

# Elena Ferrante in China Analysis of the Translation of Cultural References in the First Volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

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**Abstract** The international success of the Italian quadrilogy *L'amica geniale* (*My Brilliant Friend*) is roaring, the People's Republic of China (PRC) being no exception to its popularity. The narrative, representative of a specific place and historical period of Italy, is dense with a heavy cultural load. This article aims to describe how Italian culture has been properly introduced into China: the study is conducted through a systematic categorisation of the cultural references retrieved in the first volume and their correspondent translation strategies, triangulated with a semi-structured interview with the translator.

**Keywords** Cultural references. Translation strategies. Literary translation. Translation analysis. Elena Ferrante in China.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Elena Ferrante in China. – 3 The Translation into Chinese of *My Brilliant Friend's* Culture-Specific References. – 3.1 Generalisation. – 3.2 Explicitation. – 3.3 Adaptation. – 3.4 Loan. – 3.5 Equivalence. – 3.6 Literal translation. – 3.7 Omission. – 3.8 Simplification. – 3.9 Translation Errors. – 4 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

Already author of *L'amore molesto* (*Troubling Love*, 1992), *I giorni dell'abbandono* (*The Days of Abandonment*, 2002) and *La figlia oscura* (*The Lost Daughter*, 2006), and commonly known for her secret identity, it is only thanks to the quadrilogy *L'amica geniale*, hereinafter *My Brilliant Friend* (2011-14), that Elena Ferrante, named "leading global thinker" of 2014 by *Foreign Policy*,<sup>1</sup> and one of the most 100 influential people of 2016 by *TIME Magazine*,<sup>2</sup> became the most read contemporary Italian writer in the world (Momigliano 2019).<sup>3</sup> Shortlisted for the *Premio Strega* 2015 and with over 16 million copies sold globally, *My Brilliant Friend* is now an international literary phenomenon.

The narrative, distributed in four volumes - *My Brilliant Friend* (*L'amica geniale*), *The Story of a New Name* (*Storia del nuovo cognome*, 2012), *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (*Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 2013) and *The Story of the Lost Child* (*Storia della bambina perduta*, 2014) - revolves around the troubled friendship between Elena 'Lenù' Greco and Raffaella 'Lila' Cerullo, two young girls of poor origins who live in a neighborhood in the outskirts of Naples. The story is told and written by an adult Elena, who gives voice to her and Lila's friendship when Lila, aged sixty-six, suddenly disappears leaving no trace.

On the background of Naples and of an evolving Italy during the second post-war period, the author depicts the vicissitudes and the feelings characterising the relationship between the two girls. Through the development of their friendship, from childhood to adulthood, along with the metamorphoses of the other characters, Elena Ferrante manages to indirectly narrate the historical and social evolution of Italy from the Fifties to contemporary days. Representative of a specific place and historical period, the narrative is inextricably linked to the culture it stems from, resulting in a heavy cultural load discernible throughout the pages. It depicts marginal southern Italian society, with all its peculiarities and values: patriarchal violence and dominance over women, social regression and desire of emancipation, traditional family values, hierarchical relationships of power, to name just a few. The setting, with all its peculiarities, contributes to the strong Italian and regional features connotating the characters and the way they speak, act and think. However, the anthropologic, cultural and

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1 <https://globalthinkers.foreignpolicy.com/#chroniclers/list>.

2 <https://time.com/collection/2016-time-100/artists/>.

3 *My Brilliant Friend* is ranked first on the *Goodreads*' list of the world's most-read contemporary Italian authors: [https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/37111.Contemporary\\_Italian\\_Literature\\_2000\\_](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/37111.Contemporary_Italian_Literature_2000_).

social singularity of Naples is emblematic of a plurality of lives, facts and transformations that make the quadrilogy one of the most appreciated works of the contemporary 'World Literature' (de Rogatis 2018; Milkova 2021). The principal facets of the plot are in fact global issues that, fashioning themselves on different "suburbs and centers of the world" (de Rogatis 2019, 285),<sup>4</sup> make *My Brilliant Friend* an evocative example of the so-called 'global novel' (de Rogatis 2019), representative of a common consciousness recognised and shared by the global readership.<sup>5</sup> According to Kirsch (2016), the quadrilogy can indeed be considered to be a 'global novel' in that it approaches global issues starting from the local reality. The author underlines that the story of Elena and Lila, shaped by the neighborhood in which it is set, is in fact influenced by international historical facts (1960s' turmoil, 1970s' feminism, the advent of technology in the 1980s, etc.). Thus it might as well be the story of other women of the same generation around the world. Hence, Naples works as an 'archetype': a place that is foreign and local, but nonetheless universal: "a suburb that becomes the symbolic center of the international imaginary (de Rogatis 2018, 163)".<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the international consensus of the novel has been massive: *Ferrante Fever*, a documentary directed by Giacomo Durzi (2017), widely reports the international rising of the phenomenon through the words of some influential people like Michael Reynolds, director of *Europa Editions*, who explains: "there is nothing else like the *Neapolitan Novels* in the history of fiction", because the novel "is very vast, it is broad"; Mario Martone, director of *L'amore molesto (Troubling Love, 1995)*, evocatively confirms *My Brilliant Friend's* universality by saying that "the sensation is not that [the novel] speaks to you, but of you" (emphasis added). Ann Goldstein, the English translator of the novel, also interviewed in the documentary, underlines that Elena Ferrante "examines emotions in a way that you might not want to do yourself and you might not want to name these things or admit them. But she names those things", thus confirming the powerful 'global' (de Rogatis 2019; 2021) nature of the quadrilogy.

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4 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

5 Researchers and scholars are exhaustively investigating the global nature of Elena Ferrante's works: see, among the other contributions, de Rogatis, Milkova, Wehling-Giorgi 2021, and Milkova 2021. See in particular Kirsch 2016 and de Rogatis 2019; 2021; for more exhaustive reflections on Elena Ferrante and the 'global novel'.

6 See also de Rogatis (2021) and Milkova (2021). Segnini (2017, 115) argues that the cultural load of *My Brilliant Friend* is in any case commonly recognisable by the encyclopedic knowledge of foreign readers as it remains "accessible to the tourist's gaze", increasing the novel's translatability and access to the international readership. According to de Rogatis (2018), what furtherly guarantees the international appreciation of the novel is the point of view of the narrative, that, standing on womens' side and making them not victims but survivors, manages to attract the interest of millions of readers from all over the world (see also Kirsch 2016).

Initially driven by U.S. acclaim, the so-called ‘Ferrante Fever’ rapidly spread in over 50 countries, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) being no exception to the popularity of the quadrilogy, where its reception, fostered by the recent broadcasting of the TV series, is roaring. Since the majority of imported products in China come from anglophone countries, while Italy represents a minority culture, *My Brilliant Friend*’s excellent reception is even more significant, leading this study to interrogate the effects of importing cultural references belonging to a minority language such as Italian into China, where it is little known and translated.<sup>7</sup>

Being *My Brilliant Friend* one of the few Italian contemporary novels translated into Chinese and considering the cultural load of the narrative, this contribution aims to verify how a minority language and culture such as Italian can be properly introduced into China. Given the success the novel actually gained in China, this contribution aims, from a translating perspective, to answer to the following questions:

- How and to what extent did the Chinese translation manage to bring Italian culture and its specificity into China?
- Through which translation strategies have culture-specific references been rendered into Chinese?

The article will be divided as follows: section 2 will briefly introduce the success and the reception of the quadrilogy in China, while section 3 will provide the analysis of the translation into Chinese of all the culture-specific references selected in the first volume.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that while Italian classical literature has been conspicuously translated into Chinese (see Brezzi 2008), the same is not happening for what concerns contemporary Italian literature. By observing the top 100 and top 250 rankings of foreign novels on *Douban*, the main Chinese platform for rating books, films and music, it may be noticed that Italian novels represent a minority if compared to the anglophone ones: [https://m.douban.com/subject\\_collection/ECY45E4YA](https://m.douban.com/subject_collection/ECY45E4YA); <https://book.douban.com/top250?start=0>. By looking at the Italian section (<https://book.douban.com/tag/%E6%84%8F%E5%A4%A7%E5%88%A9?start=40&type=T> 2023-01-10), we can see that the main translated contemporary author seems to be Elena Ferrante, also represented in the *Douban* top 10 of Italian novels ([https://m.douban.com/subject\\_collection/ECVM5BDXY](https://m.douban.com/subject_collection/ECVM5BDXY)).

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that a shorter and less extensive version of this study has been presented at the “8th Lucentino Conference”, *Globalization, Understanding and Translation of Cultural References: Transversality and New Technologies* (Alicante, 2-4 November 2022). Conference proceedings are forthcoming.

## 2 Elena Ferrante in China

Published between 2016 and 2018 by *Shanghai 99 Readers* for the *People's Republic Publishing House*, the 'Neapolitan Quartet' (*Nabulesi sibuqu* 那不勒斯四部曲) is ranked as one of the most popular contemporary foreign sagas among Chinese readers by *Douban*.<sup>9</sup>

The quadrilogy was translated by Chen Ying 陈英: after graduating in Italian literature at Beijing Foreign Studies University and obtaining her PhD in Linguistics at the University of Macerata (Italy), Chen Ying is now professor of Italian Language and Literature at the Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing (China) and a professional literary translator. She is also the translator of other works of Elena Ferrante: *The Lying Life of Adults* (*La vita bugiarda degli adulti*, 2019), *Frantumaglia* (*La frantumaglia*, [2003] 2016), *Incidental Inventions* (*L'invenzione occasionale*, 2019), *Troubling Love* (*L'amore molesto*, 2022) and of other well-known contemporary Italian authors like Alessandro Baricco, Domenico Starnone, Viola Ardone, etc.

