



Article

Translation Strategies and Cultural Representation in Middle Eastern Restaurant Menus in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the translation strategies used in the Klang Valley Region of Malaysia. The primary objectives of this research are to identify the most common strategies, analyze the effectiveness of the menu descriptions, and provide recommendations for improving translation practices in the food industry. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing a frequency and descriptive analysis framework. Data were collected from a sample of Middle Eastern restaurant menus through convenience sampling. The strategies identified were categorized based on Vinay and Darbelnet's model of translation strategies, while Nida and Taber's componential analysis examined the effectiveness of the menu descriptions. The findings reveal that literal translation, transliteration, generalization, and cultural substitution are the most commonly used strategies, each with varying degrees of effectiveness in maintaining cultural integrity and communicative clarity. The results highlight the tension between preserving authenticity and ensuring comprehensibility, underscoring the importance of functional and culturally sensitive translation in multicultural food settings. This research contributes to the broader field of applied translation studies by shedding light on underexplored domains of culinary discourse and offers practical implications for menu translators, restaurateurs, and tourism stakeholders aiming to improve cross-cultural communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's Klang Valley region has become a vibrant hub of multiculturalism, home to a growing number of international communities, including a significant population from the Middle East (Abdullah & Isa, 2020). This demographic shift has contributed to the proliferation of Middle Eastern restaurants across the Klang Valley, where culinary practices serve as both cultural expressions and commercial enterprises. Menus in these establishments function not merely as lists of dishes, but as textual artifacts that mediate cultural exchange between diverse linguistic communities (Alhasnawi, 2024; Cozma, 2022; Li,

2018). Through menu translation, cultural identity is negotiated, and food becomes a communicative act that reflects sociolinguistic diversity, economic globalization, and intercultural dialogue (Chiaro & Rossato, 2015; Desjardins et al., 2015; Perry, 2017).

It is always crucial that an accurate and sensitive translation of menu items is employed (Li, 2018; Pouget, 1999; Rushaidi & Ali, 2017; Ruzaitè, 2006). All these factors influence the customer's dining experience, including their understanding of the menu items and whether the meal aligns with their expectations. Misinterpretation of what is being offered can result in customer dissatisfaction

when the delivered dish does not match their perception (Mills & Thomas, 2007; Ruzaitè, 2006; Petrc et al., 2019). These negative outcomes can have serious consequences, most notably customer dissatisfaction and negative reviews, with the worst-case scenario being a decline in business performance (Fuentes-Luque, 2016; Ngoc et al., 2021). To prevent such outcomes, it is crucial to understand the strategies and challenges within Malaysia's culinary landscape, as this knowledge plays a vital role in ensuring the success of restaurant establishments.

Translating food menus in multilingual contexts presents numerous challenges, particularly when dealing with cultural terms and gastronomic experiences. Studies have identified issues in translating between English and Malay, including sound, lexis, grammar, and style differences (Al-Aqad & Al-Saggaf, 2021; Odilova & Mamatova, 2023). When translating Australian urban gastronomic experiences for Malay tourists, researchers found that many themes appealing to Anglo audiences were not suitable for Malay readers, resulting in functionally inadequate translations (Sulaiman, 2016). Similar challenges arise when translating food menus from English to Arabic, with strategies like borrowing and literal translation often leading to lexical ambiguity and confusion (Al-Rushaidi & Ali, 2017).

Scholars propose various strategies to address these challenges, including a multimodal approach incorporating Jakobson's tripartite theory (Li, 2018) and a combination of foreignization and domestication techniques (Amirdabbaghian, 2014). The translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) in menus is particularly crucial, with different categories of CSIs influencing the choice of translation procedures (Amenador & Wang, 2023). Despite the growing market for food-related translations, the relationship between food, culture, and translation remains under-researched (Chiaro & Rossato, 2015). Effective menu translation is seen as vital for preserving culinary culture, enhancing tourist experiences, and projecting a welcoming image of the destination country (Amirdabbaghian, 2014; Amenador & Wang, 2023).

Despite the rich potential for analysis, gastronomic translation, especially within the restaurant industry, remains a relatively underexplored area in translation studies,

particularly in the Malaysian context. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the translation strategies used in Middle Eastern restaurant menus in Klang Valley, with the aim of identifying patterns of translation, evaluating their effectiveness, and exploring how linguistic and cultural elements are negotiated. By employing theoretical frameworks from Venuti (1995), Newmark (1988), and Hervey & Higgins (2002), the research focuses on domestication versus foreignization strategies, communicative versus semantic translation, and the broader socio-semiotic dimensions of food discourse. Through the analysis of translated menu items, the study explores how these strategies impact readability, cultural authenticity, and consumer engagement.

