TRANSLATION OF FOOD DISCOURSE[2]

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Abstract
This paper deals with the translation of food- and cooking-related discourse. It also offers a brief overview of the findings of studies which have dealt with this somewhat underrated issue so far. More specifically, it looks into the challenges that this specialized type of translation entails such as dealing with culture specific terms, extralinguistic factors as well as pragmatic, grammatical and stylistic concerns. It also touches on the strategies that translators normally put in use, in an attempt to overcome these obstacles and produce successful food discourse that would be equally efficient and comprehensive in the target language.
Keywords: specialized translation, food discourse, culture-specific terms

Introduction

Nowadays the discourse of food[3] seems to have gained more prominence than ever before. The reasons for that are multifarious. First and foremost, food constitutes an inextricable part of human life; apart from being a biological necessity, food also plays a central role in each and every culture (Counihan & Van Esterik, 1997, in Paradowski, 2018). Also, the process of globalization which has stirred intensive intercultural contacts via migration, tourism, business contracts, media, etc. as well as the recent general obsession with healthy nutrition habits, have enabled food discourse to gain even larger momentum and to travel across borders faster than ever before. As a result, what humanity witnesses now is a soaring number of food magazines, cookery books, blogs, TV programs, celebrity chefs and cooking experts of a wide renown, cooking competitions, culinary travel programs, etc. (Paradowski, 2018).

This proliferation of food discourse is particularly noticeable in developed countries, especially in entertainment contexts (Grazone, 2017), and has poked a drastic demand for translation, manifested mainly in food labels, restaurant menus, cookery books, magazines, tourist leaflets, food-related TV series and films (Farkhan et al., 2020; Paradowski, 2018). Translation of gastronomic texts, in whatever format, is a very important type of specialized translation which mediates 'the encounter between the source culture, desirous to display its

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[2] Revisional scientific paper

[3] In this paper the term discourse of food is used to refer to all formats of oral and written texts dealing with food and cooking, as nowadays cookery texts are no longer confined just to books, menus and recipes, but they are expressed through a range of media such as radio and TV programs, newspapers and magazine sections on cooking, cooking websites, blogs, etc. (Kerseboom, 2012).

culinary richness, and the target culture, willing to discover new and sometimes exotic tastes' (Birsanu, 2016: 30).

At first glance translating gastronomic texts may seem as an easy task – a matter of mere rendering the ingredients and steps of preparing a certain dish from one language into another (Salih, 2018: 21). However, practice has shown that it could be very challenging, as translation of food discourse is more than just about food – it is about identification, culture and even politics (Kohler, 2011). Or in Salih's terms (2018: 34) 'food is a very powerful medium that mirrors the social, cultural, and even political identity of a given society'. Hence, it is an imperative that translation of food discourse be handled with extreme caution and deliberation.

Successful translation of food discourse requires that translators meet certain necessary prerequisites. In addition to excellent linguistic competence, to be able to produce efficient and reader friendly food translation in the target language, translators need solid knowledge of both the source and the target culture and at least some basic skills in preparing and cooking food (Salih, 2018: 35). Nordman (1996: 556, in Paradowski, 2018) underlines the importance of two kinds of knowledge in this context – 'familiarity with the minilect – restricted form of practically-oriented technolects used by a limited circle of specialists and/or linked to a limited field' and 'the second type of requisite knowledge is what could be called 'encyclopaedic' knowledge and experience'. Kerseboom (2010: 5), on the other hand, stresses the fact that it is indispensable for a professional translator of cookery texts to have 'an extensive knowledge of the terminology of cooking, the cooking process and the instructional language used in these kinds of texts'.

Despite, the general trendiness of food discourse, this type of specialized translation remains largely under-researched. Chiaro & Rossato (2015: 237) note that 'despite the rapidly expanding market for translation of food-related texts' the relationship between food, culture and translation is still rather neglected and is in dire need of further exploration. Birsanu (2016: 26), too, points out that 'the translation of gastronomy has had quite a marginal status within the broader scope of analysis of specialized translations'. A possible explanation for this evident neglect of food translation, in Inness's (2006: 2) view, is that food is still regarded by many as a trivial, domestic, female topic which does not deserve serious attention (in Chiaro & Rossato, 2015: 243).

