

Explicitation Employed in the Translation of Food Culture— Based on the Research of Fujian Cuisine

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Fujian cuisine is a distinctive Chinese cuisine. Today, there are many faults and mistakes in the translation of the dish names, which leads to the failure and inconvenience of cross-cultural communication. The paper is an attempt to probe into the appropriate translation of Fujian dish names by the employment of explicitation.

Keywords: explicitation, food culture, Fujian cuisine, dish name, ingredient

A Brief Introduction to Fujian Cuisine

Fujian cuisine, also known as Min cuisine, boasts a long history and distinctive flavor. Fujian cuisine emphasizes the preservation of the natural taste of ingredients, with a focus on lightness, elegance, and freshness. It prominently features the delicacies from both the sea and mountains.

The culinary techniques used in Fujian cuisine are diverse and encompass a range of cooking methods, such as steaming, braising, stewing, and stir-frying. Renowned for its unique seasoning and cooking skills, Fujian cuisine excels in mastering the precise heat control and harmonious combination of ingredients to bring out the original flavors and textures.

Fujian cuisine has earned great prestige both domestically and internationally. Such cuisines as “醉排骨”, “醉糟鸡”, “荔枝肉”, “爆炒双脆”, and “莆田卤面” have been popular dishes in the Chinese restaurants all around the world. It is not just a culinary tradition but also a priceless cultural gem that embodies the unique characteristics and historical heritage of Fujian province. Exploring the world of Fujian cuisine promises an extraordinary gastronomic experience and a deep dive into the rich tapestry of Chinese culinary culture.

Problems in Translation of Fujian Cuisine

Considering the feature of Chinese language, Chinese cuisines are named after the principle of aesthetics in form, pronunciation, and meaning. Therefore, such rhetoric devices as homophony, rhyming, and the balanced or poetic structure might be employed in the naming of the cuisines. On the other hand, English cuisines are named after simple and direct style. Different styles increase the translation of menu. Presently, there are following problems existing in the translation of Fujian dishes.

Staying on the Literal Level

A common problem in menu translation is rigid translation regardless of cultural difference, mainly caused by disqualification of the translators or mere attention paid to menu translation. There are a number of elegant dish names in Fujian cuisine, yet literal translation of the dish names might fail to cause pleasant association

among the western diners or even seem unintelligible to them. For example, the renowned dish “佛跳墙” first appeared on the feast of an official during the reign of Emperor Daoguang during Qing Dynasty, when it was composed of chicken, duck, mutton, pork trotter, spare rib, and dove eggs. Later, the dish was improved by reducing the meat while adding many kinds of sea food. Once, on the scholars’ gathering feast, one of them composed a poem, “Once the jar was opened, the vegetarian Buddha failed to resist the temptation, jumping over the wall for it”, which the dish was named after. The dish is often translated into “Buddha jumps over the wall”, which may confuse the diners of South or South East Asia, not to say the western diners who know little about Buddhism. Another dish “爆炒双脆”, with jelly fish and pork kidney as the main ingredients, often appears on the English menu as “stir-fry double crisp”—completely a confusion. Besides, “金丝龙虾球” (mistranslated into “golden silk lobster ball”), “罗汉鸭” (mistranslated into “Buddhist duck”), and “燕子归巢” (mistranslated into “homecoming swallows”) are also faced with similar problems.

Inappropriate Transliteration

Transliteration may preserve the original sound but may not provide any meaningful information about the dish itself. Transliteration might be employed when appropriate nouns are employed. When being visited, the Putian locals may treat the guests with longevity noodles named “妈祖面”, implying safety, luck, wealth, and longevity. It is longevity noodles covered with peanuts, nori, day-lily, egg, mushroom, dried shrimp, and streaky pork. When the dish is transliterated into “Mazu line noodle”, the cultural deposit is totally written off. Another case is “十八娘红荔枝肉”. The name comes from its litchi-like shape, color, and taste. “十八娘红” in the dish name is actually a type of litchi. Once, transliteration is employed, the pragmatic information is nowhere to find.

