



Translation Principles and Dissemination Pathways of Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

Kunrong Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Xi'an Shiyong University, Xi'an, China
Email: 1526338277@qq.com

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Abstract

Culinary culture reflects national characteristics, and Chinese cuisine culture has a particularly long and rich history. In the context of globalization, the influence of Chinese cuisine has gradually increased. However, due to linguistic and cultural differences, the dissemination of its culinary terminology has encountered obstacles. This study focuses on the terminology of Chinese cooking methods. It first classifies these terms into four categories based on the heat transfer media—oil-based cooking, water-based cooking, steam-based cooking, and thermal-radiation cooking—and explains the meanings and usages of each category. It then analyzes their naming principles and linguistic features, proposes four translation principles—accuracy, conciseness, cultural adaptability, and generality—and explores dissemination pathways including database construction, cross-cultural tourism catering practices, and new media communication. This study aims to clarify the structural system of Chinese cuisine cooking method terminology and promote its translation standardization and cross-cultural dissemination.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Chinese Cuisine, Cooking Method Terminology, Translation Principles, Dissemination Pathways

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese culture encompasses multiple domains including philosophy,

literature and arts, traditional crafts, folk culture, and traditional medicine. In philosophy, the Hundred Schools of Thought lays the cultural foundation; in literature and the arts, poetry, prose, novels, opera, calligraphy, and painting demonstrate exceptional artistic achievement and cultural value; traditional crafts including ceramics, embroidery, and architectural techniques showcase unique craftsmanship; folk culture involves festival customs, culinary culture, costume culture, and more, carrying the emotions and wisdom of the people; traditional medicine, centered on Chinese medicine, safeguards people's health through its unique theories and therapeutic methods. These categories are intertwined, forming the profound and enduring system of traditional Chinese culture.

Food constitutes a fundamental material prerequisite for human survival. Over thousands of years of agricultural civilization, the Chinese people have gradually developed a distinctive set of cooking techniques and culinary concepts. The resulting Chinese culinary culture carries both the wisdom of the ancient saying "Food is the first necessity of the people" and reflects the social customs and aesthetic tastes of different historical periods. Broadly speaking, culinary culture encompasses multiple dimensions including ingredient selection, processing techniques, flavor blending, dining etiquette, and related seasonal customs [1]. China's vast territory and numerous ethnic groups, combined with differences in natural environment, resources, and cultural traditions, have given rise to diverse regional culinary styles. These culinary traditions, deeply rooted in daily life, constitute an important part of Chinese folk culture and have also profoundly influenced the formation and evolution of the Chinese vocabulary system [2]. As the most direct linguistic carrier of culinary culture, cooking method terminology often reflects a nation's cognitive approach to ingredients, techniques, and flavors. Therefore, systematic research on cooking method terminology helps to gain an in-depth understanding of the technical logic and cultural connotations of Chinese cuisine from a linguistic perspective.

At the translation level, the accurate conversion of cooking method terminology plays a key role in the international dissemination of Chinese culinary culture. With the acceleration of globalization, the international influence of Chinese cuisine is expanding. However, due to problems such as rigid literal translation and cultural loss in translation practice, many foreigners' understanding of Chinese cuisine often remains superficial. Through the translation of these terms, foreign diners can better understand the cooking processes and cultural backgrounds of Chinese dishes, thereby promoting the international dissemination and exchange of Chinese culinary culture.

In summary, the study of culinary culture and its terminology is of extraordinary significance and can contribute to cultural inheritance and exchange.

2. Classification Features of Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

Culinary terminology refers to the specialized vocabulary used to denote technical