Notwithstanding the initial hesitations on undertaking the translation task and the difficulties encountered, as explained at a conference held at Shanghai Library in 2019 and reported by *The Paper*,<sup>10</sup> Chen Ying is now the Chinese voice of Elena Ferrante. The wave of appreciation the novel secured in China is unprecedented: the first volume of the quadrilogy, in Chinese *Wo de tiancai nüyou* 我的天才女友, obtained one of the highest ranking scores of 2017 on *Douban* (8.6), where it was also ranked 3rd among the most popular foreign books of 2017.<sup>11</sup> The second and the fourth volumes, *The Story of a New Name* (*Xin mingzi de gushi* 新名字的故事) and *The Story of the Lost Child* (*Shizong de haizi* 失踪的孩子) were even nominated 'Douban Book of the Year' respectively in 2017 and 2018.<sup>12</sup> The extremely positive reception the novel achieved among Chinese readers, undoubtedly boosted by the broadcasting of the TV series,<sup>13</sup> is further high-

<sup>9</sup> According to the *Douban* ranking of the 250 most read books in China, *My Brilliant Friend* appears to be the most read Italian novel, with *The Story of the Lost Child* (4th volume) being the first Italian work of the ranking, standing at the 21st place. *The Story of a New Name* (2nd volume) stands at the 22nd, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (3rd volume) at the 97th and *My Brilliant Friend* (1st volume) at the 140th: <https://book.douban.com/top250> (2022-07-25).

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_3294462](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_3294462).

<sup>11</sup> [https://m.douban.com/subject\\_collection/2017\\_book\\_popularity](https://m.douban.com/subject_collection/2017_book_popularity).

<sup>12</sup> *Douban* Book of the Year 2017: <https://book.douban.com/annual/2017#1>; *Douban* Book of the Year 2018: <https://book.douban.com/annual/2018#1>.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the TV series *My Brilliant Friend* is one of the few Italian products officially imported to China. According to the restriction guidelines imposed by the Chinese governmental department *National Radio and Television Administration* (NRTA) on the import of foreign audiovisual products, only 34 products per year are allowed to be imported, which must not contain explicit references to sexuality, violence,

lighted by the continuous attention China is giving to the ‘Ferrante phenomenon’. In recent years China hosted many Ferrante-related events. To mention just a few, after the publication of the second volume in 2017, the Italian Embassy and the Italian Institute of Culture in Shanghai organised a cycle of conferences dedicated to the quadrilogy held at the Sinan Book Club (Shanghai) and at Fudan University (Shanghai). More recently (March 2022), the Muxin Art Museum (Wuzhen, China PRC) held a photographic exhibition on the TV series adapted from the novel and invited the director Saverio Costanzo for a debate open to the public;<sup>14</sup> in May 2022, the General Consulate of Italy in Chongqing organised an event entitled *Chongqing incontra L'amica geniale - Chongqing yujian tiancai nüyou* 重庆 - 遇见天才女友 (Chongqing meets *My Brilliant Friend*), where the translator Chen Ying was guest of honor. Indeed, the editor of the novel for Shanghai 99 Readers, when interviewed for the purposes of the Author's previous research, highlighted that

Prof. Chen's translation was the key to the novel's success in China, which garnered tens of thousands of readers evoking profound discussion on many topics probed by the author.  
(Pers. comm., September 2019)

The next section of this article will present the strategies adopted in the first volume for the translation of culture-specific references, in a preliminary attempt of describing how Italian culture has been rendered into Chinese through the translation of Elena Ferrante's works.

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instigation to criminality, anti-communist, anti-socialism or, generally speaking, anti-China contents, as well as any reference to Western values on human rights, democracy and freedom of expression (He 2017; Ho et al. 2020; Li 2017; Zuccheri 2019). Many Italian products - like *Gomorra - La serie* (see Zuccheri 2019) - did not (and presumably never will) pass the restriction scrutiny. On the other hand, the series *My Brilliant Friend* has been selected among the few foreign audiovisual products allowed on the Chinese official channels, notwithstanding its contents. Although partially cut, the first two seasons of the TV series - aired in Italy in 2018 and 2020 - have been officially broadcasted in China (2019; 2020) on *iQiyi*, *Youku* and *Tencent Video*. The popularity and high appreciation of the series undoubtedly increased the interest of the Chinese audience on the Ferrante phenomenon.

**14** The debate was held on the 13th of March 2022, both in person and streamed online on *Douyin* and *Weibo*, where it counted more than 14.4K views.

### 3 The Translation into Chinese of *My Brilliant Friend's* Culture-Specific References

Culture-specific references represent a widely debated issue in Translation Studies. One of the first definitions of the concept, as reported by Osimo (2004), was provided by Vlahov and Florin (1969, 438), who by *realia* indicate objects, concepts and phenomena that are typical of a given geographical environment, of a culture, of the material life or of particular historical-social features of a population, nation, country or tribe. Such *realia*, therefore, carry a national, local or historical colouring. However, they do not have precise correspondences in other languages.

Among the main other denominations provided in literature – “foreign cultural words” (Newmark 1988), “culture-specific items” (Franco Aixelà 1996), “allusions” (Leppihalme 1997), to name just a few – the one that has been adopted in this work is Pedersen’s (2005; 2011). In a study focused on subtitling, by “Extra-linguistic Cultural Reference” (Pedersen 2011, 43), hereinafter ECR, Pedersen conceives a

reference that is attempted by means of any cultural linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process. The referent of the said expression may prototypically be assumed to be identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience. (Pedersen 2011, 43)

However, as Ranzato (2016) points out, Pedersen’s (2011) definition of ECR is somehow narrow, in that it excludes all those “intra-linguistic” cultural references (Pedersen 2011, 49) that are specific of a given culture.<sup>15</sup> Although considering these references as highly representative of the cultural load of any culture, and therefore not excludable from a reflection on the translation of cultural references into another language, for space limit reasons this paper will only focus on ECRs.<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with Pedersen’s interpretation, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, 200) also see “culture-bound terms” as “extralinguistic” and propose a comprehensive taxonomy based on the categorisation of references according to their domains and subdomains. Although referred to audiovisual translation, Díaz Cintas and Remael’s (2007, 201) categorisation, reported in [tab. 1], was the most suitable for the purposes of this article and has therefore been adopted with minor adjustments according to specific cases:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See also Chiaro (2009, 155): “language-specific features”.

<sup>16</sup> “Intra-linguistic references” have been subject of the more extensive analysis described in detail in the Author’s Master’s Thesis, which may be subject of future works.

<sup>17</sup> Among Díaz Cintas and Remael’s (2007, 201) categorisation of Ethnographic references, the subcategory ‘Food and Beverages’ has been personally added as a single sub-

**Table 1** Categorisation taxonomy

<b>Geographical references</b>	Objects from physical geography	<i>savannah, mistral, tornado</i>
	Geographical objects	<i>downs, plaza mayor</i>
	Endemic animal and plant species	<i>sequoia, zebra</i>
<b>Ethnographic references</b>	Objects from daily life	<i>trattoria, igloo</i>
	[Food and Beverages]	[ <i>tapas</i> ]
	References to work	<i>farmer, gaucho, machete, ranch</i>
	References to art and culture	<i>blues, Thanksgiving, Romeo and Juliet</i>
<b>Socio-political references</b>	References to descent	<i>gringo, Cockney, Parisienne</i>
	Measures	<i>inch, ounce, euro, pound</i>
	References to administrative or territorial units	<i>county, bidonville, state</i>
	References to institutions and functions	<i>Reichstag, sheriff, congress</i>
	References to socio-cultural life	<i>KuKlux Klan, Prohibition, landed gentry</i>
	References to military institutions and objects	<i>Feldwebel, marines, Smith &amp; Wesson</i>

Given the taxonomy above, every cultural reference has been initially classified according to its domain. Secondly, every case has been associated to the translation strategy adopted by the Chinese translator. An overview of the translation strategies considered will be given, followed by the main representative examples from the *corpus*.

Many are the scholars who, in their studies, provided different taxonomies for describing translation strategies. For the purposes of this contribution, a combination of those proposed by Pedersen (2005; 2011), Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), Chen (2013) and Ranzato (2016) have been used.<sup>18</sup> Although referring mainly to audiovisual translation studies, they are nevertheless the more

domain, due to the high number of elements belonging to it. For this reason, the example *tapas*, originally categorised by the authors under 'Objects from Daily Life', has instead been referred to the 'Food and Beverages' subdomain. In the 2021's revised edition of Díaz Cintas and Remael's volume, not considered in the present study because published after this research was completed, the subcategory 'Food and Beverages' has indeed been added under 'Ethnographic References'. Other existing taxonomies, albeit relevant in literature, such as – among the others – Osimo's (2004, 64) one, have been considered less exhaustive for the aims of this analysis. Therefore, they have been excluded.

<sup>18</sup> For an exhaustive reflection on cultural references, cf. also Ranzato 2010.



exhaustive ones, thus suitable for the aim of this analysis too.<sup>19</sup>

272 cases of ECR have been retrieved in the first volume and classified by domain and subdomain according to the previously mentioned taxonomy; they have then been associated to the following translation strategies:

**Table 2** Translation strategies

<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>CASES</b>
Generalisation	64
Explicitation	63
Adaptation	47
Loan	24
Equivalence	22
Lit. translation	22
Omission	7
Simplification	2

In addition, 21 cases of ‘mistranslation’ have been found and will be discussed in sub-paragraph 3.9.

The next sub-sections of the article will describe in detail the analysis of the translation strategies recognised in the text, providing several examples for each case.

