

A corpus-based study of *braised* dishes in Chinese-English menus

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Abstract

Few studies have been carried out in Macao for menu translation in the past. With Macao being listed as the City of Gastronomy in 2017, the Macao restaurants started to catch the world's attention, and online menus have turned to be an important tool for attracting tourists. With quality translation for menus of Michelin-starred restaurants and those in five-star hotels, this study investigates how particular words or terms have been translated as to build a regular word set for students' learning. This paper studies the expression of the cooking method "braise" in the menu translation, based on a sample of 3,606 items from 27 restaurants (local Michelin, 5-star and high-class restaurants) and overseas (Australia). The data reveals that there is a full set of Chinese verbs that correspond to *braised* in menu translation, varying according to the particular collocation of cooking method and food.

1 Introduction

With Macao being designated as UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in November 2017, the food industry turns out to be the highlight of the tourist sector, and catches the attention of tourists worldwide. The Macao government also dedicates various resources for promoting the image of local restaurants and local food culture. To the tourists overseas, the menu of a restaurant becomes an important tool to "deliver" them "message" on what local delicacies are available or what special dishes make the restaurant a "must-visit" spot. The translation of a bilingual or multilingual menu with quality is then particularly important to a restaurant on whether it can attract more customers.

It is therefore vital to study the translation methods useful for menus, while building a corpus for restaurant menus which not only enables us to study the collocation of the lexical items, but is also important to investigate any tendencies or norms for rendering particular dishes or cooking methods. Some commonly-used terms for cooking, like fried rice, steamed fish, and roasted pork, can easily be translated into "炒飯", "蒸魚" and "燒肉". But for word like "braise", there might be various ways for its translation depending on the cooking method and collocated food. Based on a self-built corpus that consists of dish names in both Chinese and English, this paper investigates what regular set of words tend to be used to translate "braise" in high ranking restaurants or hotels both in Macau and overseas.

2 Collection of dish names

This study focuses on the translation of menus of top quality, and collected the online menus of restaurants with Michelin star or those located in 5-star hotels or the prestigious ones. The menus in these restaurants tend to be carefully produced involving professional translators.

To carry out this study, online menus from a total of 27 restaurants have been collected, which consist of 24 local ones and 3 from Australia. Of the local restaurants, 13 are Michelin starred ones. Of all collected menus, 20 menus are translated from Chinese to English and the rest are from English to Chinese. The total dish names amount to 3,606, with 2,330 entries from menus of Chinese to English translation, 981 entries from menus of English to Chinese translation, while 295 entries are from restaurants in Australia.

3 Data analysis and results

The data analysis will be both quantitative and qualitative. The concordancing software HyConc is used for data analysis, as to facilitate the statistics of the needed information. As pointed by Leech (1992) that the most simple and popular tool for carrying out a computational-basis research is through the use of indexing program (p. 114), and HyConc V3.9.6 is a reliable and an ideal concordancing software that works with Chinese and English texts. HyConc incorporates three functions: (1) processing for monolingual corpus analysis, (2) processing for parallel corpus analysis and (3) pre-processing for corpus. It has been widely used, because it supports Unicode which allows Chinese characters to be transferred freely on different platforms (Liu, 2013). Unlike some other concordance software that have problems with displaying Chinese characters, HyConc is rather reliable in this respect. With the function of parallel corpora analysis built in HyConc, the analysis can be conducted not only on the frequency of a particular lexis but also the translation between the source and target texts.

Our analysis process begins with the searching of word “braise” in both the STs and TTs (Figure 1), returning a total of 240 dish names with “braise” used in target English.

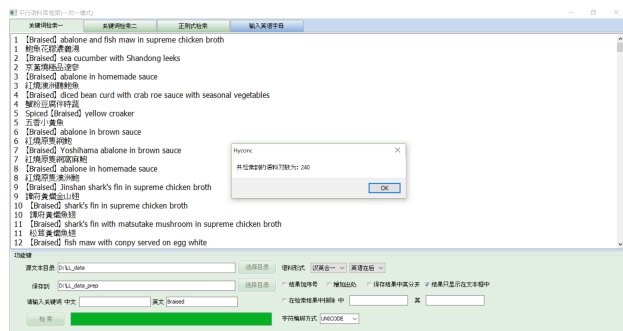


Figure 1: Searching for “braised” in HyConc

By examining this data, we further discovered nine Chinese verb types that correspond to “braise”– i.e., 燒 (shāo), 燜 (mèn), 扒 (pā), 炆 (wén), 撈 (lāo), 燴 (huì), 拆 (chāi), 煨 (wēi), and 扣 (kòu) (See Table 1). In fact, a significant number of Chinese dish names (n= 113) do not contain any verbs in Chinese but are translated into English with “braise”, accounting for 47% of the 245 instances of “braised” dishes. For example, the

