

# *Study on the Typical English Translation of Chinese Gastronomy and Flavors from the Perspective of Skopos Theory*

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**Abstract:** This article is based on the English translation of Chinese cooking methods from the perspective of Skopos theory, including the English translation of various verbs in making preparations for cooking as well as the problems in English translation. Gastronomy in China is popular both at home and abroad with a long-standing reputation. The translation of Chinese gastronomy is closely related to everyday life. Different dishes have different characteristics in cooking methods; therefore, the translation of gastronomy conforms to the features of Chinese cuisine, especially the using of various verbs and adjectives in the English Translation. The article tries to probe into the English translation of gastronomy and flavors from a new perspective, with the emphasis on the application of three major rules of Skopos theory to the English translation.

## 1. Introduction

Skopos is the Greek word for ‘aim’ or ‘purpose’ and was introduced into translation theory in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer as a technical term for the purpose of a translation and of the action of translating. Vermeer’s Skopos theory is the core of the functionalist translation theory, which has managed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the decisive factors determining the translation process. Vermeer(1983:48) claims that since Skopostheorie is a general theory of translation, it applies to both translating and interpreting. In the light of Skopostheorie, translations should be regarded as a purposeful intercultural communicative activity and the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose of the overall translational action (Nord, 2004:27). Skopostheorie has helped to bring the target text into focus and released the translator from the limitations and restrictions imposed by a narrowly defined concept of loyalty to the source language alone (Baker, 2004). Skopostheorie points out that three principles should be complied with in the process of translation, namely, Skopo rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule.<sup>[1]</sup>

The skopos rule is a general rule. Translation strategies and methods are determined by the purpose and the intended function of the target text. “If the purpose of translation is to keep the function of the text invariant, function markers often have to be adapted to target-culture standards, otherwise, source-cultural function markers that are exactly reproduced in the target text might induce the target receivers to assign a different function to the target text” (Nord, 2004: 45). Skopos

rule is intended to solve the eternal dilemmas of free vs. faithful translation dynamic vs. formal equivalence, good interpreters vs. slavish translators, and so on (ibid).<sup>[2]</sup>

The coherence rule, also called “intratextual coherence”, means that the TT should be acceptable and meaningful in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers’ situation. In other words, the target text must be translated in such a way that it is coherent for the target text receiver, given their circumstances and knowledge (Munday, 2001:79).

The fidelity rule, also called “intertextual coherence”, refers to the coherence existing between the source and target text. By using the word “coherence”, it does not mean that the target text has to be equivalent with the source text, but rather means that the target text must be coherent with the source text in one way or another depending on the translation Skopos. One possible kind of intertextual coherence could be a maximally faithful imitation of the source text (Nord, 2004:32). The intertextual coherence indicates the corresponding relationship between the source text and target text while the intratextual coherence focuses on the readability and acceptability of the target text.<sup>[3-4]</sup>

Skopostheorie was developed as the foundation for a general theory of translation able to embrace theories dealing with specific languages and cultures. Katharina Reiss’s concept of a relationship between text type and translation method is integrated as a specific theory within the framework of Vermeer’s general theory.

## 2. The English Translation of Chinese Cooking & Flavors

Chinese cooking in China is popular both at home and abroad with a long-standing reputation. Chinese flavors with a unique multinational style are delicious.(Jin Huikang, 2004) Since ancient times, the Chinese have employed many cooking methods, such as braising, boiling, braising with soy sauce, roasting, baking, grilling, scalding, deep-frying, steaming, drying, salt-preserving, etc. Different seasons suit different tastes. “Spring suits sour taste; summer suits bitter taste; autumn suits pungent taste; winter suits salty taste.”(Sun Weixin., 2004)

