

Study on Translation of Chinese Food Dishes

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Abstract

With the rapid development of global economy, food culture is indispensable for human. The need to delicate food is demanding. Chinese diet is profound. Chinese food fronts some problems, one of which is English translation. In this paper, the author aims to find the rules which influence the translation of Chinese courses and conclude the translation methods. In the modernized China, translators should improve the quality of Chinese food interpreting based on Chinese and western food difference.

Keywords

Translation, Chinese Food, Rules, Methods

1. Introduction

With many great Chinese achievements, a lot of foreigners begin to pay attention to Chinese culture, absolutely including food dish. Food dish is the sum of material wealth and spiritual wealth created by the Chinese people in the long term dietary practice activities, but also an important window for foreign guests understanding China.

The translator must follow the principles of “accurately understand and convey cuisine features, the spread of Chinese culture with western culture (Carole 2007)” because there are different translation methods in different occasions and context. Chinese dish names are not just a symbol of language. It can be said that most dishes are encapsulated with rich cultural information. Dish can be translated accurately into English with little knowledge of Chinese diet. Dish name translation is just one of the many translation topics and needs to fumble ceaselessly in practice.

The translation of the Chinese dish name is very irregular, which might have misunderstanding and barrier towards the world. The rules of translation and the methods of solving the translation problems will be discussed.

2. Main Chinese Food Culture

Since China is a vast country, there are significant differences between the climate, customs and diet and then form a special flavor. The first, China has had tastes that the southern sweet, north salty, east acids and west spicy—"Bashu, Qili, Huaiyang, Guangdong, Fujian and the four flavors." Chinese food culture is profound. At least there should be thousands of years of history, the study of the formation and the characteristics. The second, four seasons are different throughout the year. Eating season is another feature of Chinese cooking. China has been seasonal changes since ancient time, for instance, in winter dish need stew, and in summer it can be cold and dressed with sauce. The third, in cooking the beauty is paid attention to, including food color, smell, taste, shape. Beauty gives a high degree of unity of spirit and matter, special enjoyment. The fourth, cooking focused on taste earlier. Taste is not only the color of the food and smell. It includes a lot of detail things.

Many of the characteristics of the Chinese food culture reflect in the above food culture: a direct impact on the development of China's food culture. Because of the presence of population pressure, as well as a variety of other reasons, Chinese diet from the pre-Qin, meat and less grain and more grain-based, supplemented by vegetables is a typical meal structure. Rice is the staple food and the vegetable is in order with rice, which is to help the rice to swallow. Why does rice help swallow? That is because the staple food is not delicious; there must be a substance to aid it to allow people to eat. Of course, the function of the dish is in common.

3. Rules of Translation about Chinese Food

Newmark explains translation in such a way: often, through not by means always, it is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text (Fuschia, 2005). In comparing Newmark's notion with Nida's, necessity of Functional Equivalence lies in gaining the popularity among people, which is similar to Nida's view point in the receptor language the closest equivalent of the source language message. Like Nida's theory focusing on intelligibility to readers, reception theory is a branch of modern literary studies with the way which literary works are received by readers. This theory has sometimes been used to refer to read-response. According to famous scholar's theories, our ancestors concluded the lots of principles of translation of Chinese food. In China, there are main three principles in the translation of Chinese food. And these rules are the fundamental in translation. They are literal translation, meaning translation and transliteration.

3.1. Literal Translation

The literal translation method is most commonly used, especially for the realistic type of dish. And the method is the most effective one. Chinese dishes are often mainly consistent of four parts: the raw material, spices, cooking methods and shape. This method follows the rules of word formation. So the foreigners would

have no difficulty in understanding. Such as roasted duck with sweet paste, the raw material is duck, the dressing is sweet paste, and the cooking method is roasting. Literal translation is the most convenient one.

An accurate understanding of the source of language translation is the first factor. Therefore, learning the Chinese dish, the method and naming skill should be known. Many dish names reflect the cuisine of raw materials, the shape and the original cooking. Some dishes contain the words of Chinese cultural implication names; it belongs to the “impressionistic type”. Translations should be faithful and accurate, concise terms, showing a dish of raw materials, cooking methods, condiments, etc., letting the foreign guests for the first time to understand the English translation, and Chinese. Therefore, the translation must be faithful to the original text, which is very important to translate the name of the dish, without exception. In short, translation of dish name is connected to raw materials, manner, place names, and so on, owing to different Chinese and Western concepts of diet.

