

A Study of the English Translation of Characteristic Cuisines of the Hexi Corridor from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Jing Luo*

Guangdong Technology College, Zhaoqing 526100, Guangdong Province, China

*Corresponding author: Jing Luo, cstdxy2008@126.com

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Abstract: Given the diversity of geographical and cultural backgrounds, it is difficult to find precise counterparts of many food-related vocabularies in the unique dietary culture of the Hexi Corridor in the target language, making it challenging to fully convey the essence of its local dietary culture in translation. To achieve the purpose of translation, the theory of multimodal discourse analysis provides an ideal translation approach through the language mode, image mode, sound mode, and the synergistic effect of multimodalities, which can accurately address the deficiencies in the translation of dietary culture. Through this research, it is not only possible to highlight the unique charm of the dietary culture of the Hexi Corridor but also to build a bridge for its international dissemination, promoting cross-border cultural exchanges and mutual understanding.

Keywords: Multimodal discourse analysis; Hexi Corridor; Characteristic cuisine; English translation study

Online publication: October 22, 2024

1. Introduction

The Hexi Corridor, located in the western part of China, serves as a vital geographic passage connecting the Western Regions and the Central Plains. Its unique geographical environment and the background of multi-ethnic inhabitation have fostered a rich and diverse dietary culture. The characteristic cuisines of the Hexi Corridor are not only abundant in variety but also feature names that are both elegant and vulgar, embodying rich local historical culture, folklore charm, and regional customs. However, the current status of English translation for the names of Hexi Corridor's characteristic cuisines is not optimistic, with numerous problems and deficiencies such as transliteration, rigid translation, word-for-word translation, and inconsistent translations, which hinder the international dissemination of the dietary culture of the Hexi Corridor ^[1]. Multimodal discourse analysis theory refers to a research method that utilizes multiple sensory modalities such

as hearing, vision, and touch and employs various semiotic resources including language, images, sounds, and actions to conduct a comprehensive analysis of communicative activities. In the process of English translation for the characteristic cuisines of the Hexi Corridor, we can draw on multimodal discourse analysis theory and utilize multiple modal resources such as translated text, images, and videos to comprehensively showcase the ingredients, cooking methods, and cultural backgrounds of the cuisines, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the translation and the effectiveness of cultural transmission. Therefore, research on the English translation of the characteristic cuisines of the Hexi Corridor holds significant practical and cultural value.

2. Multimodal discourse analysis theory

Multimodal discourse refers to the multiple channels and media that construct meaning and engage in communication through various means such as language, images, and sounds, utilizing sensory modalities such as hearing, vision, and touch, along with language and other semiotic resources^[2]. The term “multimodal” was first introduced by Halliday (1994), and since then, an increasing number of scholars have conducted in-depth research on multimodality. Kress *et al.* discussed the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings of visual discourse and proposed the theory of multimodal discourse analysis^[3]. Multimodal discourse analysis theory plays a crucial role in the English translation of local characteristic cuisines. This theory emphasizes that communication is not limited to language itself but encompasses multiple semiotic systems, including language as well as other elements such as images, colors, music, and body language, which collectively constitute multimodal discourse. In the process of English translation for local characteristic cuisines, multimodal discourse analysis theory provides a novel perspective. It transcends the confines of textual translation and instead considers various elements such as the presentation of the cuisine, its cultural background, and taste experience. For instance, in translation, attention is not only paid to the accurate conveyance of cuisine names but also to showcasing the appearance and presentation of the cuisine through images, simulating the taste and cooking process through audio, and even presenting its production techniques and cultural background through videos. The application of this theory makes the English translation of local characteristic cuisines more vivid and comprehensive, aiding target readers in better understanding and experiencing the cultural connotations and unique charm of the cuisines. At the same time, it promotes innovation and development in translation practice, opening up new pathways for the international dissemination of local characteristic cultures. Therefore, multimodal discourse analysis theory holds profound significance and value in the English translation of local characteristic cuisines.

