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Are mouse noodles actually made from mice? Touring street food name translations

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Street food helps to characterise Southeast Asia as a popular gastronomic destination for tourism. However, confusion regarding its translation can make it difficult to understand the nature of its food types and selections. This study aims to examine how street food names in Malaysia are translated from Chinese to English and explore the cultural influence found within the translations of street food names. This study adopts a qualitative case study with thirty-six types of translations for mouse noodle, nineteen types for Hokkien *Mee*, twenty-two types for *Wan Tan Mee*, and seven types for *Kueh Chap*. Data analysis encompassed both the micro content analysis for food translation techniques with changes in content and linguistic aspects of translation varieties and the macro-analysis from an ethnography approach with a semi-structured interview comprised of perspectives from ten food vendors and twenty consumers. The analysis of the interviews is guided by linguistic and cultural factors. This study found that street food names were translated with transliteration, literal translation, amplification, omission, and their combinations—the results showed that transliteration was the most frequently used technique. In detail, the changes made in the translations were in both content and linguistic aspects—mainly addition, omission, restructuring, lexical, and morphological changes. The results also showed that the factors that played a major role include knowledge (background knowledge and linguistic competence), time, and culture (localisation and cultural policy). The ethnographic description explained how these factors result in transliteration within the social relations of Chinese Malaysians. In conclusion, the transliteration based on Chinese dialects and its varieties in spelling has labelled Malaysia a multicultural destination, in which its diverse cultures are intermingled in the translations of street food names.

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Introduction

Food-related items are often culture-specific and can therefore be regarded as a potential source of problem for translations (Marco, 2019). Food translation has always been a practice that is heavily embedded within culture; despite this fact, research pertaining to the relationship between food, culture, and translation remains limited (Chiaro and Rossato, 2015). As one of the food types, street food refers to food and/or drinks that are sold by hawkers or vendors for immediate consumption on a street or at other public locations, such as night markets, local coffee shops, hawker centres, food courts, or alongside roads at portable food booths, food carts, or food trucks. The previous studies that covered food translations often mixed street food with other types of foods—such as restaurant foods—while translation studies that specifically target street food are often neglected. In comparison to restaurant foods with a higher level of service and fancy menus, street foods are scattered about, with the names either being hand-written by the vendors themselves or placed on simple signs and boards. The presentation of food names neither follows any guidelines nor is monitored by the local governance; this, naturally, also applies to the translated names.

As a multicultural country, Malaysia has become a beacon for cultural gathering in which both street foods and food cultures from different countries and ethnicities melt together. The translation of street foods in Malaysia is necessary in order to increase dining accessibility for people who come from different cultural backgrounds. The names of street food are translated by different vendors based on their own perceptions on food, which is known as "layman translations." The main issues stem from these layman translations, which are not standard translations. Furthermore, the translators that are writing these names are oftentimes the food vendors themselves, who usually lack professional training and experience regarding translation. This problem is reflected in the fact that not a single food name within this environment has a truly fixed and established translation.

An example frequently found in street food names depicts this problem: The Chinese street food 炒粿条 Chao Guo Tiao (stir-fried rice noodle) has different translations—such as 'Char Kuay Teow,' 'fried flat noodle,' and 'Chao Kuih Tiow.' Therefore, the common existence of different translations in Malaysia may confuse people who are not familiar with the street food, 炒粿条 Chao Guo Tiao.

Within the Chinese ethnic group, a similar problem as Chao Guo Tiao is also seen in different scenarios—such as the translation of family names. For example, the Chinese family name 陈 Chen in Malaysia is known as 'Tan' in Hokkien dialects, 'Chin' in Hakka, 'Chan' in Cantonese, and 'Ting' in Foochow. This is due to the people who are from different cultures and can grasp more than one language. For the Chinese language in Malaysia, Albury (2021) showed that Chinese people have brought a plethora of heritage languages, including Cantonese (Guangdong dialect), Hokkien (Fujian dialect), Hakka (Kejia dialect), and Foochow (Fuzhou dialect), to Malaysia. The different translated family names are reflections of Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, and Foochow cultures since a name is given based on their own clan's culture. This raises the question of whether different Chinese street food translations in Malaysia are also influenced by different cultures.

Therefore, to deal with the translation problem, this study aims to identify how street food names in Malaysia are translated from Chinese to English. Additionally, the study explores the culture-related reasons for such translation practices from the perspectives of street food vendors and consumers. This study does not evaluate the translation quality, nor does it assess the reception of the translation. The goal of this study is to provide another linguistic and cultural insight into understanding the complexities of street food translation in Malaysia. This study entails the fields of translation, culture, and ethnography studies; this is because it not only attempts to reveal the cultures through the translation of street food names from Chinese to English but also draws on the ethnography approach in the data analysis. Thus, the study could contribute to the food-related translation, while also having implications for cultural diversity through the translation of street food in a multicultural society. This study also raises awareness of the transliteration of both Chinese Pinyin and Chinese dialects (especially the dialects with different writing or spoken varieties) into English. The English showcased in this study refers to the Romanised version of the languages and may not be standard English; this is due to the use of layman translations.

This study argues that the translation practice of street food names in Malaysia is not merely a translation issue, but instead a cultural one where cultural diversity is reflected through the different translations of street food names in the country. Specifically, the research questions asked in this study are: (1) What translation techniques are most commonly used in translating street food names from Chinese to English in Malaysia? (2) What cultural and linguistic factors influence the translation of street food names from Chinese to English in Malaysia? This translation study is not merely an analysis of translation techniques. The translation techniques are to showcase the complexity of translations in Malaysia by way of varieties of street food translations.

