

The Role of Genre for Translation in the UNESCO's Creative City of Gastronomy: A Case Study on International Publicity of Teochew Cuisine

Weijia Chen^{1,2,a,*}, Chunming Wu^{1,b}

¹School of Foreign Languages, Hanshan Normal University, Chaozhou, China

²PhD Student in Education, Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, City University Malaysia, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

^achenwj@hstc.edu.cn, ^bwucm@hstc.edu.cn

*Corresponding author: Weijia Chen

Abstract: Known for its rich culinary culture, China has five cities designated by the UNESCO's Creative Cities Network as City of Gastronomy, including Chengdu, Shunde, Macau, Yangzhou, and Huai'an. Applicant cities should submit all documents in either English or French. Among them, cookery books, in particular recipes play a key role in the preparation process. Recipes are a genre regarded to be highly conventionalized with their distinctive structures and linguistic features in different cultures. Therefore, their translations should read and function like recipes in the receiving culture in order to realize their communicative purpose. This paper offers insights into the features of signature Teochew recipes and the translation norms and conventions governing recipes by discussing how genre analysis based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can help produce natural and functional recipe translation in English, with the hope of helping the city better prepared for its bid to be a City of Gastronomy.

Keywords: City of Gastronomy, Teochew cuisine, SFL, Genre analysis, Recipe translation

1. Introduction

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (hereinafter referred to as CNNC) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation across cities worldwide to make the best of their respective culture and creativity for sustainable urban development, and it covers seven creative fields, namely Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts and Music ^[1]. China, a country rich in culinary culture, has in recent years witnessed a succession of its cities designated as City of Gastronomy by UCCN, including Chengdu in 2010, Shunde in 2014, Macau in 2017, Yangzhou in 2019, and Huai'an in 2021. The success in the bidding has greatly helped promote designated cities' sustainable development and the reputation of their cuisines at the global stage. For this reason, many other cities have joined the race to become members of CNNC as City of Gastronomy, including Chaozhou, a city in eastern Guangdong Province of China. Chaozhou city is well known for its local cuisine, also known as Teochew Cuisine, which is characterized by its rich ingredients, various ways of cooking, fascinating plate setting, and preservation of the ingredients' original flavors. More importantly, most of its signature dishes are considered healthy with rich cultural and historical connotations ^[2].

Application documents to UNNC for membership must be written in either English or French. For applicant cities whose working languages are neither English nor French, they are recommended to write the application in their native language and then translate the application to English or French through a certified translator ^[1]. This requirement applies to Chaozhou in its bid to become a City of Gastronomy, as its application documents have to be first written in Chinese and then translated into English, the most widely used language in the world. Among the preparation files, introduction to signature dishes especially their corresponding recipes, constitutes a key component, because recipes are recognized as "key tools in any culinary culture, instructing diners on how to prepare ingredients in a safe, nutritious, pleasing fashion" ^[3] ^[720]. It refers to a set of instructions guiding people to prepare and produce a certain dish or drink. Appropriate translation of these signature dishes' recipes will be conducive to the promotion of Teochew cuisine internationally.

Generally speaking, recipe is a specific genre which is highly conventionalized with distinctive

generic features. A recipe usually comprises of a title, an ingredient list, and a series of instruction steps, without which it will not be recognized as a recipe [4]. However, though the same genre may exist across languages and cultures at the same time, it is usually realized by different linguistic choices, and sometimes may even display very different textual structures in different languages and cultures [5]. This phenomenon is called generic difference, and the rules that a genre needs to conform to a specific language and culture is called genre convention [5]. And it applies to the genre of recipe, which displays different generic features in English and Chinese. These generic differences may create some problems when it comes to translating Chinese recipes into English. If these problems regarding generic differences or conventions in translation are not properly handled, it may further hinder international communication of Teochew cuisine and Chinese cuisine at large.

To address this issue, this paper discusses the practicality of applying Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL [6] framework to analyze the textual and linguistic features of the genre recipe in English and Chinese, and the significance of SFL in guiding translation of Chinese recipes into English.

2. Introduction to SFL-informed Genre Theory

SFL is about appropriate language usage within a given context, and genre is about the general idea of how people are doing things through language, in particular how they orchestrate the language event in specified stages to achieve a specific purpose [6]. In light of this, genres are defined as "staged, goal-oriented social processes" [7] 13 in that it usually takes more than one step to unfold a genre, and it is addressed to an intended audience to realize a communicative purpose. Therefore, at the level of social context, genre is the representation of staged, goal-oriented social processes whereby participants in a given society live their lives [7]. Of these stages, some are defined as obligatory and others optional elements in the structure of a text belonging to a particular genre [8]. By "obligatory" it means elements that define the genre per se and must appear in a specified sequence in a text to correspond to social subjects' expectation of whether or not the text is completed. By "optional" it means elements that can occur but are not obliged to occur in a text belonging to a specific genre. However, the occurrence of optional elements in a text is not random and the condition for their occurrence should be stated.