3. Multimodal discourse analysis theory and the English translation of characteristic cuisines of the Hexi Corridor

3.1. Status quo of English translation for characteristic cuisines of the Hexi Corridor

With the proposal of the “Belt and Road” initiative, tourism in the Hexi Corridor has flourished, attracting numerous foreign friends to explore the mysterious Silk Road, visit famous historical sites, and experience the cultural ambiance of the Hexi Corridor. Local characteristic cuisines not only carry local dialects but also highlight local cultural characteristics [4]. The translation of the culinary culture of the Hexi Corridor not only influences the development and profitability of the local catering industry but also affects the dissemination of the regional culture of the Hexi Corridor. Therefore, there is an urgent need for English translations of vocabulary related to the characteristic cuisines of the Hexi Corridor. Currently, there are

numerous issues with the English translations of the names of characteristic cuisines in the Hexi Corridor, mainly manifested in the following aspects.

3.1.1. Inaccurate transliteration

Due to the differences between Chinese and Western food cultures, some translators have opted for transliteration. However, these transliterated texts neither convey the ingredient information of the characteristic cuisines to foreign diners nor communicate the rich dietary cultural information of the Hexi Corridor. For example, Zhangye's specialty dish “臊子面” is translated as “Saozi Noodles,” and “酿皮子” as “Niangpizi.” These transliterations fail to inform foreign audiences about the ingredients and cooking methods of these dishes^[5].

3.1.2. Lack of cultural information in literal translation

Word-for-word literal translations fail to accurately convey the cultural connotations of characteristic cuisines. For instance, “灰豆汤” (Huidou Tang, Gray Bean Soup) is translated as “ash beans soup,” whereas “hui dou” refers to “mottled peas.” Hui Dou Tang is named thus because it is a soup made from mottled peas and red dates. A more accurate translation would be “pea and date soup.” Similarly, “手抓羊肉” (Hand-Grabbed Mutton) is translated as “grabbing mutton,” which fails to accurately convey its cultural background and cooking method.

3.1.3. Inconsistent translation names

Multiple translations exist for the same cuisine name, causing confusion among diners. For example, Zhangye's specialty noodle dish “臊子面” is translated as both “Gravy Noodles” and “Saozi Noodles,” while “西北大菜” (Northwestern Great Dish) is translated as both “sweat coupe” and “Fragrant Rice.” This inconsistency in translation names hinders the dissemination of the culinary culture of the Hexi Corridor.

3.2. Translation strategies from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis

3.2.1. Linguistic mode

When translating the names of distinctive cuisines, we can draw on multimodal discourse analysis theory and consider the cultural connotations and regional characteristics behind the names. For example, for culinary names rich in historical allusions or regional characteristics, the method of transliteration plus annotation can be adopted to retain the phonetic beauty of the original name while conveying the cultural story behind it to readers. Secondly, when describing the culinary techniques, taste, and ingredients of a dish, vivid and accurate language should be used to stimulate readers' appetite and curiosity. Adjectives, verbs, and other vocabulary can be cleverly employed, with appropriate use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors and personification, to make the translated text more vivid and specific. At the same time, attention should also be paid to the conciseness and clarity of language, avoiding lengthy and complex sentence structures so that readers can quickly understand and resonate. Furthermore, in the translation of the linguistic mode, focus should be put on handling cultural differences^[6]. Since the distinctive cuisines of the Hexi Corridor are often closely linked to the local history, geography, and folklore, appropriate cultural adaptation and transformation should be considered during translation to ensure the accuracy and readability of the translated text, taking full account of the cultural background and acceptance level of the target readers. For instance, in translating “灰豆汤” (a specialty snack from Zhangye made from speckled peas with a unique taste and nutritional value), if only literal translation is used, such as “ash beans soup,” it may confuse foreign readers because “ash beans” do not accurately convey the characteristics and taste of speckled peas. Therefore, combining

multimodal discourse analysis theory, we can adopt the method of transliteration plus annotation, translating it as “Huidou Tang (a unique soup made from ma-colored peas).” This retains the phonetic beauty of the original name while conveying the raw materials and characteristics of the cuisine through the annotation. Another example is the translation of “手抓羊肉.” If it is simply translated as “grabbing mutton,” readers may misunderstand it as mutton that is casually grabbed, thereby overlooking its status as a delicate cuisine. Therefore, we can adopt descriptive translation, translating it as “Hand-Grabbed Mutton (a traditional dish in Hexi Corridor, served and eaten by hand).” This conveys the eating method of hand-grabbed mutton while highlighting its characteristics and status as a traditional cuisine through descriptive language.