In light of the above, this study is driven by the following objectives: (1) to identify and categorize the translation strategies used in Middle Eastern restaurant menus in Klang Valley; (2) to analyze how these strategies affect the accuracy, appeal, and cultural representation of the menu items; and (3) to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps between source and target audiences. In doing so, the study not only documents the current practices of menu translation but also provides a critical lens through which to assess their broader cultural and communicative implications.

The relevance of this research extends beyond the domain of translation studies. It contributes to applied linguistics, intercultural communication, hospitality marketing, and cultural studies. Practically, the study informs restaurant owners, translators, and designers of bilingual menus about best practices in menu translation, helping them to enhance the dining experience for non-native speakers and preserve cultural identity through accurate yet engaging translations. Theoretically, it expands scholarly understanding of how translation functions within commercial and culturally sensitive settings, offering a nuanced perspective on the intersection of language, food, and identity in multicultural societies like Malaysia.

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze translation strategies found in Middle Eastern restaurant menus across Klang Valley, Malaysia. The research focused

on identifying and categorizing the translation techniques used to render Arabic or culturally specific Middle Eastern food items into English or Malay. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select a total of thirty Middle Eastern restaurants located in key commercial and urban areas of Klang Valley, including Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, and Shah Alam. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain in-depth and contextually relevant data from restaurants that met specific inclusion criteria, namely, the presence of bilingual or trilingual menus (Arabic-English or Arabic-English-Malay) and popularity among both local and international patrons. This non-probability approach ensured that only restaurants with rich linguistic and cultural translation data were included, thereby enhancing the validity of the qualitative analysis. The menus were taken from the restaurants' official websites, which are publicly available.

The extracted menu items were assembled into a database comprising 55 food names and detailed descriptions, all of which involved both source language (Arabic) and target language formats (English or Malay). The quantitative study involved data from 30 restaurants to determine the distribution and occurrence of translation strategies across different locations. In the qualitative analysis, 55 menu items and their descriptions were selected based on the individual translation strategy used to convey meaning, maintain cultural authenticity, and attract consumers.

The textual data were analyzed using content analysis based on the framework of translation strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), which categorizes translation into direct and oblique translations. This theory was applicable because it provides a systematic and well-established framework for analyzing linguistic transfer among different language structures and cultural systems. As Arabic, English, and Malay vary significantly in terms of syntax, morphology, and culture-specific equivalence, this model facilitates an examination of the complex process by which translators address culturally bound culinary terms. Qualitative analysis further describes the findings by applying Nida and Taber's (1969) Componential Analysis theories. Each menu item was carefully examined to identify the dominant translation strategy and whether it contributed to semantic clarity, cultural preservation, or marketing appeal. An interpretive

analysis was also performed to explore the implications of these strategies for cross-cultural communication and consumer understanding. To ensure analysis reliability, intercoder verification was conducted with an independent expert in Arabic-English translation, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus.

III. RESULTS

Distribution of Translation techniques used in translating the Menu

A total of 30 Middle Eastern restaurant menus from the Klang Valley were subjected to a detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis. Each food item listed in the menus was examined closely and classified according to the translation strategy employed. The classification was based on the framework by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), which includes strategies such as borrowing and calquing. Additional elements, including amplification (presence or absence) and componential or descriptive translation, were also noted. This frequency-based analysis enabled the researchers to observe the preferred translation strategies adopted by individual establishments and to assess the consistency and cultural sensitivity across different menus. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of translation strategies employed in Middle Eastern restaurant menus, as outlined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958).

Table 1 shows significant differences in the translation approach of 30 Middle Eastern restaurants scattered throughout the Klang Valley, indicating dissimilarities in how these food outlets culturally localize food items intended for their bilingual or trilingual menus. Borrowing is a prevalent strategy in many restaurants, and they often borrow heavily from Arabic, directly translating it into English or Malay. For instance, R6 and R28 demonstrate an unusually high proportion of usage: 76.7% and 59.4%, respectively. Calquing, although less common than borrowing, is also very popular, especially in restaurants such as R5 (56.4%) and R16 (55.3%). A detailed distribution of borrowing and calque can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that 26 out of 30 menus (86.7%) predominantly employ the borrowing strategy, indicating a strong preference for retaining source language terms. While all restaurants utilize both borrowing and calquing to some extent, a clear

Table 1: Distribution of Translation Strategies Used in Middle Eastern Restaurant Menus

