

Mediating Cultures: a study of translation strategies in the french translation of Ashok Ferry’s “The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons”

Samanthi Jayawardena

University of Kelaniya, Department of Modern Languages
Kelaniya, Sri Lanka
Email: samanthij@kln.ac.lk
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1971-4850>

Research interests: translation strategies, translating culture-related items, translating humour in dubbed animated films

Abstract. Translating a source text brings out various challenges. The translators constantly seek strategies to overcome the constraints they encounter. The present study aims to identify obstacles and analyse the strategies employed to address them. The chosen text, Ashok Ferry’s *The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons* (2016), is complex, given that it’s written in Sri Lankan English and it’s set in a culturally rich context. It was translated into French in 2018. Following Mona Baker’s (2011) common types of non-lexical equivalence at the word level, the study identifies forty-two challenging terms. To identify and analyse the strategies employed in the source text, the study draws on Baker’s (2018) explanation of the strategies used by professional translators. The study identifies five strategies for translating different lexical types. The same strategy is used for multiple lexical types, but its effectiveness varies. Though limitations are highlighted in the study, the strategies prove necessary for negotiating cultural differences.

Keywords: challenges; culture; loan words; meaning; Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Every source text presents countless challenges for its translator(s). The nature of these difficulties varies depending on the text, the author, the language, the culture and sometimes the publisher. The translator’s understanding of the source text is crucial to translating it into another language.

Baker (2018, p. 16) states that one of the main challenges that translators face is to understand the meanings of words and utterances as accurately as possible before transferring them into the target language (TL). She highlights the importance of understanding the propositional, expressive, presupposed, and evoked meanings of words (Cruse, 1986, cited by Baker, 2018, p. 12). Though propositional meaning is sometimes

Submitted 02 June 2025 / Accepted 14 October 2025

Iteikta 2025 06 02 / Priimta 2025 10 14

Copyright © 2026 Samanthi Jayawardena. Published by Vilnius University Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY 4.0, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original author and source are credited.

conveyed by the lexical equivalent, the translator may need to provide an explanation to describe the expressive meaning, which is unfamiliar to the TL reader.

Difficulties often arise when equivalence at the lexical level is not found in the TL. The translators are required to look for strategies. According to Chesterman (2017), strategies are also called "procedures", "techniques of adjustment", "transformations", and "transfer operations". Lörcher describes strategies as "a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language into another" (cited by Kearns, 2009, p. 283). As described, these strategies focus on individual text segments rather than the source text (ST) as a whole. The term used in the present study, "strategies", is the most widely used to refer to the mental operations performed by translators, though its use is also often criticised (Bardaji, 2009, p. 165).

Linguistic and extralinguistic elements create difficulties for translators. Translating culture-related terms is a well-documented and researched area in Translation Studies. Finkel, one of the earliest scholars who drew attention to them, indicated that they "stand out from the common lexical context, they distinguish themselves for their heterogeneity, and consequently they require a reinforcement of attention in order to be decoded" (Ranzato, 2016, p. 53). Robinson (2012, p. 177) notes that the differences between cultures spread geographically as well as historically: "Cultural difference is largely a function of the distance they move, the distance from the place or time in which they are written to the place or time in which they are read; and it can be marked by the act or fact of translation."

Texts written centuries or decades apart can be culturally unfamiliar, as in texts from distant countries. Culture also stands out as a primary factor that influences translation strategies. In a study analysing two individual dramatic texts, the author concludes that, in the two case studies, strategies and norms were adopted in response to the demands of the target culture and of various groups within it (Inggs, 2000, p. 48).

Though much has been discussed about the difficulties and challenges faced by translators, it is extremely difficult to set fixed guidelines or solutions to resolve each and every one of them.

Many of the problems that face translators are of the open-ended kind, i.e. there is no pre-determined solution, they cannot be solved consciously under controlled conditions, and the solutions cannot be subjected to absolute verification. Thus their solution requires the use of problem-solving strategies that are creative in nature. (Mackenzie, 1998, p. 201)

Baker (2018, p. 19) expresses a similar view, stressing the nature of non-equivalence. Strategies should be selected, considering the degree of difficulty, the context and the purpose: "It is neither possible nor helpful to attempt to relate specific types of non-equivalence to specific strategies ...". Therefore, the strategies selected and used by the translators in various (TT) are worth analysing to understand how different types of challenges can be addressed efficiently.