concepts in the culinary field. Among the many culinary terms, cooking verbs such as “炒” (stir-fry), “炸” (deep-fry), “熘” (quick-fry with sauce), and “爆” (flash-fry) constitute the core of cooking method terminology. The term entries for cooking method terminology in this study are primarily sourced from the cooking verbs included in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (7th ed.), with term definitions based on the interpretations provided in the same dictionary. The selection criteria are as follows: 1) cooking verbs included in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (7th ed.) are given the highest priority; 2) priority is given to monosyllabic and disyllabic verbs with clear semantic reference that specifically denote the process of cooking ingredients through heating; 3) verbs that merely denote preliminary ingredient processing, such as “削” (peel), “剁” (chop), and “切” (slice), seasoning, such as “腌” (marinate) and “酱” (soy-marinate), or preservation, such as “熏” (smoke) and “腊” (preserve), are excluded; 4) archaic words that have fallen out of daily use, such as “爨” (cuàn) and “爇” (fón), and dialectal terms with extremely narrow regional currency are excluded. In addition, this study adopts standard Mandarin culinary terminology as its basic framework and does not include regional variants limited to specific dialect areas, so as to ensure the universality and readability of the terminology system in cross-cultural communication.

According to statistical data, there are 113 words related to food processing in Chinese, a portion of which are cooking verbs that denote the process of cooking food through heating—the most essential step in food preparation [3]. The character “烹” originally meant “to boil”, while “饪” referred to food being thoroughly cooked. The combination of these two characters refers to the process of making raw food edible through heating. In its narrow sense, cooking means applying heat to ingredients to transform them from raw to cooked; in its broader sense, it covers the entire process from ingredient selection, processing, and seasoning to cooking, ultimately producing dishes that excel in color, aroma, flavor, texture, quality, and nutritional value.

There are numerous cooking techniques in Chinese cuisine, classified on the basis of factors such as heat intensity, cooking duration, heat-conducting medium, and the nature and shape of the ingredients [4]. Among these, the heat-conducting medium plays a significant role in creating the distinctive flavors of different dishes. Based on the heat-conducting media, cooking methods can be divided into four categories: oil-based cooking, water-based cooking, steam-based cooking, and thermal-radiation cooking [5]. It should be noted that some cooking methods involve compound operations with multiple heat transfer media. Their classification is determined by the heat transfer medium on which the core cooking stage depends. For example, “烧” (deep-fry then simmer) involves deep-frying in its preliminary stage, but it is the subsequent simmering in broth that determines the final doneness and flavor infusion of the ingredients, and is therefore classified under water-based cooking. “熘” (quick-fry with sauce) involves deep-frying or stir-frying first to parcook the ingredients, followed by tossing with a starch-thickened sauce as the key to doneness, and is therefore classified under oil-based cook-

ing. “焖” (braise) is characterized by adding liquid and simmering covered after pan-frying or stir-frying, with the core cooking stage relying on heat transfer through the liquid, and is therefore classified under water-based cooking. **Table 1** presents this classification.

Table 1. Classification features of Chinese cuisine cooking method terminology.

Category	Cooking Method	Description
Oil-based Cooking	炸 (zhá)	Place the food in hot oil and heat until cooked.
	炒 (chǎo)	Heat the food in a pan, stirring frequently until cooked. Add a little oil before stir-frying.
	溜 (liū)	After deep-frying or stir-frying, add seasonings and a starch slurry, then toss to coat evenly.
	爆 (bào)	Quickly fry in boiling oil.
	烩 (huì)	After stir-frying the vegetables, add a small amount of water and cornstarch slurry, then bring to a boil.
	煎 (jiān)	Heat a small amount of oil in a pan, then add the food and cook until the surface turns golden brown.
	煽 (shān)	Briefly boil ingredients in boiling water or hot oil, then remove and mix with seasonings.
	煸 (biān)	Place the ingredients in hot oil and stir-fry until half-cooked, then add seasonings to finish cooking.
Water-based Cooking	烧 (shāo)	First deep-fry, then add broth and cook, or boil first and then deep-fry.
	煮 (zhǔ)	Place the food in a pot of water and heat until cooked.
	熬 (áo)	Place the food in water and simmer until it becomes a paste.
	煲 (bāo)	Cook or simmer using a clay pot.
	涮 (shuàn)	Briefly dip thin slices of meat in boiling water, then remove and dip in seasoning sauce.
	氽 (cuān)	Briefly cook food in boiling water.
	炖 (dùn)	Add water, bring to a boil, then simmer over low heat for a long time until the food is tender.
	煨 (wēi)	Simmer slowly over very low heat.
Steam-based Cooking	煨 (wù)	Cover the pot tightly and cook the food over very low heat until tender or fully cooked.
	焯 (chāo)	Briefly blanch vegetables in boiling water and remove them immediately.
	焖 (mèn)	Cover the pot tightly and cook the food over very low heat until done.
	蒸 (zhēng)	Cook or heat food using steam.
	馏 (liù)	Reheat cold cooked food by steaming.
	焗 (jú)	Cook food in a sealed container using steam.
Thermal-radiation Cooking	烤 (kǎo)	Dry or cook food near a fire.
	烙 (lào)	To cook dough-based foods by heating them on a hot griddle or pan until done.