Restaurant (R)	Borrowing	Calque	Amplification (yes/no)	Descriptive/ Componential
R1	45 (50%)	45 (50%)	Yes	Componential
R2	40 (59.7%)	27 (40.3%)	No	-
R3	43 (56.6%)	33 (43.4%)	Yes	Componential
R4	118 (66.9%)	61 (34.1%)	Yes	Componential
R5	34 (43.6%)	44 (56.4%)	Yes	Componential
R6	56 (76.7%)	17 (23.3%)	Yes	Componential
R7	39 (57.4%)	29 (42.6%)	Yes	Componential
R8	54 (70.1%)	23 (29.9%)	No	-
R9	14 (63.6%)	8 (36.4%)	Yes	Componential
R10	63 (63.0%)	37 (37.0%)	No	-
R11	79 (57.7%)	58 (42.3%)	Yes	Componential
R12	37 (56.9%)	28 (43.1%)	Yes	Componential
R13	68 (52.3%)	62 (47.7%)	Yes	Componential
R14	29 (60.4%)	19 (39.6%)	Yes	Componential
R15	63 (52.1%)	58 (47.9%)	Yes	Componential
R16	68 (44.7%)	84 (55.3%)	Yes	Componential
R17	103 (65.6%)	54 (34.4%)	Yes	Componential
R18	54 (63.5%)	31 (36.5%)	Yes	Componential
R19	10 (35.7%)	18 (64.3%)	No	-
R20	60 (56.1%)	47 (43.9%)	Yes	Componential
R21	75 (57.3%)	56 (42.7%)	Yes	Componential
R22	41 (47.1%)	46 (52.9%)	Yes	Componential
R23	27 (58.7%)	19 (41.3%)	Yes	Componential
R24	48 (72.7%)	18 (27.3%)	Yes	Componential
R25	60 (60.0%)	40 (40.0%)	Yes	Componential
R26	32 (74.4%)	11 (25.6%)	Yes	Componential
R27	54 (64.3%)	30 (35.7%)	Yes	Componential
R28	57 (59.4%)	39 (40.6%)	No	-
R29	19 (65.5%)	10 (34.5%)	No	-
R30	43 (54.4%)	36 (45.6%)	Yes	Componential

distinction in dominant strategy is observed. The widespread use of borrowing may be attributed to its ability to preserve the cultural authenticity of food items. In many cases, there is no exact equivalent in the target language (TL) that conveys the same cultural or culinary significance, making borrowing a practical and culturally sensitive choice. By retaining the original term from the source text (ST), restaurants convey a sense of authenticity and tradition, which may positively influence consumers' perceptions. Menu items presented in their original form can signal that the dish remains true to its cultural roots, possibly implying traditional preparation methods and enhancing the overall dining experience.

In contrast, only 4 restaurants (13.3%) favor calque over borrowing. Calque offers a degree of linguistic transparency, allowing consumers to infer the meaning of the dish through the literal components of the translation. This approach can be beneficial when the translated terms align with vocabulary that consumers are already familiar with. However, the calque method carries potential drawbacks, particularly ambiguity and misinterpretation. Literal translations may fail to fully capture the essence of certain dishes, omitting key elements or introducing misleading impressions. As a result, consumers may experience confusion or uncertainty about the nature of the dish, which could lead to dissatisfaction and a

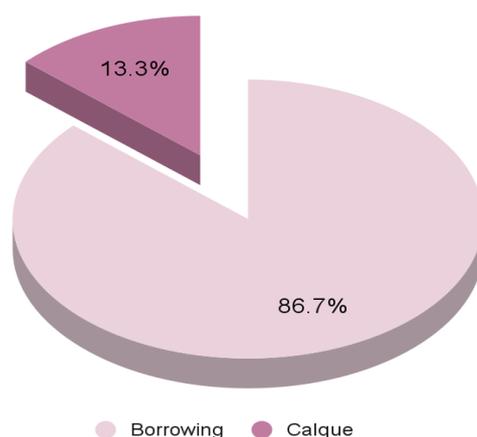


Figure 1. Distribution of borrowing and calque technique in Menu translation

diminished dining experience due to the lack of clarity or cultural nuance.

Furthermore, amplification is another noteworthy translation strategy frequently observed in menu texts. It plays a significant role in enhancing consumer understanding, particularly when menu items originate from unfamiliar culinary traditions. Table 1 shows the distribution of amplification found in the Middle Eastern Restaurant Menus.

Table 1 shows that among the 30 menus analyzed, 24 restaurants (80%) employed amplification, offering additional information such as ingredient lists, descriptive adjectives, and cultural context to enrich the consumer's perception of the dish. This strategy enables diners to form a mental image of the food's taste, appearance, and cultural background, which helps manage expectations and contributes to a more informed and satisfying dining experience. Amplification is especially beneficial for introducing dishes that consumers may not readily recognize. By elaborating on the components or origin of a dish, restaurants create a sense of familiarity and curiosity, thereby enhancing engagement and reducing uncertainty.