The constraints increase when the ST is based on a lesser-known culture and written in a variant of English unfamiliar to the rest of the world. In such cases, the ST includes, for example, culture-specific terms that undoubtedly require the translator's attention, as well as characteristics unique to this particular variant of English. Further, the translator's knowledge of both the SL and TL cultures plays a significant role in bridging the gap between them. Faced with various constraints, the translator identifies suitable strategies and selects the most efficient ones. The study aims to identify the challenging aspects in an ST and analyse the strategies employed by the translator to overcome them. By examining and understanding the challenges and strategies, the study will contribute to existing knowledge of translation strategies useful to practitioners and theoreticians alike.

1. Methods and materials

To investigate such challenges, an ST written by Ashok Ferry titled *The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons* (2016), published by Penguin Random House India, was chosen. This particular ST is selected primarily due to the presence and the influence of the Sri Lankan culture and the variant of English in which it is written. It was translated into French in 2018 by Alice Seelow for Mercure de France as *L'incessant bavardage des démons*. The choice of text is significant, as this is the first time a work of English-language fiction, published in Sri Lanka by a Sri Lankan writer, has been translated into French. Earlier, only the literary works of Sri Lankan Diaspora writers such as Shyam Selvadurai or Michael Ondaatje, who publish in the West, were translated into foreign languages, including French. The researcher, a native speaker of the local variant of English and French, is familiar with the three languages used in combination in the ST and the TT.

The story in the ST focuses primarily on the life of the main character, Sonny, who is a Sri Lankan living in England, and his family in Sri Lanka. Sonny returns briefly to his home country with his American fiancée, whom he met in England, to be introduced to the family. Ferry, who places Sonny's family in Kandy, an ancient capital of the country, entangles the members in typical family feuds. The presence of local Sinhala culture, particularly Kandyan society, along with traditional elements such as cuisine, astrology, and demons, makes the story culturally complex yet humorous for the reader. The ST presents a challenging task to its translator. The translator who performed this task in French is not a native Sri Lankan. Therefore, she needs to understand the Sri Lankan culture and the languages encompassed in the TT.

The ST is examined to identify the challenges that require strategies. At the word level, there is no direct translation for these challenging lexical and culture-related terms. To facilitate this task, common problems of non-equivalence discussed by Baker (2018, pp. 19–24) are followed. She identifies eleven common types of non-equivalence at the word level:

- (i) Culture-specific concepts
- (ii) The source language concept is not lexicalised in the target language
- (iii) The source language word is semantically complex

- (iv) Source language and Target language make different distinctions in meaning
- (v) Target language lacks a superordinate
- (vi) Target language lacks a specific term (hyponym)
- (vii) Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective
- (viii) Differences in expressive meaning
- (ix) Differences in form
- (x) Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms
- (xi) The use of loan words in the source text

Apart from (v) TL lacking a superordinate, (vii) Differences in physical or interpersonal perspectives and (x) Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms, examples were found for the other types.

The identified terms are further categorised (see Table 1) to highlight their challenging nature, in both Sinhala and English, specific to this ST. A total of 42 terms in Sinhala and English are listed, and their translation into the TL is qualitatively analysed.

Though Ferry writes in English, his writing is heavily influenced by the local language Sinhala, spoken only in Sri Lanka. Rahal (2022, p. 15) points to the "multilingual feature of today's English": English has taken "local colourings", and it has become "multiple Englishes". As Douglas (2012, p. 178) explains, language, just like culture, is not the same everywhere.

If a native speaker of American English is often puzzled by colloquial British English, how much more by Scottish English, Irish English, and then, another quantum leap, by Indian English, South African English? Do native speakers of British, American, Australian, and Indian English all share a culture? Language is not the same nor is the culture.

English has been present in the Indian subcontinent for over two hundred years and it has led to nativisation of the language, evident in the local variants collectively known as South Asian English: "The nativisation of English has enriched English as well as the indigenous languages through processes of borrowing and coinage of new words and expressions, and through semantic shifts" (Gargesh, 2006, p. 90). Sri Lankan English often uses Sinhala borrowings such as terms of address, local food items and religious terms. "Today, English is used for practically all purposes of Sri Lanka, but it is not the English of the colonizer, it is the English of the once colonized. It is Sri Lankan English, with its borrowings and influences from Sinhala and Tamil, as used in Sri Lanka" (Gunsekera, 2010, p. 20).