So how does a genre realize itself? Since genre is about systems of social processes, and the principles that relate social processes to each other are concerned about texture, genre is realized by the ways that contextual variables of field, tenor, and mode are organized together in a text [7]. Field concerns subject matter, Tenor construes interpersonal relationship, and Mode centers on coherence and cohesion of the text, all of which have their salient linguistic, syntactical and structural features depending on the genre the text belongs to [6]. In other words, genre embedded in a social-cultural context shapes texts in a top-down manner, from macro-structural level to micro-lexical choices. As genre is socially and culturally bounded, it may be realized differently in terms of field, tenor, and mode across cultures. To realize its communicative purpose, when it comes to translation, conformation to genre convention of the target culture to achieve genre fidelity is more important than sticking to surface resemblance [9].

3. Features of Recipes in English and Chinese

This section elaborates on the generic features of recipes in English and Chinese, respectively, laying the foundation for applying SFL framework in translating them from Chinese to English.

3.1. Features of English Recipes

In English, a complete recipe usually includes the following stages: title, hook (a brief introduction to the dish), practical details (such as preparation time), ingredients, instructions, nutritious details, and helpful tips. Among them, title, ingredients, and instructions are deemed as obligatory stages for the genre recipe, while the rest are optional elements depending on different historical development periods. For instance, recipes in the 19th century always involve a title, ingredients, instructions, and practical details such as costs. However, in modern times, it has become a more-or-less accepted standard to include a hook and nutritional facts to a recipe [4], as people become more and more aware of the importance of health and nutrition intake. In terms of linguistic features, the title, practical details, ingredient list and nutrition details are dominated by nominal groups, the instruction steps are characterized by bare imperatives – imperatives without "please", and the hook are featured by declaratives [4]. In short, as a procedural text type, recipe is a "macro-imperative" and "macro-material" text [6]. Below is an example of an English recipe:

Facts published by China Light Industry Press in 1996 is the only one so far in China that has provided accurate measurements and nutritional details for each of the representative dishes introduced, including calories, protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins, cholesterol, etc. [11]. However, none of the dishes listed in the book are from Chaozhou, one of the eight main cuisines in China alongside with Shandong Cuisine, Sichuan Cuisine, Suzhou Cuisine, Fujian Cuisine, Zhejiang Cuisine, Hunan Cuisine, and Anhui Cuisine [10]. Nevertheless, the detailed information provided for each signature dish including both obligatory and optional elements in the genre recipe can become a template for recomposing well-known Teochew dishes in Chinese. With respect to linguistic features of Chinese recipes, the title is dominated by nominal groups filled with metaphorical meanings [12], ingredients are characterized by nominal groups, too, and the instruction steps dominated by imperative clauses. To show the textual and linguistic features elaborated, below is a literal translation of a Chinese recipe:

3.3. Comparative Analysis of English and Chinese Recipes Within SFL Framework

In SFL, genre is defined by the obligatory elements of a text [8]. An examination of the two recipes in Table 1 and Table 2 reveals that for the same genre of recipe, both English and Chinese possess the same obligatory elements, namely title, ingredients, and instruction steps or directions. However, apart from obligatory elements, the English recipe also includes the optional ones such as a hook to introduce and promote the dish, practical details on time required and servings yielded, and nutritional facts, all of which are absent from the Chinese recipe. It is worth mentioning that the hook is predominantly characterized by declaratives filled with positive evaluative words to “seduce” people to try the dish [4].

In terms of linguistic features of the title, the English dish name tells the main ingredients and the type of dish it belongs to. The Chinese recipe, however, employs metaphor in the title and does not tell readers immediately what main ingredients the dish contains. This is a normal practice in naming Chinese dishes, a reflection of China’s multi-faceted culinary culture [12]. For ingredients, though both English and Chinese recipes employ nominal groups, close examination reveals there are many differences in textual features. First, an English recipe normally displays a list of ingredients and amounts in a column, a visually conspicuous form [13], while a Chinese recipe usually lists the ingredients horizontally. Second, an English recipe presents the amount (volume) before each ingredient and preposition such as “of” is normally omitted from the ingredient list. The order is reversed in a Chinese recipe where the name of the ingredient precedes the amount, and a direct transfer of meaning usually results in adding preposition “of” in the list of ingredients. A third difference lies in the processing description of the ingredients. The English recipe describes the condition of the vegetables and condiments separately based on the ingredients listed [14]. For instance, tomatoes are chopped, and onion sliced in the ingredient list in Table 1. In other words, preparation of vegetables and condiments are omitted in the instruction. In contrast, the Chinese recipe describes these preparation processes in the instructions.

