

Translingual journey of English words and methodological suggestions

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Crepe, pancake or jianbing (煎饼)

Introduction

The English language freely borrows words from many languages; this is a process which has been well documented by several studies, particularly in the field of contact linguistics. However, an investigation into the massive influence that the widespread, popular, and global use of the Internet has had on the development of language calls for consistent and frequent empirical enquiry. The rapid growth in the number and diversity of Internet users from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the increasing popularity and influence of Asian cultures and languages on the English language, is currently occurring at an unprecedented level. This study employs several data collection methods to demonstrate the arbitrary transnational journey of a few selected culinary terms that showcase the flexible adaptation and creation processes through which these new additions to the English language have passed. We do this by using two common culinary terms, both of which have been adapted to describe Asian dishes, as an example.

Classifications of lexical borrowing processes are still controversial and there is no widespread consensus on the matter. There are several existing methods of classifying how such complicated borrowing processes should be categorized and investigated. For example, Haugen (1950) categorized types of borrowing into four distinct groups – ‘loan words’, ‘loan translations (calque)’, ‘loan blends’ and ‘hybridization’ – while Weinreich



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(1953) classified types of lexical borrowing into three categories: 'loan words', 'loan blends' and 'loan shifts'. Arguably, these two studies can be considered as some of the most influential frameworks in contemporary studies of lexical borrowing. Furthermore, both studies establish similar distinctions between loanwords and loan translations (*calque*). A loan word generally refers to a word which is not translated, e.g., *café* in the English language, borrowed from the donor language French. Loan words are also usually classified in terms of the method of adaptation such as transliterated loans and semantic loans, while the loan translation (*calque*) process refers to a word or phrase which is borrowed from another language by translation, often a word for word or root for root translation. In a broad sense, this study will demonstrate the dynamic lexical borrowing processes of 'loan' and the '*calque*' of English words which have been adopted from Asian languages. More specifically, we will only investigate 'transliterated loan' and 'translation (*calque*)' in response to the influence of the Internet and social media, their diverse users, and the popular influence of Asian cultures.

The recent popularity of the Chinese dish 煎饼 (*jianbing*) and the common English-language label *Chinese crepes* provides an excellent example of people's arbitrary choices of processes in choosing either to 'transliterate' or to 'loan translate' when borrowing words to describe new items in English. The culinary use of the word *crêpe* (or *crepe*), according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), dates back to 1877 and is defined as 'a small, thin pancake', originating from the French word, *crêpe* (OED, 2021). The OED definition lists usage examples mainly within a French culinary context (that is, *crepe suzette*, 'a pancake

served in a hot sauce, often containing a liqueur'), which seems unchanged between the given years of 1877 and 1961. The term *pancake* entered the English Language in 1400, originating from a medico-botanical glossary; it is defined as 'a thin flat cake of batter, fried on both sides in a pan' (OED, 2021). The OED also states differences between the two types of pancakes in Britain and North America. In Britain, the pancake is made 'without a raising agent, and similar to a *crêpe*'; in North America [it is] made with a raising agent, and similar to a drop scone or [a] Scotch pancake'. Given the solid Anglophone usage of these two terms, with dictionary examples referring only to food items originating in Western Europe and North America, it is interesting to see how *crepe* and *pancakes* have come to denote Asian dishes such as *Chinese crepe*, *Chinese pancake*, or *Chinese duck pancake*.

Methods

Various data collection and analysis methods, both qualitative and quantitative, have been utilized in this study. Incorporating several data collection methods is necessary to vividly capture the reality of the fast changing as well as rapidly increasing number of English words appearing in the English lexis. These words originate as a product of the enormous influence of the Internet and social media platforms and the increasing number of English speakers using them who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is hoped that this study will also showcase the usefulness of several data collection methods for future researchers in their study of new words in the English language.

Qualitative data collection

Firstly, a traditional method employed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), the linguistic landscape approach, has been adopted as part of this study. This approach has been popularly employed in studies of World Englishes (Lawrence, 2012). The language used on commercial shop signs in Chinatown were examined and photographed as part of our fieldwork, focusing on restaurant signage and menus as this study focuses on culinary terms. The photos were taken on 5th November, 2019.