### 2.1. The English Translation of Various Verbs in Making Preparations for Cooking

Chinese people have been seeking for perfect craftsmanship and technology, so Chinese cookery lays emphasis on superb skills and techniques. Foreigners will be amazed at the numerous kinds of making preparations for cooking. For example, shelling is one of English Translations of different verbs in making preparations for cooking, such as *shelling pea pods* and *shelled shrimp*, etc. However, *skinning*, *scraping*, *paring* and *peeling* are translated according to different food materials. *Skinned frog* is a typical example. However, there are many ways of translation of “removing” in making preparations for cooking, such as *boning*, *stoning*, *scaling*, *straining* and so on. Therefore, *boned duck web* is the correct translation, whereas *scaling* is used in the translation of *scaled fish*. Meanwhile, *stoning* is expressed in the translation of *stoned fruits* instead of *scaling fruit because fish* is different from *fruit*. And what’s more, translations of other verbs in making preparations for cooking include *pickling*, *dressing*, *dressing a fried fish*, *grating*, *scalding*, *singing(pork)*; *straining*, *iced*; *freezing*, *rinsing* and so on.<sup>[5-6]</sup>

### 2.2. The English Translation of Various Verbs in Cutting & Preparing Supplies Before Cooking

Another necessary technique is also complicated enough to make people feel confused, namely, the cutting skills are so diverse that people don’t know how to cut and prepare supplies before cooking. For example, *cube or dice* is applied in *diced chicken* or *chicken cubes* because *cube* is

explained in English as a piece of sth, especially food, with six sides. Cut the meat into cubes. If *cube* is used as verb, it is often explained as *to cut food into cubes*. *Cube and dice* are synonyms if they are used as verbs in translation, such as diced carrots or *carrot cubes*, *diced chicken* or *chicken cubes*, *saute diced chicken bean sauce*, *fried diced chicken* and so on. In addition, *flattening is put* into English in *flattening garlic shoots* or *flattening cucumber*. Whereas *crushing* is different from *flattening*, *crushing* is used in the translation of *crushing almond*. *Crush* is explained in English as *to break sth into small pieces or into a powder by pressing hard* while *flatten* is explained in English as *to become or make sth become flat or flatter*. Additionally, there are a lot of slicing techniques in Cutting & Preparing Supplies Before Cooking. For example, *slicing* is used in the translation of *sliced fish/fish slices*. Other translations on *cut* include *flaking (a fish)*, *slicing (meat)*, *dicing*, *shredding*, *mincing* and so on. For instance, *mincing* is used in the translation of *minced meat* or *minced shrimp*, etc. The English translation of other verbs in cutting&preparing supplies before cooking is very diverse according to different cooking materials, such as *grinding*, *black/white pepper powder*, *shredding/shredded meat* or *pork shreds*, *stuffing*, *stuffed roast chicken*, *filleting*, *filleting a kidney*, *mashing*, *mashed potato*, *mashed garlic/ginger*, *filleting*, *fried fillet of fish*, *roll cutting*, *boned fish slice*, *diced celery*, *soaked black mushroom*, etc. (Feng Qinghua, 2006)

### 2.3. The English Translation of Various Adjectives in Chinese Flavors

As China's exchanges with other countries have become increasingly frequent, Chinese cuisine has been displayed in more and more overseas markets. The overseas visitors can learn more about Chinese food culture. However, with different international flavors being incorporated into the Chinese cuisine, many people express their concerns about authenticity. The English language newspaper, *Shanghai Daily*, quotes a foreigner in Shanghai saying that Chinese cuisine abroad caters more to the tastes of local residents. Therefore, lots of local flavors are added, while the authentic taste of Chinese cuisine remains unknown to them. It is understandable that those who run restaurants wish to attract many customers. And it might be too difficult for the restaurants to get the fine ingredients to make reliable cuisine abroad. However, it is high time that restaurant runners abroad were daring enough to try because many westerners, who have experienced authentic Chinese cuisine, are looking for it in their home country. For example, *fragrant or aromatic* is explained in English as having a pleasant smell, which the Chinese cuisine demands the "complete presence of color, fragrance and taste". The culinary skills and dish ingredients vary in different regions of China. However, good Chinese cuisine always shares something in common, namely, the color, aroma, taste and nutrition.<sup>[7-8]</sup> Apart from *fragrance*, the English translation of Chinese flavors include the expressions as follows: *sour; acidic;tart; sweet, bitter; hot; spicy; peppery; spicy, crisp; short; crispy; tender/half done; tough; hard; overdone; well-done; fishy/smelly; salty; puckery; acidic; greasy; rich; oily; mellow;tasteless/flat;fresh; newly-made; clear(mild)/bland; mild/weak/ lightly-seasoned;thick/strong/pungent/highly/(heavily)seasoned;strange/unique;stinking/smelly;*