Though borrowings are a characteristic of Sri Lankan English, they are treated separately in the present study as culture-related terms to closely examine their translation. Culture-specific terms pose a significant challenge to the translator, as reflected in the number of examples: 20 in Sinhala and 10 in English. What is considered Sri Lankan English is limited to local expressions and non-standard English pronunciation. Further, local trademarks and proper names are also listed separately to understand how they are transferred to the TL. The final category comprises terms and expressions created by Ferry.

Table 1. Terms selected from the ST

	In Sinhala	In English	Total
Culture-related terms	20	10	30
Sri Lankan English terms/expressions	–	2	2
Proper Names & Trademarks	4	2	6
Terms/expressions created by Ferry	–	4	4
Total	24	18	42

Baker discusses 8 strategies used by professional translators in *In Other Words* (2018, pp. 24–45). They are referred to in the study to identify the strategies used in the TT.

- (i) Translation by a more general word
- (ii) Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word
- (iii) Translation by a cultural substitution
- (iv) Translation by a loan word or a loan word plus explanation
- (v) Translation by a paraphrase using a related word
- (vi) Translation by a paraphrase using an unrelated word
- (vii) Translation by omission
- (viii) Translation by illustration

Translation by illustration is not relevant to the present study as illustrations are given neither in the ST nor in the TT.

2. Results & discussion

The study identifies five strategies used in the ST: (ii) Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, (iii) Translation by a cultural substitution, (iv) Translation by a loan or loan word plus explanation and (vii) Translation by omission. As considerable numbers of examples of loan words and loan words with explanations are found, they are considered two separate strategies.

In the tables below, the example in ST is given in the first column, the French translation in the second and the back translation¹ into English is provided in the third column. Given the space constraints, only the most significant examples are shown in the tables.

2.1 Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word

In terms of the number of examples, this is the most popular strategy. 14 examples are found: 8 culture-related terms in English, 1 culture-related term in Sinhala, 2 author-created expressions, 2 trademarks, and 1 Sri Lankan English term.

They are translated into French using terms that are more neutral or less expressive than those in the ST. Therefore, as the name of the strategy suggests, the French translation does not capture all the essential elements. A case in point is the translation of medicinal hair oil.

¹ Back translation from French to English is carried out by the researcher.

Example 1. Translation of culture-related terms in English

SL	TL	Back translation
For the most part they were pot-bellied drunkards smelling of medicinal hair oil. (p. 93)	La plupart étaient des ivrognes bedonnants qui empestaient la brillante... (p. 97)	Most of them were drunkards who smelled of hair gel...

Medicinal hair oils are concoctions of herbs and oils prescribed in Ayurvedic medicine. Their smell, rather unpleasant and instantly recognisable, is very familiar to the SL audience. The French translation uses *la brillante*, which means hair gel, and is generally used to stylise hair. On this occasion, the expressive meaning is not captured by the French term. The intention is not to draw attention to the hairstyle, but to highlight the unpleasant and unattractive appearance of the man, made worse by the smell of the hair oil.

Another example is the use of Little Lord or Baby Lord, which are heard infrequently today. These are believed to be diminutives of respectful terms of address used during colonial times, reserved for high-caste families. As they are associated with local castes, it is difficult to find an equivalent in French. The chosen title, *Seigneur*, though it refers to nobility, also reminds us of the feudal system, not just the colonial period.

Another challenge is translating UL, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) designator of the Sri Lankan Airlines, the national carrier of Sri Lanka. It earned the nickname Usually Late because its flights are known to be late on more than a few occasions. It is impossible to convey this meaning in French using the same abbreviation. Therefore, the translator changes it to RET (from the French word *retard*, meaning late), which is not at all associated with Sri Lankan Airlines. To complicate the matter further, the author insists on calling it UP (Unusually Punctual) on this rare occasion of punctuality. To match the French abbreviation, the translator invents PIL, which is not in any way connected to the Sri Lankan IATA designator.