Secondly, a 'virtual' linguistic landscape approach was also used by examining social media posts on Instagram and Twitter to investigate the contextual usages of such terms. This involved searching for hashtags of the chosen words on the aforementioned sites and taking screenshots of the posts in full.

Twitter and Instagram are two of the most ubiquitous and popular platforms on the World Wide Web and have a huge appeal to users, with instant global impact. However, with Twitter's length limiting format, encouraging brevity and spontaneity, and Instagram's visual element, encouraging users to craft and present a certain image of themselves to the outside world, the two sites gave similar yet nuanced sets of data with regard to the intention of the user. Although these two social media platforms provided good examples of the use of the chosen terms by real-world users as well as the evidence needed to back up the findings presented in other online databases, this data was largely limited by the inability to see huge numbers of posts from a wide variety of dates at any one time. Instead, researchers had to scroll down through posts ordered by popularity, recency of publication, or a combination thereof. This meant that the data found on social media was regarded as qualitative data that can work as the back-up of the quantitative data such as data from a corpus.

Thirdly, Google Image Search was used to investigate the images that matched the terms being discussed, as this may function as a potential pathway for the fast and effective promotion of the given words to people who were not aware of or less familiar with these terms. Although this research is limited in its scope by not being able to comprehensively address people's reasons for using these terms via Google Image Search, nevertheless, it is widely believed that people would use Google Image Search to find out what such an item is or what it looks like, especially when coming across a new food item.

Quantitative data collection

Firstly, Google Trends was utilized to demonstrate the popularity of search trends and the geographical distribution of searches, with the scope set to 'worldwide'. This program can focus on one region (or be set to 'worldwide') and search for one or many terms, creating a graphic comparison of the frequency of searches for a number of terms. This study includes, within the results, a regional breakdown which demonstrates in which regions searches for the terms were more popular. The search period for this research was set from 2004 to the present (this study was conducted in late 2019). It is also to be noted that Google Trends only came into existence in 2004.

To add quantitative data to the study, the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) was also examined. The GloWbE was released in 2013 with

data collected from 2012 and 2013 and contains about 1.9 billion words of text from 20 different countries. The texts in the corpus consist of informal blogs (about 60% of corpus) and other web-based materials such as newspapers, magazines, and company websites.

Finally, a brief online survey followed to investigate the opinions of L1 and L2 English speaking Internet users from various locations and backgrounds. The survey in question contained 20 questions asking the respondents' opinions on their perceived origins of various global foodstuffs and their names, such as dumplings, noodles, pancakes/crepes, and tea. This survey was conceived as part of a broader project concerning the origins of various food words conducted by the authors. Jieun Kiaer's 2021 work *Delicious Words* is the prime output of said wider project, in which the etymological origins of East Asian food words in English-speaking countries are investigated, explained, and placed within their new contexts. The questions in the survey drew on the learnings from this wider project in order to narrow the scope of investigation for the present study. The survey was constructed using Google Forms and was disseminated to volunteers following advertisement on social media channels, including Facebook and Twitter. The survey received 297 responses and the majority of respondents (i.e., 161) were of British origin living in urban areas of the UK while others were from countries and regions as diverse as Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, France, Italy and Lithuania. All of those surveyed spoke English as either a first or second language, with roughly two thirds speaking multiple languages to at least a beginner level. As shown in Table 1, the age demographic was relatively varied.

Table 1: Demographics of participants

Age	N (%)
11–20	82 (27.4)
21–30	94 (31.5)
31–40	18 (6.2)
41–50	35 (11.6)
51–60	60 (20.3)
61–70	6 (2.1)
71–80	2 (0.8)
Total	297 (100%)