### 2.4. The English Translation of Various Methods of Cooking

Chinese cuisine with a long history is one of the Chinese cultural treasures. Hence it is as famous all over the world as French cuisine. Chinese cookery has developed and matured over the centuries, forming a rich cultural content. It is characterized by fine selection of ingredients, precise processing, particular about the amount of fire, and substantial nourishment. Local flavors and snacks, and special dishes have formed according to regions, local products, climate, historical factors, and eating habits. Chinese cookery has no less than fifty kinds. Some common ways are introduced as follows: For example, Deep-fry is used as verb: to cook food in oil that covers it completely, which is translated into *dry deep-fry*, *soft deep-fry* and *crisp deep-fry*, such as *dry-fried*

*hairtail, dry-fried bean curd, soft-fried chicken liver, soft-fried prawns, crisp-fried beef balls and crisp-fried stuffed prawn “boxes”, etc.* Whereas *stir-fry* is explained as in English as: to cook thin strips of vegetables or meat quickly by stirring them in very hot oil. Therefore, there are various different translations in different methods of cooking, such as *sauté, quick-fry*. Other English translation of ways of cooking include *stew, pan-fry, smoke, (fry and simmer), simmer/stew, roast, steam, bake, boil, braise with soy sauce, stew in gravy, marinate/pickle, broil/grill, braise/simmer, scald, marinate with yellow bean sauce/season with soy sauce, twice-cooked, thicken with cornstarch, dual assorting*; etc.<sup>[9]</sup>

Chinese cookery is typical of the utensils for cooking. For example, the pottery pot and casserole can make the flavor of the spice penetrate into the ingredient by stewing for a long time. The sizzling dish means placing the food on hot iron board so that the sizzling sound and piping hot steam render the dish attractive drooling. In addition, the distinctive feature is its great variety of cooking ingredient. That the flower and herbal medicine can be used in cooking is another distinctive feature of its. The ordinary cooking materials are more popular with Chinese cuisine, such as mushrooms, vegetables, meat, seafood and so on. Taking mushrooms for example, it is estimated that over three hundred and sixty kinds of wild mushrooms are used for food in China. The soybean only can evolve a multifarious variety of bean products in China, including *ToFu, Fermented ToFu, Jellied ToFu, Douzhi Fermented Bean Drink*, etc.<sup>[10]</sup>

In a word, the Chinese are bold and brave enough to make all the edible into delicious dishes.

### **3. The Application of Three Major Rules of Skopos Theory to the English Translation of Chinese Gastronomy and Flavors**

As has been mentioned above, Vermeer’s Skopos theory is the core of the functionalist translation theory, which has managed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the decisive factors determining the translation process. Skopostheorie is a general theory of translation; it applies to both translating and interpreting. In according with Skopostheorie, translations should be regarded as a purposeful intercultural communicative activity. Skopostheorie points out that three principles should be complied with in the process of translation, namely, Skopo rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. The skopos rule is a general rule. Translation strategies and methods are determined by the purpose and the intended function of the target text. The coherence rule, also called “intratextual coherence”, means that the TT should be acceptable and meaningful in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers’ situation. The fidelity rule, also called “intertextual coherence”, refers to the coherence existing between the source and target text.(Munday, 2001:79)

As is known to all, the main function of Chinese dish names is to introduce the unique Chinese cooking art to overseas visitors and attract them to China for a tour. Two main purposes of translating Chinese cooking are to attract visitors as well as spread Chinese food culture. On the one hand, translators should make some information adjustments from the acceptability of rendering; on the other hand, translators should manage to keep Chinese culture and further publicize the fine traditions of Chinese culture. Therefore, translators must conform to Skopo rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule according to functional theories of translation.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### **3.1. Analysis of English Translation of Chinese Gastronomy and Flavors from Skopo Rule**

Skopos rule is the most important rule for any translation. It holds that the skopos of translation communication is the decisive factor in the translation process. Vermeer holds that each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose, which means human action and its subcategory, namely, translation is determined by its purpose, and is therefore a function of its purpose. And all translation behaviors are determined by the purpose of translation, that is, “the

purpose determines the means”(Nord 2001:29) For example, in cooking procedure of *Sauteed Eel Shreds*, it is divided into two steps, namely, step one: *Deep-fry* the eel shreds in 80% hot oil. Step two: Flavor oil with scallion and ginger, add sugar, salt, soy sauce, drop in eel shreds, add wine, *stir-fry*, place in a plate. Therefore, it is obvious that *Deep-fry* and *stir-fry* are translated in cooking procedure of *Sauteed Eel Shreds*. For another example, in the English translation of *boned fish slices, diced celery and soaked black mushroom*, different verbs are translated according to different materials, so the translation of cooking methods is diverse. Each text is created for a specific purpose and should be used to fulfil that purpose. Consequently, all translation behaviors are determined by purpose of translation.

