

On the Motivation and Translation Techniques of Chinese and English Cooking Vocabulary

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Abstract: *The diversity of cooking vocabulary in both Chinese and English reflect the uniqueness of their respective cultures. This paper aims to explore the motivation and translation techniques of Chinese English cooking vocabulary, in order to help English learners better understand and use these vocabulary. Firstly, it introduces the application of lexical motivation theory in English major learning. Secondly, it is pointed out that the motivation for Chinese and English cooking vocabulary mainly comes from their respective language and culture, historical traditions, as well as differences in ingredients and cooking methods. Then, the translation techniques for cooking vocabulary are introduced, including literal translation, free translation, additional translation, and cultural transformation techniques. Finally, mastering the corresponding translation skills can help the reader accurately express the meanings of these words, thereby promoting cultural exchange.*

Keywords: Chinese and English Vocabulary; Cooking; Lexical motivation; Translation skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cooking, as one of the most basic human daily activities, not only reflects our living needs, but also carries rich cultural significance. The richness and diversity of cooking vocabulary in both Chinese and English mirror the uniqueness of their respective cultures. This paper aims to explore the motivation and translation techniques of Chinese English cooking vocabulary, in order to help English learners better understand and use these vocabulary.

2. LEXICAL MOTIVATION THEORY

Vocabulary is the foundation of language and an important component of language learning. Understanding the motivation of vocabulary can help English learners better grasp vocabulary and enhance their language proficiency.

2.1 The Definition and Types of Lexical Motivation

Lexical motivation refers to the reasons for the formation of words, the evolution of word meanings, or the understanding of relationships between words. In English, lexical motivation can be divided into semantic motivation and phonetic motivation (Li Erzhan, 2020) [1]. Semantic motivation refers to the meaning inherent in the origin of certain words, such as those derived from myths, legends, or historical events [3]. And phonetic motivation refers to the inherent regularity in the pronunciation of certain words, such as compound words and derived words.

2.2 The Application of Lexical Motivation Theory in English Major Learning

The lexical motivation theory in English major learning is used as follows:

- 1) Enhancing vocabulary memory: Understanding the origin and evolution of vocabulary can help enhance learners' memory effectiveness. By understanding the story or historical background behind words, learners can remember them more deeply.
- 2) Improving reading comprehension: Understanding the reasoning behind words during the reading process helps to better understand the author's intention and the topic of the article.
- 3) Promoting writing expression: Understanding the reasoning behind vocabulary can help learners choose more appropriate words, and improve the accuracy and richness of language expression.
- 4) Expanding cultural knowledge: Many English vocabulary words are associated with specific cultural

backgrounds (Wang Pingping, 2017) [2]. Understanding the reasoning behind vocabulary can expand learners' cultural knowledge and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills.

The theory of lexical motivation has important application value in English learning. By understanding the sources, semantic evolution, and phonetic patterns of vocabulary, learners can gain a deeper understanding of words and enhance their language proficiency. Teachers should pay attention to explaining vocabulary motivation and guide students to explore independently in teaching, in order to improve teaching effectiveness and learners' interest in learning.

3. THE MOTIVATION OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH COOKING VOCABULARY

The motivation for Chinese and English cooking vocabulary mainly comes from their respective language and culture, historical traditions, and differences in ingredients and cooking methods. The specific analysis is as follows:

3.1 Language and Culture

Both Chinese and English have unique vocabulary systems when expressing cooking related concepts. Chinese cooking vocabulary is often closely related to Chinese culture, such as “chǎo”、“dùn”、“zhēng” (“stir frying”, “stewing”, “steaming”), etc. These words not only represent cooking methods, but also contain the refined attitude of Chinese people towards food processing and profound culinary culture (Cai Dan, 2024) [3]. And English cooking vocabulary such as “saut é”, “braise”, “steam”, etc. also reflect the characteristics and habits of Western cuisine.

3.2 Historical Tradition

The historical traditions of China and Britain also have a significant impact on the formation of cooking vocabulary. China has a long history and diverse culinary cultures in various regions, forming numerous cooking vocabulary with local characteristics. The UK is influenced by European culinary traditions, and its culinary vocabulary also reflects this background.

3.3 Ingredients and Cooking Methods

Due to differences in geographical environment and types of ingredients, the Chinese and the British each have their own unique cooking methods and ingredient usage (Bai Zhongyang, 2022). These differences are reflected in cooking vocabulary; for example, the seasonings, “wǔ xiāng” and “jiàng zhī” (“five fragrances” and “sauce”) are required in Chinese cuisine, as the seasoning of “gravy” is essential in British cuisine [4].

3.4 The Influence of Loanwords

In the age of globalization, language and cultural exchanges between China and the UK are becoming increasingly frequent, and some loanwords are borrowed into each other's languages. For instance, the English word “ketchup” comes from the Cantonese word “ke jap” (eggplant juice) (Liu Chaoyang, 2023) [5]; The Chinese words “shā lǎ” and “bù dīng” (“salad” and “pudding”) are transliterated from English.