However, 20% of the restaurants (6 out of 30) chose not to use amplification. This absence may stem from various considerations. For instance, some of these menus rely heavily on visual imagery, using photographs of the dishes as a substitute for textual descriptions. While pictures can offer visual cues about the food's appearance, they may lack the necessary depth to convey ingredients, flavors, or cultural significance. This can lead to vagueness or confusion, particularly when dishes appear

visually similar.

In such cases, consumers may struggle to distinguish between menu items and, as a result, may revert to ordering only what they are already familiar with. This behavior limits the exploration of diverse Middle Eastern cuisines, undermining the cultural experience that these menus aim to provide. Another plausible explanation for the lack of amplification is the assumption, possibly held by some restaurant owners, that Middle Eastern cuisine is already well-known among Malaysian diners, thus rendering detailed explanations unnecessary. However, such assumptions can overlook the varied levels of consumer knowledge and may hinder deeper cultural appreciation through food.

Translation Accuracy and Cultural Representation in Menu Items

This section of the analysis examines the effectiveness of food item translations and descriptions using a componential analysis approach. The objective is to evaluate the success of translating selected Middle Eastern menu items from the source language, Arabic, into the target language, English. This is achieved by systematically breaking down each food item into its core descriptive elements and assessing how well each component has been conveyed in translation. The analysis focuses on four key dimensions: ingredients, cooking method, flavor profile, and cultural significance.

In evaluating ingredients, attention is given to the accuracy and clarity with which the individual components of the dish are translated. The cooking method is assessed based on how well the preparation techniques are rendered into

English, including whether the terminology used is familiar and comprehensible to the target audience. The flavor profile component assesses the extent to which the translation accurately captures the intended taste and texture of the dish, enabling consumers to form an accurate sensory expectation. Lastly, the cultural significance of each item is examined to determine whether the translation preserves the cultural essence of the dish, including references to traditional practices, regional origins, or symbolic meanings.

Out of the 30 menus reviewed, it was found that six restaurants did not employ amplification, offering only the dish names without any descriptive information. As a result, the componential analysis focuses exclusively on the remaining 24 menus that provide descriptions of their food items. From these menus, ten food items were selected for detailed analysis. The selection was based on two primary factors. First, several popular dishes were chosen due to their recognizability among Malaysian consumers, reflecting the integration and popularity of Middle Eastern cuisine in the local culinary landscape. Second, several lesser-known or culturally specific dishes were included in the analysis to explore how unfamiliar items are introduced to a target audience that may not share the same cultural background. These selections allow for a well-rounded evaluation of the translation strategies in use.

By applying componential analysis, this study aims to determine whether the translated descriptions effectively communicate both the literal content and the cultural and sensory richness of the original dishes. Ultimately, this analysis provides insight into the extent to which the translated menus succeed in bridging cultural gaps and enhancing the dining experience through language. It is noteworthy that the SL explanations are from reliable Arabic and Middle Eastern sources (in their respective languages) translated into English by the authors. While the TL descriptions are provided from multiple menus covered in this study.

Data 1: Waraq Enab

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Waraq Enab	Translated Name: Stuffed Leaves, Stuffed Grape Leaves, Grape Leaves, Waraq Einab, Yalanji

Ingredients: Grape Leaves, Rice, Beef, Middle Eastern Spices, Lemony Broth	Ingredients: Rice, Vine, Grape Leaves, Olive Oil, Lemon, Tomato, Parsley, Pomegranate sauce, molasses, spices
Cooking Method: Boil, Simmer, slow cook	Cooking Method: boiled, slow-cooked
Flavour Profile: Tangy, Herbaceous, Savoury	Flavour Profile: tangy, fragrant

The first food item is Waraq Enab. According to a few online recipes, Waraq Enab is described as grape leaves stuffed with spiced minced meat and rice. As you can see, in the Target Language (TL), a plethora of names are being used in the different menus. Some retain the name from the Source Language (SL) while others translate the name of the dish. For this specific food item, the translation of the food item from the SL into the TL is quite clear and covers all the key components that are needed to clarify the food.

