



# A Study on the Anti-language Communication of the Translation of “麻辣烫”

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**Abstract.** As the most basic need for human survival, food is the material basis for the economic and social development of human beings. Foods from different countries reflect different characteristics due to their distinct regional and cultural backgrounds. As a unique Chinese trump card, Chinese food carries thousands of years of Chinese food culture and attracts more and more tourists. This study tries to find an effective channel among "language", "translation", "culture" and "communication" to energize new quality productive forces, new quality influential forces and new quality communicative forces.

**Keywords:** cross-language, anti-language, translation, communication

## 1 Introduction

Language, as the crystallization of human wisdom and a way for information transmission, not only carries civilization but also serves as an important bridge for cultural exchange. The relationship between language and culture is close and complex; to some extent, language reflects culture, containing its deep meanings (Cai & Zhao, 2022:85) <sup>[1]</sup>. It is worth mentioning that anti-language, as another form of language expression, also has an undeniable connection with culture. Anti-language is a re-encoding of language, and its special relationship with orthodox language also reflects the diversity and complexity of culture to a certain extent. The interactive relationship formed between culture and language or anti-language through communication greatly enriches the breadth and depth of information. "The reason why human communication ability is particularly strong is due to the development of the key tool of language/anti-language, which has endowed humanity with tremendous potential in the scope and depth of information communication "(Chen, 2008:8). <sup>[2]</sup> In this process, translation, as a special form of communication that transcends language boundaries, builds bridges for communication between different cultures, promoting exchanges, interactions, and cultural sharing among people around the world.

## 2 Language and Anti-language

"What is language? There are multiple interpretations at present, which can be roughly categorized into three types: one is the linguistic symbolism theory, one is the linguistic tool theory, and the other is the combined theory of symbolic and instrumental aspects of language (Nie, 2023:47) <sup>[3]</sup> Language use involves linguistic interfaces (e.g. the syntax-semantics interface) and linguistic/non-linguistic interfaces (e.g. the syntax-cognition interface) (Wang, 2023:237). <sup>[4]</sup>

The term "anti-language" was coined by British linguist Halliday in his article "Anti-Languages" published in the academic journal "American Anthropologist". (Halliday, 1976). <sup>[5]</sup> Anti-languages can be understood as an extreme variant of social dialects, and their way of describing the world often involves subtle differences in modes of expression (Montgomery, 2008: 228). <sup>[6]</sup>

## 3 Anti-language Translation and Communication

### 3.1 The Dialectical Relationship among Language, Anti-language, and Translation

"Language is a sensitive indicator of cultural change; it is not just a simple reflection of culture"(Burke, 2007:1).<sup>[7]</sup> Language not only has referentiality, descriptiveness, logicity, conversation, communicability, and heritability, but it is also the basic tool for human thought and communication. It allows us to express complex thoughts and emotions and to achieve communication and cooperation with others.

Language is both a mirror of cultural reality and a phenomenon of socialization, while anti-language is an important pathway to achieve resocialization. Anti-language recreates a new reality, and the process is not merely construction but reconstruction. The reality created by anti-language is another kind of reality; the construction of this reality plays a role in substitution and is not the mother tongue of anyone. It only exists in the environment of resocialization (Halliday, 2015:248). <sup>[8]</sup>

However, when language moves towards the trend of anti-language, anti-language may enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. This enhanced communicative effect also requires the aid of the fundamental medium of communication—the translation medium—to be realized. Translation, as one of the media for the communication of language and anti-language information, not only conveys information but also reflects social culture and social reality. "Language/anti-language, as essential elements of communication, are the carriers of cultural exchange. While constructing and conveying a discourse system, it itself becomes the subject that maintains, replicates, and consolidates the cross-cultural communication system." (Shan & Xiong, 2009: 133) <sup>[9]</sup>

### 3.2 Communication Medium-Translation

The inherent differences of language itself are an important factor. "The use and style of language can reflect an individual's personality, and likewise, it can also reflect the personality of a culture" (Samovar&Porter,2013:158).<sup>[10]</sup> In the cultural communication system, translation plays a pivotal role. However, "translation is an activity of mutual conversion between different languages, and this conversion inevitably involves significant differences between languages" (Zhang, 2018:105).<sup>[11]</sup>, which also leads to numerous difficulties in translation. Improper translation of words can have serious consequences. As scholar Xu Jun said: "Translation is not only an activity at the pure linguistic level, but also an important cultural practice" (Xu, 2020: 29).<sup>[12]</sup> Therefore, cultural translation theory elevates the practice of translation to a higher realm.

## 4 Case Study

The "麻辣烫" from Tianshui City, Gansu Province, has attracted widespread attention from netizens across the country. So, how should the English expression for this specialty food, "Spicy Hot Pot," be accurately conveyed?

### 4.1 Transliteration

Zeng (2024)<sup>[13]</sup> pointed out that "麻辣烫," as a popular snack in China in recent years, is most translated into English using the transliteration method, which is universally applicable worldwide. Therefore, he suggests directly transliterating "麻辣烫" as "malatang," to highlight its cultural characteristics and make it the preferred choice for translation.