Example 2 brings to light one of the limitations of this strategy. In an ordinary context, the term "white van" is not expected to cause any difficulties. White vans exist everywhere; it is hardly a culture-specific term. However, in the Sri Lankan political context, the white vans seem to evoke rather sinister memories. Ivir (1998, p. 142) states that "literal translation is communicatively inadequate when cultural information is implied in the source text rather explicitly stated". Though the Sri Lankan reader understands what is implied by "white vans" in the given context, the French reader may not be aware that this

Example 2. Translation of culture-related terms in English

SL	TL	Back translation
But he knew in Sri Lanka, today's white van victims are tomorrow's heroes. You only have to bide your time: it is a country with the longest of histories, the shortest of memories. (p. 32)	Mais il savait bien qu'au Sri Lanka, les victimes d'enlèvement à bord de fourgons blancs d'aujourd'hui sont les héros de demain. Il fallait seulement attendre le bon moment : ce pays avait une longue histoire, et la mémoire courte. (p. 40)	But he knew well that in Sri Lanka, today's victims of white van kidnappings are tomorrow's heroes. It was necessary to wait for the right time: this country had a long history and a short memory.

is a reference to the political disappearances that took place in the past: “Of the kidnappings that were witnessed, most were said to have taken place in white vans – which for years have been the vehicle of shadowy gangs behind enforced disappearances” (BBC, 2012).

A literal translation of the white van is given as *de fourgons blancs* in the TT. To it, the translator adds *enlèvement* (kidnapping), so that the TL reader understands that white van victims means that they were kidnapped in white vans. A footnote is also offered explaining how those suspected of maintaining links with terrorists were kidnapped in white vans during an absolutist regime.

In the same example, Ferry speaks of Sri Lanka as a country with “the longest history and the shortest memory”. The SL readers find this statement ironic and humorous because he mocks the Sri Lankan voters who forget quickly and keep voting for the same corrupt and oppressive politicians. This is translated using neutral terms that, unfortunately, do not clarify the socio-political reality. From the translator’s point of view, it is not possible to offer notes to each and every term that communicates an expressive meaning. Therefore, it appears that in this context, the translator considered the term “white van” more significant, offering explanations for it and leaving the TL reader to make sense of the other terms.

A single author-created expression is translated into French using this strategy. In the ST, “Fish free life” indicates a diet without fish, forced upon the Kumarihamy due to financial difficulties. It is understandably an unbearable, nutritious sacrifice for the residents of an island nation. The translator eliminates the seemingly unimportant reference to fish and provides a less expressive, ordinary term *existence misérable* (miserable existence).

The two popular trademarks found in the ST are not preserved in the TT, understandably, because they are not recognised in France. The translator indicates only the nature of the product, eliminating the well-known local brand names Motha and Sustagen. The products become more neutral and less flavoursome without the popular names.

In the following example, a Sinhala culture-related term, *baila*, is evident. This term refers to a popular dance form. In Portuguese, *bailar* means to dance. This is translated as *musiques populaires* (popular music). The local dance is replaced by a more neutral term, erasing the exotic flavour. The author created a hyphenated compound expression that is extremely difficult to reproduce in French in the same form. Therefore, the translator has to settle for a less expressive, less creative but understandable equivalent. The translator can only convey the essence of the message.

Example 3. Translation of a culture-related term in Sinhala and an author-created expression

SL	TL	Back translation
What is required here is a proper baila-bashing, family-feuding, drink-yourself-into-a-stupor-on-cut-price-arack sort of a wedding. (p. 224)	Ce qu’on demande ici, c’est un mariage avec une vraie fête bien de chez nous sur nos musiques populaires, avec des querelles de famille et des cuites d’arack à prix réduit à tomber ivre mort. (p. 213)	What we ask for here is, it’s a wedding with a real party at our place with our popular music, with our family quarrels, and with getting drop dead drunk drinking cheap arack.

In example 4, the pronunciation of the English word “swimming pool” is given as “swimming fool”. It is the young Sri Lankan driver who mispronounces this word, attempting to impress the foreign guest with his limited knowledge of English. This is a common mistake found in non-standard Sri Lankan English. The confusion between /p/ and /f/ as in profit pronounced as /frɒfit/ is a phonological feature, characteristic of non-standard Sri Lankan English (Gunesekera, 2010, p. 126). For the translator, this presents a different kind of challenge. The French equivalent of swimming pool is given as *pichine* (the correct term is *piscine*) to show the non-standard pronunciation. It is an effective solution offered by the translator because the confusion between /f/ and /s/ as in /ʃel/ for cell is another characteristic of non-standard pronunciation (p. 126). The translator adds another term, solarium, misspelt as folarium, to further emphasise this pronunciation mistake. Though creative, it is doubtful whether the target reader would understand why the French words are misspelt.