In conclusion, when literal translating method is used, and then its material, cooking method and local characteristics should be analysed.

3.2. Meaning Translation

Meaning implication is used to express the meaning of original text. It emphasizes less on the form of words and its literal meaning. When some culture-loaded words are not available in translation, it can be solved under the principle of free translation. When the literal translation approach is not suitable, the translator can try to resort to the liberal translation approach. Liberal translation is often used to tackle romantic dish names and some of the obscure and ambiguous names.

Due to the differences in histories, geographic locations, local customs, religious belief and so on, there are some translation obstacles in communication which hinder people from understanding each other properly. Accordingly, it is very important to overcome the obstacle of cultural differences in cross-cultural communication.

In this sense, translation means are more than merely translating the Chinese dish. It means also to transfer between cultures. The translation of one language into another is far more complex than most people believe. Most people assume that text in one language can be accurately translated into another language, so long as the translator uses a good bilingual dictionary. Unfortunately, language is not so simple and direct translation in many cases which are difficult, such as: Fried rice Yangzhou style, fresh mushroom and sliced pork and so on.

3.3. Transliteration

Transliteration belongs to special rules of translation.

China developed fast almost in every aspect. And Chinese flowed into the west, especially in dishes. Some is even combined in the English dictionary (Onions, 1997).

Transliteration helps to promote the food culture with Chinese characteristics. Such as Mantou (steamed bun), Jiaozi, Tofu and so on, they are all accepted by foreigners. Because some special food does not have words in the English dictionary and its name in Chinese is easy to remember. So when foreigners hear it, they can remember, eventually it appears into the English dictionary.

With the deep communication of world, many transliteration Chinese dishes transmit to west (Chen, 2001). Especially, the reflection words in English of some Chinese traditional food cannot be found, such as wonton, shaomai and chaofan. Of course, in other Asian countries, some dishes are expressed with its original name, such as sushi “すし, 寿司”, sake “さけ, 日本清酒”.

When translated into English, the names of Chinese dishes may be classified into three groups based on the uniqueness of their formation. Different name groups of Chinese dishes should adopt different translation methods, such as literal translation, meaning Translation and transliteration, according to the psychological expectation of English readers and the characteristics of cross-culture communication.

4. Methods of Translation about Chinese Food

From the three basic rules of translation, it derived some methods of translation of Chinese food name. The methods are also related to the differences between the Chinese and western food.

4.1. According to Cooking Method

This belongs to literal translation in general situation. And it can be divided into several kinds. Here three types are introduced. One is the cooking method; another is the allusion and the third is local character (Xiong, 2002).

4.1.1. Cooking Techniques

There are almost ten kinds of cooking method in Chinese food.

There are Stir-fry (炒), pan-fry (煎), quick-fry (爆), deep-fry (炸), braise (烧), boil (煮), steam (蒸), simmer/stew (煲炖), smoke (熏), and broil (铁烧). When translated, it should be compiled to the cooking method. Some instances are shown as follows: “芥末鸭掌” duck webs with mustard sauce, “葱油鸡” chicken in Scallion oil, “米酒鱼卷” fish rolls with rice wine. “红烧牛肉” braised beef with brown sauce, “鱼香肉丝” fried shredded pork with Sweet and sour sauce, “清炖猪蹄” stewed pig hoof in clean soup. The western food did not share these cooking techniques. These are all unique in Chinese food.

This can be concluded as raw material with cooking techniques of translation method (Xu, 2005).

4.1.2. The Dressing and Shape of Raw Material

The skill of cutting vegetables and meat is also very important. It is related to the cooking method. The materials could be cut to different types with different cutting skills. Like slice, piece, cube and lump. Translating dishes are also related to those. For instance, 例: “茄汁鱼片” sliced fish with tomato sauce, “椒麻鸡块”

cutlets chicken with hot pepper, “黄酒脆皮虾仁” crisp shrimps with rice wine sauce. And this can be concluded as raw material with dressing and shape of translation method.

Some dishes are related to the cooking tools, for example, “干锅牛肉” dry pot beef. This can be concluded as cooking tools with raw material translation method.

Another way of dish names translated with literal method is these names with dressing. Instances are as follows: “酒烤香肠” sausage roasted in wine, “红烧肉” pork braised in brown sauce, “蚝油生菜” lettuce in oyster sauce. At last, dish names including the taste and flavor can be translated with literal method too. Adding the favor or taste to the raw material can be easily named. For instances, “红烧肉” pork braised in brown sauce, “辣子鸡” chicken cubes stir-fried with. This belongs to literal translation rule, too.