The sections below discuss the findings of different studies that have attempted to unravel the peculiarities of this type of specialized translation – translation of food discourse. The focus is mainly placed on the challenges detected in this type of translation which encompass culture-specific terms, extralinguistic factors as well as pragmatic, grammatical and stylistic features of culinary texts. Clearly, a discussion on food translation would be incomplete without dwelling on the translation strategies normally employed in overcoming the key challenges in cookery texts.

Translating culture-specific terms in food discourse

Food plays a defining role in shaping a culture and its identity (Salih, 2018). Food discourse is naturally full of culture-specific terms referring to food and food preparation, intimately related to a specific national or regional cuisine (Keserboom, 2010). Hence, it comes as no surprise that one of the thorniest issues that professional translators face in translating food discourse is the cultural part in it (Birsanu, 2016: 26). In Garzone's (2017) words, translation of food-and cooking related texts is truly demanding, as 'food and eating are not only part of the biological processes aimed at sustenance, but comprise a set of products and actions that reflect culture, values, identities, ethnicities and religions, and work as a system of communication’. In the same vein, Chiaro & Rossato (2015: 241) emphasize the fact that food and language are inextricable part of a person’s identity, and they caution against toying with them as that can trigger strong emotions. Farkhan et al. (2020) points out that translation of food discourse needs to be handled with extreme caution because ‘the close relationship between food and culture makes the translation of food-related items so difficult and the cultural differences between two communities may evoke misunderstanding or unacceptability on the part of the target language’.

Culture in culinary texts is reflected in terms designating ‘units of measurement, cooking techniques, pots and pans, ingredients’ (Birsanu, 2016: 30), and all of these have a high potential to raise a number of problems at the time of translation. Clearly, translators’ main task in dealing with these culture-specific terms is ‘to strike a balance between the representation of the foreignness of the source content and the acceptability of the text in the target language’ (Birsanu, 2016: 30).

Based on her extensive experience in translating food texts, Epstein (2009) clearly points to terms referring to measurements, cooking utensils and cuts of meat as possible obstacles for translators because of cultural differences. Thus, for instance, the cuts of meat problem derives from the fact that different countries have different terms for different cuts of meat depending on the part of the animal’s body. Epstein’s solution to this problem is to either find a country specific chart of the cuts of meat, or to ask a professional for help. In general, what Epstein (2009) suggests is that in dealing with such terms experts should be consulted who can offer ideas (e.g. chefs, other translators, people who enjoy cooking, shop-owners, etc.). She also suggests using substitution, where appropriate; testing and comparing original recipes and with the translated ones, and using glossaries extensively, translators' notes, substitution lists, or other extratextual material where necessary, to explain the choices in the target language. In other words, Epstein insists that translators stick as closely as possible to the original and if ideas for substitutions are offered, they must be tested beforehand and explained in the target text, subsequently.

Salih (2018: 25) also discusses this issue in the context of his project which included the translation of 101 Arab recipes from Arabic to English. Thus, for instance, he mentions that the Arab cuisine is famous for its fragrant flavorful spice mixtures incorporated in preparing various dishes that might be exotic to the other parts of the world (e.g. Kabsa spice mixture which is used in preparing a dish called Kabsa (a dish of rice with spices and meat)). What Salih suggests is that, if certain spice is difficult to find in a foreign country, translators should advise readers to search for the basic ingredients of a specific spice mixture in their local shops and to produce a note instructing readers how to prepare it at home.

In dealing with the terms referring to measurements in culinary texts, the preferred strategy according to Epstein (2009) is to convert the measurement into a measurement typically used in the target language, so as not to discourage readers from approaching a particular dish. However, she also draws attention to the fact that while the conversion may work very well for main or side dishes, it can be a trickery business in bakery products and desserts where very precise quantities are needed. In those cases, Epstein (2009) suggests that the best solution is to employ both conversion and retention, i.e. to convert the measurements in the target language, but at the same time to preserve the original indications of quantities in parenthesis. This is exactly what Salih (2018) did in his translation of the 101 Arab recipes in English – he kept both methods of measurement side by side (e.g. “2 ¼ lbs. (1 kg) meat.”;

“2” (5cm); “preheat the oven to 350˚F (180˚C)”). Salih (2018) based his decision on the fact that it is far better to mention both systems side by side than to provide charts and tables of conversion at the end of the cookbook, as some translators suggest, because it might be difficult for readers to flip through the cookbook every now and then just to check the converted values.