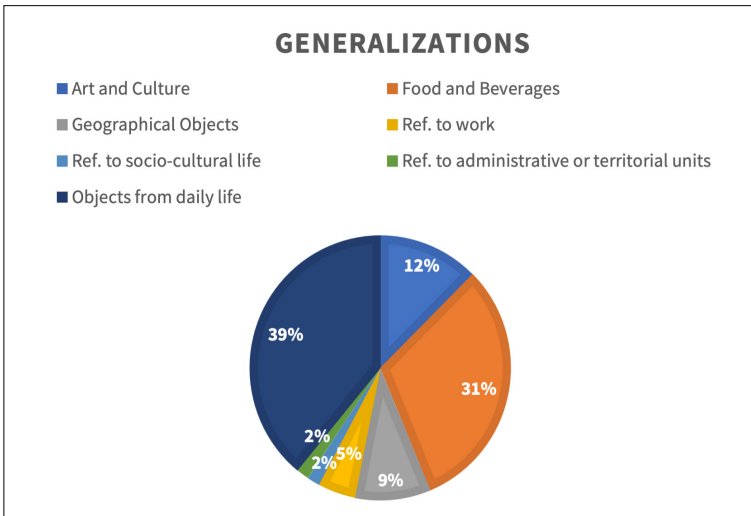
### 3.1 Generalisation

Generalisation is here conceived as in Pedersen’s (2005; 2011) definition, which basically presupposes the replacing of a culture-specific reference of the source language (SL) with a more general term in the target language (TL) - presumably better known or more easily retrievable by the TL readers - by means of hypernymy and hyponymy.<sup>20</sup>

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**19** Among the many taxonomies existing in literature, the one proposed by Faini (2008) is particularly relevant. However, since it is not specifically related to cultural references, it has been excluded from the present study.

**20** Ranzato (2016, 84) suggests two different categories for the generalisation strategy, labelled “generalization by hypernym” and “concretization by hyponym”.



**Chart 1** Generalizations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

As the chart shows, the cases that have been mostly translated via generalisation (tot. 64) belong to the domain of 'Objects from Daily Life' (39%) and 'Food and Beverages' (31%). Although the most numerous category is the former (25 cases), it is from the latter that the most interesting examples come from [chart 1]. Table 3 reports some of them:<sup>21</sup>

**21** From now on, for each example, every table will report category, subcategory, the source text (Ferrante 2011), the official English translation (Goldstein 2012), and the target text with a reverse English translation made by the Author. Emphasis on the words under analysis is added by the Author. The page number from which the quotations are taken is listed in brackets after each source text and target text.

**Table 3** Generalisations. Food and Beverages in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
1 Ethnographic references	Food and Beverages	La penna, la gomma, <b>la cotognata</b> . (32) 'A pen, an eraser, <b>the cotognata</b> '. (36)	铅笔, 橡皮, <b>零食</b> 。(20) 'Pencil, eraser, <b>snack</b> '.
2 Ethnographic references	Food and Beverages	<b>Salami, provoloni, mortadelle</b> . (32) 'Salami, provolone, mortadella'. (36)	<b>香肠, 奶酪, 熏肉</b> 。(20) 'Sausage, cheese, smoked meat'.
3 Ethnographic references	Food and Beverages	Voleva commerciare oltre che in <b>provoloni</b> anche in scarpe. (244) [He] wished to do business in shoes as well as in <b>cheese</b> '. (249)	除了 <b>奶酪</b> , 他还想做鞋子的买卖。(238) 'He wanted to do business not only with <b>cheese</b> , but also with shoes'.
4 Ethnographic references	Food and Beverages	Mi aveva comprato una pizza bollente <b>con la ricotta</b> . (133) 'He bought me a pizza melting with <b>ricotta</b> '. (137)	他给我买了一块热乎乎的 <b>奶酪披萨</b> 。(122) 'He bought me a hot <b>cheese</b> pizza'.
5 Ethnographic references	Food and Beverages	Abbondavano le <b>sciu</b> , i <b>raffioli a cassata</b> . (143) 'There was an abundance of <b>cream puffs, pastries with cassata filling</b> '. (147)	食品很丰盛: <b>脆皮奶油卷、甜奶油巧克力蛋糕</b> 。(132) 'The food was abundant: <b>crispy cream rolls, sweet cakes with cream and chocolate</b> '.
6 Ethnographic references	Food and Beverages	Lidia volle preparare lei stessa una torta zeppa di <b>crema pasticcera</b> . (226) 'Lidia herself wanted to make a cake filled with <b>pastry cream</b> '. (230)	莉迪亚要亲手给我做一个 <b>蛋糕, 上面有厚厚一层奶油</b> 。(218) 'Lidia herself wanted to make me <b>a cake with a thick layer of cream on the top</b> '.

In the examples, all the references to culture-specific foods and beverages have been generalised: *cotognata* (1), which is a typical southern Italy kind of jam, made from quince, is transferred into Chinese as a general *lingshi* 零食 (snack); *salami, provolone* and *mortadelle* (2) are also rendered with the general terms *xiangchang* 香肠 (sausage) for *salami*; *nailao* 奶酪 (cheese) for *provoloni* – examples 2 and 3 – and a slightly imprecise but nevertheless general *xunrou* 熏肉 (smoked meat) for *mortadella* (2); also *ricotta* (4) is rendered with its hypernym *nailao* 奶酪 (cheese) [tab. 3].

*Sciu* and *raffioli a cassata* (5), which are two sweets typical of Naples, can be defined, in Pedersen's (2011, 108) words, "infracultural": references that belong to the Source Culture, but which

could not be assumed to be within the encyclopedic knowledge of the ST nor the TT audience, as too specialised or too local to be known even by the majority of the relevant ST audience. (Pedersen 2011, 108)

*Sciu* and *raffioli a cassata* have therefore been generalised and somehow explicitated, in the sense that their ingredients have been ‘spilled out’ and their consistence ‘described’: *sciu*, a sort of cream puff whose name is in fact a loan from the French *choux*, have been ‘described’ as *tian naiyou qiaokeli dangao* 甜奶油巧克力蛋糕 (sweet cakes with cream and chocolate), while *raffioli a cassata* in Chinese becomes *cui pi naiyou juan* 脆皮奶油卷 (crispy cream rolls). Both these cases can be classified as both generalisations and explicitations, which, besides, corresponds to the function of generalisations *per se*: according to Díaz Cintas, Remael (2007), generalisations are indeed always explanatory.

When asked about the cultural references that caused the main translation difficulties in a personal conversation for the aim of my previous research (June 2019), the translator Chen Ying explained:

I had difficulties in translating cultural references related to Italian cuisine. I tried to make the readers understand the ingredients to make them better understand what kind of dish they were reading about.

The same issue has been addressed by Chen Ying herself in an article published on the magazine *Cina in Italia* in June 2019, where, talking about her translation task, she explained:

we know that different cultures speak different languages, for example people living in the North Pole use a rich lexicon to define different types of snow, and people living in the desert have different terms to refer to the sand. In Italy there are many types of cheese and salami that do not exist in China: in order to translate them, I had to simplify them. The fresh and soft Neapolitan mozzarella becomes *nailao* 奶酪 (cheese), a generic word that facilitates comprehension.

Similar behavior has been adopted for the last example (6) reported, where *crema pasticcera* is translated into a way less specific *naiyou* 奶油 (cream) [tab. 3].

Among ‘Objects from daily life’, relevant examples of generalisation are shown in [tab. 4]:

**Table 4** Generalisations. Objects from daily life in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
7 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Il vocabolario di latino, il <b>Campanini e Carboni</b> , anche se comprato usato era stato una grossa spesa. (100) 'The Latin dictionary, <b>the Campanini and Carboni</b> , even though it was bought used, had been a big expense'. (104)	拉丁语词典即使是买二手的,也会花很多钱。(88) ' <b>The Latin dictionary</b> , even though it was bought second-hand, had been a big expense'.
8 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Mi si accostarono i fratelli Solara in <b>Millecento</b> . (108) 'The Solara brothers approached me <b>in the 1100</b> '. (112)	这时候索拉拉兄弟 <b>开车</b> 过来了。(96) 'The Solara brothers arrived <b>by car</b> '.

In [tab. 4], the reference to the vocabulary of Latin language *Campanini e Carboni* (7) is simply omitted, and the general expression 'vocabulary of Latin' is left unspecified. Similarly, *Millecento* (8), a reference that has often been explicitated, is here generalised into *kai che* 开车 (driving a car).

While observing the generalisations of 'Objects from daily life', a reflection on a specific aspect of the Italian culture, related to the Italian subdivision of years in classical high school, needs to be made.<sup>22</sup> Classical high school years in Italy are divided into 'fourth' and 'fifth gymnasium' (first and second year); 'first', 'second' and 'third lyceum' (last three years). This distribution reflects the continuation of the old middle school system, which was made up of three gymnasium years. This, as assumed, caused some problems in the Chinese translation: 9 cases out of 25 have been adapted or generalised and thus made understandable by the target readership [tab. 5]:

<sup>22</sup> I am aware that a category called 'Objects from daily life' should only include material objects. Nevertheless, this aspect has been considered strictly connected with daily-life related issues, and thus included in this domain.