4.2. According to Allusion

Chinese dishes in accordance with the dish name can't be simply translated. Such as “Ma po to fu” is translated into pockmarked woman's bean curd and “eight immortals crossing the sea. This non-standard translation will make foreign guests dazed, amazed and misunderstanding, and then their appetite would totally disappear. So the meaning translation method is chosen.

Many Chinese names of dish often contain a lot of historical, cultural information. The elegant, subtle one stressing on expression and association ability should be paid attention to. A small amount of dishes names after raw materials. Such as “pretenders”—“佛跳墙”, which accords to a folklore: the flavor of this dish attracted monks in the temple and he jumped out of the wall to eat it. Sweetened red bean cream with lotus seeds and dried lily. The unswerving translation from the Chinese title says a happy marriage that lasts 100 years—“百年好合”. Beggar's chicken “叫花鸡” can be explained as a story. There's a legendary story connected to it (Zhang, 2000). Long ago a beggar stole a chicken and was pursued by the owner. He covered the chicken all over with clay which he found nearby and threw it into the fire to cook it. After a long while he removed the mud-coated chicken from the fire. When he cracked the clay he found, to his astonishment, that the chicken had been baked into a delicious dish with wonderful flavor. That night he had a very enjoyable meal. And this is the origin of the dish name. When we face some dishes which cannot straightforward translated, we should conceptualize it.

And that is related to meaning translation rules. The method of translation needs rich knowledge of Chinese culture, so we should accumulate little by little. It is never too late to learn. One climbing the ladder must begin the bottom.

4.3. According to Local Characteristic

Chinese cuisines are variety (Hu, 1999), like Sichuan cuisine, Shandong cuisine and Guangdong cuisine etc. So a lot of dishes emerge heavily local characteristics. For instance, Hunan beef “湖南牛肉”, when translating these dishes, we

choose the transliteration rules.

Here the translation method according to local characteristics is introduced. Some dishes are somewhere around, and particularly unique famous English translation of the original names. Even if it has no name, name is also added. Such as “叉烧”, a Cantonese dish of pork, is a roast meat marinated in spices, unique to Guangdong. If it is translated into general barbecue, translation is not the recipe. Therefore, pork can be translated as Roast iced fillet of pork, Guangdong Style. It reviews delta fried wild geese, translated as Chaozhou roast goose or roast goose “潮州烧鹅”.

The translation of dish name should pay attention to preserve local culture, reflect local characteristics and flavor cooking skills. There are three methods of translation. The first is the literal translation method names of raw materials. Such as: Guangdong sausage “广东香肠”. The second is the name reflecting the local flavor. Such as: Beef Cooked with Soy Sauce beef in brown sauce, Beijing Style “京酱牛肉”. The third is the name of raw materials for the local specialty, their translations for: cooking method + name + materials. Such as: Steamed Nanjing Duck “南京板鸭”.

However, there are some factors preventing the translation of dish names (Duo, 2005). For instance, the ingredients of dishes are very extensive; the art of cuisine is very complicated and stresses Chinese people’s pursuit of elegance in naming the cuisine. All of those may lead the translation disarray. So in most cases, it is not appropriate to merely use one of translate methods to translate dish names, so the better method is to combine other methods. For example, if dish names are related to legends with metaphorical meanings or with auspicious implication (Newmark, 2001), it is suitable to use meaning translation plus transliteration.

5. Conclusion

From the differences on western and Chinese food: the raw material, cooking method, table manner and concept on food, more about the factors which result in the misunderstanding of dish translation can be learned. Then from the rules of translation of Chinese food, the methods of translation are concluded. There are almost three kinds of translation rules that are literal translation, meaning translation and transliteration. Here the methods of translation of Chinese food, according to cooking method, allusion and local characteristic, are just small part of translation ones. These can be used in all kinds of translation, especially in food dish translation. The methods of translation can be concluded. And it still has space to perfect the methods.

It is natural that the translation methods and skills would change, too. We all know that translation cannot live without the understanding of culture, so does the food dish translation. The translation of Chinese dishes is stepped into a regular and standard way. The methods from the differences of food can be concluded. The purpose is the more accurate translation of dish names to the west. Another point is the change. With time changing, the culture is changing, so our

translation methods need to be changeable. So the translation road is very long. Eventually, our aim would be to achieve the better communication and greater development.

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