3. Principles for Naming Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

The naming of cooking method terminology follows certain cognitive patterns

and linguistic principles. Unlike general vocabulary, terminology places greater emphasis on systematicity, accuracy, and monosemy [6]. Terminology studies indicate that technical terms possess a rational basis—their names often allow for a certain degree of “literal interpretation” based on their internal form [7], and their names often have direct semantic connections with the operation performed, tools used, degree of cooking, or final outcome. The so-called naming motivation refers to the basis on which new things and new phenomena acquire their linguistic names, illustrating the relationship between a term and its referent [8]. For cooking method terminology in particular, the naming motivation can be manifested in different dimensions: the core action itself, the tools involved in the operation, the degree and effect achieved by the cooking process, and the specific operational requirements of the technique. At the same time, the differences in the above naming motivations are also reflected in the linguistic structural forms of the terms—terms named with monosyllabic head verbs and those named with modifier-head structures exhibit different features in their naming patterns. The classification in this section is therefore based on the two dimensions of naming motivation and linguistic structure. Accordingly, the naming patterns of Chinese cooking method terminology can be summarized in the following four main aspects:

3.1. Naming Based on Core Actions

This type of naming is directly associated with the core action in the cooking process, defining the term through the characteristics of the action itself. For instance, the term “炒” (stir-fry) is based on the action of quickly tossing ingredients, allowing them to heat evenly and cook rapidly within a short time. This naming method is concise and directly reflects the main features of the cooking operation.

3.2. Naming Based on a Combination of Action and Tool

This naming principle closely integrates the cooking action with the typical tool used, describing the cooking process more precisely. For example, the term “烤” (roast/bake) explicitly refers to cooking with equipment such as ovens, which cook food through thermal radiation. The term “烙” (griddle-cook) specifically refers to cooking pastries on a hot griddle or flat pan, indicating a fixed association between the action and the cooking surface. Further subdivisions such as “明炉烤” (open-oven roasting) and “暗炉烤” (closed-oven roasting) further distinguish the types of ovens used in roasting. This type of naming adds tool-related information to the action, making the conceptual boundary of the term clearer.

3.3. Naming Based on Degree of Cooking and Final Result

This type of naming is based on the changes that ingredients undergo during cooking or the final effect achieved. The term “炖” (stew) emphasizes the effect of long, slow simmering over low heat to achieve tenderness and rich flavor; “焖” (braise) refers to adding a small amount of liquid after frying and cooking covered, allowing the ingredients to become tender and flavorful in a relatively enclosed

and moist environment. This type of naming not only indicates the operation but also implies the expected flavor outcome. Terms like “脆熘” (crispy quick-fry) directly indicate the texture requirement of being crispy on the outside and tender on the inside, while “滑熘” (velvety quick-fry) emphasizes the smooth and tender texture achieved by coating the ingredients before frying. This type of naming foregrounds the cooking effect, allowing diners to anticipate the texture before even seeing the dish, reflecting the comprehensive pursuit of color, aroma, flavor, texture, and quality in Chinese cuisine.

3.4. Specialized Technique Naming

For cooking techniques that are unique or highly specialized, dedicated terms are assigned to precisely reflect their operational features. The term “爆” (flash-fry) requires ingredients to be rapidly heated in a high-temperature wok until just cooked, followed immediately by the addition of seasonings and quick tossing—this name highlights the “fast and vigorous” operational characteristics. The term “酱爆” (sauce flash-fry) adds a seasoning dimension to “爆”, where “酱” (sauce) indicates the use of sweet bean paste or fermented soybean paste, demonstrating a composite naming model combining seasoning and technique. In Chinese culinary vocabulary, “attributive-head structures” and “affixation structures” are common word-formation patterns, and these structures “can precisely express subtle differences in meaning through the combination of modifiers and head constituents” [9]. This pattern is equally common in cooking terminology—for example, “糟熘” (fermented-rice quick-fry) indicates the use of fermented rice juice as the seasoning feature, and “干煸” (dry stir-fry) emphasizes the absence of added water during the heating process. These terms achieve refined conceptual expression through the combination of modifying constituents and head verbs.

