Food and translation, translation and food. Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Food and translation, translation and food

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Food, the cornerstone of life, lies at the heart of our cultural identity. Vital for our health and well-being, our awareness of its economic, cultural and social significance - how the language of food and related practices travel across languages and cultures cannot be disregarded. Despite a rapidly expanding market for translation of food related texts: cookery books and TV programmes, magazines and food labels, to name just a few, and despite fast-pace evolving eating habits and phenomena, the relationship between food, culture and translation remains under-researched. By bringing these issues to light, this special issue aims to be a truly interdisciplinary reference work that brings together expert scholars writing on food related topics from a translational and intercultural perspective.

Keywords: food and translation; cultural translation; food-related texts; fusion cuisine; food and identity; slow translation and slow food

Food is indispensable for our health and well-being and is deeply ingrained in our cultural identity, so it makes sense to pay attention to our awareness of its cultural and social significance as well as how practices related to it travel in time and space across languages and cultures. Science writer McGee ([1984] 2004) maintains that since food has become more easily available in Western societies a rising wave of general interest in food and cooking has progressively grown. Furthermore, he argues that in the last few decades 'science has found its way into the kitchen and cooking into laboratories and factories' (2) and as science has gradually percolated into the world of cooking, cooking has been drawn into industry, academia and society at large. Such is the extent of interest in food, that issues concerning food molecules and microbes frequently appear in the news and popular press, so that nowadays anyone who is vaguely interested in health and nutrition knows about the benefits of antioxidants or the hazards of trans fatty acids (*ibidem*). Moreover, due to the globalisation of food production and distribution, the circulation of food items originating from the most remote parts of the planet has also increased enormously, boosting the need for documents and labels that accompany foods and the need to translate them.

Yet despite a rapidly expanding market for translation of food-related texts, the relationship between food, culture and translation remains under-researched. By bringing these issues to light, this special issue of *The Translator* sets out to present a variety of approaches to food and translation and considers the multifaceted aspects of this phenomenon both in theory and in practice. By searching for analogies between translation and food and by exploring intersections between cultural and linguistic aspects of food, the contributors to this issue deal with intriguing and stimulating aspects of translation theory as well as a number of thorny issues faced by professional translators. As speculated

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theoretically by Michael Cronin and highlighted in practice in Renée Desjardins, Nathalie Cooke, and Marc Charron's discussion of the bilingual Canadian food scenario, there are numerous points of convergence between Food Studies and Translation Studies.

Translation has many things in common with the vast area that encompasses food. The simplest analogy could be the comparison of the act of translation with the preparation of a dish. Translation begins with an alien text made up of words that are strung together through syntax, in turn upheld by grammar; similarly, a foreign dish consists of a number of unusual ingredients, combined in such a way as to create a dish that is acceptable within a diverse culinary culture. Both cook and translator must examine the original recipe or text, find the right ingredients or words and consider strategies that will make the dish or script appealing to readers or diners. These strategies may involve the omission or substitution of an ingredient or an expression, if not the explicitation of a cooking method, of a pun or a metaphor. In a sense, the translator acts like a mother whose infant, the target reader, is incapable of chewing. Just as a mother pre-masticates food, similarly, the translator will physically break down the text and transform it into a satisfactory and easily digestible form. However, the work of the translator and his or her strategies and choices are merely the tip of a lingua-cultural iceberg. The twenty-first century is emerging as a liquid society in which borders and cultures appear to be slowly merging not only into a multicultural melting pot but also, as far as culinary habits are concerned, into a huge transcultural cooking pot in which translation plays a major role thereby justifying the whys and wherefores of this special issue.