**Table 5** Generalisations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*. Classical high school

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
9	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Le giurarono anzi solennemente che mi avrebbero mandata in <b>quarto ginnasio</b> . (121) 'They swore solemnly that they would send me to the <b>first year of high school</b> '. (125)*	他们庄严地向老师保证, 会让我读 <b>高中</b> 。(110) 'They swore solemnly to the teacher that they would send me to <b>high school</b> '.
10	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life All'entrata, all'uscita del <b>liceo</b> [...]. (153) 'Entering and leaving <b>the school</b> '. (157)	在 <b>学校</b> 进进出出。(143) 'Entering and leaving <b>the school</b> '.
11	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life [Ero] già in <b>quarto ginnasio</b> . (184) 'In my <b>first year</b> '. (188)	我在高一。(175) 'In my <b>first year</b> '.
12	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Gino, che se ne era augurato la bocciatura per poter ripetere insieme il <b>quarto ginnasio</b> , ci rimase malissimo. (249) 'Gino, who had hoped that he would fail so that they could repeat the <b>first year of high school</b> together, was disappointed'. (253)	吉诺希望阿方索通不过考试, 这样他们就能一起留级、重读高一。(243) 'Gino had hoped Alfonso would fail the exam, so that they could repeat the <b>first year</b> '.
13	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Quando si accorse che noi due, ormai in <b>quinto ginnasio</b> [...]. (249) 'When he realized that the two of us, now in our second year [...]. (253)	当他发现, 我和阿方索已经上高二了[...]。(243) 'When he realized that Alfonso and I were already in second year [...]'. (253)

\* The English translation has been generalised too, with references to 'gymnasium' and 'lyceum' being generalised as in 'first year of high school' for the Italian 'fourth gymnasium'.

*Quarto ginnasio* (first gymnasium) and *liceo* (meaning here 'classical high school' in a broad sense, differentiated from professional high schools that are not called *liceo* in Italian) are in the first two examples (9 and 10) adapted and translated with the generic terms *gaozhong* 高中 (high school) and *xuexiao* 学校 (school). Again, "ripetere insieme il quarto ginnasio" (12) and "ormai in quinto ginnasio" (13), are correctly translated into *gao yi* 高一 (first year of high school) and *gao er* 高二 (second year of high school). But problems arise when explicit reference is made to the distinction between gymnasium (1st and 2nd year) and lyceum (3rd, 4th and 5th year). Elena, the protagonist and narrative voice, is in first year (4th gymnasium) and is envious of her friend Lila, who got engaged to a boy many years older than her. As shown in table 6,<sup>23</sup> Elena says:

<sup>23</sup> Since the official English version is too general and does not allow a proper comprehension of the analysis conducted on the Italian source text, a full explanation is given only throughout the paragraph.

**Table 6** Classical high school. Translation errors in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
14 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Guardavo i grandi, <b>quelli del liceo</b> . Preferivo quelli, ma mi sarei accontentata anche di uno del <b>quinto ginnasio</b> . (153)	我看着那些高年级的学生。我更喜欢那些高年级的男生,但现在能有一个上高一的男朋友也不错。(143)
15 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Sarebbe stato bellissimo uscire in quattro, Lila col suo promesso sposo, io col mio. Certo, Nino non aveva l'auto rossa decapottabile. Certo, era uno studente di <b>seconda liceo</b> , non aveva una lira. (250)	那样我们就可以四个人一起出去:莉拉和她的未婚夫,我和我的男朋友。当然,尼诺没有红色的敞篷车,他只是一个高二学生,口袋里没有一毛钱。(245)
16 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Sarebbe comparso un articolo con la mia firma nella stessa rivista dove scriveva un ragazzo bello e bravissimo di <b>terza liceo</b> . (319)	我的一篇文章会发表在一份杂志上,有一个非常英俊、优秀的高三生也给那份杂志写稿。(316)

In the first example (14), Elena emphasises the fact that she used to look at the older boys, *quelli del liceo* (meaning 'those of 3rd, 4th and 5th year'), but she would have settled – in order to catch up with her friend Lila – even with a younger boy of *quinta ginnasio* (meaning 'a boy of 2nd year'), only one year ahead of her. *Quelli del liceo* is translated into *gao nianji de xuesheng* 高年级的学生 (students from senior years), but then *quinta ginnasio* (again, 2nd year) is erroneously translated into *gao yi* 高一 (first year), which is in fact contradictory with what she has just said, because a *gaoyi* 高一 student would have been the same age as her. Again, in the following example (15), she is referring to the same issue, dreaming of getting together with Nino Sarratore, a boy she has always been secretly in love with and whom, when introduced at the beginning of the novel, is said to be some years older than Elena and Lila. When she says *Nino [...] era uno studente di seconda liceo* (Nino was a student of *seconda liceo*) she means he was in 4th year, but *seconda liceo* is translated here into *gao er* 高二 (2nd year) thus creating confusion in the narrative. The same reasoning is applicable to the last example (16) provided in table 6, where Elena, later in the story, refers again to Nino and says *un ragazzo bello e bravissimo di terza liceo* (a handsome and smart boy from third-senior year): however, *terza liceo* is translated into *gao san* 高三 (3rd year), while in fact *terza liceo* is the fifth and final year of high school [tab. 6].

### 3.2 Explicitation

Among the existing taxonomies in the scientific literature that inspired this analysis, Pedersen's (2005) and Ranzato's (2016) definition of Explicitation, as well as Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2007) definition of Addition most fit how the examples of Explicitation have been treated in this study.<sup>24</sup>

Pedersen (2005) includes both Explicitation and Addition as subsidiary strategies of the more generic Specification strategy. After pointing out the fact that, generally speaking, Explicitation refers to any form of expansion of a text or of any 'spelling out' of what is implicit in the ST, he then specifies that in his model "explicitation [...] means that the added material is latent in the ST ECR, as part of the expression side (the name) of the ECR" (Pedersen 2005, 4).

By Addition, he means instead the addition of what is latent in the ST ECR "as part of the sense or connotations of the ECR" (Pedersen 2005, 5). Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2007) consider Explicitation all those cases in which the text is made more accessible by either a specification or a generalisation. Having separated Generalisations from Explicitations in the taxonomy adopted in this study, Díaz Cintas and Remael's definition of Addition is in fact closer to how Explicitation has been conceived here:

Additions [...] occur [...] especially in passages containing cultural references that are expected to cause comprehension problems but are essential for a good understanding of the programme. In such cases, information is added. Additions are always a form of explicitation. (Díaz Cintas, Remael 2007, 207)

Finally, according to Ranzato (2016), Explicitation occurs whenever an ECR is defined by means of an explanation or of an addition of information.

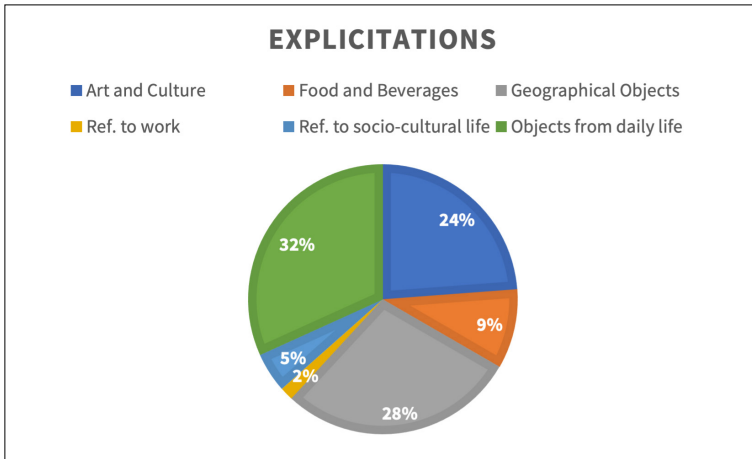
In sum, every case in which information was added to better define or better explain the culture-specific reference considered, or when the concept embedded in the reference was somehow disentangled, has been here categorised under the label Explicitation.

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**24** As in the instance of other Oriental languages, no previous studies on the language combination Chinese-Italian seem to exist. Anyway, particular attention should be given however on the study conducted by Vitucci (2018) on the explicitation strategy, applied in subtitling, in the language combination Japanese-English. However, given its very narrow scope, the study has not been considered for the aim of the here presented research.



**Chart 2** Explications in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*



As shown in [chart. 2], most cases that have been explicated are ‘Objects from daily life’ (32%), among which the most relevant cases are what Ranzato (2016, 64) calls “asynchronous references”, namely those references that are set in a specific time and place and that, for this reason, are “time-specific” (74): embedded in a particular temporal frame, they may not be shared and recognised even by parts of the source language readers too, like Pedersen’s (2011, 108) ‘infracultural’ references.

Among Explications, special attention should be given to ‘transliteration’, generally used in the translation of proper names from foreign languages into Chinese: although it is common ground in literature that transliteration constitutes “the most typical of loanwords” (Chen 2013, 2), they may in fact - and have been treated as such in this article - be divided into different typologies and translation strategies. Concerning transliteration from English into Chinese, Chen (2013) distinguishes between three kinds of transliteration: 1) phonemic transcription and phonemic loans; 2) transliteration plus notes and annotated transliterations; 3) half transliterations plus half translations and loanblends.<sup>25</sup> The first, phonemic transcription and phonemic loans, include lexical items that have no equivalents in the target language and which are thus phonemically transcribed with Chinese

<sup>25</sup> See also Cook (2018): in the thorough categorisation of lexical borrowings existing in Standard Mandarin Chinese, the author recognises different types of transliterations, among which the categories of “transliteration plus explanation” and “transliteration plus translation” (13) are pretty much the same as Chen’s (2013, 3) “transliteration plus notes and annotated transliterations” and “half transliterations plus half translations and loanblends”.

characters simulating the original pronunciation, as in *bashi* 巴士 (bus) or *ninmeng* 柠檬 (lemon). Transliteration plus notes and annotated transliterations, the second type of transliterations recognised by Chen (2013), refers to those cases in which a Chinese morpheme adds to a phonetic transliteration relevant semantic information, for example: *kache* 卡车 (car), where *ka* 卡 is the phonemic transcription of ‘car’ and *che* 车 (car) is the added information. The third type, half transliterations plus half translations and loanblends, refers to those cases in which one part of the reference is transliterated and one part is a “morpheme-for-morpheme rendition” (Chen 2013, 3), as in *dengge re* 登革热 (dengue fever), where *dengge* 登革 is the transliteration of *dengue* and *re* 热 means ‘fever’. Given Chen’s (2013) taxonomy for classifying transliterations, in this work ‘phonemic loans’ have been labelled under Loans, while transliterations belonging to Chen’s (2013) second and third categories have been labelled as Explicitations.