3.2.2. Visual modality

The utilization of visual modality is equally crucial in the English translation process of the distinctive cuisines of the Hexi Corridor. As an intuitive and vivid communication medium, images can quickly capture readers’ attention and assist them in deeply understanding the uniqueness of the cuisines. Firstly, when selecting images for distinctive cuisines, emphasis should be placed on their representativeness and attractiveness. For instance, when translating “武威酿皮” “Wuwei Liangpi (Wuwei Style Noodles with Chili Sauce),” an accompanying image of the noodles with a crystal-clear appearance and smooth texture can be provided (**Figure 1**). This image not only showcases the visual characteristics of the Liangpi but also stimulates readers’ appetite and curiosity through its inviting color and presentation. With the supplementation of the visual modality, readers can more intuitively perceive the charm of this cuisine.



Figure 1. Wuwei Liangpi

Secondly, in the application of visual modality, it is also possible to combine textual descriptions to create a translation effect that is both illustrated and well-documented ^[6]. For example, when translating “酒泉糊锅” (**Figure 2**), an image showcasing the dish’s abundant ingredients and rich, thick broth can be inserted, accompanied by a brief textual description below the image: “Jiuquan Hu Guo (a hearty and flavorful dish featuring a rich variety of ingredients and a thick, savory broth)” ^[7]. This combination of images and text not only preserves the visual impact of the cuisine but also deepens readers’ understanding and impression of the dish through the textual description.



Figure 2. Jiuquan Hu Guo

Furthermore, in the application of visual modality, attention should also be paid to addressing cultural differences. Since the distinctive cuisines of the Hexi Corridor are often closely linked to the local history, geography, folklore, and so on, when selecting images, the cultural background and level of acceptance of the target readers should be fully considered. For example, when translating “敦煌烤全羊,” an image showcasing the scenic desert landscape of Dunhuang and the scene of the roast whole lamb can be chosen (**Figure 3**). This image not only displays the deliciousness of the roast whole lamb but also conveys the unique cultural connotation and regional characteristics of this cuisine to readers through the Dunhuang cultural elements in the background. It can be translated as “Dunhuang Roast Whole Lamb (featuring a scenic backdrop of Dunhuang’s desert, this dish captures the essence of local cuisine intertwined with rich cultural heritage).”



Figure 3. Dunhuang Roast Whole Lamb

3.2.3. Auditory modality

Sound is also one of the important modalities for constructing meaning. In the English translation process of the distinctive cuisines of the Hexi Corridor, the application of auditory modality represents an innovative and attractive approach that enhances readers' immersion and experience, making translation not just a visual and textual exchange but also a comprehensive, multidimensional cultural dissemination^[8]. Firstly, the auditory modality can simulate the sounds of the food preparation process, such as chopping, stir-frying, stewing, etc., through audio or video formats. These sounds can evoke readers' auditory memories, making them feel as if they are in a kitchen or restaurant, experiencing the food preparation process in person. For example, when translating “嘉峪关烤肉串,” an audio clip featuring the crackling of charcoal, the sizzling of fat dropping onto the fire, and the sound of meat skewers turning on the grill can be attached. Such sound effects not only increase the fun of the translation but also allow readers to more intuitively feel the seductive charm of the barbecue. Secondly, auditory modality can also convey the taste and flavor of food. By simulating chewing, swallowing, and other sounds, auditory modality can stimulate readers' gustatory imagination, making them feel as if they can taste the unique texture of the food. For instance, when translating “张掖灰豆汤,” a sound effect of tasting the soup, such as the sound of beans gently breaking in the mouth and the smooth sensation of the broth gliding down the throat, can be added. This auditory description enables readers to more vividly experience the delicate texture and rich layers of Huidou Tang. Furthermore, auditory modality can be used to tell the stories and cultures behind the food. By interviewing local chefs, diners, or cultural experts and recording their narrations and feelings about the food, the auditory modality can convey more authentic and vivid cultural information. For example, when translating “敦煌烤全羊,” an audio narrative about the historical origins, preparation techniques, and cultural significance of roast whole lamb in the Dunhuang area can be attached. Such auditory modality not only enriches the cultural connotation of the translation but also allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the story and tradition behind this cuisine. However, when utilizing auditory modality, attention should also be paid to addressing cultural differences. Readers from different countries and regions may have varying levels of acceptance and preferences for sounds. Therefore, when selecting auditory materials and creating sound effects, the cultural background and acceptance level of the target readers should be fully considered. Meanwhile, to ensure the accuracy and readability of auditory modality, it can be supplemented and explained in combination with textual descriptions or visual modality. Auditory modality plays a significant role in the English translation process of the distinctive cuisines of the Hexi Corridor. By skillfully utilizing auditory modality, the translation can become more interesting and immersive, enabling readers to gain a deeper understanding and experience of the unique charm of the food. At the same time, attention should also be paid to addressing cultural differences and the organic integration of multiple modalities to ensure the accuracy and readability of the translation.