### 3.2. Analysis of English Translation of Chinese Gastronomy and Flavors from Coherence Rule

The coherence rule states that the TT ‘must be interpretable as coherent with the TT receiver’s situation’ (Reiss and Vermeer 1984:113). In other words, the TT must be translated in such a way that it is coherent for the TT receivers, given their circumstances and knowledge. The translator should take into consideration the background knowledge and actual situation of the recipient in order to comply with the expression habits of the TL to make the translation readable as well as acceptable, and to enable the recipient to understand its meaning (Zhang Chenxiang, 2008). For example, ‘*instant-boil*’ is used in *instant-boiled mutton* because it is explained in English as *scald thin slices of meat in boiling water*. If it is translated into ‘*rinse*’, ‘*rinse mutton*’ will be the violation of its original meaning. Whereas ‘*spice*’ is translated in *spiced donkey meat* instead of *fragrance or aroma* because ‘*spice*’ is explained in English as: *to add spice to food in order to give it more flavour*.

### 3.3. Analysis of English Translation of Chinese Gastronomy and Flavors from Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule, also called “intertextual coherence”, refers to the coherence existing between the source and target text. The fidelity rule merely states that there must be coherence between the translatum and the ST or, more specifically, between the ST information received by the translator; the interpretation the translator makes of this information; the information that is encoded for the TT receivers.(Munday, 2001:79). In the specific translation process, the translator should be faithful to both initiators and the author of the source text, so as to achieve a balance the two(Xie Tianzhen, 2007) For example, ‘*pat*’ is expressed in ‘*pat loose the drumsticks*’, ‘*roast*’ in *Beijing Roast Duck*, and ‘*steam*’ in *Steamed Yellow Croaker*, etc. As to English translation of flavors, ‘*sweet*’ is very common in our everyday life. For instance, ‘*sweet*’ is translated in *sweet lotus root porridge*.

## 4. The Currents Problems and Countermeasures in English Translation of Chinese Gastronomy and Flavors

Chinese cookery with at least 50 species is so various that it makes people dazzled. Attention should be paid to the differences between cookery and the tedious words should be avoided when translating into English. For example, ‘*Scramble*’ should be translated in “*Scrambled Egg/Omelette*” instead of *Fried Egg* because “*fried*” is explained in English as: to cook sth in hot fat or oil. In addition, different verbs are translated in “*Boiled Egg*”, “*Poached Egg*” and “*Sunny-Side-up Egg*”, etc. Sometimes, different verbs are translated in the light of different cooking methods, such as *roast, grill, char* and so on. However, there are subtle distinctions in translating specific Chinese cuisine. For example, the same verb is translated in *Roast Mutton, Beijing Roast Duck* and *Roast Suckling Pig*. Here, *to roast* means roasting directly on bright fire. However, ‘*bake*’ is translated in “*Mud-Baked Chicken*”, which is different from “*Roast Mutton*”. *Salt-Baked Chicken* and *Mud-Baked*

*Chicken* are produced in the sealed utensil, which belong to *Salt Bake*. Besides, there is another way of cooking named *barbecue*, such as *Grill on a Red-Hot Iron Plate*; *Grilled Dish in Cantonese Style*. (Jin Huikang, 2004). Therefore, we should take some countermeasures: Don't interpret it without real understanding when translating the synonym.

## 5. Conclusion

Attention should be paid to precise usage of verbs and adjectives in the C-E translation of Chinese cooking. We mustn't be as punctilious as literal meaning. It is very important for us to try to translate them according to their pragmatic meanings. In addition, we should further learn more about the basic knowledge on cooking methods and Chinese cuisine culture so as to avoid Chinglish when translating them.

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