Example 4. Translation of Non-standard Sri Lankan English

SL	TL	Back translation
Queen’s hotel cool. Lemonade. Ginger beer. Swimming fool. (p. 197)	Queen’s Hotel, bon. Limonade, ginger beer, <i>Pichine</i> et <i>Folarium</i> . (p. 186)	Queen’s Hotel, good. Lemonade, ginger beer, <i>Swimming pool</i> and <i>Solarium</i> (pronounced incorrectly).

These examples highlight the limitations of using a less expressive or a more neutral word. Yet, in the TT, they resolve several intricate challenges. It is noted that these terms are not used repeatedly. Therefore, on that single occasion when it is used, the translator finds a solution to temporarily overcome the difficulty.

2.2 Translation by a cultural substitution

This strategy is found only twice. In example 1, a substitution from French is provided for the Sri Lankan English expression “pull down”. It gives the meaning “you have become thin”, but in this context, it ironically implies that Sakuntala has gained weight. The translator chooses to replace it with the French expression *Quel massacre!* which signifies “what a mess”. The TL reader may wonder what it is about, because the translator does not, directly or indirectly, indicate that the comment is meant to criticise Sakuntala’s weight.

Example 1. Translation of a Sri Lankan English expression

SL	TL	Back translation
My, Sakuntala, <i>how</i> you have pulled down. (p. 49)	Ça, par exemple, Sakuntala, quel massacre! (p. 54)	This, for example, Sakuntala, what a mess!

The second example focuses on a traditional item of furniture called a *kavichaya*. Along with the Sinhala name, Ferry gives a close equivalent in English: “ebony sofa”. Ebony is the type of wood used to fabricate traditional furniture in the past, which, at present, is

sought after. In the French translation, the translator replaces the term with *méridienne*, which is more familiar to the TL reader, even though it is not an antique and may not be made of ebony. As they all possess a similar structure common to long chairs, with backrest and armrest, *méridienne* is selected as a modern French equivalent.

2.3 Translation by a loan word plus explanation

Translation by a loan word with an explanation is a popular strategy, found in 12 examples. The explanations are provided in footnotes or in the text. The SL term is incorporated into the TL, usually because the TL lacks a term for it. The translators sometimes add explanations to assist the reader (Fawcett, 1997, p. 35). In the ST, the author incorporates Sinhala borrowings in his English writing, exhibiting the influence of the local language. In example 1, the author describes the character Kumarihamy as *akuru deke geni*. In this context, it is an insulting nickname. Therefore, the translator also preserves the borrowing with the added explanatory words *littéralement* and *autrement dit inculte* for the benefit of the TL reader. It means “literally”, “uneducated” respectively, which are not disclosed in the ST.

Example 1. Translation of culture-related term in Sinhala (with an explanation in the text)

SL	TL	Back translation
... but behind her back they called her the <i>akuru deke geni</i> , the women with two letters. (p. 12)	... mais derrière son dos elles l'appelaient <i>akuru deke geni</i> , littéralement « la femme-de-deux-lettres » autrement dit l'inculte. (p. 20)	... but behind her back they called her <i>akuru deki geni</i> , literally “woman of two letters”, in other words uneducated.

Similarly, in example 2, an explanation is inserted into the text to clarify the Sinhala loanwords. For *roti and lunu miris*, a typical breakfast meal, the translator adds an explanation about the ingredients. *Roti*, a kind of flatbread, is described as a pancake to facilitate easy comprehension for the TL reader. Further, *lunu miris* (a combination of salt, onions and chilli) is called *chutney d'oignons*, again for the benefit of the TT reader. Though they share certain similarities, pancake and chutney, it is not possible to consider them culinary equivalents of *roti* and *lunu miris*.

Example 2. Translation of culture related terms in English (with an explanation in the text)

SL	TL	Back translation
As soon as she had her breakfast – <i>roti</i> and <i>lunu miris</i> ... (p. 105)	... dès qu'elle eut pris son petit déjeuner de <i>rotis</i> au <i>lunu miris</i> (crêpes à la noix de coco assaisonnées de chutney d'oignons) ... (p. 106)	As soon as she had her breakfast of <i>rotis</i> in <i>lunu miris</i> (coconut pancake seasoned with onion chutney) ...