3.5 Cultural Differences

There are differences in dietary habits, table manners, and other aspects between China and the UK, which to some extent also affect the formation and derivation of cooking vocabulary. For example, Chinese terms such as “tuán yuán fàn” and “nián yè fàn” (“reunion dinner” and “New Year's Eve dinner”) contain cultural meanings of family reunion, while British “high tea” (afternoon tea) is a representative of social activities (Liu Ying&Liu Yan, 2024) [6].

In summary, the motivation behind Chinese and English cooking vocabulary is multifaceted, including not only the word formation characteristics of the language itself, but also the cultural background, historical traditions, differences in ingredients and cooking methods, as well as the influence of foreign vocabulary and cultural differences. These factors together lead to the lexical diversity of both Chinese and English cookings.

4. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES FOR COOKING VOCABULARY

4.1 Literal Translation

In cooking, literal translation of vocabulary is an important concept, which involves directly translating vocabulary from one language to another. For vocabulary with clear underlying reasons, it should be translated directly to preserve its cultural connotations. (Zhao Lisa, 2010) [7]. For example, Chinese words “chǎo fàn”, and “jiān jiǎo” (“Fried Rice”, and “fried dumplings”), should be literally translated as "stir fry rice" and "fried dumpling".

On the one hand, the literal translation process may bring some challenges, for the following reasons:

- 1) Cultural differences: There may be significant differences in the meaning and usage of vocabulary across different languages and cultural backgrounds. For example, "pancakes" may represent a simple breakfast food in some cultures, while in other cultures they may represent a complex banquet dish. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to consider the context and conventions of the target language culture.
- 2) Language limitations: in translation, there may be limitations in language expression. Some vocabulary may not have a direct translation or may not fully convey the meaning of the original vocabulary in the target language. In this case, the translator may need to search for alternative vocabulary or use explanatory language to convey the original information.
- 3) Context loss: Literal translation may lead to the loss of contextual information. Context is an important element in language use, providing the background and meaning of vocabulary. If one only focuses on the vocabulary itself and ignores the context, one may misunderstand the original information.

On the other hand, literal translation also provides people with important opportunities for culinary cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding, such as:

- 1) Promoting cultural exchange: Through literal translation of vocabulary, communication between people with different cultures becomes easier. This helps people to understand the cooking traditions and food of other cultures, thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding.
- 2) Innovative cooking: The translation process can stimulate the chefs' innovative thinking. The chefs can use new vocabulary and novel concepts to introduce new cooking methods and ingredients, thereby creating unique dishes.
- 3) Globalization of cuisine: Through literal translation, new cooking methods and ingredients can more easily enter other cultures. This helps to promote the integration of global cuisine, providing people with more diverse food choices.

In short, literal translation of vocabulary brings both challenges and opportunities in cooking. As chefs and food enthusiasts, we should understand cooking vocabulary from different languages, while also being adept at utilizing the innovative opportunities brought by translation to promote the globalization and diversification of food culture.

4.2 Free Translation

For vocabulary with metaphorical or cultural connotations, free translation should be used to convey the meaning of the original text. For example, the translations of the Chinese words "hóng shāo ròu" and "táng cù pái gǔ" ("Braised pork belly with brown sauce", "sweet and sour pork ribs"), not only retain the original meaning, but also conform to the expression habits of the target language.

Cooking is an art that requires us to use various vocabulary to express our ideas. These vocabulary include ingredients, seasonings, cooking methods, cooking utensils, etc. However, sometimes we may encounter situations where some vocabulary cannot fully express our meaning in a specific context. In this case, we usually choose the word paraphrasing, which means expressing our meaning in another way.

Firstly, let's take a look at the free translation of ingredients. In cooking, we often use various ingredients such as meat, vegetables, fruits, grains, etc. However, sometimes we may encounter some uncommon ingredients or ingredients with unclear names. In this case, we need to use free translation to describe these ingredients. For

example, if we want to describe a special type of mushroom, we can use the Chinese word "shān zhēn" ("mountain treasure") to express its preciousness and rarity.

Secondly, seasoning is also one of the very important vocabulary in cooking. In cooking, the usings of different types of spices are very important because they can change the taste of food. However, sometimes we may encounter some uncommon condiments. In this case, we also need to use free translation to describe these seasonings. For example, if we want to describe a special spice, we can use the word "mysterious spice" to express its unique taste and aroma.

In addition to ingredients and seasonings, vocabulary on cooking methods are also very important. In cooking, different methods can produce different effects. However, sometimes we may encounter new cooking methods, and in this case, we also need to use free translation to describe these methods. For example, if we want to describe a new cooking technique, we can use the term "innovative cooking technique" to express its novelty and uniqueness.