Translation techniques on food names. Many studies adopted translation techniques to portray how different food texts are translated in different food types. In restaurant menus or coffee shops, Setyaningsih (2020) found four techniques—exoticising, rich explicatory, recognised exoticism, and assimilative translation techniques—in the translation of Indonesian traditional food names into English in hotel restaurant menus. Chen and Kongjit (2021) designed a knowledge translation framework for the Chinese translation of Thai foods, which connected translation techniques and cultural elements in food names. Al-Rushaidi and Ali (2017) investigated the translation strategies of food menus in restaurants and coffee shops from English into Arabic. These strategies included borrowing, using a literal translation, using a superordinate word, amplification, reduction, cultural substitution and using a load word plus an explanation. Graziano (2017) applied translation procedures to the restaurant menus from Italian to English. The actual procedures used are borrowing, calque, expansion or amplification, literal translation, adaptation, and omission. Amenador and Wang (2022) concluded the techniques in translating Chinese-English food menus as retention, literal translation, neutralisation (description, generalisation and particularisation), amplification or condensation, intracultural adaptation, substitution, and omission.

In literary texts, Moropa (2018) proposed cultural borrowing, cultural borrowing plus paraphrase, paraphrase (explaining the meaning of a word) on the translation strategies of indigenous Xhosa food items in folk narratives, and biographies from isiXhosa to English. Similar translation techniques were found in the frameworks of Oster and Molés-Cases (2016) and Marco (2019), who focused on translation techniques of food- and drink-related culture-specific items within literary text. The techniques after Marco's (2019) modification included borrowing, literal translation, neutralisation, amplification or compression, intracultural adaptation, intercultural adaptation, and omission.

These studies suggest that there is a less 'one-size-fits-all' taxonomy in food translation, and each study needs to be approached with its target's cultural context in mind. To

summarise these techniques clearly, it can be found that these methods, as seen in Marco (2019), are placed into intralingual and interlingual translations (Jakobson, 1959). The intralingual translation includes borrowing, while the interlingual translations are literal translation, neutralisation (description, generalisation and particularisation) and amplification or compression, intracultural adaptation, intercultural adaptation and omission. Moreover, there is a research gap in that the food texts seen above were mostly based on restaurant menus, coffee shops, or literary texts—while fewer studies specifically focused on street food names (which are scattered around the food courts, hawker centres, or other similar places).

This study applies Marco's (2019) translation techniques, which comprehensively show the translation techniques regarding food names. Furthermore, most of these techniques have been adopted in Chinese-English food names—as seen in the studies of Amenador and Wang (2022) and Zhu et al. (2021). In detail, Marco's (2019) translation techniques are: (1) the borrowing of the source text item, which may be pure or naturalised (i.e., adapted to the spelling and morphology of the target language); (2) literal translation; (3) neutralisation: the replacement of the source text item with a mostly lengthy or detailed explanation in the form of description, generalisation, and particularisation; (4) amplification or compression: a certain amount of information is added or omitted in the target text; (5) intracultural adaptation: the source text culture-related item is replaced by another item that also belongs to the source culture, but is more familiar to target text readers; (6) intercultural adaptation: a target culture item is substituted for the source text item; and (7) omission: the removal of the traces of source culture specificity from the target text.

Transliteration between Chinese and English. Transliteration refers to the phonetic translation by the item's closest corresponding target language sound, which belongs to a natural borrowing between Chinese and English compared to pure borrowing (Dong, 2021). Previous studies on the transliteration of food names between Chinese and English indicated that using Chinese *Pinyin* was the main method of transliteration. For example, Li (2019) adopted intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translations to compare Chinese food names and their translations. It was believed that *Pinyin*, as an intralingual translation in food menus, can engage learners of Chinese who use this method. In fact, transliteration is mostly adopted in translating food names from Chinese to English (Liao, 2015; Reynolds, 2016; Zhao, 2016; Zhu et al., 2023). Scholars believed that transliteration in Chinese *Pinyin* could present the Chinese cultural elements implied in food names and maintain the source culture's practices. However, they stayed with the argument that Chinese *Pinyin* was not only an important tier of intralingual translation, but also an important source for transliteration. Chinese *Pinyin* is not just used for food names; its use as a way of transliteration is also reflected in other texts between Chinese and English. For example, Lim et al. (2022) believed that transliteration may be one of the ways to render the terminology of traditional Chinese medicine into English. These studies showed that transliteration with *Pinyin* in culture-specific texts, such as food and medicine, was commonly used in translations.

The Chinese dialects, as a way of transliteration, were rare for the transliteration of food names; however, some scholars are aware of the complicity of transliteration from phonetic systems in other texts. For example, Zhou (2019) pointed out that English transliterations of Mandarin are often inconsistent, and Wade-Giles and *Pinyin*, as well as other systems, reflect the complexity of Mandarin Chinese and the plethora of phonologies within it.

Specifically, Chan (2018) focused on Cantonese-based translations and Mainland *Putonghua*-based translations in Hong Kong from English to Chinese. Chan's (2018) research provided insight into transliteration in both Mandarin Romanisation in Chinese *Pinyin* and Cantonese Romanisation in *Jyutping*. Also discussing transliteration in *Pinyin* and Cantonese, Wong (2021) compared *Putonghua* transliteration with *Pinyin* as 'xi qu zhong xin' (a traditional Chinese theatre centre) and Cantonese transliteration as 'hei-kuk jung-sam' for the name of a traditional Chinese theatre. The conclusion was drawn that the name transliteration of *Putonghua* stirred the voices of Chinese nationalists for claiming a rightful place for their nation on the world stage.