Problems may arise in dealing with culture-specific terms that denote different cooking tools and kitchen utensils which are country specific and do not exist in the target culture. In that respect, Birsanu (2016: 28) notes that actual and practical familiarization of the translator with the utensils used in the kitchen is of tremendous assistance (2018: 26). He upholds this claim by providing examples from the Arabic cuisine referring to some special pots, pans and baking tools that can be difficult to find in other countries (e.g. an earthenware pot used for cooking delicious Moroccan couscous and meat stews; a big platter for serving traditional dishes in Jordan called Almansaf; a special mold for preparing an Iraqi dessert, Klaicha).

In addition, both Epstein (2009) and Salih (2018: 26) observe that sometimes the titles of the dishes can be tricky to translate as well. Some of them have meanings specific to a region or a country carrying characteristics of the culture they represent (e.g. *Kushary*, a popular Egyptian street dish consisting or rice, lentil and red sauce; *Al-harira soup*, a traditional Moroccan soup consisting of grains and medley of vegetables). According to Salih (2018: 27) the foreignization strategy plays a pivotal role in keeping the identity of the dish alive in the target culture, although in his project, most of the titles have been provided with a translation, explaining the meaning of the dish. He opted for this option clearly because he believes that ‘to reach the ultimate goal of translation effectiveness, the translator of food discourse is not really called upon to produce very creative solutions to the cultural issues encountered, but rather to decide how the text can ‘speak’ to the target readers while preserving its uniqueness and specificity in terms of content’ (Birsanu, 2016: 26).

Grammatical and stylistic features of food discourses

Although all food discourses have their specific format and stylistic features, still what they all have in common is the fact that they revolve around recipes. Writing food recipes is a creative art which has a distinctive narrative that differentiates it from any other type of writing. Thus, for instance, the structure of a recipe usually consists of a title, a list of ingredients and preparation instructions (Salih, 2018: 22). However, some cookery books, such as, for instance, those of Jamie Oliver, display a completely different stylistic features. Thus, instead of providing a list of ingredients, followed by the preparation instructions, Jamie Oliver skillfully intermingles all of that information in his text:

Throw all this into a food processor with a handful of peeled and chopped spring onions and a good handful of fresh coriander. Once this has been chopped up nice and fine, I add a couple more chopped tomatoes, a good pinch of salt and half of another avocado, chopped, to give it a nice chunky texture. Transfer everything into a bowl and season carefully with sea salt, freshly ground black pepper and a good squeeze of lemon or lime juice. If you decide to buy ready-made guacamole, which is a bit lazy but probably very realistic, you can put it into a bowl and chirp it up a bit with a squeeze of lemon juice, a little extra salt and a bit of chilli to give it a kick (Oliver, 2004: 101)

In addition, Jamie Oliver seems to avoid providing specific measurements in his recipes and adopts a very casual and informal mode of addressing his readers, the aim of which is to leave them the impression that cooking is a simple and straightforward procedure (Kerseboom, 2010).

Kerseboom (2010: 41) notes that writers of English recipes predominantly use imperative and affirmative sentences. They also sometimes use present participle constructions (e.g. "*Fitting the paper which has been greased on the top side neatly into the greased tin, by overlapping the cut corners* ..."). Kerseboom (ibid.) also notices that dangling participles are also sporadically used alongside imperatives in recipes (e.g. "*Serve the soup immediately, sprinkling 2 to 3 tablespoons of the toasted sunflower seeds"*), but he claims that this makes the action look more complex than it actually is and that translators should avoid those cumbersome constructions and replace them with imperatives only (e.g. "*Serve the soup immediately and sprinkle*…"). In his discussion on the grammatical features of recipes, Kerseboom (2010: 40) also cautions translators to use modal auxiliaries carefully as they are less effective in instructions and leave the reader with the impression that a specific action in the cooking process is simply an option, and not a necessity.

