture-loaded terms in Chinese-to-English translation.

Table 6

Summary of Avoidance Strategies and Reference Translation Usage

Culture-loaded word	Type	Ref.	Syn.	Sup.	Para.	T.Av.	Coin.
Guwen (顧問)	Social	21.4%	78.6%	-	-	-	-
Lushi (律師)	Social	96.4%	3.6%	-	-	-	-
Chubanshang (出版商)	Social	96.4%	-	-	-	3.6%	-
Liangxingguanxi-zhuanjia (兩性關係專家)	Social	0%	25%	-	-	-	75%
Zhuixincigu (椎心刺骨)	Body	0%	-	-	96.4%	3.6%	-
Youliketu (有利可圖)	Other	10.7%	78.6%	-	-	10.7%	-

Dianfan (典範)	Other	3.6%	28.6%	57.1%	-	10.7%	-
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Note. Ref. = exact reference translation used; Syn. = synonym; Sup. = superordinate; Para. = paraphrase; T.Av. = total avoidance; Coin. = coining terms; "-" = strategy not observed.

Conclusion

This section mainly reiterates and summarizes the findings of the study by answering the three research questions proposed: 1) Based on Blum & Levenston's five categories on lexical avoidance, which of them was most frequently used, and what were the categorical proportions observed in treating culture-loaded words by EFL learners? 2) In addition to the existing five categories on lexical avoidance, were there new categories observed? 3) What training suggestions can be given to translation teachers based on the findings? Consequently, this study will also provide suggestions for future research.

In response to the first research question, this study found that using synonyms is the most frequently utilized lexical avoidance strategy performed by EFL learners, as can be seen in the handling of the first and the third type of culture-loaded words *guwen* (顧問; counselor) (78.6%), *youliketu* (有利可圖; lucrative) (78.6%), *dianfan* (典範; role model) (28.6%), *liangxingguanxizhuanjia* (兩性關係專家; relationship pundit) (25%), and *lushi* (律師; lawyer) (3.6%). The use of superordinates, as well as the use of paraphrase as lexical avoidance strategies, were both less frequent compared to the use of synonyms; the former occurred only in the case of translating the third type of culture-loaded word *dianfan* (16 out of 28 EFL learners, 57.1%), whilst the latter occurred only in the case of translating the second type of culture-loaded word *zhuixincigu* (27 out of 28 EFL learners, 96.4%). The use of approximation and the use of transfer as lexical avoidance strategies were not observed at all and were, therefore, not discussed in the present study.

In response to the second research question, a noteworthy finding lay in the discovery of two categories absent in Blum & Levenston's classification, namely, total avoidance and coining terms, which also answered the hypothesis with such discovery. Total avoidance refers to and is defined by the present study as not translating the target culture-loaded term at all. Coining terms refers to and is defined by the present study as producing terms nowhere to be found, either online or offline, in the English dictionaries and could experience distortions in meaning at times, as can be seen in several translated versions of *liangxingguanxizhuanjia* showcased in Table 5. This study also holds that coining terms as a new category observed echoes the notion of "backfire" with the use of lexical avoidance in learning a foreign language by Laufer & Eliasson (1993) that students missed the opportunity

of learning new words or mastering complicated words to produce appropriate translated terms in the given translation context.

In response to the third research question, considering the observation of the frequent use of synonyms and coining terms in treating culture-loaded words performed by EFL learners, this study would suggest that for translation teachers, in addition to the teaching of translation skills, expanding students' bilingual (i.e., Chinese and English) vocabulary bank and background knowledge of the topic or of given terminologies to be discussed and translated in class is essential to make sure the likelihood of misinterpretation can be kept to the minimum. Following the discovery, another suggestion would be teaching translation skills such as rearranging word order and changing grammatical categories of the terms is also necessary to deal with difficulties encountered at lexical level while possibly reducing the likelihood of lexical avoidance on the part of EFL learners.

Lastly, as mentioned earlier, why total avoidance occurred in treating some culture-loaded terms performed by a small proportion of EFL learners remains unknown but provides room for further investigation in future research. Admittedly, follow-up interviews with participants could have provided immediate insights into why total avoidance occurred, particularly given the absence of standardized proficiency measures in this study. Such interviews may have revealed whether total avoidance was related to participants' English proficiency levels or other factors such as time constraints or unfamiliarity with the source text content. In other words, this study would encourage future studies to probe further into the reasons behind total avoidance performed by individual EFL learners by adopting a qualitative approach in the form of follow-up interviews and requesting them to offer corresponding terms as a remedy for total avoidance. With further research, there will be a more comprehensive understanding of employing lexical avoidance strategies by EFL learners and thus yield more guidance to translator training at the undergraduate level.

Limitations and Suggestions

Like all research, this study also has some limitations that should be considered. First, the participants were 28 second-year English major students from a public university in northern Taiwan. Although this sample size is acceptable for an exploratory analysis focusing on the written text of translations, it might weaken the generalizability of its results to other EFL communities. Students of different institutions, regions or countries might not display the same lexical avoidance patterns because curriculum designs and instructional practices as well as English exposure are different. The sample could be extended in future studies to participants from other

schools or the strategies for avoidance compared among various EFL contexts.

Second, although all students studied a required translation course and had basic knowledge of culture-loaded terms, their English was not assessed separately by standardized exams. Differences between individuals in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and productive language abilities may lead to variation in the types and usage of avoidance strategies. It remains for future research to include English proficiency measures such as TOEFL, IELTS or CEFR-aligned assessments in order to investigate whether the avoidance strategies would be different across proficiency levels.

Third, this research examined one translation task concerning a single text genre—a bilingual digest of an article in a news magazine on a social issue. Various genres (e.g., literary texts, technical writings and promotional materials) can include different types of culture-loaded words with possible divergences in the avoidance strategies. Future studies with multiple text types would yield a fuller picture of how EFL learners cope with culture-loaded terms in different translation environments.

Despite these limitations, the present work contributes to translation pedagogy and second language acquisition research. It provides empirical evidence of how EFL learners deal with culture-loaded vocabulary in Chinese-to-English translation. The identification of two new types of avoidance that have gone previously unidentified, namely total avoidance and coining terms, represents an extension to the seminal model by Blum & Levenston (1977) and gives a more nuanced framework for future investigation. In addition, pedagogical suggestions stemming from the findings provide practical guidance for translation teachers who are seeking to address lexical avoidance at the undergraduate EFL classes. As such, this study provides a foundation for future work and facilitates the discussion on translator training in EFL contexts.

Acknowledgements

My special thanks go to students who took part in my translation course and those who provided their insights over the course of my research.

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