Chinese dish named 蒜子火腩豆腐煲 is translated into *Braised Bean Curd with Garlic & Roast Pork Ribs*, in which 煲 bāo ‘clay pot’ entails the meaning of stewing food in clay pot, resulting in the use of “braise” in the English dish name. In addition, the most frequently used verb turned out to be 燒 shāo (n=56), which appears either by itself (n= 12) or in three collocations – i.e., 紅燒 hóng shāo ‘braised in soy sauce’ (n= 29), 蔥燒 cōng shāo ‘braised with scallion’ (n= 8) and 乾燒 gān shāo ‘dry braised’ (n= 7). The verb 燒 shāo and its collocations in Chinese therefore present the predominant type of verb phrase for “braised” dishes in our sample. There is also dialectal use of 炆 wén ‘simmering’ (n=5), which gives local Cantonese-speaking flavor.

Types of verbs	n=
no Chinese verb	113
燒	56
- 紅燒	29
- 蔥燒	8
- 乾燒	7
扣	20
扒	14
燴	13
燜	11
炆	5
撈	5
煨	2
拆	1
Total	240

Table 2: Verb Types in Chinese corresponding to “braised” in English

Our data shows that 47% (113 items) of the translation with the word “braise” is from Chinese dish names without occurrence of verb. Some of the examples are extracted below:

- 千層雙冬豆腐
Braised Bean Curd with Mushroom and Bamboo Shoot
- 順德花雕雞
Braised Chicken in Chinese Yellow Wine "Shunde Style"
- 蟹粉豆腐伴時蔬

Braised diced bean curd with crab roe sauce with seasonal vegetables

酸辣蹄筋

Braised pig tendon with Yunnan ham, sliced bamboo shoot and wild mushroom

麻婆豆腐

Braised bean curd with minced beef, Sichuan peppercorn and broad bean paste

饞嘴牛蛙

Braised bullfrog with angled luffa, spring onion pickled ginger and chili

壇子肉

Braised pork knuckle with chicken, thousand year egg and dried bamboo shoot

In the above examples, the source names of dishes in Chinese do not contain any Chinese verb about cooking. However, the word *braised* is used in the translation, and there is a regular pattern of *braised* collocating with bean curd and meat (chicken, pig tendon and bullfrog, etc.), while the prepositions “with” and “in” are used to expound the method of cooking. Instead of using literal translation, a very communicative translation is adopted with the addition of a great deal of details on ingredients and explicitation of cooking method in order to convey a more comprehensive idea to the foreign customers on how the dishes look like or taste like. The notably long English dish names are also the feature as described by Jurafsky (2014) that the use of longer words to describe a dish is a feature pertaining to expensive restaurants. Our study lends support to Jurafsky’s observation, because the most lengthy dish names in our sample were collected from a restaurant of five-star hotel.

Apart from the “braised” dishes that do not contain Chinese verbs, the dishes with Chinese verbs on the cooking method (53% of our sample) reveal the types of food that tend to collocate with these verbs:

燒 (vegetable, tofu, duck, pork, lamb brisket and seafood);

紅燒 (mainly with shark’s fin and abalone, followed by fish maw, tofu, pork belly, fish fillet, yam and beef brisket);

蔥燒 (all with sea cucumber except one with pig tendon and one with garoupa fillet);

燜 (mainly with seafood, and also with tofu and Chinese egg plant)

扒 (all with vegetable except one with fish maw and one with bird’s nest)

燴 (mainly with shark’s fin, followed by bird’s nest, and a few instances of pork, sea cucumber and bean curd sheet)

乾燒 (seafood and E-Fu noodle)

炆 (abalone, fin, beef ribs, E-Fu noodle, and pomelo skin)

撈 (exclusively for shark’s fins)

煨 (sea cucumber and shark’s fin)

拆 (with crab meat)

扣 (mainly with goose web, followed pork belly, abalone, fish maw and sea cucumber)

The meats and vegetables that collocate with various types of Chinese verb for “braise” are presented in Table 2, with the information on frequency count and percentage.