All these studies showed an awareness of using dialects in transliteration. Both dialects and *Pinyin* are important signifiers for original cultures. In short, the transliteration is not only related to Chinese *Pinyin*, but also to the Chinese dialects in their respective regions. However, studies that focus on transliteration based on dialects in food translation studies remain limited. Besides, the studies focusing on transliteration based on dialects were confined to Cantonese Romanisation, and not on other ethnic languages like Hakka and Hokkien. In addition, the previous studies on transliteration between Chinese and English were confined to texts based in China; fewer studies focused on Chinese societies in other countries, such as Malaysia.

Theoretical foundation. Transliteration falls into intralingual translation, which refers to an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language (Jakobson, 1959). As a subcategory of intralingual translation, the term "transliteration" has been used to refer to any type of semiotic difference, including differences between systems of lettering (Gottlieb, 2018; Zethsen and Hill-Madsen, 2016). According to prior research on Chinese translation to English, the translation between Chinese characters and Romanised language satisfies the criteria for intralingual translation (cf. Li, 2019). Thus, transliteration between Chinese and Romanised languages is included in the scope of intralingual translation.

For the changes to the source text when using intralingual translation, the prominent aspects are additions, restructuring, omissions, and lexical and syntactical changes. Zethsen (2009) divided additions into explanations and explications. She believed that omissions in content served the target group with less background knowledge and a lower level of comprehension. The lexical and syntactical changes are ways of simplification, providing "everyday language instead of formal or archaic language" (Zethsen, 2009, p. 805). Screnock (2018) developed these changes to content and linguistic changes. The content changes covered are addition, restructuring (cases where the order of the source text is changed), and omission. The linguistic changes are lexical and syntactic, as well as occasional morphological and orthographic changes. The analysis of the changes between Chinese street food names and Romanised names is inspired by Screnock's (2018) category.

On the reasons that result in an intralingual translation, Zethsen (2009) proposed knowledge, time, space, and culture factors. The space factor is not considered in this study due to it referring to a reduction or extension of the text. Background knowledge and linguistic competence formulate the major aspects of the knowledge factor. Knowledge is "the target group's general ability to understand a text, its level of general background knowledge or its level of expertise (or lack of) in connection with a specific subject" (Zethsen, 2009, p. 806). The typical example showcased is often the expert-to-layman. As Screnock's (2018) complement, the presumed audience's linguistic competence also functions; this refers to a person's innate ability and unconscious

knowledge for decoding utterances. Thus, the knowledge factor consists of both background knowledge and linguistic competence.

Time is "the diachronic factor which results in the lack of knowledge or cultural understanding" (Zethsen, 2009, p. 806) when the fact that "a text and its audience are not from the same era creates comprehension difficulty" (Lotz, 2017, p. 170). Time is related to the factors of culture and knowledge since these two factors in intralingual translation are the results of different eras of history.

Localisation and cultural politics are the major aspects of culture factor. Culture refers to "the need to explain cultural references in a text" (Zethsen, 2009, p. 807). The example is shown in the replacement of the words "biscuits" in British English and "cookies" in American English. There is a difference between the culture factor here and the background knowledge in the knowledge factor since the former focuses on the replacement of texts and the latter focuses on the target reader. Localisation is an important incarnation of the culture factor (Lotz, 2017), which aims "to produce different cultural versions of the same text within the same language" (Zethsen, 2009, p. 807). Another incarnation of the culture factor is cultural politics, which was proposed by Longinovic (2011)—it was derived from Zethsen's culture factor to show the alterity. In cultural politics, intralingual translation implies unintelligibility or alterity between languages or linguistic codes (Karas, 2016). All these studies offer an insight into the thematisation of the factors on the reasons for intralingual translation. In sum, there are three factors for intralingual translation used in this study: knowledge (background knowledge and linguistic competence), time, and culture (localisation and cultural politics).

Methods
This study is qualitative in nature. The three qualitative methods are content analysis on street food names, observations and semi-constructed interviews on food vendors, and consumers within the ethnography approach explaining the macro-sociocultural context of Chinese Malaysian society. It aims to acquire an understanding of cultural issues through the translation of street food names in Malaysia.

The research settings of this study were Johor, Kedah, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Penang, Perak, Perlis, and Sarawak. There were two phases of data collection, following the two types of data: textual data on street food names and feedback from interviewers. Purposive sampling was adopted in collecting these two types of data.

The first phase was the collection of street food names. The textual data was the Chinese version of street food names paired with the English translation; this refers to not only standard English, but also a Romanised form that uses Latin letters due to the non-standard method of writing and spelling. Noodle foods are focused on in this study as they are commonly consumed by Chinese Malaysians. To increase the diversity of the data, the collection is conducted at night markets, local coffee shops, hawker centres, food courts, or alongside roads at portable food booths, food carts, or food trucks. The researcher walked along every selected area and took photos of street food sign names with paired translations. Then, the food names are transcribed from the photos to a textual form in Excel. The data saturation depended on the fact that there were no new types of translations for the street food names. In this study, four types of street foods were taken into analysis as they can cover all types of translations of collected food names. There are thirty-six types of translations for 老鼠粉 mouse noodle (Hakka ethnic origin), nineteen for Hokkien *Mee* (Hokkien ethnic origin), twenty-two for 云吞面

Wan Tan Mee (Cantonese ethnic origin), and seven for 粿汁 *Kueh Chap* (Teochew ethnic origin).

The selection of these four noodles is based on their roles as iconic foods of different origins. Although these four foods belong to the noodle category, they also have distinct differences. Mouse noodle, in its Chinese names, does not include its Hakka evidence —despite it being Hakka food. Meanwhile, Hokkien *Mee* includes *Fujian* as a mark that pertains to foods eaten by people within the Hokkien clan or food that originates from either *Fujian* province or the Hokkien people. *Wan Tan Mee*'s Chinese name, 云吞 *Yun Tun*, is a Cantonese word based on the pronunciation of /wɐn tɐn/ for 馄饨 *Hun Tun* (dumpling). *Kueh Chap*, though a noodle food, is a specialty in its Chinese name without the common marks, 粉 *Fen* (rice noodle) or 面 *Mian* (flour noodle). The similarities and differences could show the variety of data.