The above four naming patterns are not mutually exclusive but jointly serve the demand for systematicity in terminology: terms named after core actions form the foundational level of the system; action-tool combination naming reflects the patterns of term derivation and composition; cooking degree and effect naming reflects the precise conceptual differentiation of terms; and specialized technique naming highlights the distinctiveness of terms within the system. These four patterns work together to make cooking method terminology a hierarchical and easily identifiable system of appellation [10].

4. Linguistic Characteristics of Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

Cooking method terminology exhibits distinct technical text features in linguistic expression. This type of text aims to impart specific techniques or knowledge, and its language is characterized by accuracy and clarity, avoiding ambiguous or vague expressions. Cooking method terminology is a typical example of these linguistic features—different cooking method terms correspond to specific heating operations, and in professional culinary contexts, the standard definitions of each term

have clear conceptual boundaries and are not interchangeable. When certain everyday expressions enter the professional culinary context, their meanings undergo semantic narrowing and specialization. For instance, “滑” (velveting) in professional contexts refers to the complete procedure of “coating ingredients with starch and quickly dispersing them in warm oil”, rather than its everyday meaning of “smooth”.

Although cooking terminology belongs to technical texts, it does not merely convey operational information. China’s vast territory, combined with significant regional differences in products and flavor preferences, means that the same term may refer to different cooking operations in different culinary traditions, and the same operation may have different names across regions. This study adopts the standard definitions provided in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* as the basis for term definition, and regional variants are not within the scope of this discussion. It should be noted, however, that this implies the acquisition and translation of cooking method terminology cannot be limited to technical correspondence alone; the regional culinary traditions and historical-cultural contexts behind them must also be taken into account.

5. Translation Principles of Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

The translation of cooking method terminology differs fundamentally from that of general vocabulary. General vocabulary translation only requires finding functionally equivalent expressions in the target language, whereas terminology translation also requires maintaining conceptual consistency and systematicity throughout the entire terminological system. The translation of terminology should balance accuracy, readability, and transparency [11]. These standards provide basic references for the translation of cooking method terminology. Based on the classification features, naming logic, and linguistic properties of cooking method terminology, this study summarizes the following four translation principles.

5.1. Principle of Accuracy

For cooking method terminology, accuracy is required at two levels.

First, the translation should faithfully reflect the essential characteristics of the cooking method. Chinese cooking methods are rich and diverse, and the conceptual boundaries between different terms are clear—“炒” (stir-fry) emphasizes quick tossing, “炸” (deep-fry) features abundant hot oil, and “熘” (quick-fry with thickened sauce) refers to frying or stir-frying followed by sauce-thickening. Translation must accurately convey the core action and technical features without confusion or generalization. For example, “爆” (bào) requires rapid heating over intense heat and cooking the ingredients quickly until just tender. The core of this cooking operation lies in speed and high heat intensity. If translated merely as “fry”—a general term covering stir-frying and deep-frying—the characteristic of

short-duration high-temperature treatment cannot be reflected, and the term is liable to be confused with conventional oil-based cooking techniques including “炒” (stir-fry) and “炸” (deep-fry). By contrast, rendering it as “quick-fry” or “flash-fry” explicitly highlights the temporal feature of rapid, fierce heating via the prefixes *quick-* and *flash-*, thus capturing the operational essence of this cooking method more precisely.

