

# English Translation of Doomsday Food in China under International Trade Analysis

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**Abstract:** With China's doomsday food packages entering the world market, the issue of the name translation from Chinese to English is becoming increasingly outstanding. Considering the Chinese and foreign cultural differences, this paper, based on relevant functional translation criterion as well as the current translation practices, explores the translation studies of the product, and puts forward relevant translation strategies to translate the Chinese doomsday food packages. It aims at achieving better interpretation and branding in the international market, promoting international food trade and communication between different cultures, contributing to the world development.

**Keywords:** international trade; doomsday food; food translation; business English; translation strategies

## 1. Introduction

With the economic globalization becoming a major trend of the world, international food trade has witnessed an ever-rising frequency, as China, the world's leading food exporter, exports food up to more than 200 countries and regions. In 2019, China's food industry export value reached 109.8 billion yuan, including doomsday food. Nevertheless, because of the complexity of its composition and diversity of functions of the commodity, there is a series of problems in the translations. As is known to all, translation, as a link of transnational communication, is largely influenced by the language habits, cultural differences and thinking patterns of various countries. According to the functional translation standards, the core essence of translation is not simple coding of the information, but a kind of social interaction and cultural transformation, and a kind of balanced between two cultures. Therefore, the translation of the doomsday food occupies a certain position in international trade, impacting the development of the international food trade to a certain extent.

## 2. Major Customer Targets and Cultural Backgrounds of Doomsday Food

According to the Global Daily, many western countries have a strong "doomsday complex", and they are naturally sensitive to adversity. The ordinary people have the habit of storing up food. The global spread of Covid-19 further deepens the concept of storing up food. Take for example, the United States, as early as in the thirties of the last century, is worried about "the end of the

world", whether from the war, local conflicts, terrorist, economic collapse, or many other factors affecting the residents' normal life. This concern is not unfounded. It can be seen in many literary works. At that time, local residents had prepared for the "doomsday" by building air-raid shelters and stockpiles of living materials, as they got used to the "Cold War". The sudden "Great Depression" made people more determined to be prepared for unexpected events. "Survivalist" was even proposed in the 1960s [1], to encourage people to learn more survival skills, reserve emergency food supplies to guard against future upcoming disasters. Out of mistrust of the government, most people put their hopes on themselves, causing the "doomsday food" out of stock frequently. Thus the doomsday food is mainly targeted at customers in countries like the United States, where exist a wide-spread "doomsday" worry. Besides, the American diet, unlike Chinese, which is mainly made up of fresh food, includes a lot of canned food and frozen food. The contents of these foods are similar to those of "doomsday foods", just with different names. According to the Global Times report, a package of "two weeks' emergency food supply" priced at \$157 are sold out within a few days after being launched online, which is a sign of their popularity.

After realizing that the sales target of doomsday food is mainly the United States and other western countries, the translation based on the relevant cultural background can be useful for us to achieve the translation purpose and accomplish more appropriate translation.

## 3. The Current Situation of Chinese Doomsday Food Translation in International Trade

Chinese food in the forefront of international trade are canned Maling, Guangdong lychee, Yantai apple, jinxiang garlic, canned sweet corn, frozen dumplings (frozen food), biscuits. Take Maling as an example, "Maling" is China's national food brand, which was founded in the 1930s. Maling brand, at the beginning of its birth, borrowed from the Roman word "MALING", since the first hit product developed is the tomato sauce that foreigners like to eat. In the following 80 years of history, Maling canned meat has been exported to more than 100 countries and regions, and even won the international reputation that Chinese Spam is the best canned product in the world. But at the same time, the brand of Maling is full of the essence of Chinese traditional culture. The literal meaning of the brand "Maling" according to its Chinese pronunciation is based

on the Chinese idiom: the fragrance of plum blossoms comes from the bitter cold. It is hoped that the factory staff as a whole would work hard and the company would thrive, just like the plum blossoms blooming in the cold winter, not afraid of rain, snow or frost. Plum blossom trees symbolize auspiciousness, prosperity and beauty. It can be seen that the translated "Maling" brand, although achieves the purpose of translation in pronunciation, but its meaning in foreign countries is vague, without considering the cultural background of readers. Foreign readers may not realize that the word "Maling" is featured with Chinese classic culture, nor feel its thick cultural element. From the perspective of functional translation, translation should clearly express the meaning intended to convey, enable readers to correctly understand the contents of the information intended to communication. Its purpose is very clear in that it does not pursue word-for-word literal translation, but to achieve the purpose of communicative interaction and cultural exchange. However, the translation of Maling seems not to accurately express the clear meaning and not to achieve the purpose of communicative interaction and cultural exchange well. In this sense, the goal of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" of translation has not been realized. [3] The current situation of Chinese food translation in international trade has a series of such problems which need to be tackled with.