The second phase pertains to the semi-constructed interviews with street food vendors and consumers. Before interviews, field observations were first used during the ethnographic fieldwork. The field observations involved recording the languages used in oral communication between vendors and consumers with different cultural backgrounds. The intention behind this is to help understand how vendors communicate with consumers to understand the role of Chinese dialects in communication.

Next, the semi-structured interviews were applied to respondents; this is because this method would help respondents feel more at ease, while still maintaining the structure of the study's objectives (Bailey and Bailey, 2017). Thus, the semi-structured interview process was appropriate for focusing on both the vendors' and consumers' practice of language use. The respondents were from Kuala Lumpur. This location was chosen due to it being a large city where commercial activities are active. It attracts consumers and food vendors from different origins. The inclusion criteria were as follows. Firstly, the vendors and consumers who knew English and Chinese (Mandarin Chinese and at least one Chinese dialect) were selected; this is because the focus of this study revolves around translations from Chinese to English, and the translation versions included Chinese dialects. Secondly, street food vendors who originally operated the stalls and sold noodles that included mouse noodle, Hokkien *Mee*, *Wan Tan Mee*, or *Kueh Chap* were included; this was to ensure that these vendors were familiar with the language use of the noodle food in question. This is all to guarantee that the information collected is relevant to the noodle food names. The regular consumers who often ate noodle foods were interviewed in the location of their street food consumption place.

Both street food vendors and consumers are assured that their real names and identities are not revealed in the reporting of the findings, and that only the researchers would have access to the data (the names used in this study for food vendors and the consumers were all pseudo names). After seeking informed consent, as well as informing respondents of the purpose of this interview, the interviews were conducted to learn of their reasons for food translation with face-to-face communication in front of their stalls; this was done for both convenience and to ensure their willingness to provide adequate feedback.

The interview consisted of open-ended questions that centred around the reasons for the language use. The questions for food vendors included topics like: Why do you write the (English) name like this? Is the name the same as others? Will the different names influence the understanding of consumers? The questions for the consumers involved topics like: Which languages on the menus do you often refer to when ordering foods? To what extent do you understand the Romanised English in the menus? The interviews are conducted in Chinese since the respondents can speak Chinese well. The responses are literally translated by the researcher and checked by the respondents. The duration of the

interview was from October 2022 to January 2023. The instruments included the interview guideline questions, field notes, and a voice recorder. Each interview lasted roughly 15 to 20 min, depending on the location and business time. Sometimes, the interview with vendors was interrupted and had to be repeated. Then, the voice recorder audio was manually written as a transcript since the researcher would be more familiar with the data. The interview and data analysis are reiterative, and saturation was achieved since no new insights emerged from the data. Finally, the data from ten street food vendors and twenty street food consumers were taken into analysis; this is because the same reasons or factors were drawn out after more interviews with the respondents. These vendors and consumers range in age from 22 to 70 and speak the languages of Malay, English, and Chinese (including Mandarin Chinese and dialects).

For data analysis, the collected names in textual form were first analysed based on Marco's (2019) translation techniques; furthermore, the detailed analysis of the techniques is seen in Screnock's (2018) content and linguistic changes. Secondly, as thematic analysis was a rather useful method for drawing insights from real events and experiences (Nowell et al., 2017), it was also used in the semi-structured interviews; this led to the identification of the related themes for reasons of translation. Knowledge (background knowledge and linguistic competence), culture (localisation and cultural policy) and time proposed by Longinovic (2011), Screnock (2018), and Zethsen (2009) served as a framework in the thematic analysis for interpreting the data from the interviews; these were also utilised for explaining why the translation of street food names was translated as such. To clarify the pronunciations of Chinese dialects, the transliterations of street food names in this study are verified by two groups of local Chinese Malaysians until reaching consensus. The Chinese Malaysians were recruited with the following criteria: (1) Chinese Malaysians must be able to speak two or more of the Chinese dialects—Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, or Teochew—in everyday life and can identify two or more of the dialects based on the writings; and (2) the age of vendors ranged between 40 and 70 years old. This age bracket was based on that many of today's younger generation no longer speak Chinese dialects (e.g., Albury, 2017; Wang, 2017)—thus, they would not be able to provide relevant information.

Results and discussion

This section shows the findings concerning what translation techniques are mostly used in translating street food names, as well as the cultural and linguistic factors for translation.

Translation techniques for street food names. It is found that the techniques used are transliteration, literal translation, amplification, omission, and their combinations. The results showed that the four street food names had diverse translation techniques, where the translation of mouse noodle accounted for five categories (C1–C5) of techniques (see Table 1), Hokkien *Mee* for five categories (see Table 2), *Wan Tan Mee* for eight categories (see Table 3), and *Kueh Chap* for one category (see Table 4). The results also showed that transliteration is the most frequently occurring technique and there are several different spelling versions for transliterations. The detailed interpretations for changes in translations are as follows. In the whole text, the non-English words are italicised, and the translations are put in single quotation marks. In terms of the consistency of the Chinese Romanised street food, all translations of street food names in tables that are put in single quotation marks are duplicated as they were shown at the food stalls, without changing the spelling, structure, or sequence of any alphabets or words. "No." in Tables 1–4 refers

to the number of translations, which may be unequal to the variety of translations because one variety has more than one number.

From Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, the changes in content and linguistic aspects proposed by Screnock (2018) are found—with addition, omission, restructuring, lexical, and morphological changes being the main ones. Addition is related to the amplification technique, which can be found in Hokkien *Mee* and *Wan Tan Mee*. The translated food name 'Hokkien Prawn Mee (No Pork)' in Table 2 adds 'No Pork' to show its non-pork ingredient. The translated name 'Wonton Noodles (Chinese Dumpling Noodle)' in Table 3 adds 'Chinese Dumpling Noodle' as a complement for the Hakka-based transliteration 'Wonton' in order to clarify the food for those who do not know the Hakka dialect. 'Mee with Boiled Wan Tan' in Table 3 adds 'Boiled' to show its cooking process. Omission is related to the omission technique, which can be found in three street foods. *Lao Shu Fen* in Table 1 is translated to 'Noodle,' and the meaning of *Lao Shu* is lost. The translated name 'Hokkien' in Table 2 omits the type of this food, while Hokkien noodle or Hokkien others are not clear. The similar one is in 'Wan Tun' in Table 3, which also omits the food type noodle. The translated name 'Mee' in Table 2 omits the place name *Fujian* or the cooking style of *Fujian*.

The street food names in the translated version appear in a different structure from the Chinese name. The transposition differentiates 'Mee Wan Ton' and 'Wan Ton Mee' in Table 3 by a difference in word order. While 'Wan Ton Mee' maintains the same word order with the original Chinese name because of 'Wan' for 云 *Yun*, 'Ton' for 吞 *Tun*, and 'Mee' for 面 *Mian*—the word order of 'Mee Wan Ton' turns 'Mee' in the front. This restructuring is also found in mouse noodle such as 'Mee Tikus' in Table 1 and in Hokkien Mee such as 'Mee Hockkien' and 'Mee Hokkien' in Table 2. The restructuring "makes the text more easily processed and understood" (Screnock, 2018, p. 482) since these translated versions place the food type at the beginning position.

Lexical changes are found in the different translation versions for one food name. *Lao Shu Fen* is translated to 'Lao Shu Fan' based on Cantonese pronunciation, as well as to 'Mouse Noodles' and 'Pearl Noodles' in Table 1. Though 'Lao Shu,' Mouse,' and 'Pearl' refer to the shape of the food, the translated food name is changed by using different words and expressions. Similarly, 'Hokkien Mee' and 'Prawn Noodle' in Table 2 are the variants of the translation of *Fujian Mian* since 'Hokkien Mee' is also called 'Prawn Noodle' in different regions of Malaysia. 'Wan Tan Mee' and 'Dumpling Noodle' in Table 3 are the two translations for *Yun Tun Mian*. The lexical changes result in more translated versions of street food names.

Morphological changes are found in the differences in the number of letters, uppercase or lowercase letters, and spacing. In Table 1, three words of 'Fan,' 'Fun,' 'Fen'—though translated from 粉 *Fen*—have the variation in the middle letters 'a,' 'u,' and 'e'. These three words are transliterated based on Cantonese pronunciation. 'Fan,' 'Fun,' and 'Fen' are adopted since they have a similar pronunciation to *Fen* in Cantonese. Another typical example is the transliteration of *Kueh Chap*. The letters are changed in "Kueh," "Koay," "Keow," "Kuoy," "Kuay," "Koay," and "Kway." This letter change is also found in "Chap," "Chup," and "Jub." Besides, the difference in uppercase or lowercase letters also leads to the variety of translated food names. This example is seen in 'Hock kean Mee' in Table 2, with a capitalised 'K,' and 'Hock Kean Mee' with a lowercase 'k.' In addition, spacing also makes the translation version different, as seen with 'Wantan Mee' and 'Wan Tan Mee' in Table 3, since spacing changes the linguistic structure of the same food name. The former is the combination of 'Wantan' and 'Mee,' while the latter is the

Table 1 Techniques and variety of translations on Mouse Noodle.

C	Techniques	Changes	Variety of translation	No.
1	Transliteration	Morphological change	'Lao Shu Fan' 'Lao Shu Fun' 'Lao Shu Fen' 'Lau Shu Fen' 'Loh Shi Fun' 'Loh See Fun' 'Loh She Fun' 'Loh Shu Fen' 'Loh Shu Fan' 'Loh Shu Fun' 'Loh Sui Fun' 'Lo See Fun' 'Lo She Fun' 'Loo Shi Fun' 'Lou See Fun' 'Lou Shu Fen' 'Lou Sue Fen' 'Low Shu Fen' 'Luo Shi Fun' 'Bi Tai Bak' 'Bee Tai Bak' 'Bee Thai Bak' 'Bee Thai But' 'Mee Chai Mar' 'Mee Tai Bak' 'Mee Dai Mak' 'Mee Tai Mak' 'Me Tai Mat' 'Mi Tai Mak' 'Mi Tai Bak' 'Mitamat'	31
2	Transliteration + Literal translation	Restructuring	'Mee Tikus' 'Lao Shu Noodles'	2
3	Literal translation	Lexical change	'Mouse Noodles'	1
4	Literal translation + Omission	Omission	'Noodle'	1
5	Neutralisation + Literal translation	Lexical change	'Pearl Noodles'	1
	Total			36

Table 2 Techniques and variety of translations on Hokkien *Mee*.