Some examples are reported in table 7 [tab. 7].

**Table 7** Explications in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*. Objects from daily life

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
17	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life I due figli di Silvio Solara, si comprano un <b>Millecento</b> bianco e blu. (104) ‘The two sons of Silvio Solara bought a blue-and-white <b>Fiat 1100</b> ’. (107)	西尔维奥·索拉拉的两个儿子买了一辆蓝白色相间的‘ <b>菲亚特1100</b> ’汽车。(91) ‘The two sons of Silvio Solara bought a blue and white <b>Fiat 1100 car</b> ’.
18	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Poi si fermò una macchina ed era il <b>Millecento</b> dei Solara. (191) ‘Then a car stopped and it was the Solaras’ <b>1100</b> ’. (196)	最后，一辆汽车停了下来，那是索拉拉兄弟的‘ <b>菲亚特1100</b> ’。(183) ‘Then a car stopped, and it was the Solara brothers’ <b>Fiat 1000</b> ’.
19	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life S’era inventato di essere caduto dalla <b>Lambretta</b> di un suo amico. (194) ‘He made up a story that he had fallen off a friend’s <b>Lambretta</b> ’. (199)	他说是从一个朋友的兰美达摩托车上摔下来搞得。(186) ‘He said he had fallen off a friend’s <b>Lambretta scooter</b> ’.
20	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Allora mi compro la <b>Lambretta</b> . (302) ‘Then I’ll buy a <b>Lambretta</b> ’. (306)	那我还不如去买辆兰美达踏板摩托呢。(299) ‘Then I’ll buy a <b>Lambretta scooter</b> ’.

*Millecento* and *Lambretta* are both “time-specific” (Ranzato 2016) cultural references to car and motorcycle models famous in Italy in the Fifties: they are both time-specific and infracultural, since due to generational gaps they may not be recognised by some of the source readers as well. While *Millecento* has been explicated by maintaining ‘1100’ and adding both the brand name *Feiyate* 菲亚特 (Fiat) and *qiche* 汽车 (car) after the name in the first example (17), and only the

brand-name *Feiyate* 菲亚特 (Fiat) in the second one (18), *Lambretta* has instead been rendered through Chen's (2013) "half transliteration plus half translation" strategy. In both the examples reported in [tab. 7], the word *Lambretta* has been phonemically transliterated into *Lanmeida* 兰美达 (19) and explicitated – thus categorised as an explicitation – by the addition of *motuoche* 摩托车 (motorcycle) in the first example (19) and *taban motuo* 踏板摩托 (scooter) in the second one (20).

Similarly, interesting cases of explicitation through transliteration plus addition of information belong to the domain of Geographical objects: representing 28% of the Explicitations, they serve as relevant examples of how toponyms have been rendered into Chinese. Among the 68 total cases of geographical objects found in the *corpus*, 18 are the ones explicitated through phonemic transliteration plus "half translation" (Chen 2013), *versus* 16 loans, 12 equivalences, 10 literal translations, 5 generalisations 1 omission and 6 cases of translation error:

**Table 8** Explicitations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*. Geographical objects

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
21 Geographical Reference	Geographical Obj.	Raccontò di quando andava a <b>Poggioreale</b> . (91) 'She told of going to the <b>prison of Poggioreale</b> '. (95)	她说她去 <b>波桥监狱</b> 。(79) 'She told of going to <b>Poggioreale prison</b> '.
22 Geographical Reference	Geographical Obj.	La gente andava nei negozi del <b>Rettifilo</b> . (111) 'They went to the stores in the center of town, on the <b>Rettifilo</b> '. (115)	人们去 <b>雷蒂费落区</b> 。(99) 'People went to <b>Rettifilo district</b> '.
23 Geographical Reference	Geographical Obj.	E giurava che mi aveva portata a <b>Coroglio</b> tutti i giorni. (204) 'She swore that she had taken me to <b>Coroglio</b> every day'. (208)	她非常肯定地说,她每天带我去 <b>克洛伊奥海滩</b> 。(196) 'She swore that she had taken me to the <b>beach of Coroglio</b> every day'.
24 Geographical Reference	Geographical Obj.	Voleva andare a <b>Forio</b> , e a <b>Casamicciola</b> . (209) 'She wanted to go to <b>Forio</b> , and to <b>Casamicciola</b> '. (213)	她想去 <b>福利奥镇、卡萨米乔拉镇</b> 。(201) 'She wanted to go to <b>Forio town</b> and to <b>Casamicciola town</b> '.
25 Geographical Reference	Geographical Obj.	Dovevo andare ogni giorno in un posto tra <b>Mergellina e Posillipo</b> di cui non sapevo nulla. (274) 'I was to go every day to a place between <b>Mergellina</b> and <b>Posillipo</b> that I knew nothing about'. (279)	我要每天去一个地方—— <b>梅格丽娜和波西利波</b> 之间的一个海滩。(270) 'I was to go every day to a place, a beach between <b>Mergellina</b> and <b>Posillipo</b> '.

The examples above show place names that have been phonemically transliterated and explicitated.

*Poggioreale* refers to a district of Naples where there is the homonymous prison in which Pasquale's father was imprisoned for being accused of the murder of Don Achille. In the original version, no mention to the prison is made and the reference is intentionally left implicit. In the Chinese translation, though, the name *Poggioreale* is phonemically transliterated into *Poqiao* 波桥, and *jianyu* 监狱 (prison) is added, again in accordance with Chen's (2013) "half transliteration plus half translation" strategy.

Similarly, *Rettifilo*, *Coroglio*, *Forio*, *Casamicciola*, *Mergellina* and *Posillipo*, all referring to the city of Naples or to the island of Ischia, are all transliterated and explicitated:

- (22) Rettifilo: 雷蒂费落区 = *Leidifeiluo* 雷蒂费落 + *qu* 区 (district).
- (23) Coroglio: 克洛伊奥海滩 = *Keluoyiao* 克洛伊奥 + *haitan* 海滩 (beach).
- (24) Forio: 福利奥镇 = *Fuliao* 福利奥 + *zhen* 镇 (town).
- (25) Casamicciola: 卡萨米乔拉镇 = *Kasamiqiola* 卡萨米乔拉 + *zhen* 镇 (town).
- (26) Mergellina and Posillipo: 梅格丽娜和波西利波 [...] 的一个海滩 = *Meigelina* 梅格丽娜 *he* 和 [and] *Boxilibo* 波西利波 + *deyi ge haitan* 的一个海滩 (beach).

24% of the Explicitations is represented by the domain of Art and Culture; it is interesting to observe some cases of literary references [tab. 9]: Table 9 Explicitations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*. Art and Culture

	Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
26	Ethnographic References	Art and Culture	Ma quando cercavo di riflettere con lui sui <b>Promessi Sposi</b> [...]. (255) 'But when I tried to talk to him about <b>The Betrothed</b> [...]'. (259)	但当我试着和他讨论《约婚夫妇》[...]。(250) 'But when I tried to talk with him about <b>The Betrothed</b> [...]'. (259)
27	Ethnographic References	Art and Culture	Durante il pranzo in casa di <b>don Rodrigo</b> [...]. (255) 'During the lunch at the house of <b>Don Rodrigo</b> [...]'. (259)	比如说讨论《约婚夫妇》中, 几个人在堂·罗德里戈家里吃饭的情景。(250) 'For example, <b>talking about The Betrothed</b> , some people are having lunch at the house of Don Rodrigo'.

*Promessi Sposi* is translated with its “official equivalent” (Pedersen 2011, 76) *Yue hun fufu* 约婚夫妇 (*The Betrothed*, 26) and an explicative footnote on the literary work is added.<sup>26</sup> The following example (27), which is on the same page of the previous one, refers to the famous character of *I Promessi Sposi*, don Rodrigo: the explicitation lies in the addition (and repetition) of *biru shuo taolun Yue hun fufu zhong* 比如说讨论《约婚夫妇》中 (for example, when speaking of *I Promessi Sposi*...) to the transliteration of the name of the character, *Tang Luodelige* 堂·罗德里戈 (Don Rodrigo).

It is interesting to note, however, how some ‘Food and Beverages’ examples – 9% of the Explications – have been rendered: first, it should be highlighted that among the 49 total cases of this domain found in the *corpus*, only 6 have been explicited, while the remaining 43 cases have been classified into 21 generalisations, 6 adaptations, 4 literal translations, 3 omissions, 2 equivalences, 1 loan and 6 cases of translation mistakes.

To sum up, it is possible to observe that the Explication strategy has been used above all to render general objects from daily life (32%) and place names (28%).

### 3.3 Adaptation

In accordance with Pedersen’s (2005) definition of “substitution”, divided by the author into “cultural substitution” (6) and “paraphrase” (8), all those cases in which culture-specific references have been substituted with cultural references either belonging to the target culture or reformulated with expressions better retrievable by target readers, have been categorised as adaptations. According to Pedersen (2005), culture-specific references can either be replaced with different elements that are “transcultural” (10), thus expected to be known by the TT readers, or, else, be completely removed and replaced by target culture references. This corresponds also to Díaz Cintas and Remael’s definition of “transposition”, according to which “a cultural concept of one culture is replaced by a cultural concept from another” (Díaz Cintas, Remael 2007, 204).

As regards paraphrasing, Pedersen (2005, 8-9) considers two ways of paraphrasing: paraphrase with sense transfer, meaning keeping the sense of the original reference that is instead removed, or situational paraphrase, that is the total elimination of the source text culture-specific reference and its replacement with something else that fits the context.

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that, in a second interview conducted in November 2019, the translator explained that the footnotes included in the book have been added by the editors, and not by her.