As indicated in the title of the ST *The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons*, demons equally play a part in the narrative. Sinhala words associated with exorcism are borrowed by Ferry. For these terms, English equivalents do not exist. The term *thovil* can, at best, be described as an exorcist ceremony.

For terms that are used repeatedly and are culturally significant to the context, such as *walauwa*, an explanation is necessary. A footnote describes the basic concept.

Example 3. Translation of culture related terms in Sinhala (with footnote)

SL	TL	Back translation
... there were many demons said to be flying about hillsides of the <i>walauwa</i> ... (p. 4)	<i>walauwa</i> ... (p. 12) (manoir colonial sri lankais)	<i>walauwa</i> (Sri Lankan colonial mansion)

The explanation is sometimes necessary not only to describe the propositional meaning but also the expressive meaning. For example, the footnote explains the term *suddha* not just as a white person, or a foreigner, but it is also colloquial and derogatory.

Example 4. Translation of culture-related term in Sinhala (with an explanation in the text)

SL	TL	Back translation
He's coming back; bringing his <i>suddha</i> wife with him. (p. 155)	Et il amène sa <i>suddha</i> d'épouse avec lui. (Adjectif familier plutôt désobligeant pour « Blanc ») (p. 143)	And he brings his <i>suddha</i> of a wife with him. (rather informal adjective disagreeable for "Whites")

All the explanations are added to assist the TL reader in understanding the culturally important terms in Sinhala and English. The translator decides, depending on the context and the significance and frequency of their use, which kind of explanation to give. Each explanation serves a different function, such as explaining the expressive meaning, the propositional meaning, or offering further details to understand both.

2.4 Translation by a loan word without explanation

This is another frequently used strategy by the translator. 13 examples in English and Sinhala are identified in the ST.

In these examples, the author does not offer any explanation to the TL reader to help them understand the terms. In most cases, the context assists to a certain extent. For example, a *kurakkan* loaf, translated as *un pain au kurakkan* is understood as bread made of *kurakkan*. The curious TL reader may search and find out that it is a bread made with finger millet.

Another borrowing, *Nona*, an informal equivalent of *Madam*, is misunderstood in this example. It is used by the Sinhalese to address a respectable, older woman, generally by an employee to an employer. If "Jane Nona" is literally translated into English, it means "Jane Madam". By preserving the borrowing, the translator could mislead the TL reader. As it is a Sinhala word, the TL reader could understand it as Ms Jane Nona, with *Nona* being Jane's surname.

Example 1. Translation of culture-related terms in Sinhala

SL	TL	Back translation
Are you happy now, Jane Nona? (p. 193)	Et-tu heureuse maintenant, Jane Nona? (p. 183)	Are you happy now, Jane Nona?

Proper Names are kept as they are in the TL. The translation of anthroponyms by borrowing is a frequent and popular strategy (Lecuit et al., 2011, p. 211). Unfortunately, the significance of the names is not disclosed to the TL reader. For example, the use of a name such as Kodivina Peiris is humorous. *Kodivina* signifies a curse or an evil spell in Sinhala. Ironically, the name is appropriate for the character as it is his profession to liberate people from evil spells and curses.

Translating the name Kumarihamy is another considerable challenge. Throughout the ST, she is referred to as Kumarihamy, though her name is Clarice Mahadewala. Kumarihamy is a term of address that represents her caste, social class, and title in the household. It consists of two words: *Kumari* (princess) and *Hamy* (Madam). It is a respectful and caste-sensitive term for which there is no equivalent in French. The translator decides to leave it as it is, for the simple reason that it is her name. However, the term's expressive meaning remains unknown to the TL reader.

The example below, based on the same character, highlights her characteristic nature. The translator, too, following the author's example, produces an almost exact French version. It is expected that the TL reader can understand that this is a reference to Kumarihamy from the similarity in spelling.

Example 2. Translation of author-created terms

SL	TL	Back Translation
... acquiescing to her every wish with a very un-Kumarihamyesque cringe. (p. 183)	... acquiescent au moindre de ses souhaits de façons très peu kumarihamiesque. (p. 171)	... acquiescing to her every wish in a very unkumarihamyesque way.