Shifts in populations and the ease of gathering information from afar are just two of the reasons behind the trend for fusion cuisine, food that blends the fares of at least two cultures, in present day society. Mediterranean flavours are typically combined with spices from the East, traditional pies and puddings, once part of the staple diet of the UK's working classes, are exoticised with anything from basil to wasabi, while street food has been gentrified and elevated to the realms of haute cuisine. What is fusion if not a translation, or, at the very least, a transcreation? Examples of 'translated' dishes abound, such as Pizza Hut's much-maligned Hawaiian Pizza, topped with ham and pineapple, and the same chain's pizza crusts, habitually filled with anything from BBQ sauce and cheese to Jalapeño.[1] In fact, both tangibly and linguistically, nowhere is the link between food, language and translation more apparent than on the menus of global food corporations. A glance at Starbucks' fare reveals items such as *Frappuccino, Babyccino, Petites* and the omnipresent coffee known as *Latte*, a term which now only retains its original meaning of 'milk' in Italy. *Antipastiteller* appear to have replaced *Hors d'oevres* in German speaking Switzerland and the Italian chain *America Graffiti* [sic] boasts tiered hamburgers called 'rosty towers' in single, double and triple versions.[2] While writing this introduction, the *Pret à Manger* food chain is advertising '[There's] a new burrito in town':

> Roasted corn salsa was tossed with chimichurri. Wisconsin cheddar was melted over red quinoa. Finally, Niman Ranch pork was spooned into soft, flour tortillas. Ovens purred. Timers ticked. Mouths watered. Until finally … Pret's new burrito was born. [3]

Thus, the Tex-Mex burrito, a fusion in itself, is coupled with Uruguayan, Argentinian and Californian genetic material with an addition of DNA from the Great Lakes to produce a new dish.

This trend in creating bi-cultural gastronomy appears to irritate culinary purists like the conservative Italians described by Linda Rossato, who harshly criticise celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's attempts at re-versioning traditional dishes, simply because to them, like a

poem or a joke, they are untranslatable. Yet like poetry and jokes, dishes are indeed translated and adapted much to the annoyance of some of those who are familiar with the original and who think they know better. Clearly, the more lingua-culture specific the joke, or poem, the more liberties the translator may be forced to take. Nevertheless, food is neither a joke nor poetry; it is the cornerstone of life and lies at the heart of our cultural identity. The emotions provoked when Proust tastes a madeleine and Tony Soprano eats *capicola* help explain why those who tamper with a dish that evokes childhood memories unknowingly play with fire. Jamie Oliver displays displeasure at the criticism with which Italians meet the way he alters traditional dishes, but, as Rossato argues, it may well be this very stubbornness and attention to detail and tradition that has made Italian cuisine an international frontrunner in terms of culinary quality and popularity. By adding fennel to fish, and too many vegetables to a Tuscan *panzanella*, Oliver is not simply getting the recipe wrong; he is toying with the memories and identities of others, and that is no-go territory for them.

Generally speaking it would appear that a sort of food mania has pervaded the post-modern world. There is a widespread increased interest in food and gastronomy at a global level and the volume of translated food-related texts such as cookery books, television programmes and formats, food labels and food-related websites has, of late, been hugely amplified. In major bookstores around the world, next to cookery books containing national classics of autochthonous gastronomic tradition, there is an abundance of translated cookbooks offering access to the cuisines of others, often authored by celebrity chefs or well-known personalities. TV cookery formats such as the *Great British Bake Off* and *MasterChef* are translated and adapted for countless target cultures, which in turn spawn eponymous books and magazines. While the World Wide Web overflows with food-related sites, blogs, forums, and last but certainly not least, various social media serve as platforms for discussions and visual representations on the subject. . And if words do not suffice, a photograph of whatever may be on our plates at a given moment can be posted on Instagram or Pinterest for the world to see. According to journalist and food blogger Dolce:

> In Britain food is the new sex. Culinary magazines photograph food so intimately, you feel as if you're almost up inside that fleshy pepper. Each month a new cookbook is born, or a new television programme with a new food star comes out. Londoners used to define themselves by which designers they wore or which music they listened to; today, it's which restaurant they frequent, whose recipes they're trying.[4]

