

## Machine Translation Analysis of Chinese Dish Names

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**Abstract :** This article presents a comparative study evaluating and comparing the quality of machine translation (MT) output of Chinese gastronomy nomenclature. Chinese gastronomic culture is experiencing an increased international acknowledgment nowadays. The nomenclature of Chinese gastronomy not only reflects a specific aspect of culture, but it is related to other areas of society such as philosophy, traditional medicine, etc. Chinese dish names are composed of several types of cultural references, such as ingredients, colors, flavors, culinary techniques, cooking utensils, toponyms, anthroponyms, metaphors, historical tales, among others. These cultural references act as one of the biggest difficulties in translation, in which the use of translation techniques is usually required. Regarding the lack of Chinese food-related translation studies, especially in Chinese-Spanish translation, and the current massive use of MT, the quality of the MT output of Chinese dish names is questioned. Fifty Chinese dish names with different types of cultural components were selected in order to complete this study. First, all of these dish names were translated by three different MT tools (Google Translate, Baidu Translate and Bing Translator). Second, a questionnaire was designed and completed by 12 Chinese online users (Chinese graduates of a Hispanic Philology major) in order to find out user preferences regarding the collected MT output. Finally, human translation techniques were observed and analyzed to identify what translation techniques would be observed more often in the preferred MT proposals. The result reveals that the MT output of the Chinese gastronomy nomenclature is not of high quality. It would be recommended not to trust the MT in occasions like restaurant menus, TV culinary shows, etc. However, the MT output could be used as an aid for tourists to have a general idea of a dish (the main ingredients, for example). Literal translation turned out to be the most observed technique, followed by borrowing, generalization and adaptation, while amplification, particularization and transposition were infrequently observed. Possibly because that the MT engines at present are limited to relate equivalent terms and offer literal translations without taking into account the whole context meaning of the dish name, which is essential to the application of those less observed techniques. This could give insight into the post-editing of the Chinese dish name translation. By observing and analyzing translation techniques in the proposals of the machine translators, the post-editors could better decide which techniques to apply in each case so as to correct mistakes and improve the quality of the translation.

**Keywords :** Chinese dish names, cultural references, machine translation, translation techniques

**Conference Title :** ICALTS 2019 : International Conference on Applied Language and Translation Studies

**Conference Location :** Venice, Italy

**Conference Dates :** April 11-12, 2019