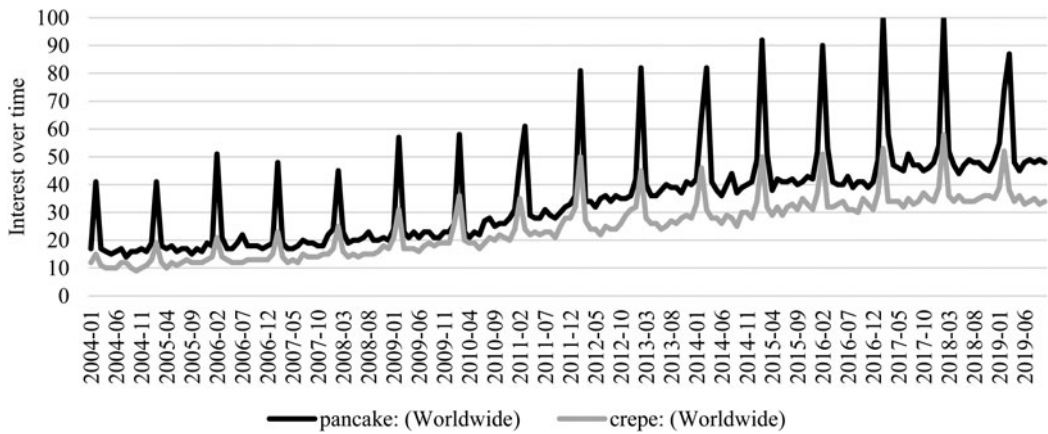


Figure 1. Google Trends results for *pancake* and *crepe*, worldwide, 2004–present

Results

Primarily, these results show the flexible adaption and increasingly popular use of the words *pancake* and *crepe* in various regions, followed by the specific uses of these the words as included in the terms *Chinese pancake*, *Chinese crepe* and *Chinese duck pancake*.

The fluidity of pancake and crepe

The words *pancake* and *crepe* are common terms that, as seen in the Google Trends results below in Figure 1, are becoming increasingly popular worldwide. Since Google Trends does not show the frequencies for these words, a GloWbE comparison was conducted and it was found that the overall frequency of the word *pancake* was 2,675 compared to 990 for *crepe*, suggesting that the term *pancake* was a lot more popular worldwide (See Table 2). The GloWbE result also suggests that both terms are frequently used in Asian regions such as Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, and Hong Kong.

In addition to the quantitative results, to determine the usage of these two terms, qualitative investigations were conducted on Twitter and Instagram. Searching for #pancake in English-language posts on both Twitter and Instagram brings up posts referring to various forms of pancakes originating in a whole host of different cuisines, including American, Dutch, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Whilst the same search for #crepe results in slightly fewer posts, the word was still used within an equally wide range of cuisines and contexts. For example, the Tweet below says, ‘I have been watching a ton of Chinese street food videos lately and I don’t know what it’s called but

Table 2: GloWbE results for *pancake* and *crepe* in various regions

	pancake	crepe
SECTION	FREQ	FREQ
ALL	2675	990
US	540	130
Canada	254	101
Great Britain	429	144
Ireland	133	44
Australia	251	74
New Zealand	157	32
India	76	45
Sri Lanka	83	35
Pakistan	11	17
Bangladesh	30	4
Singapore	186	68
Malaysia	152	102
Philippines	110	64
Hong Kong	70	49
South Africa	44	22
Nigeria	24	3
Ghana	20	9
Kenya	25	5
Tanzania	32	31
Jamaica	48	11



Figure 2. Tweet

there's [sic]¹ like this. Savory crepe with eggs and veggies in that . . . ' This blog post vividly showcases how easily Internet users, who are not necessarily experts in Chinese food, can access these cultural items and introduce these items to others, adapting the familiar term *crepe* to explain an unfamiliar item. This also demonstrates how words are being adapted in new culinary contexts, facilitated by the linguistic freedom of social media.

There was also a variety of spellings and contexts found for the term *crepe* on social media. For example, on Instagram, whilst #crepes was by far the most popular version (with almost 1.9 million posts), #crêpes (18,389 posts) was also common, despite the fact that the original French

term is spelled *crêpe*. The high usage rate of #crêpes, mostly in the English language, shows the variety of spellings permitted online, demonstrating how incorrect grammar is not an issue in the casual fora of social media sites. The Instagram post shown below in Figure 3 shows both *crêpes* and *crêpe* appearing in the same post.