Also translated are menus, tourist leaflets and guidebooks in which the food and drink section may well be the segment most frequently consulted by new travellers, globetrotters and adventurous tourists. Alessandra De Marco examines the Italian translations of the wine and food sections of three well-established guidebooks to New Zealand in which, she argues, Māori food words are adopted to reinforce an 'exoticised Other' and attract tourists, rather than to convey a truly bicultural New Zealand national identity. Canadian culture, and therefore also its foodscapes, also has more than one identity as highlighted in the contribution by Renée Desjardins, Nathalie Cooke, and Marc Charron who examine the finer points of culinary lexical (un)equivalence. They point out how even apparently universal concepts (and objects) such as cookbooks, are taken up a notch lexically in French, a language that has two terms, *livre de cuisine* and *livre de recettes*. The colloquial term 'foodie', on the other hand, may well only exist in the English language. *Gourmand*, fine *fourchette* and *gastronome* connote a sense of sophistication that is simply missing in

the term ‘foodie’. While ‘foodie’ smacks of egalitarianism and street credibility, the French terms reflect an ocean of history and refined tradition lacking in the English equivalents. ‘Foodie’ culture also carries connotations of novelty and possible transience, reflected in the fashion for menus on blackboards which, while denoting freshness, also underscore ephemerality. Furthermore, as Desjardins et al. point out, blackboard menus may present an obstacle for food historians wishing to trace a significant sector of twenty-first-century wining and dining.

Naomi Morgan also tackles issues regarding food and untranslatability in her article discussing a one-man play by South African and New Zealand playwright Ryk Hattingh. The play, *Eensnaar*, actually involves cooking tongue, a South African speciality, live on stage for the audience. Over and above the endless difficulties of a multilingual production, what is considered an appetising aroma in South Africa becomes an unpleasant smell when ‘another’ tongue is cooked in New Zealand. This highly appropriate metaphor illustrates the angst suffered by many diasporic individuals. Migrants take two things with them, their language and their food, and as they struggle to learn the host language they are nourished by tastes and flavours of home, albeit through what are only attempts at emulating those flavours. How many migrants in the past have been accused of producing unpleasant smells while preparing foods previously unknown to their host communities? Suffice it to think of octopus and squid, commonly eaten in Mediterranean countries but still capable of producing reactions of disgust in the UK.

The fields of Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies and Aesthetics have been very productive in terms of scholarly literature on the subject of food. Sociologists in particular have been investigating food habits in relation to social change, while anthropologists have examined food as part of their studies of domestic and social organisation in different civilisations. Further studies have been conducted on food semantics, concentrating on the meaning of food in different cultures. Normally carried out in remote locations where food had retained strong religious significance (see for example Vogt 1976; Powers and Powers 2003) these scholarly studies highlight how secularised food has become in contemporary society. Mary Douglas argues that peoples are uniquely different and that nothing that may be learned about the food habits of other societies can help us make any sense of current food problems, current consumer tastes, and the significance of food today (2003, 7–8). Other theoretical approaches, however, provide a broader framework for analysis that can be applied to more global categories. Barthes ([1961] 2013) and Lévi-Strauss ([1966] 2013), for example, used metaphors that concerned the linguistic domain to describe social and anthropological features of food consumption. Barthes ([1961] 2013) described food items in terms of highly structured signs and argued that eating is a behaviour which, like working, dressing or practicing sports and leisure activities, implies choices that develop beyond their own ends (28). When modern man or woman buys, consumes or serves food, the single item of food s/he is handling sums up and transmits messages, provides information and, ultimately, signifies. Products, techniques of preparation, habits, all sorts of associations pertaining to food items become part of a significant system and hence trigger communication by way of food (24–25). Lévi-Strauss ([1966] 2013) went as far as saying that just as ‘there is no society without a language’, so there is none ‘which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food’ (40). He drew on the linguistic concepts of ‘minimum vocalism’, ‘minimum consonantism’ and ‘consonant triangle’ to describe cooking. He built a system of double oppositions between categories such as ‘elaborated/unelaborated’ and between ‘culture/nature’, and finally came up with the delineation of what he called the ‘culinary triangle’, made out of relative oppositions between ‘raw’, ‘cooked’ and ‘rotted’ (41).