Second, the translation should correctly grasp the multiple layers of meaning in terms. Some cooking terms include not only basic operational meanings but also specific procedure combinations or flavor references. Taking “熘” as an example, this term refers to a composite cooking method that involves first deep-frying and then stir-frying with a starch-thickened sauce. If it is translated merely as “stir-fry”, only the “tossing and stirring” step is conveyed, while the procedural sequence of “first deep-frying, then sauce-thickening” is lost, making it difficult to distinguish effectively from “炒” (stir-fry). In contexts where complete technical information needs to be conveyed, it may be translated as “quick-fry and then stir-fry with thickened sauce”, which accurately reproduces the operational procedure through a step-by-step description, allowing target-language readers to understand the complete cooking process.

5.2. Principle of Conciseness

The conciseness requirement of terminology translation is closely related to the inherent conciseness of the terms themselves. As terminology, cooking method terms should have the characteristic of conciseness. Chinese cooking method terms often convey complete operational information in monosyllabic or disyllabic forms. This feature requires translations to be as concise as possible while ensuring complete information transmission, avoiding lengthy expressions.

Under this principle, two points should be noted in translation. First, avoid stacking modifiers that bloat the translation. For cooking methods with modifiers, the core action should be extracted for translation. Taking “清炖” (clear stewing) as an example, its operational essence lies in slow cooking over low heat, with the modifier “清” (clear) merely indicating the texture of the broth. If one attempts to translate the two characters separately in a word-for-word manner, such as “clear-stewed”, though a superficial correspondence is achieved at the lexical level, the combination does not constitute a natural expression in English. Moreover, incorporating the modifier into the internal structure of the term increases the cognitive load for the reader. By contrast, translating it as “stew in clear soup” extracts the core action “stew” and places the modifier “clear” after the head term in the form of a prepositional phrase to specify the state of the broth. This version not only conveys the complete operational information but also avoids the redundancy caused by crowding the modifier into the core terminological structure, resulting in a more concise and natural translation. Second, when accuracy conflicts with conciseness, accuracy should take precedence—the primary purpose of terminology translation is to convey accurate conceptual meaning, and conciseness

should not be achieved at the expense of accuracy [11].

5.3. Principle of Cultural Adaptability

The cultural adaptability principle requires translation to fully consider the receptive habits and cognitive patterns of the target language culture. People from different cultural backgrounds may have significantly different understandings and expressions of cooking methods, so the translation of cooking method terminology should align as much as possible with the cognitive habits of target-language readers.

Specifically, on the one hand, existing cognitive frameworks in the target culture can be used for explanation. For example, “焗” (baking in a sealed container) is a cooking method with Chinese characteristics that has no exact single-word equivalent in English. Translation can draw on the familiar concept of “bake” and render it as “bake in a casserole with a lid” or “casserole-bake”, using the familiar “bake” and “casserole” to explain the operational features of “焗”, allowing Western readers to understand this unfamiliar Chinese cooking method through their existing knowledge.

On the other hand, cultural misunderstandings caused by literal translation should be avoided. Some cooking terms may carry culturally specific imagery, so translation should focus on operational essence rather than literal meaning. For example, “红烧” (braised in soy sauce) features the character “红” (red), which in Chinese refers to the reddish-brown color of dishes achieved through soy sauce coloring and constitutes an element of cultural imagery. If it is translated literally as “red-cooked”, target-language readers might interpret it as “cooked with red color” or “colored with red pigment”, leading to a misunderstanding of the cooking operation. Translating it as “braised in soy sauce”, by contrast, although it discards the color imagery evoked by “red”, accurately conveys the core technique of “slow-cooking and coloring with soy sauce”. This version not only preserves the accuracy of the cooking operation but also avoids misinterpretation caused by cultural imagery.

5.4. Principle of Generality

The principle of generality requires that the translation of cooking method terminology maintain consistency within the industry and align with internationally accepted culinary terminology systems.

First, refer to existing international culinary terminology standards. Western culinary terminology has many expressions similar to Chinese cooking methods—for example, “roast” corresponds to the basic concept of Chinese “烤” (roast/bake), “grill” corresponds to open-flame roasting, and “bake” corresponds to oven roasting. When translating Chinese “烤”, the closest equivalent among “roast”, “grill”, “bake”, etc., can be selected according to the specific cooking method, making the translation consistent with international usage and facilitating cross-cultural communication.