Data 2: Mutabal

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Mutabal	Translated Name: Moutabal, Mutabbal, Muttabal, Eggplant Mutabbal, (Variations of spellings) Eggplant Dip
Ingredients: eggplant, garlic, tahini, lemon juice, salt, olive oil, greek yoghurt	Ingredients: eggplant, tahini, olive oil, yoghurt, garlic, lemon juice, sesame paste
Cooking Method: roast, grill, mash	Cooking Method: roast, whipped, mashed, pureed, grilled
Flavour Profile: smoky, nutty, fresh	Flavour Profile: fragrant, tangy, creamy

The next food item on the list is Mutabal, described as a creamy and smoky eggplant dip that bears a resemblance to hummus. It is famous in the Middle East for its versatility and for its nutty flavour (which can be attributed to the usage of Tahini). In the TL, this aspect is not highlighted in the flavour profile. The nuttiness that the tahini provides to the dish is not credited; instead, they use adjectives such as fragrant, tangy, and creamy, which may undermine the uniqueness of Mutabal. As this dish is similar to Baba Ghanouj, emphasizing what sets it apart is extremely important. In hindsight, the target audience may not even be able to differentiate between the two dishes as the ingredients are similar. Therefore, using key components effectively is crucial to avoiding confusion among the target audience.

Data 3: Baba Ghanouj

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Baba Ghanoush	Translated Name: Baba Ghanouj, Baba Ghanuj, Baba Ganush.
Ingredients: Eggplant, Tahini, garlic, lemon juice, Greek yoghurt, sumac, olive oil	Ingredients: eggplant, olive oil, lemon juice, bell peppers, onion, parsley, tomato, pomegranate sauce
Cooking Method: grill, bake, chop, crush	Cooking Method: finely chopped, roasted, chopped, grilled, pureed, mashed
Flavour Profile: smoky, creamy, tangy, chunky	Flavour Profile: smoked

Providing a more informative flavour profile will help the target audience to have a better choice with a better understanding. Smoked is highlighted, but that is not enough for the target audience to decipher the exact difference between Mutabal and Baba Ghanouj. Stating the texture and additional flavour adjectives would help the target audience more.

Data 4: Falfel

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Falfel	Translated Name: Falafel
Ingredients: chickpeas, fava beans, parsley, cilantro, dill, onion, garlic, Middle Eastern spices, flour	Ingredients: chickpeas, herbs, spices, broad beans, onions, garlic, coriander, spring onion
Cooking Method: deep fried, baked	Cooking Method: deep-fried
Flavour Profile: savoury, herby, nutty	Flavour Profile: -

Falafel is described as a famous Levantine dish that originates from Egypt. It is a deep-fried ball that is herbal and nutty. One thing that all the menus did not do was to provide any indication of their flavour. This could be attributed to the dish's global popularity, and so which explains why an extensive description of the dish was not provided. Having assumptions about the target audience's knowledge of cultural food items could be harmful, as the establishments did not provide an accurate portrayal of the food. This might alter the choices that the target audience makes, and further encourage reluctance in the target audience when it comes to experiencing cultural dishes.

Data 5: Bamia

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Bamia	Translated Name: Okra, Bamia, Ladies Finger
Ingredients: Okra, tomatoes, onion, garlic, coriander, lemon juice, coriander powder, olive oil	Ingredients: okra/ladies finger, tomato, garlic, coriander, chillies, spices, tomato paste
Cooking Method: simmer	Cooking Method: simmer, high temperature
Flavour Profile: savory, tangy, thick, sweet, and sour	Flavour Profile: sour

Bamia is a hearty and flavourful Middle Eastern stew, mainly composed of Okra, tomatoes, and meat. As Bamia, in Arabic, means 'lady fingers', it is important to provide more context to the target audience. Adding the word 'stew' to the name of the food will help the target audience get a general idea of what the dish is, whereas leaving the name as it is may allow the target audience to easily overlook this cuisine. Another component that could have been elaborated on more is the flavour profile. Simply describing it as sour will not do the dish justice, as the term sour presents itself in many different dimensions. Using other adjectives like tangy, warm, spiced, or savoury will help boost the dishes' acceptability among the target audience, as they can then associate it with what they are familiar with.

Data 6: Saltah

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Saltah	Translated Name: Salta, Saltah
Ingredients: Lamb/Chicken, onion, garlic, spices, tomatoes, fenugreek paste, cumin, coriander, olive oil, Yemeni Hawayji spice blend, maraq, hilbeh	Ingredients: potatoes, rice, lamb, eggs, gravy, vegetables, herbs, onions, tomato, peppers
Cooking Method: simmer, claypot	Cooking Method: claypot
Flavour Profile: aromatic, savory, warm	Flavour Profile: spicy

Next is Saltah, considered the national dish of Yemen, a hearty stew consisting of a meat broth base (maraq) and a fenugreek condiment (hilbeh). Though the list of ingredients provided is extensive, the main ingredients that make Saltah unique are missing. There are no mentions of fenugreek and

Yemeni spices across all menus, which diminishes the selling point of the dish. The target audience might view Saltah as just another typical stew and overlook it on the menu. The lack of a variety of adjectives used to describe the flavour profile is also astonishing and does not effectively highlight the special ingredients (fenugreek) in the dish. Using ‘spicy’ by itself is insufficient to provide the target audience with a clear understanding of the dish. More adjectives must be utilised to describe the cuisine clearly.