Finally, vocabulary on cooking utensils are also very important in cooking. In cooking, we need to use various utensils to help us complete our work. However, sometimes we may encounter new cooking utensils, and in this case, we also need to use free translation to describe these instruments. For example, if we want to describe a new type of oven, we can use the word "smart oven" to express its advanced technology on intelligence.

Overall, vocabulary paraphrasing is very important in cooking. It can help us better express our ideas and needs, and also help us better understand the thoughts and needs of others.

4.3 Vocabulary Addition Translation

Vocabulary addition translation is a technique of adding information or meanings that are not clearly expressed in the original text during the translation process. In cooking, vocabulary translation mainly manifests in the description of details such as ingredients, seasonings, and cooking methods. By adding these vocabulary, we can describe our cooking process more comprehensively and specifically, enabling others to better understand our cooking techniques and insights. For example, "má pó" in the Chinese term "má pó dòu fǔ" ("Mapo tofu") is a description of famous chefs, which should be explained when translating; if "Mapo tofu" is translated into bean curd made by a pock marked woman, it will leave a bad impression on foreign audiences (Liu Yuting, 2023) [8].

The application of vocabulary addition translation is reflected in the following aspects:

- 1) Ingredients selection: When selecting ingredients, we need to describe the type, freshness, and origin of the ingredients. For example, "I chose fresh bass from the local market." This description can help listeners better understand the freshness and origin of the bass, and help them make corresponding judgments.
- 2) Use of seasoning: In the cooking process, the type and amount of seasoning and its use method need to be accurately described. For example, "I used one-fifth spoonful of salt and sprinkled it evenly on the ingredients." This description can help listeners better understand the amount of salt and its using method, and help them better grasp the cooking temperature and time.
- 3) Cooking methods: Different cooking methods require different technique. For example, a description like "I used medium heat with slow stirring to ensure that the ingredients were evenly heated." This can help listeners better understand and master the cooking method.

In brief, vocabulary addition translation can make the cooking process more specific and refined, improving the quality of cooking. At the same time, it can also enhance the interactivity between the cook and the listeners, allowing the listeners to better understand and participate in the cooking process. However, when translating vocabulary, over-description of the cooking process may affect the listener's attention. We should use accurate and precise language, rather than overly complex vocabulary and sentence structures, to avoid affecting the listener's understanding and engagement. Overall, vocabulary addition translation is an indispensable part of the cooking process. By adding descriptions of ingredients, seasonings, cooking methods, etc., we can better share our cooking skills and insights with others, to improve the quality of cooking.

4.4 Cultural Transformation

In translation, sometimes it is necessary to transform the expression of one culture into the expression of another culture to adapt to the habits of the target language readers. For example, the term “gǒu bù lǐ bāo zī” (“Goubuli Steamed Bun”) is difficult to find the vivid corresponding expression in English, hence explanatory translation can be used, such as “Goubuli Steamed Bun” (Zhang Xiaolin, 2024) [9].

In translating cooking vocabulary, cultural transformation is particularly important because cooking is not only about ingredients, cooking methods, and flavors, but also deeply rooted in the history, traditions, and values of a culture. Therefore, translators need to understand the background and habits of the target culture as much as possible in order to translate cooking vocabulary more accurately.

In cross-cultural communication, vocabulary translation is a crucial task. Especially in the field of cooking, due to the differences in ingredients, cooking methods, and flavors between different cultures, the accuracy of translation is particularly important. The cultural transformation in the culinary field is mainly reflected as follows:

1) Translation of ingredients

Ingredients are the foundation of cooking, and there may be significant differences in the types and names of ingredients between different cultures. For example, “chicken” exists in many cultures, but in some cultures, the word “chook” may not have a direct translation. In this case, the translator needs to find a translation that is as close to the original meaning as possible, while also considering the acceptance of the target culture.

2) Translation of cooking methods

Cooking methods are also a major challenge in translation. Different cultures have their own unique cooking methods, some of which cannot even be directly translated. In this case, the translator needs to describe the method as much as possible, while also considering the acceptance of the target culture.

3) Translation of flavors

Taste is another important element in cooking, and people from different cultures have different taste preferences. The translator needs to consider the taste preferences of the target culture and try to make the translation as close to the taste of the target culture as possible.

Overall, cultural transformation in the translation of cooking vocabulary is a complex and important task. Translators need to consider various factors, including ingredients, cooking methods, flavors, and cultural background, in order to more accurately convey the original meaning and promote cross-cultural communication.

5. CONCLUSION

The diversity of cooking vocabulary in both Chinese and English reflects the uniqueness of their respective cultures. Understanding the vocabulary motivation can help us better understand and apply the vocabulary. Meanwhile, mastering corresponding translation skills can help us accurately express the meanings of these words, thereby promoting cultural exchange. Future research can explore the evolution of cooking vocabulary in different languages and its impact on cross-cultural communication.

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