C	Techniques	Changes	Variety of Translation	No.
1	Transliteration	Morphological change	'Hockien Mee' 'Hockkien Mee' 'Hockkian Mee' 'Hock kien Mee' 'Hock kean Mee' 'Hock Kean Mee' 'Hockkien Mee' 'Hokkien Mee' 'Hokian Mee' 'Hokkian Mee' 'Hok Kien Mee' 'Hok Keen Mee' 'Mee Hockkien' 'Mee Hokkien'	14
2	Transliteration + Omission	Omission	'Hokkien' 'Mee'	2
3	Transliteration + Literal translation		'Hokkien Noodles'	1
4	Transliteration + Amplification	Addition	'Hokkien Prawn Mee (No Pork)'	1
5	Omission + Literal translation + Amplification	Omission	'Prawn Noodle'	1
	Total			19

Table 3 Techniques and variety of translations on *Wan Tan Mee*.

C	Techniques	Changes	Variety of Translation	No.
1	Transliteration	Morphological change; Restructuring	'Wan Tan Mee' 'Wan Tan Me' 'Wantan Mee' 'Wan Than Mee' 'Wan Thun Mee' 'Wan Tun Mee' 'Wanton Mee' 'Wan Ton Mee' 'Wonton Mee' 'Mee Wan Ton' 'Mi Wantan'	11
2	Literal translation + Transliteration	Morphological change	'Dumpling Mee' 'Wantan Noodles' 'Wonton Noodles' 'Wooton Noodles' 'Wantan Noodle'	5
3	Literal translation + Transliteration + Amplification	Addition	'Wonton Noodles (Chinese Dumpling Noodle)'	1
4	Transliteration + Omission	Omission	'Wan Tun'	1
5	Literal translation		'Dumpling Noodle'	1
6	Literal translation + Omission	Omission	'Noodle'	1
7	Transliteration + amplification	Restructuring; Addition	'Mee with Boiled Wan Tan'	1
8	Omission	Omission		1
	Total			22

Table 4 Techniques and variety of translations on *Kueh Chap*.

C	Techniques	Changes	Variety of Translation	No.
1	Transliteration	Morphological change	'Kueh Chap' 'Koay Chap' 'Keow Chup' 'Kuoy Chap' 'Kuay Jub' 'Koay Chup' 'Kway Chap'	10
	Total			10

combination of three words 'Wan,' 'Tan,' and 'Mee' in the word-formation process.

In sum, these findings show the common results for mouse noodle, Hokkien *Mee*, *Wan Tan Mee*, and *Kueh Chap*. The different spellings in transliteration, together with other techniques, show the diverse translation versions for street food names. This diversity can be seen through addition, omission, restructuring, lexical, and morphological changes. This study indicates that

it is the literal translation of 老鼠粉 *Lao Shu Fen* to 'mouse noodle' that pushes the food into a stage related to mouse. The noodle food 老鼠粉 *Lao Shu Fen* (mouse powder) is named *Lao Shu* (mouse) because the shape of the noodle is tapered-off at the ends, much like a mouse's tail. The literal translation for *Lao Shu Fen* is mouse for 老鼠 *Lao Shu* and noodle for 粉 *Fen* since *Fen* with Cantonese pronunciation means 'noodle.' The more transliteration that is used somewhat weakens the literal

translation that would pertain to an actual image of a mouse. However, this transliteration preference strengthens the differences and diversities of translation.

The co-existence of different translation techniques suggests that the food vendors, as translators, presented diverse ways to introduce their foods. Surprisingly, the transliteration of street food names prevails in Malaysia. The diverse spellings of transliteration have become the main source of diversity in translated street food names in Malaysia. Zhou (2019) argued that English transliterations recreated the diversity of the concept of Mandarin in English, both socially and historically. The transliteration of street food names reveals the diversities in translated versions, which provides translational and cultural implications.

On one hand, this diversity signifies the non-professional translation conducted by street food vendors who are producing their own self-representation as target audiences (Cronin, 2013) based on the vendors' own experiences. They use different spellings for one food name based on different languages or dialects. Because there is no singular common standard to govern the translation practice, the translation has vastly more freedom and presents various versions in which each vendor could provide one translation.

On the other hand, this diversity in transliteration is also a reflection of diverse cultures. The pronunciation of 'Bi Tai Bak' towards Hokkien and 'Mee Tai Mak' towards Cantonese and Hakka reflects the cultural differentiation of the different translations of street food names. The same cultural reflection can also be seen in other foods. *Wan Tan Mee*'s closeness to the Cantonese pronunciation, and *Wonton Mee*'s being more of a Hakka pronunciation both show that the different cultures of Cantonese and Hakka are maintained in translated street food names. Hokkien *Mee* and its variations maintain the Hokkien pronunciation, and so the Hokkien culture is also reflected. For *Kueh Chap*, the Teochew pronunciation in translation reflects the Teochew food culture. Through the different pronunciations of food names in translation, it reminds people of the Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, and Teochew cultures. Thus, the method of transliteration is beneficial for the dissemination of food culture as different clan cultures—such as Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Teochew—are preserved within different pronunciations. The specialty lies in that the dissemination of food culture in this study specifically refers to the preservation of different clan cultures through pronunciations instead of meaning transfer. In sum, through translation, this supports the idea that food realises its role as a medium to reflect upon culture, tradition, history, and someone's origin (Barthes, 2013).

Therefore, non-professional translation and cultural reflection create the unique features of the translations of street food names, which have complex translation varieties that result from Chinese dialects. In comparison with previous studies on the transliteration of food names, foods come from other cultures without an equivalent; therefore, it would be best to use transliteration in such cases (Reynolds, 2016). Thus, in a way, transliteration creates a communicative possibility rather than a direct omission. Although Li's (2019) study on restaurant menus recognised *Pinyin* as an intralingual translation, this study mostly focused on standard *Pinyin* rather than dialects and even the varieties of dialects. This shows that there were differences in translating food names between contexts in China and Malaysia, even though these names are translated from Chinese to English. Hence, the findings recall that the transliteration that is based on dialects is the main reason for diverse translations in Malaysia.