Posts featuring accent marks (i.e., *crêpe/crêpe*) were most commonly used by restaurants, cafes, and companies advertising food products. The use of accents is frequently harnessed as a marketing tool and is intended to convey authenticity. The same is also true for loan words used in a second foreign culinary context such as the more authentic French-looking spelling of *crêpe/crêpe* being utilized to describe East Asian foods. This suggests that accents from an entirely different language can indicate authenticity, demonstrating how authenticity within a particular cuisine is conflated with authenticity in general and that lexicon and orthography play an important role in this process. Furthermore, French terms generally have connotations of sophistication and excellence, particularly with regards to cuisine. Hence, we can argue that using the term *crepe* to introduce a new Asian food trend to the West is also an attempt to utilize French as an indicator of exoticism as well as sophistication. This certainly ties in with the



Figure 3. Instagram post



Option 1 (61.8%)



Option 2 (2.9%)



Option 3 (33.2%)



Option 4 (1.8%)



Option 5 (1.4%)

Figure 4. Survey options for the question: ‘Which image do you associate the most with the word *pancake*?’

common use of French in Asian brand names and restaurants to imply a trendy or sophisticated atmosphere.

While it is popular to adopt the term *pancake* in the English language (as shown by the existence of #chinese pancake, #korean pancake, and #vietnamese pancake) on Instagram and Twitter, it is clear that the term is still predominantly thought of as being Euro-American at heart. In the survey, when provided with images of five different kinds of pancakes, the majority of respondents (61.8%) selected Option 1 (American-style pancakes), with a further 33.2% selecting Option 3 (French crepes) (see Figure 4). This demonstrates that, whilst *pancake* is readily used to describe Asian

foods (e.g., Chinese duck pancakes), it is still thought of primarily as a Euro-American word.

Flexible use of Chinese pancake, Chinese crepe & Chinese duck pancake

Linguistic landscape of London’s Chinatown

In London’s Chinatown, one can easily see numerous signs advertising *jianbing* (煎饼, a popular Chinese breakfast/snack dish) as *Chinese crepes* (see Figure 5). One could suggest that the term, *Chinese crepe*, a translated version of the Chinese food item, is more popularly used than the transliterated version, *jianbing*, as it has only recently become a culinary trend in Western cities. However, the fact that many people choose to use



Figure 5. Restaurant menus for *jianbing* in London’s Chinatown



Figure 6. Chinese *jianbing* being made

the French term rather than the traditional English *pancake* deserves further exploration. Whilst the word *crepe* is firmly embedded in the English lexicon, it is clear that the English term *pancake*, originating in approximately 1400, is certainly a more native-sounding term, hence it is curious that a term with mainland European connotations should come to define an Asian food item. From a culinary perspective, the term *crepe* probably better describes a *jianbing* as it is cooked on large round cast iron plate much like a traditional French crepe and often uses similar utensils (see Figure 6). The term *crepe* is also useful in distinguishing *jianbing* from the thicker rolled scallion pancakes (葱油餅, *cōng yóubīng*), or the thin wheat flour pancakes westerners have come to associate with Chinese roast duck.

Google Image Search: What do they look like?

Google Image Search suggests that the terms *Chinese pancake* and *Chinese crepe* coexist at a

similar level of usage, but the Google search results for *Chinese crepe*, *Chinese pancake*, and *Chinese duck pancake* reveals a reference to different items. While *Chinese crepe* seems to refer to a ‘rolled’ or ‘folded’ type of food with a somewhat ‘thinner’ crust (see Figure 7), *Chinese pancake* shows slightly thicker crusted food that is cut into pieces like a pizza (See Figure 8). However, *Chinese duck pancake* looks more like a *Chinese crepe* with the following ingredients: pieces of marinated duck and vegetables rolled within its thin wrapper (See Figure 9). Google Image Search shows the inconsistent adaptation of *pancake* and *crepe* when they are borrowed.

Google Trends: Search trends for these terms

Despite the common translation of Chinese *jianbing* as *crepes* in English, the transliterated term *jianbing* seems to be gaining popularity online as shown in Figure 10. A comparison of the terms *Chinese pancake*, *Chinese crepe* and *jianbing* on Google Trends initially suggests that *Chinese pancake* is by far the most popular. This is because Chinese pancakes are being understood as either scallion pancakes or the wheat pancakes traditionally eaten with roast duck – two of the most well recognized Chinese dishes in the English-speaking West. However, the increase in searches for the term *jianbing* since 2015, as can be seen in Figure 10, suggests that the item itself has become more popular in food trends, thus indicating that transliterated Mandarin Chinese terms have become more common over the past few years, most likely due to an increased awareness of international foods on social media. In Figure 10, numbers on the vertical axis represent search interest relative to the highest point on the