### 4.2 Recreation Translation

A blogger innovatively translated it as "numbing hot boil," which literally means "spicy numbness boiled food" and is indeed appropriate. In this translation, "numbing" is used for "麻" (causing a loss of sensation in a body part), "hot" for "辣" (causing a burning sensation), and "boil" for "烫" (cooking food with boiling water). Although this recreation translation may seem unconventional at first glance, it highlights the exotic texture and accurately conveys the three core elements of "spicy hot pot."

### 4.3 Rhetorical or Poetic Translation

The translation method of anti-language can more vividly display the unique charm of this food: "An enticing symphony of spicy delights, a simmering cauldron of treasures, offering fiery flavors that explode on the tongue with every bite, leaving a lingering warmth in the heart." Such a description not only accurately conveys the char-

acteristics of "spicy hot pot" but also provides readers with a deeper culinary experience through creative expression.

## 5 Results and Analysis

### 5.1 Language Effect of Anti-language Translation Strategies

Table 1 indicates that the translation of anti-language can be divided into the phonetic level, morphological level, and variation level. The phonetic level includes: transliteration translation; the morphological level includes: rhetorical translation and poetic translation; the variation level includes: recreation translation. The communication medium for "麻辣烫" is translation.

**Table 1.** Anti-language Translation Levels, Strategies and Communication Effect

| Anti-language Translation Levels | Translation Strategies                        | Communication Medium | Communication Effect    |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Phonological Level               | Transliteration                               | Translation          | Extension of language   |
| Morphological Level              | Poetic Translation/<br>Rhetorical Translation | Translation          | Complement of language  |
| Variational Level                | Recreation Translation                        | Translation          | Development of language |

From the phonetic level, transliterating "malatang" is an extension of language. The transliteration anti-language translation strategy not only enriches the forms of language expression but also promotes communication and understanding between different cultures. From the morphological level, the anti-language poetic or rhetorical translation strategy of "麻辣烫" complements the limitations of traditional language. Compared with the traditional translation methods, anti-language can express those inexpressible experiences more directly through the association and superposition of imagery. From the variational level, the recreation translation strategy of "麻辣烫" in anti-language reflects the evolution and development of language. Anti-language greatly enriches the vocabulary and expression of food description through innovative vocabulary encoding, polysemy, and metaphorical associations.

### 5.2 Audience Effect of Anti-language Translation Strategies

Table 2 shows that the main anti-language translation strategies include: transliteration, recreation translation, rhetorical translation, and poetic translation. Transliterating "麻辣烫" as "Malatang" highlights Chinese cultural features, establishes cultural confidence, and enhances cultural identity; recreation and rhetorical translations of "麻辣烫" are aimed at increasing the audience's sensory experience and achieving effective cross-cultural communication. Similarly, the translation "Mouthwatering

Mala Soup" cleverly employs the techniques of anti-language, where "Mouthwatering" vividly expresses the feeling of being tantalizingly delicious. Poetic translation of "麻辣烫" is intended to provide the audience with unlimited imagination and multi-modal sensory experiences.

**Table 2.** Anti-language Translation Strategies and Communication Effect for Audiences

| Translation Strategies | Versions of Translation                           | Communication Medium | Communication Effect     |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Transliteration        | Malatang                                          | Translation          | Cultural identity        |
| Recreation Translation | Numbing hot<br>boil/Numbing hot/                  | Translation          | Sensory experience       |
| Rhetorical Translation | Spicy Delight Soup/<br>Mouthwatering Mala<br>Soup | Translation          | Sensory experience       |
| Poetic Translation     | "An enticing symphony of spicy delights           | Translation          | Multi-Sensory experience |

**5.3 International Communication Effect of Anti-language Translation Strategies**

Although the official English translation of "麻辣烫" has been determined as "Spicy Hot Pot," and has been officially implemented in the standards jointly issued by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine and the Standardization Administration of China since December 1, 2017, this does not hinder the existence of other translation methods. In many authoritative corpora, we can easily find the figure of "malatang." For example, the San Francisco Chronicle reported extensively on spicy hot pot on November 4, 2022, specifically mentioning the popular Chinese spicy hot pot chain, Zhangliang Malatang. At the same time, on Yelp, the largest review site in the United States, you can even find recommendations for the "Top Ten Spicy Hot Pots near the San Francisco Bay Area in California."

**6 Conclusion**

This paper delves into the intricate connections between language, anti-language, translation, and communication through an in-depth study of anti-language communication in the translation of "麻辣烫." Although the specific relationship between food translation and anti-language communication may still be an emerging field of study, we can still draw nourishment from the rich literature of multiple disciplines. Specifically, we can rely on cutting-edge theories in linguistics regarding language variation and innovation to deeply analyze the unique role of anti-language in food translation; at the same time, we can also draw on profound insights from translation studies on cultural translation and recreation translation to analyze the strategies for communication of food culture.

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