Cultural and linguistic factors. The translation, especially of transliteration, of street food names in Malaysia is related to the society of Malaysia. Based on observations, the majority of food vendors were Chinese Malaysians, while the majority of customers were both Chinese and foreign visitors. The observations also revealed that throughout the conversations, Chinese food vendors and Chinese customers primarily spoke in dialects such as Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka. Through semi-structured interviews, the factors of knowledge, time, and linguistic competence were coded based on thematic analysis, which depicts the cultural and linguistic factors in the meaning-making process.

Knowledge. From semi-structured interviews written in italic form, an interpretation around knowledge, culture, and time factors fits the theory and reinforces the findings of diverse translations. The three factors function not in a single use, but rather in the interplay to the translation of street food names.

In the knowledge factor, both the multilingual and multicultural backgrounds of both vendors and consumers provide the foundation of the translation. The vendors who translate these street food names explain how their clan cultures influence their choices. In other words, their choices in translation with these dialects are based on what language group they are from or what languages they are more familiar with. All vendors acknowledge the role of their clan's cultures in translation. As food vendor Wong said, "w*e speak different dialects, including Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka. Translations vary depending on the ethnic groups of vendors, since different dialects are used to enunciate the same food name.*" This reflects that the transliteration is based on the pronunciation of different vendors who can use their own dialects, and thus represent their dialect culture through the food names.

This multicultural background not only functions for vendors, but also for consumers. This means that both the vendors and consumers agree that the multicultural background of potential consumers is also a factor for transliteration; this notion responds to the argument that the translation considers the general background knowledge of the audience (Screnock, 2018; Zethsen, 2009). The evidence is from a food vendor named Lee and two consumers named Yong and Law. For Lee, "*standardising to a single translation may confuse people due to the consumers being of different ethnicities. More translations increase the likelihood that Cantonese or Hakka would remember the name of the food and order it again in the future.*" The food vendors assume that the current translation practice is understandable by consumers who also share a multicultural background with the vendors, which echoes the response from Yong, "*we can understand because we get used to the language and we are born with at least five languages.*" Therefore, a common multicultural background between vendors and consumers brings an intelligible translation since the consumers can also understand different dialects.

The background knowledge is a reflection of how Chinese Malaysians in Malaysia maintain their own clan culture. The Chinese in Malaysia are descendants of migrants from different parts of China, particularly south-eastern China, thus bearing one or more Chinese dialects, such as Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese (Carstens and Ang, 2019). This allows Chinese Malaysians to easily embrace a diverse background based on their original backgrounds. The ethnography analysis demonstrates how Chinese Malaysians translate street food names with their own multicultural background, and how both vendors and consumers with a shared background reach consensus in the meaning-making of the translation. The findings that the food names are Romanised in Cantonese or Hokkien are similar to Coluzzi's (2020) case of shop names in Kuala Lumpur, partly to highlight the ethnic origin of the owners.

Another aspect of the knowledge factor is linguistic competence. Both vendors and consumers believe that linguistic competence influences diverse transliterations, which echoes the finding regarding linguistic competence as a key factor in intralingual translation. However, Screnock (2018) and Zethsen (2009) refer to the audience's lack or potential lack of requisite knowledge for understanding the text without mentioning the translators. The findings of this study show not the audience's linguistic competence, but rather the vendors' as translators. This is similar to Jensen and Zethsen (2012), in that the most crucial factor for intralingual translation is relying on translators without a linguistic or translational background.

This linguistic knowledge is often related to the time factor, in which different eras result in a lack of education or the learning of certain languages. Time plays a role here since the old generations from China to Malaysia previously could not use Chinese *Pinyin* or speak *Putonghua*. According to the explanation of food vendor Khoo, "*the elder doesn't learn English and Chinese Pinyin when they come to Malaysia; thus, the writing is done by pronouncing the food names based on their pronunciation. However, distinct variants arise due to variations in the English proficiency level.*" This explains how Chinese Malaysian elders prepare the name and translation with limited linguistic competence. Undoubtedly, one of the causes of the inferior proficiency in Mandarin Chinese and standard English is immigrant history. There is an imbalance between their period of arrival and language acquisition. This imbalance becomes more exacerbated following their language background at the time of migration, the linguistic environment in their new place of residence, and individual language choices.

A lack of education is one of the reasons for linguistic competence; according to consumer Lim, "*prior to now, the majority of local Chinese in Malaysia spoke Chinese dialects because there was no Mandarin Chinese education system in place. We have no idea what constitutes accurate writing, and nobody revises our writing. We just follow the elders who talk in dialects and write the noodles with the Malay alphabet, not Chinese Pinyin.*" This feedback reflects what Ang (2007) argues: that the education level of the elderly Chinese population is not high. Therefore, it is inevitable that some words will be turned into their own common Chinese dialect because they do not know how to spell them in a standard form. Nowadays, the languages for Chinese Malaysians are a fusion of Chinese dialects and Chinese *Pinyin* due to the different eras of immigration. "*We are in the era from Chinese dialects to Chinese Pinyin,*" said consumer Chan. Therefore, translation is often presented in a Romanised form based on both Chinese *Pinyin* and Chinese dialects.