When an explanation is not given to the loan word, the TL reader may or may not decipher it correctly, but may appreciate the exotic nature of TT. The TL reader's reading experience differs from that of the SL reader, who acknowledges cultural elements. Nevertheless, providing explanations for all the loanwords is not feasible in the TT; as a solution, some translators add a glossary.

2.5 Translation by omission

Only one example of omission is found in the study. The term of address *Hamu* is not easy to translate because of its association with social class, just like Kumarihamy. If it is left untranslated, as in the case of *Nona*, *Hamu* can be mistakenly considered as a part of Louisa's name. Louisa, being American, the TL reader may wonder why a Sinhala name is given to her. However, as Louisa is about to become part of the Mahadewala family,

she, too, can be rightfully called a Hamu, as the author indirectly indicates in the ST. As a strategy, the translator eliminates the term to avoid confusion.

Example 1. Translation of a culture-related term

SL	TL	Back translation
'It is for Louisa Hamu,' she said... (p. 236)	C'est pour Louisa, annonça-t-elle ... (p. 227)	It's for Louisa, she announced.

3. Discussion and conclusion

The strategies used by the translator in the TT are summarised in Table 2. Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, Translation by a loan word and Translation by a loan word with explanation are the most frequently used. Looking closely at the category Culture-related terms, it is interesting to note that Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word is dominantly used to translate terms in English, while for the terms in Sinhala, the translator's strategy of choice seems to be Translation by loan word with or without explanation. Though used infrequently, Translation by cultural substitution is reserved for English terms, whereas the only term omitted is in Sinhala. In the case of proper names, too, the terms in English are transferred using Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, and those in Sinhala are borrowed with or without explanation. For the expressions created by the author, more neutral/less expressive terms or loan words are preferred in the TT. The single use of omission is well noted as it proves that the translator has recourse to it only as a last resort. The study emphasises how the translator exploits a limited number of strategies to translate several types of lexical terms in two languages.

Table 2. Summary of strategies used by the translator

Strategy	Culture related term		Sri Lankan English terms/expressions	Proper Names/ Trademarks		Author created terms/expressions in English	Total
	In Sinhala	In English		In Sinhala	In English		
Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word	1	8	1	–	2	2	14
Translation by a cultural substitution	1	–	1	–	–	–	2
Translation by a loan word plus explanation	9	2	–	1	–	–	12
Translation by a loan word	8	–	–	3	–	2	13
Translation by omission	1	–	–	–	–	–	1
Total	20	10	2	4	2	4	42

By borrowing Sinhala terms, an exotic flavour or a stylistic effect is advantageously added to the TT (Vinay, Darbelnet, 1977, p. 47). It mirrors the influence of the local language in Ferry's writing and also preserves SL cultural elements. However, the meanings of these culturally rich Sinhala borrowings, such as proper names, which are important to the narrative, are not disclosed to the TL readership. For the terms in English, which are more comprehensible to the translator, explanations, equivalents or substitutions are provided, rendering the TT more comprehensible. The translator attempts to strike a balance between respecting local culture by incorporating loanwords and, when possible, providing explanations to make the TT comprehensible to its readers.

It is observed that what is explained in a footnote or in the text is constrained by space and the translator's knowledge. The inadequacy of the explanation or the substitution was evident in several examples, casting doubt on the translator's knowledge. In a study conducted on using translation strategies to solve cultural translation problems, it was identified that the performance was influenced by several areas, including "level of development of the translator's cultural competence, the ability to identify culturemes and the level of declarative knowledge about the source culture" (Olalla-Soler, 2019, p. 385). When translating culturally rich texts, the translators' knowledge naturally comes under scrutiny.

In a classroom-based examination of Baker's taxonomy, the study reveals that students' translation is less unacceptable when strategies are used successfully. It highlights the pedagogical value of teaching strategies to translation students (Aguado-Giménez, Pérez-Paredes, 2005, p. 306). Translation strategies are necessary to overcome obstacles and negotiate cultural differences. It should be noted that the strategies offer solutions to varying degrees. An explanation of a loan word can either clarify or confuse the readership further. The use of a loan word can be more effective in translating a culture-related term than a proper name. The limitations of the strategies emphasise the need to utilise and exploit them skilfully.