Paradowski (2018) also observes and comments on numerous features of food discourse and recipes in particular, and draws attention, among many other things, to the importance of correct preposition use in the translated cookery texts in English (e.g. *adjust oven rack <u>to</u> medium position; add butter and grated parmesan <u>towards</u> the end; cut <u>in</u> half; fry tomatoes with shallot <u>in</u> butter; turning occasionally, <u>until</u> evenly browned <u>on</u> both sides, etc*.). He advises translators to make use of electronic corpora to determine the right choice of prepositions whenever they are faced with dilemmas. He identifies the interference from the mother tongue as a root cause for a sizeable proportion of errors of this kind in the translation of food discourse.

According to Paradowski (2018) another notorious area that tends to spill over into translations of food discourse is that of articles. Paradowski (ibid.) notes that translating culinary texts presents a complex problem for such texts do not tend to obey the rules of article usage imparted in English textbooks. He also observes that in the context of the recipes the most common article is the zero article – one could surmise that once the ingredients have been provided, and given the relative universality of kitchens being equipped with a customary set of utensils and appliances, definiteness ceases to be an issue and the resultant need to encode it by means of the definite or indefinite article becomes obviated (e.g. *transfer Ø turkey to Ø cutting board; press through Ø sieve to remove Ø seeds; soak Ø rice; when soft, arrange Ø feta, cheese and watermelon,* etc.).

Paradowski (2018) underlines yet another syntactic and stylistic feature or English culinary texts – their relative brevity which refers to the general tendency to package and compress larger chinks of information into single-word terms that need more than one lexeme when expressed in other languages. Thus, for instance, he notes that verbs, in particular passive participles, are the most frequent information compressors (e.g. *chicken breasts – skinned and boned; shrimp – peeled and deveined; beer-battered fish; curried egg sandwiches; reduce, sieve and add chopped cilantro*).

Pragmatic issues in translating food discourse

In dealing with food discourse, it is unavoidable for translators to deal with certain pragmatic aspects of the text (Kerseboom, 2010: 26). For instance, translators need to be aware of the fact that the use of passive sentences in culinary texts broadens the gap between the reader and the task. That is why active sentences are preferred instead, particularly, in conveying the sense of urgency and purpose in carrying out the actions depicted in the text (e.g. it is more effective to instruct someone to ‘knock the dough back and press it gently’ than to tell them that ‘dough becomes less sticky when pressure is applied’). Also, an effective translation refers to ingredients or results unambiguously. In other words, translators have to imagine the situation in the target language and culture so that they can come up with a translation that TT readers can understand and use in preparing cooked dishes properly (e.g. instead of translating the instruction “the juices should run pink but not bloody” literally, translators might opt for a translation that goes along the following lines “the kidneys should be medium-cooked” which is much clearer and unambiguous).

Punctuation and connectives are especially vital in cooking texts, because they mark transitions in the text and help the reader switch from text to action and back. The translator must be aware of the value of these marks and how they function. Although most of the time it is just a matter of retaining the marks of the ST, sometimes, it might be more efficient to add a comma or split up sentences, so that readers get a clearer view of the instruction. Conversely, translators can opt for joining two clauses or sentences with a conjunction to reduce the speed of the user’s actions (Kerseboom, 2010: 27).

Steehouder (1998: 102-106) notes that while most instructive cooking texts have an anonymous narrator, some have an explicit narrator. In the case of the latter, the narrator or the writer is referred to explicitly in the text, which, in turn, narrows the distance between the reader and the text narrator. For instance, the famous British chef, Jamie Oliver, often uses the explicit narrator in his recipes (e.g. “*You can grill them, but I like to put them in a dry non-stick frying pan on a medium heat*” (Oliver, 2004: 101). This suggests that the writer is giving the readers advice instead of telling them what they must do (in Kerseboom, 2010: 29).