Types of verbs	n=	Meat		Vegetable	
紅燒	29	fish maw beef brisket sea cucumber bird nest pork belly fish fillet abalone Shark fin	3.4% 3.4% 6.9% 6.9% 6.9% 6.9% 17% 37.9%	Yam bean curd	3.4% 6.9%
蔥燒	8	pig tendon pork belly garoupa fillet fish maw sea cucumber	12.5% 12.5% 12.5% 12.5% 62.5%	ginger scallion spring onion leek	25% 25% 25% 37.5%
乾燒	7	shark fin abalone lobster ball pork fish	14.28% 14.28% 14.28% 28.57% 28.57%	bean curd mushroom bean sprout celery	14.28% 14.28% 28.57% 28.57%
扣	20	shrimp roe salt fish abalone pork sea cucumber fish maw goose web	5% 5% 15% 25% 30% 30% 35%	mushroom eggplant preserved vegetable	5% 5% 15%

(Table 2 continued)

Types of verbs	n=	Meat		Vegetable	
扒	14	scallop crab claw fish seafood	7% 7% 7% 7%	winter melon bean sprout bean curd onion	7% 7% 7% 7%

		duck beef lamb chicken beef pork chop bird nest prawn ham crab meat	7% 7% 7% 14% 14% 14% 21% 28.5% 42.8% 42.8%	choy sum potato bamboo piths pineapple mushroom seasonal vegetable	7% 7% 21% 21% 28.5% 42.85%
燴	13	Lobster conpoy fish pork gizzard birdnest Abalone Octopus Bacon Ox tongue Seafood Shrimp Sea cucumber	7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 15.3% 15.3% 23%	bean curd lily bulb bay leaves preserved vegetables Mushroom	7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 15.3%
扒	14	scallop crab claw fish seafood duck beef lamb chicken beef pork chop bird nest prawn ham crab meat	7% 7% 7% 7% 7% 7% 7% 14% 14% 14% 21% 28.5% 42.8% 42.8%	winter melon bean sprout bean curd onion choy sum potato bamboo piths pineapple mushroom seasonal vegetable	7% 7% 7% 7% 7% 7% 21% 21% 28.5% 42.85%
燴	13	Lobster conpoy fish pork gizzard birdnest Abalone Octopus Bacon Ox tongue Seafood Shrimp Sea cucumber	7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 15.3% 15.3% 23%	bean curd lily bulb bay leaves preserved vegetables Mushroom	7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 7.69% 15.3%

Table 2: Distribution of the collocation of meats and vegetables with each type of verb

According to Merriam-Webster English dictionary, the definition of *braise* means to have food cooked slowly in a closed pot, and the Chinese term 焗 is used in Lu Gusun's *The English-Chinese Dictionary* (2007). Our data shows that a variety of Chinese verbs for cooking are related to *braise* in English. Depending on the

way of cooking and the collocation of food, translators can use corresponding Chinese verbs in addition to 焗 for the appropriate expression.

Comparing to the collected data from Chinese menus, the English menus have much fewer dishes with the names containing *braise*. From a total of 981 dish names, there are only two dishes, which account for only 0.2% of the total dishes. The two dishes are *Octopus Braised in Olive Oil with Garlic, Peppers and Sautéed Spinach Corn Bread* (欖油焗八爪魚配香蒜, 波椒及薯仔) and *Braised Grouper Fillet with Thyme and Buttered Clam Sauce* (石斑魚柳配蜆汁). While the Chinese menus (which are first written in Chinese) have roughly 10% (240 out of 2330) of dishes translated as *braised* dishes, the English menus (which are first written in English) have around 50 times less. This can be due to the reason that the Chinese menus were collected from the Chinese restaurants, whereas the English menus were mainly collected from Portuguese restaurants, and also some French, Italian and Indian restaurants. The figures strongly suggest that cooking food with slow fire in a closed pot is typical for Chinese cuisine.

The menus collected from the Chinese restaurants in Australian revealed similar findings. – There are 25 braised dishes in a total of 295 dishes, accounting for around 8.5% of the total, which is close to our finding of 10% in the local menus in Macau. The dish names collected from Australian presented similar expressions in Chinese and in the foods that collocate with *braised*, as shown below.

