

Study on the Translation of Chinese Specialty Pastry Names from the Perspective of High and Low Context Cultures

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Abstract: Chinese culinary culture is not only an integral part of traditional Chinese culture but also increasingly gains recognition on the international stage. Chinese specialty pastries, as a dazzling gem in Chinese cuisine, reflect the profound cultural heritage of China. Appropriate translation of their names can facilitate the conveyance of cultural connotations and enhance the exchange between different cultures. From the perspective of high and low context cultures, this paper analyzes the characteristics of Chinese specialty pastries names and explores their translation methods. The aim is to further standardize the translation of Chinese specialty pastry names, promote the international dissemination of Chinese pastry culture, and allow the world to better appreciate the unique charm of Chinese characteristic pastry culture.

Keywords: Chinese Specialty Pastries; High-Context Culture; Low-Context Culture; Translation Methods.

1. Introduction

In increasingly interconnected global landscape, the breadth and depth of cultural exchanges continue to expand. As an important bridge in intercultural communication, the dissemination and acceptance of food culture are of significant importance for promoting mutual understanding and respect among different cultures. Research on the translation of Chinese menus, food, and specialty snacks has made certain progress, especially in the field of food. For instance, the publication of *Public Service Translation* in 2016 and *Chinese Menu Translation into English (Beijing Edition)* in 2007 has further clarified and standardized the English translation of Chinese menus and catering, which has been quite effective. Nonetheless, the translation of Chinese pastries remains a relatively under-explored area of research. Although *Chinese Menu Translation into English* includes translations for some pastry names, they are mostly related to traditional festivals and are quite general. The classification is not very clear, and in the dessert category, there are many more flaky pastries and cakes. Chinese pastries, as a treasure of Chinese food culture, not only carry rich historical and cultural connotations but also attract many domestic and foreign diners with their unique production techniques and flavors. However, in the process of promoting Chinese pastries to the international stage, how to accurately and appropriately translate the names into English has become an urgent problem to be solved. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the methods of translating Chinese pastry names from the perspective of high and low context cultures, to promote the international dissemination of Chinese food culture, and to fill the research gap in the field of English translation of Chinese pastry names.

2. Characteristics of Chinese Specialty Pastries Names

Chinese specialty pastries are not only an embellishment for traditional Chinese ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and housewarming, but also a delightful treat to satisfy hunger.

They carry a profound sense of Chinese traditional sentiment and occupy a significant part in the Chinese characteristic diet culture, with a long and illustrious history. Due to different geographical locations, resource distributions, and customs, Chinese specialty pastries have developed into various types with different raw materials and flavors. Commonly, they are classified by production techniques into categories such as flaky pastry, steamed cake, oven cake, crispy skin pastry, fried pastry, and other types; based on regional characteristics, they are divided into Beijing style, Tianjin style, Guangdong style, Suzhou style, Fujian style, etc. (Yuan Yang, 2021). It can be seen that Chinese pastries are diverse and exquisitely crafted, endowed with evocative names that embody Chinese traditional cultural characteristics, mainly divided into two naming methods: realistic and artistic.

2.1. Realistic Pastry Names

Realistic pastry names refer to those that only summarize the basic characteristics of the pastries, pursuing authenticity and focusing on names like “红豆饼”, “绿豆糕”, “鲜花玫瑰饼”, “云腿月饼” and “松子百合酥”, etc. These names adopt a direct approach, describing as much as possible the raw materials and production methods of the pastries, making them concise and clear, allowing diners to understand the pastries clearly.

2.2. Artistic Pastry Names

Artistic pastry names often contain unique regional cultural connotations and historical significance. They do not merely emphasize the raw materials but also integrate elements such as cultural allusions and historical events, such as “驴打滚”, “太白拉糕”, etc. Some artistic pastry names also symbolize auspiciousness and celebration, such as “定胜糕”, “京八件”, etc. These names are not only rich in cultural meaning but also reflect people's aspirations for a better life. They represent the culmination of centuries of cultural sedimentation within Chinese cuisine, showcasing distinct regional traits and offering an insightful window into the depths of Chinese traditional culture for international audiences.

3. Intercultural Communication and High and Low Context Cultures

In the era of globalization, the interpenetration and transformation of diverse cultures have intensified. Understanding, accepting, and embracing cultural differences, while adopting appropriate and effective translation strategies, are crucial for achieving cultural exchange and mutual understanding. The theory of high and low context cultures proposed by American cultural anthropologist Hall offers significant guidance for translation practices in intercultural communication.

3.1. Contextual Differences in Intercultural Communication

Human linguistic communication comprises two essential elements: language and context. In 1976, Hall (1989) first introduced the concept of dividing cultures into high-context culture and low-context culture in his book, *The Silent Language*. According to Hall, in high-context cultures, the majority of communicative information relies heavily on nonverbal, internalized, or shared contextual factors (such as common cultural backgrounds, values, and social norms), with the explicit linguistic content being relatively limited. Conversely, in low-context cultures, the understanding of semantic information is less dependent on context, and a significant portion of information is conveyed through explicit codes, with a lower reliance on contextual cues. Through his research on communicative behaviors across cultures, Hall identified Asian, African, and Latin American cultures as high-context, characterized by implicit and nuanced expressions that emphasize group harmony and indirect communication. In contrast, European and American cultures are classified as low-context, favoring direct and explicit language expressions that prioritize individualism and direct communication.

