

## **What's for Dinner? Gastronomy as a linguistic genre and its translational implications**

Issac Yue  
School of Chinese  
University of Hong Kong  
Hong Kong  
isaacyue@hku.hk

The inability to understand what is written on a menu in a restaurant is surely one of the most frustrating experiences for tourists visiting a foreign city. Sometimes, this is true even in cases when English translation is provided. The Chinese menu, for example, is notorious for its ability to defy the efforts of even the most erudite translators. In fact, some of the more common mistranslations have acquired such a reputation (thanks largely to the convenience of the internet) that some have begun to consider them as an essential part of the nation's "linguistic landscape". Case and point: soon after the Municipal Office for Foreign Affairs in Beijing announced their plan to publish a translation manual for popular dishes in China ahead of the 2008 Olympics, the internet became flooded by the idea of traveling to Beijing as soon as possible, in order to have one last opportunity to taste the "Chicken Without Sex" before its extinction.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss why, in a cross-cultural context, gastronomic items in particular present such difficulties for language users and translators. My presentation will first address the different cultural contexts by which Chinese and English food-related terminologies are informed, to be followed by a discussion of the idea of gastronomy as a unique genre in corpus linguistics. In doing so, I hope to bring more awareness to how gastronomy can be understood as reflective of the unique linguistic patterns of a particular culture and to determine some of the limitations and challenges faced by translators working within this context.