Data 7: Fattoush

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Fattoush	Translated Name: Fattoush, Fattoush Salad, Fatush
Ingredients: Romaine lettuce, tomato, Persian cucumber, bell pepper, radish, green onion, parsley, olive oil, sumac, garlic, pomegranate molasses, dried mint, seasoning, pita, lime	Ingredients: Romaine lettuce, cucumber, tomato, black olives, toasted bread, pomegranate sauce, lemon juice, olive oil, pita, radish, parsley, bread
Cooking Method: chopped, toasted (bread)	Cooking Method: marinated, fried (for bread)
Flavour Profile: fresh, herbaceous, crunchy, tangy, balanced	Flavour Profile: refreshing, crunchy, light, tangy

Fattoush is a Levantine Salad and is described as a simple, chopped salad laced with a zesty lime dressing. Herbaceous is not mentioned in the TL description, which is an important clarifying dimension for the target audience. Some may enjoy herbaceous food, while others may not, so identifying the relevant adjectives to properly describe the dish is extremely important, allowing the target audience to make informed choices when attempting to enjoy cultural cuisine.

Data 8: Kibbeh

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Kibbeh	Translated Name: Fried Kubba, Grilled/Fried Kibbeh, Fried Lamb Kubba, Kubba Trabolseya
Ingredients: bulgur, onion, mint leaves, red bell pepper, kibbeh spices, marjoram, pine nuts, minced beef	Ingredients: Beef, bulgur, onion, lamb, pomegranate molasses, capsicum, nuts
Cooking Method: deep fried, baked	Cooking Method: grilled, fried

Flavour Profile: rich, savoury, nutty, tender, juicy, earthy

Kibbeh is considered to be Syria’s National dish and is described as a dish that consists of bulgur wheat and meat, generally shaped as a ball, and can be cooked/served in various ways. Similar to Baba Ghanouj, this dish was void of any adjectives that detail the flavour of the Kibbeh. Without it, the target audience cannot grasp what Kibbeh is, nor how the ingredients come together to create a wonderful dish. What flavour is dominant in the dish is also worth mentioning. These issues could be addressed to ensure a more comprehensive and seamless dining experience for the target audience.

Data 9: Tabbouleh

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Tabbouleh	Translated Name: Tabouleh, Tabulah, Tabbouleh, Tabboulah
Ingredients: bulgur, parsley, scallion, mint leaves, tomato, olive oil, lemon juice, seasoning	Ingredients: parsley, tomato, mint, bulgur, onion, olive oil, lemon juice, cucumber, wheat groats, spices
Cooking Method: chopped	Cooking Method: chopped, shredded, grained, cracked
Flavour Profile: refreshing, vibrant, herbaceous, citrusy, nutty, balanced	Flavour Profile: refreshing

Tabbouleh is a Levantine salad that primarily consists of parsley, bulgur, mint, onion, tomatoes, and olive oil. It is described as refreshing and herbaceous (parsley, mint). There is a lack of information on the flavour profile of the dish, and key adjectives like ‘herbaceous’ and ‘citrusy’ were not mentioned. With a more precise selection of adjectives, the target audience can better understand the dish.

Data 10: Oqdah

Source Language	Target Language
Name of Food: Oqdah	Translated Name: Akda Chicken/Lamb, Lamb/Chicken Oqda
Ingredients: Chicken, onion, garlic, olive oil, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, paprika, chicken broth, tomatoes	Ingredients: chicken/lamb, potato, onion, garlic, tomato, akda sauce, tomato puree, chili
Cooking Method: baked	Cooking Method: stir-fried
Flavour Profile: exotic, aromatic, warm	Flavour Profile: fragrant

Oqdah is a Yemeni stew that consists of meat, spices, and vegetables. Similar to the previous food items, the inexact flavour profile is used to describe the dish. The word ‘fragrant’ may be easily misunderstood by the target audience. Mentions of the spices used are also unavailable; incorporating the spices is important, as they are one of the main elements in the dish and could also be helpful in identifying the specific flavour profiles associated with the dish.