3.2. High and Low Context Cultures and Translation

British translation theorist Peter Newmark (1982) emphasized the paramount importance of context in translation, asserting that it surpasses linguistic rules and the meaning of language itself. Context serves as the foundation for accurate translation, and a profound understanding of contextual cultural differences is vital for translation within an intercultural context. Beyond the linguistic transformation between two languages, translators must consider various social factors such as linguistic habits, time, place, and cultural backgrounds. When translating from low-context cultures, translators must focus on the textual information, ensuring an accurate rendition of the original meaning into the target language without over-interpretation, addition, or alteration. In contrast, translating from high-context cultures requires adapting to the specific contextual characteristics to ensure that the target audience comprehends the information and cultural nuances conveyed in the original text, fostering positive interactions across different contexts. For instance, in Chinese social settings, people often employ euphemistic and implicit expressions. During translation, translators must be mindful of the implicit cultural backgrounds and identity information in the original text and strive to convey these contextual elements in the target language to ensure a complete and meaningful translation.

Words devoid of cultural context are mere meaningless

symbols; it is only when language bears the weight of culture that it acquires significance. Lu Juan (2011) noted that values within different food cultures are pivotal in the translation process, emphasizing the need to consider the perspectives of communicative partners towards food cultural exchanges. The names of traditional Chinese pastries, rich in cultural connotations, exemplify high-context cultures. Cultural gaps frequently arise during translation. Therefore, translators must delve into the cultural significance behind pastry names within a high-context culture context, while also considering the receptivity and comprehension habits of low-context culture readers. By adopting appropriate translation strategies such as literal translation with annotations, free translation, or creative translation, translators can fully convey the information and national cultural elements embedded in the names while ensuring their accessibility and acceptability. This intercultural translation approach, which accommodates audiences from both cultural backgrounds and facilitates contextual shifts, not only serves the purpose of intercultural communication but also fundamentally promotes the exchange and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures.

4. Translation Methods for Chinese Specialty Pastry Names from the Perspective of High and Low Context Cultures

Chinese specialty pastries are not only rich in cultural connotations but also occupy a significant position in Chinese culinary culture. In 2007, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism Development issued the *Chinese Menu English Translation Guide*, which set standards for the English translation of Chinese food and snacks, including some Chinese pastry names (Shi Xinmin & Liu Yangyang, 2021). This guide provides an important reference for unifying and standardizing translations. Translation expert Xiong Xin emphasized that the translation of dish names should follow seven principles, including semantic closeness, cultural dissemination, economic development, aesthetics, innovation, simplicity, and brand establishment. When translating the names of Chinese specialty pastries, we must go beyond mere linguistic conversion and deeply consider their cultural particularities and translation purposes, adopting appropriate translation strategies and methods. This not only helps to better introduce the traditional culture of Chinese pastries but also plays an important role in intercultural communication. This paper will explore suitable translation methods for realistic and artistic Chinese pastry names from the perspective of high and low context cultures.

4.1. Semantic Equivalence Strategy

Despite the contextual differences between Chinese and English, communicators in different cultural contexts still share some common cultural backgrounds. In translation, the translator can strive for literal translation, maintaining the form and structure of the original text as much as possible, directly translating it into the target language to reproduce the authentic image expressed in the original work.

Realistic pastry names do not carry cultural significance, and their translations should be concise and convey the essential content of the pastry name, including ingredients, place of origin, etc. Literal translation can best preserve the characteristics of the source language in the translation process, striving for a word-for-word translation. Thus, from

the perspective of high and low context cultures, literal translation is often used under the premise of maintaining the basic semantics of realistic pastry names, seeking similar expressions in the target language culture to achieve semantic equivalence, enabling foreign diners to understand the ingredients and production processes of the pastries more intuitively. At the same time, attention should be paid to avoiding cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, ensuring the acceptability and accuracy of the translation in the target culture. For example, when translating the traditional specialty dessert Red Bean Cake from southern China, its clearly visible ingredients are highlighted, and it is translated as “Red Bean Cake” using literal translation; Egg-Yolk Puff can be directly translated as “Egg-Yolk Puff”; and Pine Nut Lily Pastry can be translated as “Plum Pastry with Pine Nuts.”

4.2. Creative Translation Strategy

As a high-context language, Chinese relies heavily on context, and Chinese people place more emphasis on “implication” than “explicitness” in interpersonal communication. Artistic pastry names have profound cultural and historical backgrounds, embodying a wealth of Chinese cultural information and reflecting, to a certain extent, the characteristics of China’s high-context culture. In contrast, low-context cultures emphasize accurate and clear information, often requiring explicit and clear expressions to enable readers to understand the true meaning of the dialogue.