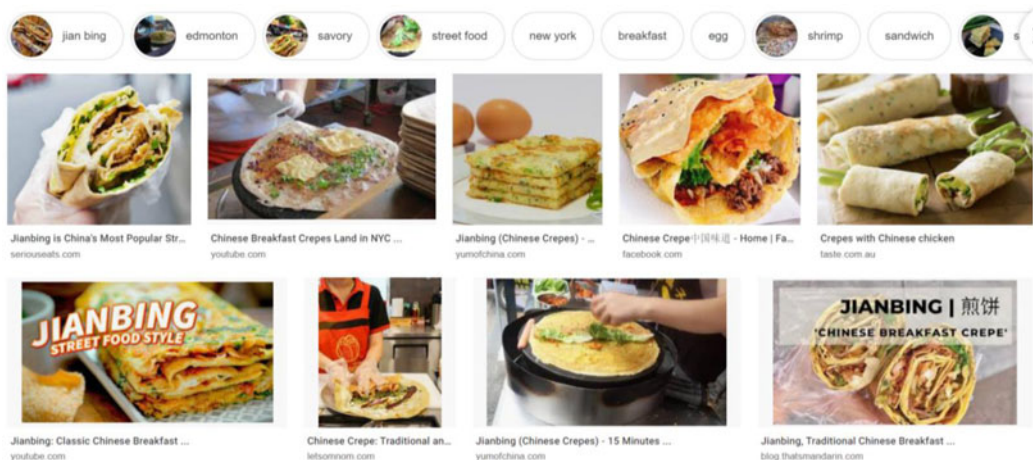


Figure 7. Google Image Search results for *Chinese crepe* (accessed on 21st November 2019)

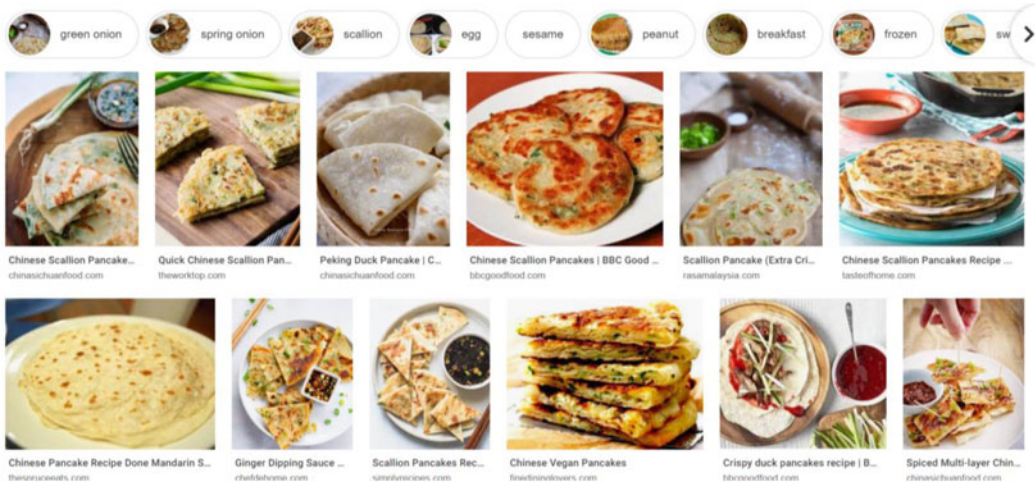


Figure 8. Google Image Search results for *Chinese pancake* (accessed on 21st November 2019)