Culture. Localisation illustrates the culture factor in translation, in which Malay culture influences the translation from Chinese to English in Malaysia. The translations of food menus require not just knowledge of the two languages, but also a deep sense of localisation (Ghafarian et al., 2016). The not entirely pure Chinese-to-English translation with localised Malay words or morphemes is the tagging of Malaysian cultural influence on the translation. According to the consumer, Yap, "*while the government requires the submission of food stall brands in Malay but the foods from Chinese groups may not have equivalent words in Malay, the translation without any guidelines is based on the vendors' own oral accounts following the dialect. The officer or the listener marks the writings based on the pronunciations of different speakers.*" This response is in line with the notion that Malay *Pinyin* is used in spelling Chinese food names through pronunciation. For example, 'Mitamat' is a translated name for *Mi Tai Mu* (known as *Lao Shu Fen*), and the translation uses the existing word 'tamat' ('over' in Malay) in the Malay language to mimic the pronunciations of the Chinese dialect. Another

example, 'Mee Tikus,' shows the Chinese dialect 'Mee' for noodle and the Malay word 'Tikus' for mouse. This means that local Malay culture influences the production of the translation of food names by using Malay morphemes or words. Translations infused with Malay words or morphemes are considered a special type of food translation, which either serves Malaysian consumers or is mostly pronounced or written by Malay people.

The localisation influence for the transliteration of food names can also be seen in English culture since English, as the official second language in Malaysia, has influenced the transliteration with Chinese dialects. For example, 'Fun' is a reflection of English culture since 'Fun' can also be synonymous with English words like 'joy.' In Teh's response, "*writing 'Fan' in 'Fun' is to pronounce the word more accurately, which is influenced by English because they have similar pronunciation.*" 'Fun' and 'Fan' have a similar pronunciation, and 'Fun' is used to refer to the Chinese dialect 'Fan.' The Chinese-to-English translation with Malay and English words into Chinese dialects reflects the connections and their intermingling among source languages, local languages, and target languages. From the translation of writings similar to Malay words and pronunciations in English, the study's findings reveal that localisation is one incarnation of the parameter of culture in that the aim often is to produce different cultural versions of the same text within the same language (Lotz, 2017; Zethsen, 2009). This increases the diversity of street food translations in Malaysia because of their intermingling with different languages.

The recognition of translation alterity reveals that intralingual translation can be used to draw a border between two languages and cultures, instead of bridging said borders (Brems, 2018). This is also a reflection of the factor of cultural politics, according to Longinovic (2011). As food vendor Chee reveals, "*if others don't know this translation (transliteration), they can ask and learn, and we don't need to explain it to them. The names we use to speak to them are the same as those of the locals. They need to learn from us while they go to every place where things are different.*" In this way, the transliteration with one's own language variant has become a marker for their ethnicity since "language is arguably the most important among the cultural practices defining ethnicity" (Subaric, 2015, p. 53). Thus, the unique translated language has become a cultural tagging to differentiate others from their own—a reflection of their speciality.

This also emphasises the relations between the alterity and the history in that "intralingual translations can shed light on our relationship with the past" (Albachten, 2013, p. 268) if they date to the origins based on the transliteration. This aroused the thought that translation is not only a linguistic transfer based on equivalence to the target language, but also a foreignness based on transliteration of food-related culture-specific items (Guo et al., 2020)—an important approach for mediating encounters with alterity. For Chinese Malaysians, "the continuous use of Chinese dialects is linked to showing appreciation to their ancestors" since knowing family roots "is essential in Chinese society and will prevent the family umbilical cord from breaking" (Ong, 2020, p. 2). This is also why Chinese dialects in Malaysia—especially in daily life—are widely used. The emotion towards the roots and ancestors of Chinese Malaysians pushes them to take Chinese dialects to support the connections to their clans, and this special emotion also influences the translation language.

In response to the translation inconsistency, the translations of street food names represented the translation landscape by/for laymen or non-professionals. The translational differences in morphological, lexical, and syntactical levels, similar to Lees's (2021) findings, diverge from the norms of Standard English in this context, revealing the translator's identity as a non-professional translator. The translation of street food names is often conducted by food vendors without any professional

training or by other laymen who translate the names based on their own realisations and preferences. The translations cannot reach a unified version. Besides, vendors' deep-rooted clan cultures result in a dialect-based translation where Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, and Teochew are used in phonetic translation. This dialect-based translation is also influenced by Malay and English culture, presenting varieties in letters and pronunciations. Therefore, the diverse translations for street food names are a complex of the multicultural environment of the Chinese Malaysian community, the limited linguistic and translation competence, and the vendor's own dialectal heritage.

Conclusion

This study first identified the translation techniques of street food names in Malaysia from Chinese to English. They include transliteration, literal translation, neutralisation, amplification, omission, and their combinations. The changes in content and linguistic aspects that result from translation are addition, omission, restructuring, lexical, and morphological changes. As a prevailing technique, transliteration based on Chinese dialects becomes the primary source for diversity—which can be seen from the different spellings in translated street food names. Moreover, this study reflects on more than just the diverse translation versions due to various spellings of street food names; it also covers the cultural issues that are related to the factors of knowledge (background knowledge and linguistic competence), time, and culture (localisation and cultural policy). The interplay of these factors leads to different versions of translation.

This study contributes to the understanding of social relations through translations of street food names. The translation issue explained within Malaysian ethnography helps shed light on the connection between language and society. Furthermore, it contributes to intralingual translations by revealing the complexity of the translations for dialects and their variants that are commonly used in transliteration in Malaysia. In addition, it enlarges the materials used for the research's scope of food translation by specifically taking street food names into account.

This is a preliminary study, and further studies can obtain more insights for translation and society. It is interesting to take various names into consideration—not only street food names, but other names—to compare the similarities and differences in translation. In addition, the ethnography analysis could extend to other multilingual societies to better understand the specific social relations behind the translation of names.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Author contributions

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

The research was conducted ethically in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The research procedure was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universiti Putra Malaysia (JKEUPM-2023-637).

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained orally from all respondents prior to the interviews. The participants were informed about the aims of the research and how their responses would be used anonymously. They were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point, and given the option to review the transcripts after the interviews to adjust/revise as they saw fit.

Additional information

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