3.2.4. Multimodal synergy

In the practice of English translation for the distinctive cuisines of the Hexi Corridor, linguistic modality, visual modality, and auditory modality do not exist in isolation but rather complement and synergize with each other to jointly construct a comprehensive and three-dimensional cultural dissemination system. This multimodal synergy not only enhances the accuracy and readability of the translation but also strengthens readers' cultural experience and emotional resonance^[9]. Firstly, as the foundation of information transmission, linguistic modality provides readers with detailed information about the names, preparation techniques, tastes, and ingredients of the cuisines through precise textual descriptions. However, pure textual

descriptions often fail to fully demonstrate the charm and cultural connotations of the food. Therefore, the incorporation of visual and auditory modalities becomes particularly important. Visual modality, through intuitive visual presentation, allows readers to instantly see the appearance, presentation art, and color matching of the food, thereby stimulating their appetite and curiosity. Meanwhile, auditory modality simulates the sounds and taste experiences during the food preparation process, making readers feel as if they are in the scene and can sense the tempting charm of the food. Under the multimodal synergy, linguistic modality, visual modality, and auditory modality intertwine and complement each other, jointly constructing a comprehensive and multidimensional dissemination system for culinary culture^[10]. Taking Hexi Corridor's distinctive cuisine, Camel Hump Roast, as an example, let's conduct an English translation case analysis from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis.

Original text: 驼峰烤肉

Transliteration: Tuofeng Kaorou

Literal translation: Camel Hump Roast Meat

From the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis, the English translation is: Camel Hump Barbecue (a traditional Hexi Corridor dish made from camel humps, which are rich in nutrition and flavor. The dish is cooked by slow roasting over an open fire, resulting in a tender and juicy texture. The camel hump symbolizes abundance and prosperity in Hexi Corridor culture).

Accompanying image: A picture of Camel Hump Barbecue, showcasing its cooking process and final presentation.

Through this translation and accompanying image, not only are the phonetic and literal translations of “驼峰烤肉” retained, but the ingredients, cooking methods, and cultural background of this culinary delight are also comprehensively displayed through various multimodal resources such as explanations and images, enhancing the cultural transmission effect of the translation.

4. Conclusion

This paper conducted a study on the English translation of characteristic cuisines from the Hexi Corridor from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis. By analyzing the naming characteristics, current translation status, and existing issues of these cuisines, corresponding translation strategies are proposed. The aim is to promote the international dissemination of the culinary culture of the Hexi Corridor and enhance the influence of local cultural tourism. In the future, research and practice on the English translation of characteristic cuisines from the Hexi Corridor should be continuously strengthened to improve translation quality, facilitate cultural dissemination, promote economic development, and make greater contributions to the cultural tourism industry of the Hexi Corridor.

Funding

Department of Science and Technology of Guangdong Technology College in 2024 “A Study on the English Translation of Characteristic Cuisines of the Hexi Corridor from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis” (2024QNSK019)

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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