Kerseboom (2010) also stresses the fact that directions that refer to mistakes commonly made by users could be threatening and should be treated with a great deal of caution in food discourse by both writers and translators. In that respect, Steehouder (1998) describes a variety of ways to mention the user’s errors that are appropriate to recipes. Thus, for example, instead of telling users what they should not do, writers and translators consequently should focus on what users should do (e.g. ‘Make sure you always check …’). Adding arguments for the actions is yet another warning strategy used in recipes that adds a hint of politeness to the text. Another useful strategy is called impersonalizing: the reader is not explicitly present in the direction and will, therefore, not be addressed, nor threatened. This is achieved by using passive sentences (Steehouder, 1998: 108-111, in Kerseboom, 2010).

To conclude, it is of paramount importance for the translator to recognize all these pragmatic strategies and to adapt them if necessary in their translation to ensure a successful rendering of the source text into the target language (Kerseboom, 2010: 29).

Extralinguistic factors in translating food discourses

The challenges presented in the translation of food discourse extend far beyond the terminological issues (Birsanu, 2016: 28). Some of these challenges are of extralinguistic nature and they too deserve special attention on the part of translators.

The availability of ingredients is one of these extralinguistic factors in food discourse. Problems with the availability of ingredients are bound to occur whenever the cultural distance between the two cultures involved is considerable. In fact, the availability issue refers to the cases where access to ingredients listed in the original recipe is limited or more expensive in the target language culture (Epstein, 2009). In this case, the dilemma that arises is whether to stick to the original ingredients and keep the integrity of the recipe, or to adapt the dish to another culture by offering substitute ingredients that are available in the target culture. Epstein (2009) explains that this problem cannot be solved by simply exchanging one ingredient with another without offering further explanation. If suggestions or changes are made to the original recipe, she proposes that it should be clearly stated in the translation what has been changed and why.

Moreover, in undertaking the task of translating a gastronomic text, the translator needs to account for the intention of the source text and the target readership, i.e. whether the text is aimed at people working in the field (chefs, even connoisseurs) or at persons with little to no cooking experience. These considerations are vital in selecting proper translation strategies (Birsanu, 2016: 27). As to the target readers, Kerseboom (2010: 17-18) also observes that nowadays recipes serve as external memories and include greater detail than before, as readers are not expected to memorize the entire recipes in detail and rely solely on their memory each time they prepare specific dishes. Also, nowadays, bearing in mind the readers and the intention of the text, which is instructional for the most part, recipes are written in such a style that they allow readers not only to conceptualize the final product but also to mentally process the instructions and carry them out step by step. This means that the information in the text is carefully segmented and the instructions are carefully ordered. Readers work more efficiently when they work step-by-step instead of reading the entire text first and performing the actions afterwards. Therefore, short segments enable them to process and act out short instructions more efficiently than large segments. Kerseboom (2010: 20) also underlines that instructions are most effective when the reader is first presented with the objective and then the actual actions he/she needs to take (e.g. it is better to say first ‘now prepare the dough (objective), and then ‘Mix the flour with the butter and sugar (action) than vice versa).

A final extralinguistic factor that is worth considering is the publishing house policy with respect to the extent to which it allows for domesticating or foreignizing interventions in the text (Birsanu, 2016: 27). Evidently, translators must be aware of this aspect as well as of all other extralinguistic aspects of food discourse discussed above, in order to be able to reach the final goal – an efficient and effective instructive food discourse in the target language.

Translation strategies used in rendering food discourses from one language into another

In translating food discourse, according to Kerseboom (2010), the instructive function should always be considered dominant and a priority for the translator. If the translator does not adequately transfer the expressive or operative elements in a recipe to the TT, those elements will be lost to the TT readers, but if the instructive content is not properly translated, the readers will not be able to get the right result. In other words, as Kerseboom (ibid.) explains, a recipe in the TT with poorly translated style is a bad reading experience at the most, while a recipe with incorrect or unclear instructions and references is completely useless.

A handful of studies have dealt with the translation strategies employed when handling culture-specific terms in the translation of food discourse. Thus, for instance, Marco (2019) discusses the translation techniques used in translating food-related items from English into Catalan. His study shows that in that specific context, the neutralization technique was the most frequently used one because of the absence of the original items in the target culture.