Inaccurate Translation

Inaccurate translation is mainly derived from two reasons; one is misunderstanding of the material in the dish. For example, one might translate “兰花鳊鱼” into “steamed mandarin fish with orchids”. But actually, “兰花” in the dish is not the orchids for ornamental value, but broccoli. “土笋冻” is a well-known Fujian flavor. However, few know that there are two different “土笋冻”—South Fujian “土笋冻” and Longyan “土笋冻”. The former is made of sea worms in sediment of beach, better translated into “sea-worm jelly”; the latter is made of fresh bamboo shoot, ham, egg, and pork bone soup, a refreshing and nutritious dish especially suitable for summer, better translated into “local bamboo shoot jelly of Longyan”. Another case of inaccurate translation is caused by neglect of regional disparity. For example, “福建担担面”, if literally translated into “Dan Dan noodle”, might be associated the diners with the better known “Sichuan Dan Dan noodle”, thus causing misunderstanding.

Explicitation Employed in Translation

An Overview of Explicitation

The concept of explicitation was firstly advocated by Vinay and Darbelnet in 1958. Explicitation is a translation strategy to manifest the hidden information of the source language in the target language. Great importance has been attached to the strategy in the recent decades. Some researchers even hold that explicitation is the necessary bond between the source language and the target language, as well as the inevitable access from the source language to the target language (Zhang, 2010).

Illustration

Due to the linguistic difference of English and Chinese dish names, we should translate the imaginative and abstract Chinese dish names into more concrete English ones by employing explicitation.

The ingredients in dishes, such as “鱼丸汤”, “福建鲍鱼”, and “漳州蹄膀饭” are so obvious that translation is easy. However, some of the dishes only show part of the features, for example, “爆炒双脆” only indicates the crispiness of the dish itself; the dish names “半月沉江” and “东壁龙珠” highlight the appearance; and the name “佛跳墙” puts emphasis on the effect. In these cases, the translators have to explicate the ingredients, the cooking method, or cultural information of the dish.

The techniques read as follows:

Explication of the ingredients. For example, the main ingredients of the above mentioned dish “爆炒双脆” are pork kidney and jellyfish, so it could be translated into “crispy pork kidney and jelly fish stir fry”; “半月沉江” is a tonic soup of fried glutton, mushroom, winter bamboo shoot, angelica sinensis, celery, and tomato. It would be too redundant if we put all these ingredients into the dish name. So, during translation, it is advised to choose two main ingredients and at the same time, explicate the function of the dish. Therefore, the translation could be “tonic soup with fried glutton and mushroom”. Angelica sinensis, although the soul ingredient of the soup, is not familiar to the westerners, and therefore is not recommended to appear in the translation.

Explication of the ingredients and the cooking methods. The main ingredient of “东壁龙珠” is the longan of ancient Dongbi Temple in Quanzhou, named after its dragon-ball-like shape. Neither ingredients nor cooking methods are revealed in the dish name. It is advised to explicate the ingredients and the cooking methods so as to give the western diners a comprehensive image, so the version could be “fried longan with stuffed meat, shrimp and mushroom”; another famous dish “荷包鱼翅” is shark fin in sachet shape, with such ingredients as pork, chicken, and shrimp, and therefore is advised to be translated into “simmered shark fin with pork, chicken and shrimp”. Both dragon-ball and sachet are not familiar to western diners. Therefore, the appearance or shape of the dish is better to be ignored in the English version.

Figurative translation + proper annotation. Annotation applies to the dishes with allusion. For example, the above mentioned “佛跳墙” can be translated into “Chinese chowder of sea food, poultry, and mushrooms”. But in order to make up for the cultural information lost during translation, the annotation can be added as, “Literally, the dish means ‘Buddha jumping over the wall’”, which means even the Buddha, the vegetarian, could hardly resist the temptation and jumped over the wall to taste the dish. Likewise, “西施舌” literally means the tongue of the Chinese top beauty’s tongue, and actually is sand clam, a seafood along the coast of Fujian. Therefore, the annotation is advised to be added to its figurative translation “fried sand clam”—“sand clam is nicknamed ‘the tongue of Xishi’, which is to commemorate the top beauty of China, who was drowned in the sea out of the jealousy of the queen after she had helped her king to defeat the neighbouring state”.

Conclusion

In brief, Fujian Cuisine is an important branch of Chinese cuisine, provided with the shared feature of the later and its own local characteristics. During translation, the translators should not only consider the basic function and requirement of the menu, but also convey the cultural information of Fujian culture. Therefore, corresponding strategies and principles have to be employed to achieve the food cultural communication between china and the west. Finally, it is expected that more scholars would be devoted to the research of Chinese food culture and narration of Chinese food stories, contributing to the popularization of Chinese culture.

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