There are few jokes that meaningfully translate through English and Chinese.

Rosemary Heng let me in on some of her family secrets. The whole family like laksa. Mum, Dad, her sister and brother, all love laksa.

In the 1990s, in a particularly popular hawker centre in the Singapore suburb of Katong, there was no hawker stall selling laksa, the hearty meal-in-a-soup so beloved of those searching for spicy food. The Heng family were regulars at the hawker centre. They mentioned the lack of laksa to a friend who saw a business opportunity.

He opened a stall selling laksa in the Katong hawker centre. As a newcomer, his stall was not given priority. His stall was near the toilet block but the laksa proved wildly popular. Most other stalls featured an overhead photo of the type of food on offer. But the smiles on the faces of satisfied customers proved sufficient advertisement for the laksa stall.

Inevitably, competition arrived. A hawker centre that once had no stall selling laksa now had six stalls selling laksa.

The original stall installed a tempting photo above the head of the cook of a steaming bowl of laksa.

Incredibly, the competitors took photos of the photo on the original stall and installed them on their own stalls.

The original stallholder installed a sign boldly saying “The original Katong Laksa”.

The next day, the competitors all posted signs (some in capital letters) saying “The original Katong Laksa”!

So the average hungry Singaporean looking for the original laksa faced a dilemma. But that problem was not a concern for the Heng family. They knew the original stall!

The only problem that arose was because Rosemary knew a different stall from her parents and her siblings knew a different stall from her!