

Translatable and Untranslatable vocabulary in IELTS Speaking

Brainstorm things into the categories below, only writing down the ones that one of you didn't know before your partner told you about it.

Types of accommodation

Parts of a home/ Furniture

Places where people live ("city" etc)

Relationships

Types of job

Festivals/ Celebrations

Things related to festivals/ celebrations

Places people go in their free time

Free time activities

Types of music

Types of TV programme

Types of food

Compare with the list on the next page. Did you come up with any high level language that isn't on that list?

When you were brainstorming, did you think of any words in your language which you couldn't translate? How could you explain those things in the speaking test?

Suggested answers

Types of accommodation

(university) halls/ dorm
condo(minium)
council flat
high rise
shared house
studio (flat)

Parts of a home/ Furniture

balcony
cooker
corridor/ hall
fitted kitchen
fridge
intercom
living room
master bedroom
wardrobe

Places where people live (“city” etc)

capital (city)/ regional capital
(seaside) resort
(small/ medium-sized/ large) village
city centre/ downtown/ town centre
commuter town/ satellite town
outskirts
suburb

Relationships

(distant) relation/ relative
(former) classmate
(former) colleague/ co-worker/ workmate
(maternal/ paternal) grandfather/ grandmother
_____-in-law/ my in-laws
acquaintance
ancestor
best friend/ good friend
direct boss/ line manager
drinking buddy
ex (husband/ wife/ boyfriend/ girlfriend)
fellow alumni
female friend/ male friend
fiancé/ fiancée
great grandparent
great uncle/ aunt
niece/ nephew

old friend
partner
school friend/ childhood friend
stepmother/stepfather

Types of job

admin staff/ clerk
businessman/ entrepreneur
cashier/ shop assistant
office worker
profession

Festivals/ Celebrations

local festival
marriage ceremony/ wedding reception

Things related to festivals/ celebrations

fireworks/ sparklers
party poppers
speech
toast

Places people go in their free time

(live/ music) venue
amusement arcade
hot springs (resort)/ public baths
masseur

Free time activities

a... reunion
channel hopping
chill out/ veg out/ take it easy
go clubbing
have a lie in/ catch up on my sleep
meet up with...
surfing the net
window shopping

Types of music

classic rock
classical
dance/ techno/ house
folk
folk
girl band/ boy band
indie/ alternative
pop
world music

Types of TV programme

adaptation
cop series
costume drama/ historical drama
current affairs
mini-series
murder mystery/ whodunit
news broadcast
quiz show
reality show
sit-com
sketch show
soap opera
stand-up comedy
talk show
travel programme
weather forecast
wildlife documentary

Types of food

(Sunday) roast
dessert
fast food/ junk food
main course
microwave food/ ready meals
starter
soup/ stew

Try to think of a word or expression which is basically untranslatable from your language in one of the categories above (including phrases that are only used in your country but are based on English), then use phrases like those given below to describe that thing until your partner guesses what it is. Do they agree that it is untranslatable and think you described it well?

- Although there's no obvious translation, it could be explained as...
- (Foreign/ Young) people sometimes think this means... but in fact/ actually...
- I think most people know what a... is, but anyway it...
- In Japan we say this when (we are talking about)...
- It has something in common with...
- It's a bit like (the British/ American/ Chinese/ Korean...) but...
- It's something like...
- It's the closest Japanese equivalent to...
- The normal/ usual translation for this is...
- There's a word/ expression in my language, " _____ ", which means...
- This also exists in China/ Korea/ most Asian countries/...
- This is in English dictionaries, but not everyone knows it. It means...
- This is often explained as...
- This means (something like)...
- This only exists in Japan (and a couple of other countries) and is...
- Translated word for word, it would be.../ The direct translation is...

Do the same with the expressions on the next page.

Ask your partner and then the teacher about any which you might want to mention in the speaking exam but don't know how to explain.

Suggested untranslatable words and expressions

Types of accommodation

Apaato

Manshon

Minshuku

Ryokan

Parts of a home/ Furniture

Chabudai

Cooler

Flooring

Fusuma

Futon

Genkan

Genkan-saki

Getabako

Kotatsu

Oshiire

Shouji

Tansu

Unit bath

Washitsu

Washlette

Youshitsu

Zabuton

Places where people live (city etc)

-ku

-ken

Furusato

Relationships

Bucho

Joushi

Kacho

OB

Sempai/ Kouhai

Types of job

Freeter

OL

Paato/ Arubaito

Salaryman

Festivals/ Celebrations

Bounenkai

Enkai

Hanami

Hatsumode

Hinamatsuri

Kodomo-no-hi

Nomikai

Nyuugakushiki

Obon

Oomisoka

Seijinshiki

Setsubun

Shichigosan

Tanabata

White Day (including giri choco)

Things related to festivals/ celebrations

Giri-choco

Hakama

Otoshidama

Toshikoshisoba

Yukata

Places people go in their free time

Bunka centre

Hello Work

Izakaya

Karaoke box

Manga kissa

Free time activities

Tachiyomi

Nomikai

Types of music

J-pop

Enka

BGM

Idol

Visual kei

Types of TV programme

Kouhaku gassen

Manzai

Variety bangumi

Types of food

Nabemono

Nimono

Wagashi

Washoku

Yakitori

Youshoku