If the translator still uses literal translation, it may cause comprehension barriers for low-context culture readers. Therefore, for some Chinese artistic pastry names with unique cultural connotations and aesthetic values, the translator adopts creative translation strategy, adjusting the original meaning based on the target language and cultural background through free translation. This approach neither compromises the source language information nor ensures that the translation reveals the hidden culture, vividly conveying the historical legends, traditional customs, and beautiful meanings behind the pastry names, enabling foreign friends to understand the cultural information and aesthetic values embodied in Chinese characteristic pastry names. When applying free translation to artistic pastry names, the following three methods are primarily used:

1. Explain some words in the artistic pastry names instead of directly translating them, such as the famous Beijing-style pastry “牛舌饼”, which is named for its shape like an ox’s tongue. However, if it is directly translated as “ox-tongue cake,” it will not convey its characteristics. Instead, it is translated as “shortening cake,” which vividly depicts its shape and production technique. “Sweet honey” can be used to translate “蜜三刀”, which is also known as “honey food,” famous for its sweet and soft texture, to attract attention.

2. Omit irrelevant information in the artistic pastry names, such as when translating “清香黄金糕”, omit the taste “清香” and highlight the shape and method, translated as “Fried Sponge Cake,” which perfectly explains the origin of the word “黄金”; “奶香粟米片饼” can be translated as “Golden Corn Pancake” to emphasize the ingredients and color; when translating “香煎萝卜糕”, omits the word “香” and directly describes the cooking method and materials, translated as “Pan-Fried Turnip Patties with Bacon”.

3. Appropriately process some images in the artistic pastry names, using images or common names that Westerners are more familiar with for translation, which can achieve

unexpected effects. For example, “叉烧酥” can be translated as “BBQ Pork Pastry”; “Honey BBQ Pork Puff” can be used for “蜜汁叉烧”; “Assorted Fruit Muffin” can be used for “什锦水果松饼”.

4.3. Cultural Adaptation Strategy

Regarding the implicit meanings and cultural symbols in high-context cultures, cultural adaptation strategies are adopted through transliteration (with annotations) to supplement the cultural background information that may be lacking for low-context culture readers, enabling them to better understand and accept the cultural connotations of Chinese pastry names. In addition to the aforementioned free translation for artistic pastry names, given the regional characteristics and local flavors formed by thousands of years of Chinese pastry culture, transliteration (with annotation) can be used when corresponding cultural phenomena cannot be found in Indo-European cultures, avoiding misunderstandings and unreadability caused by literal or free translation while preserving the characteristics of Chinese pastries to the greatest extent. This translation method can be applied to the following three types of Chinese pastry names:

The first type is pastries named after their titles. For example, when translating the “太谷饼” from the time-honored Chinese brand Rongxintang (荣欣堂), “太古” as a place name can be directly translated, resulting in the name “Taigu Cake”; when translating “龙凤酥”, the unique Chinese term “龙凤” can be directly translated as “Longfeng,” and the whole is translated as “Longfeng Crisp,” preserving the original characteristics and flavors, facilitating cultural exchange between different cultures.

The second type is pastries with strong local characteristics. For instance, the traditional product “津八件” from the Beijing-style pastry brand Daoxiangcun (稻香村) elegantly and vividly displays the “eight blessings” such as fortune, rank, longevity, happiness, wealth, and culture in people’s lives at that time. Therefore, it can be transliterated with annotations as “Jingbajian (The eight Beijing-style pastries),” which better highlights the characteristics of the time-honored Chinese pastry. The characteristic pastry of old Beijing, “驴打滚” can be translated as “Lú dagunr (Glutinous Rice Rolls Stuffed with Red Bean Paste)”.

The third type is pastries for Chinese traditional festivals, which almost all represent a certain Chinese traditional festival. For example, the translation of “元宵” is “Yuanxiao (Glutinous Rice Balls for Lantern Festival)”; the translation of “发糕” is “Fagao (Steam Sponge Cake),” which implies the wish for promotion and wealth in the coming year; the seasonal pastry essential for the Qingming Festival, “青团” is translated as “Qing Dumpling.”

5. Conclusion

Chinese food culture boasts a long history and is an essential part of Chinese culture, increasingly radiating international charm in the accelerating globalization process. The names of Chinese specialty pastries are diverse, both aesthetically pleasing and truthful. Based on the perspective of high and low context cultures, this paper points out that the naming categories of Chinese specialty pastries are divided into realistic pastry names and artistic pastry names. It summarizes three common translation strategies for handling

Chinese pastry names: semantic equivalence strategy, creative translation strategy and cultural adaptation strategy through literal translation, free translation, and transliteration (with annotation), to maintain the Chinese characteristics of pastry names, introduce folk customs and cultural backgrounds, and achieve cultural exchange, to promote and develop Chinese pastry culture.

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