While anthropologists and sociologists have been inclined to resort to linguistics and to the semantic field of language to draw inspiration to describe food-related phenomena, linguists and translation scholars have so far tended to neglect, ignore or overlook the conceptual connections and familiarities between food and language in different societies and cultures. Yet, translation scholars occupy a privileged position for cross-cultural investigation and comparison, and have a responsibility to use that vantage point. In this volume, De Marco, Desjardins et al., Morgan and Rossato explore in different ways the tug-of-war between language and food that seems to occur at lingua-cultural crossroads. Both food and language are inextricably part of a person's identity, and toying with either can trigger strong emotions. Italians stereotypically complaining that Jamie Oliver's take on a particular dish is not like *mamma* makes it (cfr. Rossato), French-Canadian chefs up in arms at having to use the term *pâtes* in place of the Italian word *pasta* (cfr. Desjardins et al.), Māori food practices misinterpreted while being presented as exotic other (cfr. De Marco), and a South African delicacy (which ironically happens to be tongue) disgusting the olfactory glands of New Zealand theatregoers (cfr. Morgan) – all these things hit a raw nerve.

The connection between food and language, furthermore, goes well beyond disciplines traditionally connected to the liberal arts, and Food Science itself embraces numerous areas that involve translation. The food industry comprises farming, agriculture, economics, consumer sciences, and other fields too. It is an industry that has developed enormously over the past century. Yet, while homemakers of the post-war period welcomed the arrival of canned and processed foods, and the closing decades of the twentieth century saw the arrival of freezers and microwave ovens in many households, today the emphasis is on the naturalness, authenticity and freshness of what we eat. Here Michael Cronin finds another important similarity between food and translation. Food has undergone a long journey from primeval attempts at conservation by means of salt or desiccation to the numerous preserving methods offered by the modern food industry; however, we have come full circle, back to a fashion for organic crops and all that is home-made which simultaneously demonises anything industrially prepared. 'Natural' is preferable to 'canned', 'dried' or 'frozen' and, drawing on the similarities with language, Cronin wonders whether the current trend for machine translation might equally be eschewed. Might future translators not disdain the advantages of CAT tools and automatic translation and return to a more natural approach?

While Cronin's concept of Slow Translation remains a vision, Slow Food is very much a reality. Launched in Italy in the late 1980s by a group of activists with the purpose of preserving regional traditions while also promoting good and healthy food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life, Slow Food has spearheaded a shift back to naturalness in what we eat.[5] In over two decades the movement has evolved to adopt a comprehensive approach to food that acknowledges the strong connections between cuisine, people, culture, planet and politics. Today Slow Food is a global movement involving thousands of projects and millions of people in over 160 countries and may also be partly responsible for current foodie culture. The Universal Exhibition in 2015, Expo Milano, took place between May and October 2015 with food and nutrition as its main themes. The global event, which attracted tens of millions of people to Italy's fashion and design capital, was entitled 'Feeding the planet, energy for life'. With 145 participant countries, Expo Milano 2015 also substantiated the growing interest of the international community in issues regarding agricultural production, quality and healthy food, food distribution, food waste, and the international engagement with malnutrition and the

sustainability of the planet's natural resources. Almost in contrast to the 'slow' themes of Expo 2015, Federico Gaspari uses innovative corpus linguistics' methodology (known as a 'comparallel' corpus approach) to provide a cross-linguistic phraseological comparison of the formal and functional features of the most frequent lexical items used to describe food in English and Italian on the exhibition website. There are parallels between Gaspari's findings and those of Desjardins, Cooke and Charron. They maintain that the high register terms of French gastronomy – which are, in any case, of common usage – reflect the prestige of the cuisine itself, over and above issues regarding the complexity of French syntax and morphology compared to English. Gaspari, on the other hand, demon- strates that in lexical and phraseological terms, Italian prefers higher level, often Latinate lexis, with respect to English. Gaspari's discussion begs a further question that goes beyond issues regarding food, namely, how much of the language we encounter on the Web is actually a result of translation from English? In addition, how much web language derives, in direct or indirect ways, from English language sources?