Lastly, when it comes to instruction steps, both English and Chinese recipes employ imperative clauses to describe a sequence of actions to make a dish, exhibiting the authority of the recipe owner or composer to issue a series of commands telling the reader “you” to do things without worrying that you “might protest at such ‘bossiness’” [4] 41.

Based on the comparative analysis of the textual and linguistic features of recipes in English and Chinese within the SFL framework, it becomes clear that knowing and understanding cross-cultural similarities and differences on genres and genre conventions is pivotal to producing translation that will be functional in the receiving culture [5]. The following section proposes a genre-based approach to translating Chinese recipes into English and offers an improved version of the translation in Table 2.

4. Genre-based Translation Strategy

A genre-based strategy to translate recipes follows a top-down direction, which first deals with macro-structural features and then micro-lexical choices in order to uphold genre convention in the target culture. Therefore, in terms of macro-structure, optional elements like hook, practical details, and nutritional facts should be supplemented to make the English translation of the Chinese recipe look like a recipe originally composed in English.

The first optional element to be added is a hook. This dish – Patriotic Soup, known for its rich historical connotation, silky texture and abundant flavors is one of the top ten signature dishes in Teochew cuisine. To promote this dish, a hook characterized by simple declarative clauses with positive expressions will help foreigners get a glimpse into this recipe, intriguing their interest to try this dish.

When all macro-structural adjustments are done, it is time to deal with adjustment at micro-lexical level. The first adjustment is the title. Though the Patriotic Soup is the most representative dish of Teochew Cuisine, it may not be that well known by English-speaking people. To bridge the cultural gap, it is necessary to put in a bracket the main ingredient of the soup in the title so that it will be more easily recognizable as a recipe in English. The second adjustment is the ingredient list. Instead of listing ingredients horizontally from left to right, it is necessary to adjust the list into a column, “a visually prominent form”^[13]³³⁸; instead of simply listing the ingredients, it is necessary to describe the preparation process of each ingredient by inserting a comma right after the ingredient’s name^[14]; it is not necessary to spell the whole word “gram”, a short form “g” will suffice, and it is not necessary to add preposition “of” in-between the amount and each ingredient; in addition, it is necessary to reverse the order by putting the amount ahead of each ingredient^[13]. The third adjustment is the instructions. Since preparation of vegetables and meat is described in the list of ingredients, the instruction steps in the original literal translation can be simplified to make it short and succinct.

From the comparative study, it can be noted that both English and Chinese recipes share common ground in the aspects of ideational meaning (field), interpersonal meaning (tenor), and textual meaning (mode), but they also distinguish each other in the three aspects to varying degrees. Based on the analyses, an improved version of the English translation of the recipe should look like this as shown in Table 3 below:

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the above comparative study on English and Chinese recipes as well as its translation from Chinese to English within the SFL framework show that most of the ideational meaning and interpersonal meaning in the Chinese recipe are preserved in the English translation with minor alteration, but textual meaning of the Chinese recipe has undergone major changes with optional elements supplemented to the translation to make it read and function like a recipe in the English-speaking culture.

Signature dishes epitomize the salient features of local culinary cultures. And good English translation of signature dishes’ recipes serves as an important vehicle for international communication of Teochew cuisine at the global stage. The study shows that genre analysis with an SFL perspective helps translators adopt appropriate strategies to deal with translation issues at both macro and micro levels. In other words, knowledge of SFL is crucial to understanding and analyzing English recipes and their Chinese counterparts, laying the foundation for appropriate functional English translation of the Chinese recipes. In the long run, this strategy can help better promote publicity of Teochew cuisine to a larger international audience.

Finally, findings of the study indicate that much is desired for Teochew cuisine to go global especially against the backdrop of its attempt to become a City of Gastronomy. There is an urgent need for standardized compilation of cookery books^{[10],[11]} on local culinary cultures such as Teochew cuisine, in particular recipes of its signature dishes in Chinese that include both obligatory and optional elements like hook, practical details and nutrition information. In this way, it is hoped that the English translation thus produced will be recognized as a recipe by the target readers and function as a recipe by its international users, achieving the recipe’s “genre fidelity” to realize its communicative purpose^[9]³⁶.

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