Similarly, Farkhan (2020: 141) studied the translation strategies used in rendering food-related culture-specific items in a Netflix cooking reality show *The Final Table* from English to Indonesian. What he found out was that there were five translation strategies employed, out of which the most widely used strategy was retention (borrowing); the next strategy was direct translation (calque), followed by cultural substitution (a reference is substituted with another one which deviates more or less from the source one), specification (using a hyponym), and generalization (using a hypernym or superordinate). In his research of the translation strategies used in the translation of *Sju Sorters Kakor*, a Swedish classic baking cookbook, from Swedish into English, Kohler (2011) observes that the translation strategies employed are more culture-oriented than language-oriented, as the recipes are named to fit the expectations of the target language, and the descriptions of ingredients and tools are adapted to the conventions and common usage in the target culture.

According to Kerseboom (2010), as recipes are instructive texts, practical in nature, they will be more likely to require substitution in translation than conservation of culture-specific terms. To support his claim he provides an example of a recipe by Nigella Lawson which makes reference to "Mr Whippy", a brand of cupcakes famous for its voluminous, swirled toppings. In transferring this term in another language, the translator would be better off to substitute this item unknown to the target reader, by referring to the thick, gleaming, voluminous quality of the topping, as thus he/she would enable the reader to understand the reference. Keeping the term in its original form, on the other hand, presents a serious risk which has the potential to jeopardize the understanding and the proper preparation of this specific dish. However, Kerseboom (2010) also mentions that sometimes there can be a specific need for conservation of cultural elements because allusions to other cultures enhance readers' pleasure. This is particularly the case when it comes to translating names of dishes (e.g. a recipe for 'Spaghetti Arrabiata' sounds more attractive than a recipe for 'Spaghetti with Spicy Tomato Sauce'). So conservation is the better option here as the name of the dish is the attention-grabber and should be as attractive as possible.

Conclusion

As much as food is a topical issue in our daily life so is the translation of food discourse as relevant as ever. The translation of food discourse is important not only because it touches upon the human basic need of survival and nutrition, but also because it helps cultures meet and speak together. The translation of gastronomic texts may seem to be easy, but anyone who has tried it knows how challenging it might be. The purpose of this paper has been to present the challenges of translating food discourse as well as the strategies that translators can use to achieve their goal of conveying a source language food-related text into a target language culture.

As a general prerequisite, in addition to knowledge of the languages involved, the translator should have an excellent command of the terminology, the cooking process and the language of instruction used in such texts. The challenges involved in translation of this type relate to a range of different issues. Food is deeply immersed in the culture of the people where it is prepared, so when transferring it to another culture, one has to be cautious to strike a good balance between the foreignness of the original content and the acceptability in the target language. Units of measurement, cooking techniques and utensils, ingredients and the names of dishes are some of the frequent culture-specific items that must be carefully addressed in translation. Grammatical and stylistic features should also receive due attention in the translation process. The ones discussed in the paper are the use of imperatives, definiteness, complex noun phrases or compound structures as well as a distinctive narrative structure. The selection of certain grammatical structures and punctuation marks bears pragmatic importance too. The use of active vs. passive sentences and the use of commas and full stops is a case in point. Adopting the reader's point of view helps in selecting the best approach to follow if the translator is to render a source text properly and achieve the same pragmatic effect in the target language. Finally, extralinguistic factors may also play a role in how a translator deals with a certain textual feature. Things to bear in mind are the availability of ingredients, the target readership and its technical preparedness as well as the publishing house policy.

In view of all the challenges discussed, the paper also presented the strategies that translators of food-related discourse choose. The strategies range from neutralization, to retention (borrowing), direct translation, cultural substitution, specification, to generalization. The choice of strategy depends to a large extend on the overall purpose of the translation as determined by the translator and/or publisher.

Food is an indispensable part of everyday life and the translation of food-related text is inevitable too. As long as there is food, there will be food translation. In that sense, knowledge of the processes underlying food translation is of paramount importance in making food travel across cultures. This paper has made a small step in illuminating those processes in terms of challenges and possible solutions. As such, it has paved the way for future more detailed study of the translation of food discourse.

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