No discussion of food and translation would be complete without including food and performativity and Morgan's study of Ryk Hattingh's play, in which cooking occurs on stage, is possibly the ultimate illustration of food and performance. However, the links between food and performativity are not restricted to theatregoers with cultural capital to spend. Food and cookery are also well represented in cinema and on television, especially since the advent of dedicated factual channels on satellite, cable and Digital Terrestrial Television that broadcast food-related shows 24 hours a day. On television, cookery programmes occupy vast quantities of broadcasting space and chirpy working class super-chef Jamie Oliver is one of the genre's most famous faces. Either subtitled or dubbed, TV cookery programmes, including the many series starring Jamie, are distributed worldwide. Rossato examines how these programmes are connected to the translation publishing market, through products such as series-related cookery books and magazines. As Rossato points out, what is especially interesting about Jamie is that after he introduced Italian cuisine (with a twist) to UK viewers, the same programmes were translated into Italian and sold to Italian TV stations. This interesting example of selling coal to Newcastle goes to show that these cookery programmes are as much about entertainment as food preparation – although why Italians should buy books about how to prepare Italian food written by a British chef who has translated his recipes from Italian only to then have them translated back into Italian via the UK remains a mystery.

Undeniably, current debates on food and eating tend to revolve around economic, legal and medical issues. Academic, political and mainstream society are inclined to focus on food production, food costs, food waste, the merits of organic food vs genetically modified food, or legally relevant issues such as food information and food labelling. Many scholars support a moral or medical approach, as they concentrate on healthy and sustainable food, eating disorders, special dietary requirements, unequal distribution of food resources, famine and starvation versus overeating. The cross-cultural and cross-linguistic aspects of food as it travels across physical and cultural boundaries, on the other hand, remain inexplicably neglected, despite the omnipresence of food and eating in every domain of life, and in spite of a growing need for the translation of texts related to food. Could it be that food is still regarded as a trivial, domestic, female topic, even at a time when, as pointed out by Inness (2006, 2), food discourse has become progressively more fashionable and glamorous? We hope that the present collection will begin to bridge this gap by tackling the 'grey zone' of food translation, as well as the increasingly common and complex practices of cross-cultural adaptation of food-related texts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1. Pizza Hut UK menus are available at: <https://www.pizzahut.co.uk>. Retrieved September 22nd 2015.
2. See <http://www.americagraffiti.it/>. Retrieved September 23rd 2015.
3. See <https://www.pret.com/en-us/fall-specials>. Retrieved September 21st 2015.
4. Dolce, Joe. 2001. 'England's It Girl' Available on line at *Gourmet.com* <http://www.gourmet.com/magazine/2000s/2001/04/englandsitgirl.html>. Retrieved September 14th 2015.
5. See: <http://www.slowfood.com/international/1/about-us?-session=query_session:89CC27021657b199E8TtD2573C2>. Retrieved September 14th 2015.

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Delia Chiaro is Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Bologna's Department of Interpreting and Translation. Born, bred and educated in the UK, Delia has spent her entire academic career in Italy where she has combined her passion for film and TV with her interest in visual and verbal ambiguity and duplicity – an interest which has provided her with the perfect excuse to study humour in all shapes and sizes, but especially how it is perceived in translation and its cross-cultural impact. Since publishing *The Language of Jokes: Analysing Verbal Play* (London: Routledge 1992) she has written extensively on diverse aspects of language and humour, most recently *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives* with Raffaella Baccolini (New York: Routledge, 2014) while *The Language of Jokes in the Digital Age* is forthcoming with Routledge in early 2016. She has been invited to lecture on humour across Europe, the Middle East, Asia and New Zealand. Beyond academia, her hobbies include running, socialising and socialism.

Linda Rossato is a post-doc research assistant at the University of Bologna's Department of Interpreting and Translation. After graduating in translation from the University of Bologna, from which she also received a Master's degree in Audiovisual Translation, she obtained her PhD in English for Special Purposes in 2010 from the University of Naples with a dissertation on the discourse of British TV cookery. She currently holds a research fellowship entitled: 'The voice of Italian Migrants in the UK.' She is also part of the InMedioPueri research group that studies child language brokering in Italy. Her publications revolve around audiovisual translation, humour studies, food and cultural studies, as well as child language brokering.

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