Sources

- Ferry, A., 2016. *The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House India.
 Ferry, A., 2018. *L'incessant bavardage des démons [The Incessant Chatter of the Demons]*. Traduit de l'anglais (Sri Lanka) par Alice Seelow. Paris: Mercure de France. [In French].

References

- Aguado-Giménez, P., Pérez-Paredes, P.-F., 2005. Translation-strategies Use: a classroom-based examination of Baker's taxonomy. *Meta*, 50 (1), pp. 294–311. <https://doi.org/10.7202/010675ar>.
 Baker, M., 2018. *In Other Words*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315619187>.
 BBC, 2012. Sri Lanka's sinister white van abductions. 14 March. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17356575>>. [Accessed 07 March 2025].
 Bardaji, A. G., 2009. Procedures, Techniques, Strategies: translation process operators. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 17 (3), pp. 161–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09076760903249372>. Available

at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09076760903249372#d1e250>>. [Accessed 12 November 2025].

Chesterman, A., 2017. Problem with Strategies. In: *Reflections on Translation Theory: Selected Papers 1993–2014*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 201–211. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.132.c16>.

Cruse, D. A., 1986. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fawcett, P., 1997. *Translation and Language: linguistic theories explained*. London: Routledge.

Gargesh, R., 2006. South Asian Englishes. In: *The Handbook of Englishes*. Eds. B. B. Kachru, Y. Kachru, C. L. Nelson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., pp. 90–113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119147282.ch7>.

Gunesequera, M., 2010. *The Postcolonial Identity of Sri Lankan English*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications.

Inggs, A. J., 2000. Applying a Descriptive Translation Studies model to the analysis of individual dramatic texts: two case studies. *Language Matters*, 31 (1), pp. 32–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228190008566158>.

Ivir, V., 1998. Linguistics and Communicative Constraints on Borrowing and Literal Translation. In: *Translators' Strategies and Creativity*. Eds. A. Beylard-Ozeroff, J. Kralova, B. Moser-Mercer. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 137–144. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.27.22gra>.

Lecuit, E., Maurel, D., Vitas, D., 2011. La traduction des noms propres: une étude en corpus [The Translation of Proper Names: a corpus study]. *Corpus* (online), 10, pp. 201–218. <https://doi.org/10.4000/corpus.2086>. Available at: <<https://journals.openedition.org/corpus/2086#tocto1n3>>. [In French].

Kearns, J., 2009. Strategies. In: *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*. Eds. M. Baker, G. Saldanha. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge, pp. 282–285.

Mackenzie, R., 1998. Creative Problem-solving and Translator Training. In: *Translators' Strategies and Creativity*. Eds. A. Beylard-Ozeroff, J. Kralova, B. Moser-Mercer. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 201–206. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.27.22gra>.

Olalla-Soler, C., 2019. Using Translation Strategies to Solve Cultural Translation Problems. Differences between Students and Professional Translators. *Perspectives*, 27 (3), pp. 367–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2018.1549574>.

Rahal, A., 2022. World Englishes in the Linguistic Landscape of Tunisia: critical perspectives and pedagogical implications. In: *World Englishes and Language Assessment*. Eds. C. Smaoui, A. Rahal. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 12–27.

Ranzato, I., 2016. *Translating Culture Specific References on Television: The Case of Dubbing*. London: Routledge.

Robinson, D., 2012. *Becoming a Translator: an introduction to the theory and practice of translation*. 3rd Edition. London: Routledge.

Vinay, J. P., Darbelnet, J., 1977. *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais: méthode de traduction [Comparative stylistics of French and English: a methodology for translation]*. Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée. Paris: Didier. Available at: <[http://traduttologiageneralenz.pbworks.com/w/file/attach/139402668/Jean-Paul%20Vinay,%20Jean%20Darbelnet%20-%20Stylistique%20compare%CC%81e%20du%20franc%CC%A7ais%20et%20de%20l'anglais-Didier%20\(1.pdf\)](http://traduttologiageneralenz.pbworks.com/w/file/attach/139402668/Jean-Paul%20Vinay,%20Jean%20Darbelnet%20-%20Stylistique%20compare%CC%81e%20du%20franc%CC%A7ais%20et%20de%20l'anglais-Didier%20(1.pdf))>. [Accessed 18 November 2025]. [In French].