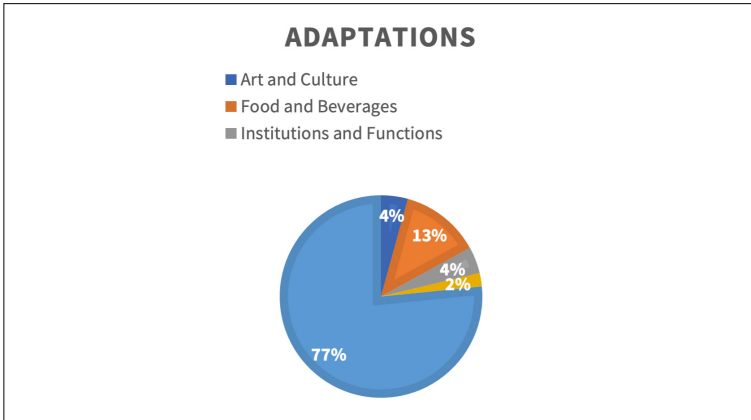


Chart 3 Adaptations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

It is clear from the chart that most cases that have been adapted once again belong to the domain of Objects from daily life [chart 3]. Among them, interesting examples concern what Pedersen (2005, 6) calls “cultural substitution”, where, as previously mentioned, a cultural element is basically substituted with another element that is either better known by the target readers or which belongs to the target culture. The first solution has been applied to the example (28) shown [tab. 10]:

Table 10 Adaptations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
28 Ethnographic References	Food and Beverages	Ci mettevamo sassi, tappi di <b>gassosa</b> , fiorellini, chiodi, schegge di vetro. (26) 'There we put rocks, <b>bottle tops</b> ', little flowers, nails, splinters of glass'. (30)	我们会放一些石子儿, 香槟酒塞子, 还有玻璃碎片。(14) 'We put some rocks, <b>champagne corks</b> and splinters of glass'.

\* The English version is here a generalisation, leaving out the reference to the Italian *gassosa*.

*Gassosa* is a typical Italian drink, very popular during the Sixties and famous for its iconic bottle. The Italian sentence focuses on the cap of the bottle, used by the protagonists as a toy to play with in the courtyard. The reference to *gassosa* is a way to inscribe the narrative into the precise historic period in which the story takes place, which highlights the cultural load of the novel. The Chinese translation, although trying to keep the original message unaltered by focusing on the caps too, substitutes the cultural reference with another one, probably considered better retrievable by the target readers: *xian-*

*gbingjiu saizi* 香槟酒塞子 (champagne corks). In order to better understand the rationale behind this translation choice, a question has been posed to the translator (pers. comm., June 2019), who explained:

in this case I could have used *qishui ping gaier* 汽水瓶盖儿 (sparkling water bottle caps). To use the word *saizi* 塞子 (cork) though, I used *xiangbin* 香槟 (champagne), because corks are used also for wine bottles or champagne bottles. (Author's transl.)

Her explanation shows that the choice was taken in order to use a cultural reference that could have sounded more familiar to the target readers while maintaining the reference to the cork. Although the adaptation strategy is meant to preserve the reference to the cork,<sup>27</sup> which would have been lost if *qishui* 汽水 (sparkling water) were used instead, the choice does not quite seem appropriate. It is difficult to imagine that the two protagonists, coming from poor families living in the suburbs of Naples during the post Second World War, would play with cork caps of champagne, an expensive wine that would hardly have been that popular in their neighborhood.

Cases of cultural adaptation, where the source culture reference has been substituted with a target culture one, can be observed in the examples reported in [tab. 11]:

**Table 11** Adaptations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
29 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Era un ragazzo coraggioso che brillava in tutti i giochi del cortile e della strada, soprattutto nel <b>lancio dello strùmmolo</b> . (39) 'He was a fearless boy who shone in all the courtyard and street games, especially <b>spinning a top</b> '. (44)*	他是一个非常勇敢的小伙子。在院子里和街道上玩游戏,他玩得特别棒,特别是 <b>抽陀螺</b> 。(28) 'He was a very brave kid. When he played in the courtyard or in the streets, he was very good especially in <b>spinning a top</b> '.
30 Ethnographic References	Art and Culture	A giocare a <b>dama e tris</b> . (80) 'To play <b>checkers and three-of-a-kind</b> '. (84)	一起玩 <b>三人跳棋</b> 。(68) 'Playing together <b>Chinese checkers</b> '.
31 Ethnographic References	Food and Beverages	Portandomi un' <b>orzata</b> . (225) 'Bringing me an <b>orzata</b> '. (230)**	给我端了一杯 <b>大麦茶</b> 。(218) 'Bringing me a <b>barley tea</b> '.

\* The English version is generalised.

\*\* Italics in the original.

<sup>27</sup> By looking at the historical bottles of *gassosa* of the Sixties, though, no references to a cork-closed bottle seem to exist. Only one source shows a packaging similar to champagne bottles, cf. the website: <https://www.patrimoineculinaire.ch/Produit-to/Gazzosa/65> (2022-05-28).

*Lancio dello strummolo* (29) – a typical street game like a spinning top – is culturally adapted by substituting it with *chou tuoluo* 抽陀螺, a Chinese traditional street game very similar to the Italian *strummolo*. Similarly, *dama e tris*, which means ‘checkers and tic-tac toe’ (30) are substituted with *san ren tiaopi* 三人跳棋, a traditional Chinese game; *orzata* (31), a typical drink made from almonds, is adapted with *damaicha* 大麦茶 (barley tea).

Another aspect that has always been adapted in the novel regards the floors of buildings. Italy and China are different in the way buildings’ floors are counted: while in Italy the ground floor is counted as ‘floor zero’, in China it is counted as ‘first floor’. It comes as no surprise, then, that every time a floor is mentioned in the source language, it is increased by one in the target language, as in:

**Table 12** Adaptations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
32 Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life	Al <b>quarto piano</b> della palazzina dove abitava don Achille. (53) ‘On the <b>fourth floor</b> of the building where Don Achille lived’. (57)	那是住在 <b>五楼</b> 的堂·阿奇勒。(41) ‘Don Achille living at the <b>fifth floor</b> ’.

Here (32), *quarto piano* (fourth floor) has been translated into *wu lou* 五楼 (fifth floor).

Particular attention should then be given to a description of a precise episode in the story, the New Year’s Eve dinner. In the neighborhood where the story is set, the strong distinction between social classes was symbolised by Elena, Lila and their friends’ poor families on one side and, on the other side, by the Solara family, the rich people. During New Year’s Eve, this distinction was highlighted by the quantity and the kind of fireworks every family could afford to buy and throw in the air: the more and magnificent the fireworks, the richer and powerful the family. Elena Ferrante describes the episode in detail, recurring to several specific names of different typologies of fireworks. Chen Ying, the translator, when asked about the strategies used to solve their translation, explained that she simply used “the names of the Chinese fireworks used for Spring Festival, which are similar to the Italian ones” (pers. comm., June 2019).



**Table 13** Adaptations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*. Fireworks

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
33	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Ma lo scoppiettio dei <b>trictac</b> , il sibilo dei <b>razzi</b> , il cannoneggiamento delle <b>botte a muro</b> aveva un costo. (163) 'But the pop of the <b>poppers</b> , the hiss of the <b>rockets</b> , the cannonades of the <b>missiles</b> had a cost'. (167)	但 <b>鞭炮</b> 、 <b>冲天炮</b> 和各种 <b>烟花</b> 都是要钱的。(152) 'But <b>firecrackers</b> , <b>rockets</b> and <b>fireworks</b> had a cost'.
34	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Mio padre comprava una scatola di <b>fitfit</b> , una di <b>rotelle</b> e una di esili <b>razzi</b> . (163) 'My father bought a box of <b>sparklers</b> , one of <b>wheels</b> , and one of <b>slender rockets</b> '. (167)	我父亲会买一盒 <b>烟花</b> ，一串 <b>鞭炮</b> ，还有几个小小的 <b>礼炮</b> 。(153) 'My dad used to buy a box of <b>fireworks</b> , a stick of <b>firecrackers</b> and <b>small rockets</b> '.
35	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life Io accesi i <b>fitfit</b> e le rotelle ai bambini. Lila convinse Melina ad accendere insieme a lei la miccia di un <b>bengala</b> . (169) 'I lighted <b>sparklers</b> and pinwheels for the children. "Lila persuaded Melina to light the fuse of a <b>Bengal light</b> with her'. (174)	我点燃 <b>烟火</b> ，还有小孩子手上的 <b>旋转烟花</b> 。莉拉说服了梅丽娜，她们一起点燃了一个 <b>孟加拉烟火</b> 。(160) 'I lighted the <b>sparklers</b> and the <b>pinwheels</b> the children had in their hand. Lila persuaded Melina and they lighted a <b>Mengjiala firework</b> '.
36	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life A mezzanotte metteva in mano a me <b>il ferretto delle stelline</b> o quello delle <b>girandole</b> . (163) 'At midnight he put in my hand, since I was the oldest, <b>the stem of a sparkler</b> or of a <b>Catherine wheel</b> , and lighted it'. (167)	他会把一些 <b>鞭炮</b> 和 <b>烟花</b> 交到我手上有那种会炸出 <b>星星</b> 的烟火，还有那种 <b>旋转烟花</b> 。(153) 'He would put some <b>firecrackers</b> and <b>fireworks</b> in my hand, <b>those fireworks that would burst into stars</b> and the <b>rotating fireworks</b> '.