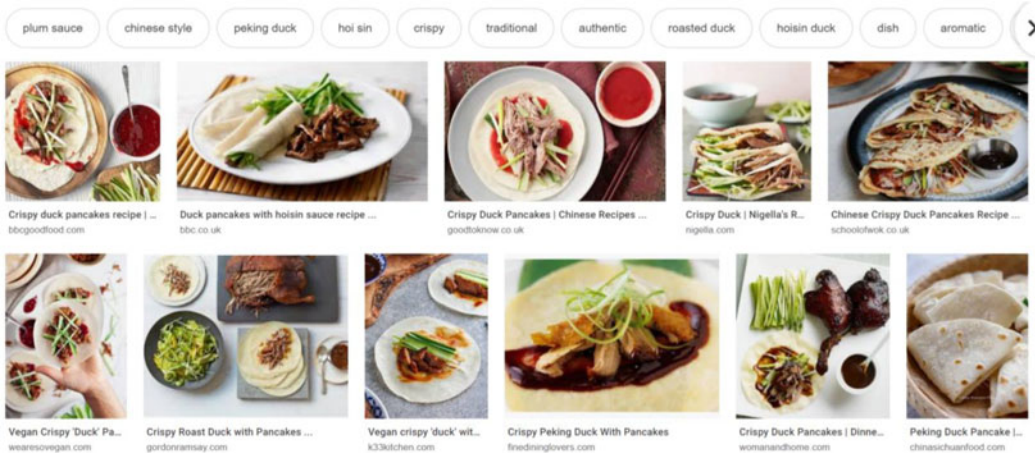


Figure 9. Google Image Search results for *Chinese duck pancake* (accessed on 21st November 2019)

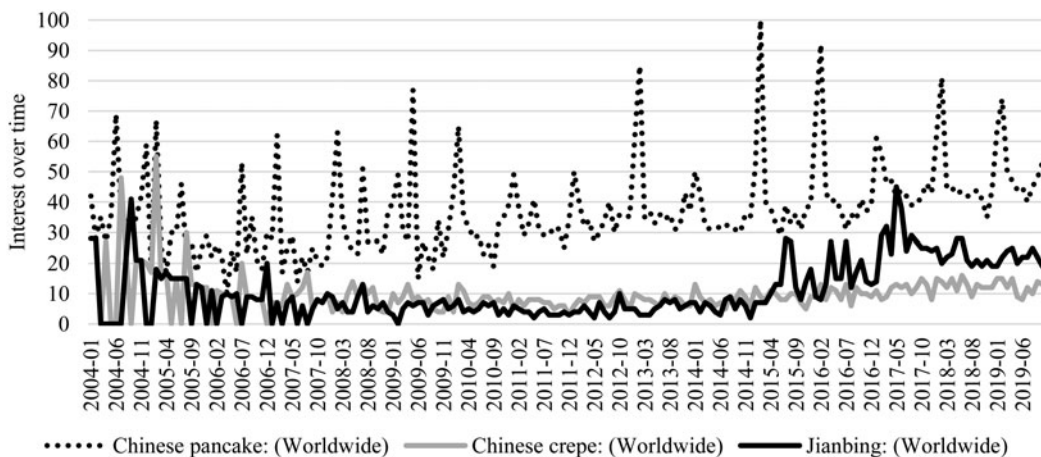


Figure 10. Google trends results for *Chinese pancake*, *Chinese crepe* and *jianbing*, worldwide, 2004–present

chart for the given region and time. Values were calculated on a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 is the location with the most popularity as a fraction of total searches in that location. A value of 50 indicates a location which is half as popular and a value of 0 indicates a location where there was not enough data for the given term. In addition, *Chinese pancake* was the most popularly searched term in Malaysia, New Zealand, the UK, Singapore and Hong Kong, while *Chinese crepe* was the most widely searched term in Canada, the US, Australia, the UK and Singapore. The term *jianbing* was the most popular search term in China, Norway, Denmark, Germany and Mexico.

Conclusion

In this article, words related to *pancake* and *crepe* are discussed by incorporating several data collection methods to showcase the arbitrary and flexible choices of English language users in deciding between translation (i.e., crepe, pancake) and transliteration (i.e., *jianbing*) to refer to Asian-type dishes online. While the French origin term *crepe* has been frequently used to denote an Asian-style dish, probably to create an air of exoticism and sophistication (particularly when used with accents) the increased use of the transliterated *jianbing* is noted. This trend has most likely been accelerated by the ease of access to social media which has increased people's familiarity with the native names for Chinese food. This also showcases how the freedom of the Internet is allowing users to either transliterate or translate at will, resulting in new

words from Asian languages being easily and more popularly used by English speakers. In addition, even though both the terms *crepe* and *pancake* were used both on social media and by survey respondents to refer to Asian dishes, the evidence taken from the social media posts and the results of the survey demonstrate that the origins of dishes referred to as 'crepes' and 'pancakes' are considered to be grounded in Western dishes. This shows that there is a continued hybridity in how users apply words in different situations, with social media enabling users to adapt and use words simultaneously in varying global contexts.

Notes

1 Indicates incorrect spelling in the source material

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