Second, maintain unified and stable translations within the industry. In the catering industry and translation practice, for some common Chinese cooking methods, widely recognized translations should be adopted as much as possible. For example, “焖” is often translated as “braise”, and “炖” as “stew”. If different restaurants or menus use different translations, it will confuse diners. Therefore, translators should fully understand and follow generally recognized translation practices within the industry.

6. Dissemination Pathways of Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

The effective dissemination of terminology translation results requires standardized knowledge management methods and diverse dissemination pathways.

6.1. Building a Translation Database for Chinese Cuisine Cooking Method Terminology

The systematic storage and sharing of terminology translation results form the basis for ensuring the uniformity and standardization of translated terms. A domain knowledge base is “a knowledge application system that uses information technology to organize, present, and manage knowledge in a specific subject or field in an orderly manner” [12]. Drawing on this concept, a specialized translation database for Chinese cooking method terminology can be constructed, integrating information such as Chinese term names, English translations, cooking technique descriptions, and representative dish examples. This database can be used by catering professionals, translators, food culture researchers, and general enthusiasts, facilitating accurate translation and communication in different contexts. Taking “溜” (also written as “溜”) as an example, the database may list the English translation of this term as “quick-fry and then stir-fry with thickened sauce” to provide a detailed description of the operational steps and procedural features of the technique, allowing users to understand the technical connotations of the term. Meanwhile, menu translations of representative dishes may also be included, such as “溜肉段” translated as “Sautéed Pork Chunks with Sweet and Sour Sauce” and “溜肝尖” translated as “Sautéed Pork Liver with Scallions”, to illustrate the practical application of this cooking method within complete dish names. Term translations and dish name translations are to be listed in separate columns within the database for easy reference in different usage scenarios.

6.2. Integrating into Cross-Cultural Tourism Translation Practice

Tourism and catering constitute one of the most direct dissemination scenarios for cooking terminology. When Chinese catering enterprises expand into overseas markets, menu translation is a crucial task. A menu is not merely a tool for ordering food but also a carrier for disseminating food culture. In cross-cultural tourism contexts, the translation of cooking method terminology needs to balance accuracy with readability—accurately conveying the technical connotation of the

method while remaining comprehensible to foreign diners. Therefore, relying on the tourism and catering industry, standard translations of cooking terminology can be incorporated into menu translation guidelines and catering service training, allowing terminology translation results to be applied and tested in real cross-cultural communication contexts. The promotion of Chinese culinary culture plays a crucial role in the dissemination of regional cultures across different areas of China. As a core linguistic element of culinary culture, cooking terminology directly affects the effectiveness of cultural dissemination through its translation quality.

6.3. Expanding Communication Channels through New Media Platforms

In recent years, food-related short videos, documentaries, and other new media content have gained widespread attention on international platforms. This type of content, through intuitive visual presentation and vivid narrative methods, transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, allowing overseas audiences to perceive the charm of Chinese culinary culture through specific cooking processes. Research has indicated that the cross-border dissemination of food short videos contributes to the international spread and recognition of Chinese culinary culture [13]. At the same time, such videos often naturally present the application scenarios of different cooking methods, by demonstrating the operational processes of techniques through visuals, accompanied by subtitles presenting Chinese-English translations of the terms, viewers can understand and retain the terminology while watching. Compared with traditional text-based comparison methods, this communication approach lowers the threshold for understanding terminology and helps promote cooking method terminology from the professional domain to public awareness.

7. Conclusion

This paper has systematically explored Chinese cuisine cooking method terminology from classification, naming, linguistic features, translation principles, to dissemination pathways. The study has clarified the terminology classification framework based on heat-conducting media, analyzed naming patterns including core action naming, action-tool combination naming, cooking degree and effect naming, and specialized technique naming, identified the linguistic characteristics of cooking method terminology as technical texts, proposed four translation principles—accuracy, conciseness, cultural adaptability, and generality—and discussed dissemination pathways including database construction, tourism and catering practices, and new media communication. In the context of globalization, the international influence of Chinese cuisine continues to rise, and the accurate translation and dissemination of cooking terminology have become an important bridge connecting Chinese and foreign food cultures. Translators need to continuously improve their professional competence and cross-cultural communication

skills to more effectively promote Chinese culinary culture to the world.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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