*Trictac* (33), which refers to a long trigger on which small fireworks are joined to, is translated with the general term *bianpao* 鞭炮 (firecrackers). *Razzi* (33), which means 'rockets', has its own equivalent, *chongtianpao* 冲天炮, while *botte a muro* (33), an onion-shaped firecracker that is normally thrown against a wall to make it explode, are adapted with *yanhua* 烟花 (fireworks). Again, in (34) *una scatola di fitfit e una di rotelle* (a box of *fitfit* and one of rolls) are adapted with *yanhua* 烟花 and *bianpao* 鞭炮. *Bengala* (35), which is the brand-name of a firecracker, is instead transliterated and explicitated into *Mengjiala yanhuo* 孟加拉烟火 (*Mengjiala* firework). In (36), *stelline* (sparklers) and *girandole* (Catherine wheels) are also adapted with *yanhua* 烟花 (fireworks) and *bianpao* 鞭炮 (firecrackers). They are also somehow explicitated by saying *na zhong hui zha chu xingxing de yanhua* 那种会炸出星星的烟火 (fireworks that could burst into stars) and *na zhong xuanzhuo yanhua* 那种旋转烟花 (rotating fireworks).

### 3.4 Loan

Loans have been intended as in Díaz Cintas and Remael’s (2007, 202) definition, which – according to the authors – implies that “the source text or phrase is incorporated into the TL text because no translation is possible and both languages use the same exact word”. Among these cases have been included all those transliterations without any additional information, which Chen (2013), previously mentioned, categorises as “phonemic transcription and phonemic loans”.

As predictable, most cases belong to the domain of geographical objects (16 cases out of 24):

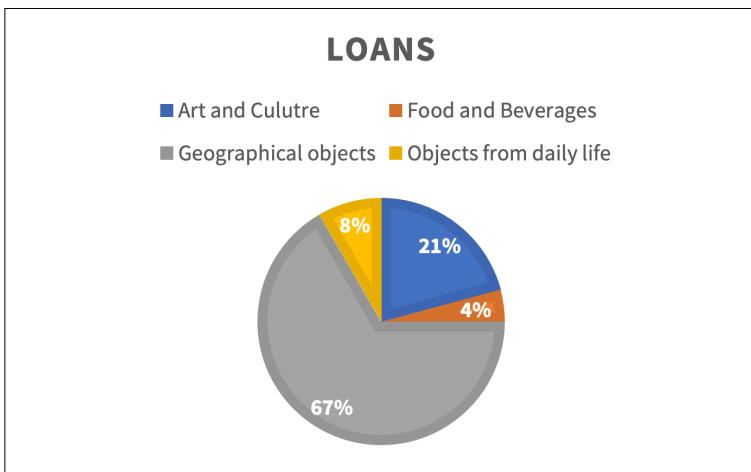


Chart 4 Loans in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Chen Ying, the translator, reported of having personally transliterated those names which do not have an official Chinese equivalent existing on official Chinese road maps (pers. comm., June 2019). One example, representative of the strategy, is provided in [tab. 14]:

Table 14 Loans in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
37 Ref.	Geographical Geographical Obj.	Comparvero tre apprendisti, ragazzi della provincia, venivano da <b>Melito</b> , quasi muti. (245) 'Three nearly silent apprentices appeared, country boys, from <b>Melito</b> '. (249)	整个作坊被重新布置了,有了三个从 <b>梅利托</b> 来的乡下学徒。(239) 'There were three apprentices coming from <b>Melito countryside</b> '.

Indeed, *Melito* is phonemically transferred into *Meilituo* 梅利托.

### 3.5 Equivalence

Under 'Equivalence' have here been categorised all cases rendered through their pre-existent TL official translation or, to put it in Pedersen's (2011, 76) words, their "official equivalent". Among these, have been classified also cultural references defined by Pedersen (2011, 107) as "transcultural", namely references which are

not bound to the source culture, but which should be retrievable from common encyclopaedic knowledge of the ST and the TT audiences, as [they] could be assumed to be known in both the SC [Source Culture] and the TC [Target Culture]. (Pedersen 2011, 107)

'Geographical Objects' is the most numerous category of Equivalences (12 cases out of 22):

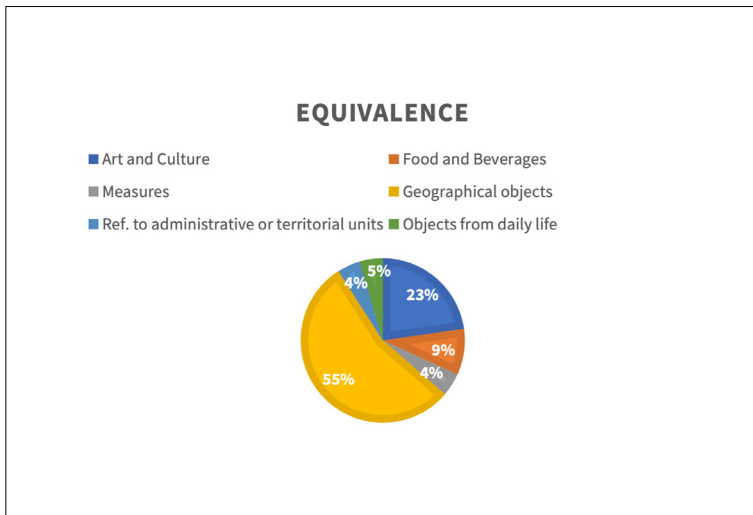


Chart 5 Equivalences in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

They all refer to those place names that do have their institutional Chinese name, as in [tab. 15]:

**Table 15** Equivalence in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Subdomain</b>	<b>Source text (page)</b>	<b>Target text (page)</b>
38	Geographical Ref.	Geographical Obj.	Suggerì una permanenza a <b>Ischia</b> , a <b>Capri</b> e casomai sulla <b>costiera amalfitana</b> . (284) 'She suggested a stay on <b>Ischia</b> , <b>Capri</b> , and maybe the <b>Amalfi coast</b> '. (288)	她提出去 <b>伊斯基亚岛</b> 、 <b>卡普里岛</b> 逛逛, 说 <b>阿玛菲海岸</b> 也可以。(280) 'She mentioned <b>Ischia Island Capri Island</b> and maybe the <b>Amalfi coast</b> '.

*Ischia*, *Capri* and *costiera amalfitana* (Amalfi coast) have their official Chinese translation: *Yisijiya dao* 伊斯基亚岛 (Ischia Island), *Kapuli dao* 卡普里岛 (Capri Island) and *Amafei hai'an* (Amalfi Coast).

As for transcultural references, an example is provided by [tab. 16]:

**Table 16** Equivalence in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Subdomain</b>	<b>Source text (page)</b>	<b>Target text (page)</b>
39	Ethnographic References	Art and Culture	Aveva un'enorme vasca da bagno come quella della pubblicità <b>Palmolive</b> . (284) 'The apartment in the new neighborhood was smaller but had an enormous bathtub, like the ones in the <b>Palmolive ad</b> '.	有一个很大的浴缸, 就像 <b>棕榄牌卫浴广告</b> 上面一样。(280) 'The apartment had a big bathtub like the one in the <b>Palmolive advertisement</b> '.

*Palmolive* is an American brand of personal hygiene products, well known in Italy and famous in China too, where it thus has its official Chinese translation: *Zonglan* 棕榄.

### 3.6 Literal Translation

Literal translation is a strategy often associated to Calques (cf. Pedersen 2005; Díaz Cintas, Remael 2007) or Loans (Ranzato 2016), labelled by Pedersen (2005; 2011) under the Direct Translation broader category: it implies leaving unaltered the semantic load of the ST ECR, without adding or eliminating any piece of information and without guiding the target audience in any way. As shown by the chart, the majority of them belongs to the category of Geographical Objects [chart 6]:

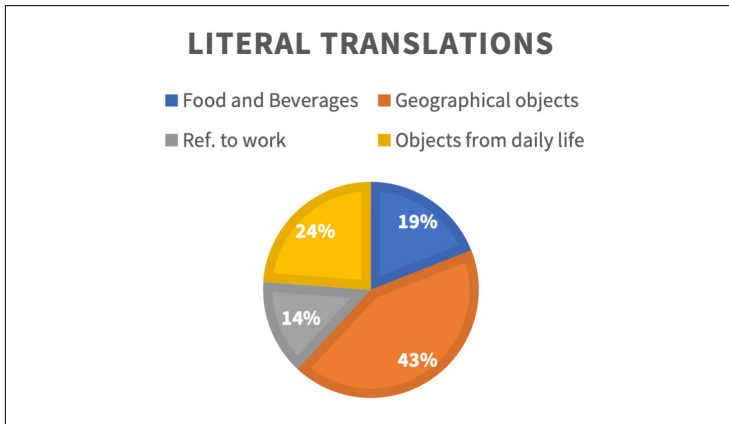


Chart 6 Literal Translations in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

However, an interesting example comes from Objects from daily life:

Table 17 Literal Translation in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
40	Ethnographic ref. Obj. from daily life	Riuscivano a leggere al massimo: <b>Sali e Tabacchi</b> , Salumeria, <b>Poste e Telegrafi</b> . (118) ‘[They] managed to read at most: <b>Tobacconist</b> , Grocery, <b>Post Office</b> ’. (122)	勉强能读出来的字是: 盐、香烟、肉食店、邮局、电报。(107) ‘What they managed to read was: <b>salt, tobacco</b> , grocery store, <b>post office, telegram</b> ’.

*Sali e Tabacchi* refers to the iconic sign of the shops where tobacco and salt, the State’s monopoly until 1975, used to be sold. Similarly, *Poste e Telegrafi* represents the equally iconic sign of the national post office service during the post war period. In the Chinese version, the terms are simply literally translated one by one by leaving the semantic load unaltered, but somehow missing the original iconic significance: *yan* 盐 (salt), *xiangyan* 香烟 (tobacco), *youju* 邮局 (post office), *dianbao* 电报 (telegram).