IV. DISCUSSION

The analysis clearly demonstrates that the choice of translation strategy plays a critical role in ensuring that the target audience accurately understands the intended meaning of menu items. This is particularly important in the context of food, which is deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of its origin. Effective translation, therefore, not only communicates information but also serves as a medium for cultural transmission. In the initial part of the analysis, it became evident that many establishments prioritize preserving the original names of dishes using borrowing. This strategy is widely employed as a means of maintaining cultural authenticity and signalling the dish’s ethnic or regional origins. While the use of borrowing is not inherently problematic, it presents challenges when transliterated names lack explanatory context, especially for diners unfamiliar with Middle Eastern cuisine. Relying on assumptions about the audience’s prior cultural knowledge can lead to confusion or misinterpretation, undermining the communicative function of the menu. These results are significant as they demonstrate how menu translation operates not merely as a linguistic exercise, but also as a cultural negotiation. Literal translations, while maintaining lexical fidelity, often fail to capture the socio-cultural nuances of Middle Eastern culinary terms. This supports Venuti’s (1995) argument on the limitations of domestication when cultural resonance is lost and highlights the importance of balancing semantic accuracy with cultural accessibility.

This is where amplification, particularly in the form of componential analysis, becomes essential. By breaking down menu items into key elements, such as ingredients, cooking methods, flavor profiles, and cultural significance, amplification helps bridge the gap between unfamiliar terminology and consumer understanding. It enables

establishments to showcase what makes each dish unique and appealing, thereby supporting informed decision-making and enhancing the overall dining experience. When applied thoughtfully, this technique can encourage consumers to explore a broader range of offerings, particularly those they might otherwise overlook due to unfamiliarity.

However, the qualitative findings reveal that while amplification is present in most menus, its execution is often inconsistent or underdeveloped. Many establishments appear to omit important details, possibly under the assumption that consumers already understand the cultural or culinary significance of the dishes. This results in missed opportunities to inform and engage potential diners. The absence of clear, well-chosen keywords or descriptors for key components can cause uncertainty, leading consumers to default to familiar items rather than exploring the rich diversity of Middle Eastern cuisine. The observed use of transliteration reflects an effort to preserve cultural authenticity, particularly in dish names with no English equivalents. However, this strategy also risks alienating unfamiliar diners, echoing Nida’s (1964) dynamic equivalence principle, which emphasizes the receptor’s understanding as paramount. This suggests that while transliteration supports identity preservation, it may compromise communicative clarity.

The findings of this study reveal that the most frequently employed translation strategies in Middle Eastern menus in Klang Valley include literal translation, transliteration, generalization, and cultural substitution. These results are significant as they demonstrate how menu translation operates not merely as a linguistic exercise, but also as a cultural negotiation. Literal translations, while maintaining lexical fidelity, often fail to capture the socio-cultural nuances of Middle Eastern culinary terms. This supports Venuti’s (1995) argument on the limitations of domestication when cultural resonance is lost and highlights the importance of balancing semantic accuracy with cultural accessibility.

The observed use of transliteration reflects an effort to preserve cultural authenticity, particularly in dish names with no English equivalents. However, this strategy also risks alienating unfamiliar diners, echoing Nida’s (1964) dynamic equivalence principle, which emphasizes the

receptor's understanding as paramount. This suggests that while transliteration supports identity preservation, it may compromise communicative clarity.

Recent studies highlight the complexities of menu translation in multicultural contexts. Effective strategies include description, adaptation, and amplification to enhance readability and appeal (Ekasani & Kesumayathi, 2025). However, simple translation often falls short, necessitating culturally augmented approaches that provide background information and bridge cultural differences (Gallo et al., 2020; Gao, 2019; Komiljonovna, 2019; Setyaningsih, 2020). A corpus-based analysis reveals inconsistencies in the translations of ingredients and cooking methods, suggesting the need for a multimodal approach that incorporates Jakobson's tripartite theory (Li, 2018). In Malaysia, street food name translations predominantly use transliteration, reflecting the country's multicultural nature. Factors influencing translation choices include knowledge, time, and cultural considerations (Zhu et al., 2024). These findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive menu translations in promoting local cuisine and enhancing tourist experiences, while also highlighting the challenges in accurately conveying culinary information across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The results support the applicability of functionalist translation theories in real-world, service-based texts, such as menus. They challenge the overreliance on literal strategies by demonstrating how cultural resonance and functionality are often sacrificed for form. Furthermore, this research is beneficial for practical application; restaurateurs and translators are urged to consider the role of food translation in shaping customer perception. Effective translation can enhance customer satisfaction, brand identity, and even tourism. Bilingual or annotated menus could be a practical solution to bridge comprehension gaps.