#### **4. Problems in Translation of Doomsday Food**

Firstly, in the research of the doomsday food packages, it is found that there are not many studies on the translation of its names and food culture. Most studies only focus on the translation of food description. The food description is important, though, since foreign consumers are unfamiliar with the doomsday package and the safety of imported food is on consumers' concern list, so the accurate translation of the food description is necessary. Nevertheless, not enough attention is paid to the translation of its name. Taking Canned 'yinlu' brand as an example, it is directly translated into 'Canned silver heron', combining the silver(yin), heron(lu), Canned (guantou) translation together. Although the literal meaning achieves the so-called accuracy, it neither well interpret the name nor express the characteristics of Chinese culture. We need be aware of the fact that little research has been done on doomsday food name translation and therefore, further research could be undertaken on it.

Secondly, there is a lack of reference standards of the food products translation. According to the relevant market research and statistical report, 37% of the food packages sold in China have errors in English translation, and 30% of the instructions on each type of food package have errors, which are mainly manifested in the wrong use of words, grammar and professional terms. There are various aspects of factors causing this phenomenon, such as the lack of English proficiency, low level of practitioners or the carelessness of the translators. However, relevant bureaus fail to issue related food packaging translation standards, or norms. In the absence

of standards for reference, the chances of translation errors are high. It increases the difficulty of translation work. Furthermore, food companies, in order to save costs, spend little effort or finance on brands or food products translation, even relying on machine translation, which tends to cause misunderstandings or confusion among customers, harming food brand image and national image. Meanwhile, it is not conducive to the spread and development of Chinese culture. If not dealt with properly, the non-standard English translation on the packaging of doomsday food will not only damage the economic benefits and brand image of food enterprises, but also restrict the development of China's international trade and economy to a certain extent.

Thirdly, few translation theories and strategies are used. When dealing with food translation, translators tend to ignore relevant translation theories and strategies. According to equivalence theory, equal value, namely the equivalent value, between the form and the function (function) is strongly emphasized. In the doomsday food translation, equivalence theory has not been applied perfectly. Some only highlighted its brand effect and literal conversion in both Chinese and English instead of form and function. Another important translation strategy is to pay attention to the update of knowledge. Due to the rapid development of biology and other disciplines, knowledge is updated very rapidly. Therefore, the speed of knowledge update in the food industry is also accelerated, especially when it comes to doomsday food. In this case, the translators must keep pace with the time, pay attention to the timeliness of translation, and keep up with the latest knowledge at any time, so as to be better qualified for the translation task.

#### **5. English translation strategies of doomsday food in international trade**

It is essential for translators to improve their knowledge and ability so that the most appropriate translation is accomplished [5]. It is not only necessary for translators to have certain English skills and proficiency, but also to understand business and trade related knowledge. Because the doomsday food international trade involves the integration of food English and business trade, in translation, we should try our best to avoid confusion of words and pay attention to the accurate application of some abbreviations [2]. It is not to blindly copy words in the dictionary, but to grasp the logic of language, understand the content of the text, analyze the appropriate words. Translators should be loyal to the original information it intends to convey, and also pay attention to the sales market. A choice of the best translation scheme can to a certain extent affect their sales. As doomsday food is a constantly developing and advancing, it also needs to take into account new terms in its industry. Only in this way can the translation work be better done and be as accurate as possible.

In terms of diet, there are great differences between China and foreign countries. Chinese people prefer fresh food and have requirements in all aspects of color, smell and taste, while foreigners prioritize convenience, speed

and balanced nutrition, and they emphasize taking in required nutrients accordingly [6]. So different cultural background and customs should be considered in times of translation as poor translation may lead to all sorts of unnecessary cultural and religious conflicts. For example, some people don't eat pork. In the translation of doomsday food containing pork, there should be clear message suggesting pork included. As a business English translator, we should master the differences in cultural backgrounds and language expressions of different countries as many as possible, and strive to accumulate more language and culture knowledge, so as to reduce some errors in translation due to cultural differences [4].

In addition, it is advisable that some Chinese elements are added appropriately to the translation of doomsday food. Chinese doomsday food is imported not because there is no such package in other countries or because China is better at manufacturing it than foreign countries, but partly because some Chinese characteristics attract foreign consumers. Yantai apple, for example, if added in the Chinese doomsday food, needs to be explicitly pointed out about its origin; hot-and-dry noodles labeled with Wuhan City can attract more consumers' attention. Appropriate addition of some Chinese elements in the translation of doomsday food can not only greatly promote sales, but also spread Chinese food culture, so that the world can better understand Chinese food. It is conducive to the economic and cultural exchanges between countries to achieve a good win-win purpose.

Lastly, flexibility always comes second to the integrity policy. It is very common for translators to encounter contradictions in the process of translation. It is hard to achieve a balance between accuracy and reason, so in event of contradiction or problems, the overall translation

quality should be measured, essence kept, dregs discarded. Translation, read by target readers, should not be bound by rigor and complicated by too many jargons. If translators could think more from the perspective of the readers, make the translation easy to understand, the translation can be better as a whole. The unity and consistency is a important translation criteria to achieve the translation goal.

#### Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank the guidance of lecturer Huan Cao and Hubei University of Technology. This work was supported in part by a grant from the College students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship training program in Hubei University of Technology in 2020 entitled "Survival food Packages" (No. X202010500105X).

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