### 3.7 Omission

In this analysis, omission has been considered by means of “replacing the ST ECR with nothing” (Pedersen 2005, 9), a definition that finds common ground among scholars. As Leppihalme (1994), quoted by Pedersen (2005; 2011) notes, this strategy may be voluntary

and chosen after excluding all the other viable options, or it may be in fact an irresponsible decision, taken to avoid looking up something the translator may not know. In this sense, two cases (on a total of 7) have been observed in the here presented analysis:

**Table 18** Omission in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
41 Socio-political references	Ref. to socio-cultural life	Per raccogliere i voti di <b>Stella e Corona</b> , dei monarchici. (149) 'It was the base for smuggling and for collecting votes for the monarchists'. (152)*	是保皇党的基地。(138) 'It was the base of the <b>Monarchist Party</b> '.

\* The English version omits the reference too.

“Raccogliere i voti di Stella e Corona, dei monarchici” (Ferrante 2011, 149) is a sentence that refers to the Italian Monarchist Party *Stella e Corona*, whose reference is omitted in Chinese – *shi baohuangdang de jidi* 是保皇党的基地 (it was the base of the Monarchist Party) – probably because it is too specific. A similar choice has been taken in the example reported in [tab. 19], where the geographical reference to Avellino is completely omitted.

**Table 19** Omission in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
42 Geographical Ref.	Geographical Obj.	Fu contento che avesse raggiunto i suoi compagni nell' <b>Avellinese</b> per studiare. (218) 'He was pleased that he had joined his schoolmates <b>in the Avellinese</b> to study'. (223)	他同时很高兴尼诺和他同学见面、一起学习。(211) 'He was happy hat Nino and his schoolmates would meet and study together'.

### 3.8 Simplification

In this category, personally coined for the specific purposes of this analysis, have been listed two cases in which the original tone and intention have been 'toned down' by the omission of swearwords and which have thus been noted as relevant:

**Table 20** Simplifications in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
43 Ethnographic ref.	Obj. from daily life	Andai nel <b>cesso</b> a vedere cosa avevo e scoprii che le mutande erano sporche di sangue. (89) 'I went to the <b>bathroom</b> to see what was wrong and discovered that my underpants were stained with blood'. (93)	我去洗手间里看看发生了什么, 看到内裤上全是血。(77) 'I went to the <b>bathroom</b> to see what had happened and saw blood on my underpants'.
44 Socio-political ref.	Ref. to socio-cultural life	Quello è il figlio di <b>un comunista di merda</b> . (146) 'He's a <b>lousy Communist</b> ' (150).	那个人是一个可恶的共产党。(135) 'He is a <b>hateful Communist</b> '.

Both the cases presented above are related to low register words: *cesso* (43) is the vulgar word for 'bathroom' and *di merda* (44), which literally means 'made of shit', is a swearword referred to *comunista* (communist), meaning 'fucking communist'. Both the expressions have been neutralised and reduced to *xishoujian* 洗手间 (toilet) and *kewu* 可恶 (hateful; lousy). While the toning down of *cesso* may sound a bit forced, since it is not a proper swearword, the second example may have been somehow diminished, instead, because considered too offensive.

### 3.9 Translation Errors

In recognising the translation strategies used to transfer Italian culture into Chinese, some cases of translation mistakes have been retrieved too. All things considered, the percentage of mistakes in the first volume, although existent, is nevertheless low: among the 272 cases of *realia* selected, only 21 of them have been cause of translation errors, some of which, referred to classical high school (3), have already been described in the Generalisation section.

Other examples are mainly concerned with 'Objects from daily life' (5), 'Food and Beverages' (6), 'Geographical Objects' (6) and 'Art and Culture' (1). The most relevant ones, representative of incomprehension by the translator, are reported in [tab. 21] below:

**Table 21** Translation errors in the first volume of *My Brilliant Friend*

Domain	Subdomain	Source text (page)	Target text (page)
45	Ethnographic References	Obj. from daily life La Oliviero, arcigna ma calma, sfoderò i temi meravigliosi di Lila e persino i disegni coloratissimi che in classe, quando si applicava, ci incantavano tutte perché, <b>rubacchiando pastelli Giotto</b> , tratteggiava molto realisticamente principesse [...]. (60) 'Maestra Oliviero, stern but calm, displayed Lila's marvelous compositions and even the beautifully colored drawings that in class enchanted us all, because, <b>pilfering Giotto's pastels</b> , she portrayed in a realistic style princesses [...]. (64)	老师有些不满,但还是尽量保持平静。老师拿出了莉拉写的精彩作文甚至是课堂绘画。莉拉无论画什么,班上的女生都很喜欢,她巧妙地模仿乔托的画法,她笔下的那些公主都很逼真。(48) 'The teacher didn't say anything, but stayed calm. She took Lila's wonderful compositions and even her drawings. Whatever she painted, every girl in the classroom liked it. <b>She wisely imitated Giotto's painting technique</b> '.
46	Ethnographic References	Food and Beverages A mangiare <b>i taralli e i frutti di mare</b> . (70) 'To eat <b>taralli and seafood</b> '. (74)	吃牡蛎和其他海鲜。(58) 'To eat <b>oysters and other seafood</b> '.
47	Ethnographic References	Food and Beverages A mangiare pane con la salsiccia e i <b>friarielli</b> . (106) 'Eating bread with sausage and <b>greens</b> '. (110)	吃着一块夹着香肠和煎蛋的面包。(94) 'Eating bread with sausage <b>fried eggs</b> '.
48	Ethnographic References	Food and Beverages Portava sempre qualcosa: <b>paste</b> , cioccolatini, zucchero, caffè. (223) 'He always brought something: <b>pastries</b> , chocolates, sugar, coffee'. (227)	每次他都会带点东西来:面条、巧克力、糖或者咖啡。(215) 'He always brought something: <b>noodles</b> , chocolate, sugar or coffee'.

The first case (45), *rubacchiando pastelli Giotto* (stealing Giotto pencils), refers to an iconic Italian brand of pencils and drawing material, named after the famous painter Giotto. The Chinese translator, perhaps in the attempt of keeping the reference to Giotto, transferred the sentence into *Lila wulun hua shenme, banshang de nüsheng dou hen xihuan, ta qiaomiao de mofang Qiaotuo de huafa* 莉拉无论画什么,班上的女生都很喜欢,她巧妙地模仿乔托的画法 [...] (whatever Lila painted, every girl in the classroom liked it. She wisely imitated Giotto's painting technique). Although the sublet meaning, the fact that she painted very well, is somehow maintained, in the original version there is in fact no reference to Giotto's style, thus the translation choice seems rather a misunderstanding of the reference.

The other three examples, belonging to the category of 'Food and Beverages', are representative of a series of incomprehensions, or of lack of knowledge, of some typical Italian dishes. The first one (46),



*a mangiare taralli e i frutti di mare* (to eat *taralli* and seafood), refers to the traditional Neapolitan salty snack *taralli*. If we look at the Chinese version, however, it is clear that the reference has not been retrieved by the translator, as the sentence is rendered into *chi muli he qita haixian* 吃牡蛎和其他海鲜 (eat oysters and other seafood). Similarly, the following example (47) refers to turnip tops, which in southern Italy, and in Naples in particular, are traditionally called *friarielli*. The semi-dialectal term serves here to contribute to the “neopolitanity” (de Rogatis 2018) that characterises Elena Ferrante’s language, but, probably because of the assonance with the Italian word *frittata* (fried eggs), it has been translated into *jiandan* 煎蛋 (fried eggs). The last case (48) reported in [tab. 21] shows a mistranslation of the term *paste*. *Paste* (pastries) has here, and in another occurrence too, been confused with *pasta*, thus translated with *miantiao* 面条 (noodles).

#### 4 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper shows how the heavy cultural load characterising the Italian novel *My Brilliant Friend* has been transferred into Chinese. In particular, the study analysed the translation of the cultural references retrieved in the first volume of the quadrilogy through their systematic categorisation and the recognition of their correspondent translation strategies adopted, triangulated with an interview conducted with the translator. After defining culture-specific references and presenting the methodology and the relative categorisation taxonomies applied, a detailed description of the analysis has been provided by presenting the most relevant examples for each typology.

Although the analysis is referred only to Extra-linguistic Cultural References (Pedersen 2005; 2011), thus excluding ‘intra-linguistic’ ones and being therefore limited in its scope, it is however possible to note that extra-linguistic cultural references have been mostly rendered via ‘explicative’ strategies, with 64 generalisations, 63 explicitations and 47 adaptations out of 272 total cases. The results of the analysis may in a way confirm the initial assumption – formulated in the introduction of this article – that Italian language and culture are little known in China, thus highlighting the necessity of some further information to transfer Italian cultural references into Chinese; on the other hand, the data also show a lack of knowledge or incomprehension of particular aspects of Italian culture, which caused some mistakes in the translation. The number of errors is nevertheless low (21) if compared with the total amount of cases considered in the study (272).

In order to have a wider spectrum of comparison, intra-linguistic references as well as other cases of translation errors may be analyzed too, and the *corpus* may also include the other three volumes of the quadrilogy. Considering then the wave of success the Ferrante phenome-

non is having in China, it should be noted that also the TV series taken from the novel is gaining an undoubtedly enthusiastic acclaim among the Chinese audience. However, the official subtitled version of the episodes seems to be criticised by the Chinese audience and by the translator and editor of the novel (pers. comm., February 2020), complaining several translation errors, lack of knowledge of the novel and plot cuts due to restriction guidelines. At the same time, there are several different non-professionally subtitled versions of the series, translated by the so-called *fansubbers*, that are guaranteeing the appreciation of the series by the Chinese audience. Future research will investigate how Italian culture is transferred also in the Chinese audiovisual sector, where translation still does not seem to receive sufficient attention, often resulting in poor outcomes (Chen 2014; Yang 2019; Zhao, Li 2017).

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