Without the use of Chinese verbs for cooking (16 items)

扒 (6 items) with duck and vegetable

紅燒 (2 items) with fish fillet and tofu

焗 (1 item) with pork ribs

Similar to the previous findings on the local menus of Chinese restaurants, the data from overseas menus again show that the Chinese dish names without verbs account for 64% (16/25) of the total dishes. However, the data of the local menus does not have 焗 *jú* ‘baked’ as a verb type for dishes with *braised* in their English names. The Chinese verb “焗” in the last example above is from the dish named “OK 汁焗肉排” with English translation *Braised pork ribs in OK sauce*. We can make reference to the local menus of the Chinese restaurants, in which there are two dishes of pork

ribs, namely 蒜香肉排 (Salt & Pepper Spare Ribs with a Touch of Garlic) and 椒鹽肉排 (Deep-fried Pork Ribs with Peppercorn Salt). There is no verb “焗” in both Chinese names, while its commonly used English equivalent is *baked*. This is evidenced by the data collected from the Portuguese restaurants, for examples, *Baked codfish with creamy sauce* (白汁焗馬介休), *Baked coconut chicken in Portuguese style* (焗葡國雞) and *Baked duck rice with cheese and Portuguese sausage* (芝士葡國腸焗鴨飯).

The instance of using “焗” for *braised* dish name in English can be a result of a mixed cuisine culture, as the Chinese restaurant that uses this dish name is located in Australia. Baking food is a typical western style and favorite dishes for Australians. By including the verb “焗” in the Chinese name of the dish can be an attraction to the Australian Chinese, and a reflection of a western style with OK sauce, which is a brand of brown sauce originated from the UK. The use of the word *braised*, on the other hand, is a reflection of Chinese style of cooking, which may sound exotically interesting to Australian clients.

Types of verbs	This sample	CCL	Sinica
燒	56 (49%)		
- 紅燒	29 (25%)	555 (19%)	25 (42%)
- 蔥燒	8 (7%)	27 (1%)	3 (5%)
- 乾燒	7 (6%)	63 (2%)	0 (0%)
扣	20 (17%)	72 (2%)	0 (0%)
扒	14 (12%)	125 (4%)	0 (0%)
燴	13 (11%)	563 (19%)	7 (12%)
燜	11 (10%)	873 (30%)	13 (22%)
炆	5 (4%)	76 (3%)	2 (3%)
撈	5 (4%)	2 (0%)	0 (0%)
煨	2 (2%)	577 (20%)	9 (15%)
拆	1 (1%)	10 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	240 (100%)	2943 (100%)	59 (100%)

Table 3: Comparing the frequency of occurrence of the verbs: this sample, CCL and Sinica

Apart from our analysis of the samples collected from local restaurants, we also examined the verbs listed in Table 1 in large balanced corpora, looking at their occurrence in cooking situations in general. The aim is to reveal if the “braised” dishes in our sample entail a special distribution of meaning. Table 3 presents a comparison of the verbs in terms of occurrence count and percentage between this sample and two very representative balanced corpora of Modern Chinese – i.e., CCL and Sinica.

The comparison shows that the braised dishes in our sample entail a notably higher rate of occurrence of 紅燒, 蔥燒, 乾燒, 扣, 扒, 炆, 撈 and 拆, in particular 紅燒, 扣 and 扒. By contrast, 燴, 燜 and 煨 appear to be weakly associated with braised foods in our sample, although they are commonly used verbs for cooking in Chinese (see Table 3).

4 Conclusion

The data collected from three different sources for this study, including local Chinese, non-Chinese (mainly Portuguese restaurants) and overseas restaurants (Australia), has led to interesting findings that the term *braise* reflects typical Chinese cooking style, and has been widely used in the menu of Chinese restaurants to denote a variety of Chinese cooking methods, collocating with a wide range of seafood, vegetable and meat. This study has identified a set of Chinese verbs for cooking with fine-grained differences, although they can be expressed by the term *braise* as a general cover term. The set of Chinese verbs provides student translators with a wider range of word choice in addition to the few ones given by the dictionary. They will also have a better idea of when to have *braise* translated as rarely known verbs like 扒 *pā*, 撈 *lāo* or 拆 *chāi*, according to the cooking method and collocation of food and ingredients. This study points to the value of using corpus tools for vocabulary preparation (Lim 2014). It reveals, in particular, the usefulness of self-built specialised corpus, which enables translators or interpreters to conduct in-depth study on word choices for rendering food-related texts and to work out the contexts in which different choices fit. The findings inspire new methods for translator and interpreter training, in relation to their self-initiated use of IT tools (cf. Lim 2013; Wang and Lim 2017).

Even though the data from overseas is of a modest size, with around 300 items from three reputable Chinese restaurants in Australia, the research can be taken as a pilot study, which has resulted in useful findings that similarities in menu translation do exist between Macao and Australia, and that overseas menus tend to adapt to the western culinary culture in order to be more attractive to the local customers.

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