The study is limited to a small sample of Middle Eastern restaurants in Klang Valley, which may not represent broader practices across Malaysia or in other ethnic cuisines. Additionally, the study focuses only on the English translations, excluding the perspectives of restaurant staff and customers, which could enrich the analysis. Further

studies could examine how customers interpret translated menu items, potentially using surveys or interviews. Expanding to other cuisines (e.g., Thai, Indian, or Peranakan) or exploring digital menus and food delivery apps would offer valuable comparative insights. Moreover, incorporating semiotic analysis could deepen the understanding of how visual and linguistic elements interact in food presentation and branding.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined the translation strategies used in Middle Eastern restaurant menus across the Klang Valley region of Malaysia, with a specific focus on the effectiveness of these strategies within a multicultural and multilingual context. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including frequency and descriptive analyses, the research identified the dominant use of borrowing, calque, and amplification, and evaluated their effectiveness through componential analysis based on established linguistic frameworks by Vinay and Darbelnet and Nida and Taber. The findings underscore the importance of selecting appropriate translation strategies to enhance consumer understanding, preserve cultural authenticity, and ensure accurate communication. While borrowing is often used to retain cultural identity, it must be complemented by amplification and descriptive techniques to provide clarity for unfamiliar audiences. The analysis also revealed inconsistencies in the use of amplification, suggesting a need for more deliberate and informed application of translation techniques. This research contributes to both theoretical and practical dimensions of translation studies. For the restaurant industry, it underscores the importance of accurate and culturally sensitive menu translations in enhancing the customer experience and gaining a competitive edge. For language professionals, the study points to the need for specialized training in culinary translation. For academic research, it offers a methodological model for future studies examining translation in specific professional domains.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Amin Amirdabbaghian, conceptualizing the idea, collecting the data, analyzing the data, writing and revising the article.

Handoko, writing and revising papers, data analysis, formatting the articles.

Syakirah Rifa'in@Mohd Rifain, collecting the data, drafting and proofreading the article.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in *JournalArbitrer*. The current work does not involve human subjects, animal experiments, or any data collected from social media platforms.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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APPENDICES

No	Name	Link
1	Sihaf Arabic Restaurant	Menu – Sihaf
2	Hadramawt Kitchen Shah Alam	Menu Hadramawt Kitchen
3	Al Sultan Shah Alam	Middle Eastern Cuisine Restaurant Glenmarie, Shah Alam - Al-Sultan Restaurant (alsultanofficial.com)
4	Al Rawsha Restaurant	Menu Shah Alam - Al Rawsha (al rawsha-restaurant.com.my)
5	Bedouin Arab Cuisine	Menu Bedouin TTDI
6	Turkish Cafe Istanbul	Turkish Cafe Istanbul Menu.pdf - Google Drive
7	Chef Ammar	Our Menu - Chef Ammar
8	Arabica Restaurant	Online Flipbook (heyzine.com)
9	Leen's Middle East Kitchen	Leen's Middle East Kitchen (@leens.kl) • Instagram photos and videos
10	Dar Al-Arab Restaurant	Salads Dar Al-Arab Restaurant Menu Arabic Food Delivery Service (daralarab.my)
11	Wadi Hadramawt	Home - Wadi Hadramawat Restaurant (wadihadramawt.com)
12	Qasar Balqis	Qasar Balqis Res. — The best Yemeni and Arabic Restaurant
13	Yahala Restaurant	Yahala Restaurant Menu
14	Saba Restaurant	Saba Restaurant Main Dishes (sabaholdings.com.my)
15	Shamna Restaurant	Shamna Restaurant - Cyberjaya - Shamna Restaurant (alacarte.my)
16	Halab Restaurant	KL Menu – Halab Restaurant
17	Tarbush Restaurant	Menu - tarbush-my.com
18	Damascus	Menu - Damascus
19	Al-Hamra Restaurant	Menu - Alhamra Restaurant
20	Beirut Ts Restaurant	Menu - Beirut Ts Restaurant
21	Taj Hadramawt	Products – TAJ HADRAMAWT
22	Shisha Lounge Bistro	Shisha Lounge Bistro and Cafe Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Cuisine
23	Hadramawt Castle	Menu of Hadramawt Castle
24	Hadramawt	Damansara Menu Hadramawt Restaurant & Catering
25	Lalezar	Menu – Lalezar Restaurant
26	Kabul Darbar	Kabul Darbar BBQ Restaurant SDN. BHD. (1443234-K) B14-1, Batu, 4.5, Jalan Ampang Utama 2/2, One Ampang Avenue, 68000 Ampang, Selangor, Malaysia EasyEat
27	Samad Ali Iraqi Restaurant	Our Menu - Samad Al Iraqi (samad al iraqi restaurant.com.my)
28	Marrakesh Restaurant Malaysia	MENU مرا عطل ا فمى اق (marrakesh restaurant.com)
29	Shako Mako KL	Shako Mako, The Authentic Iraqi cuisine. (shakomakokl.com)
30	Hadramout Tower Restaurant	me-qr.com/mobile/pdf/12021782