

Loanword Usage in Indonesian Culinary Naming: A Morphological and Anthropological Perspective

Nurilam Harianja¹, Robert Sibarani², Gustianingsih³, Mahriyuni⁴

nurilam@unimed.ac.id¹, rs.sibarani@usu.ac.id², gusti_ningsih@yahoo.com³

Departments of French Language, Faculty of Language and Art, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia¹,
Department of Linguistics Postgraduate Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Sumatera Utara,
Indonesia², Department of Linguistics Postgraduate Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas
Sumatera Utara, Indonesia³

Abstract. The phenomenon of loanwords in menu naming demonstrates an interaction between local and foreign languages, along with the accompanying social and cultural values. This study aims to analyze the morphological forms of loanwords used in Indonesian food menu naming and examine their anthropological implications. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a linguistic (morphological) and language anthropology (anthropological) approach. The data were collected from menu documentation of restaurants, street food stalls, and cafés in Medan. The analysis was conducted through the identification of morphological processes (phonological adaptation, affixation, compounding, and clipping) and anthropological interpretation (identity, cultural hybridization, branding strategies, and social relations). The results reveal that loanwords in food menu naming are not merely linguistic adaptations but also carry socio-cultural meanings that reinforce global-local identity as well as creative economic practices.

Keywords: Loanwords; Foodnaming; Morphology; Anthropological; Indonesian Culinary

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Indonesian cuisine holds a significant position as part of the nation's intangible cultural heritage, carrying historical, social, and economic values. Beyond mere biological consumption, food functions as a cultural text that encodes collective identity, social relations, and symbolic meanings [1-2]. In the context of menu naming, the phenomenon of loanwords plays an important role as it represents linguistic and cultural contact that has occurred from the past through the present era of globalization.

Loanwords in Indonesian food naming originate from various languages, such as:

Dutch: *bistik* (from *biefstuk*), *sisis* (from *saucijs*), *soes* → *sus*

Arabic: *kebab*, *kebuli*

Chinese (Hokkien): *bakmi* (*bak* = meat, *mi* = noodles), *capcay* (*shap cai* = assorted vegetables)

French: *croissant* → *kroisan*, *soufflé*

English: *steak*, *burger*, *sandwich*

These borrowings reflect a long history of cultural encounters, migration, trade, colonialism, and modern influences. Linguistically, such interactions have generated new lexical forms adapted to the morphological system of the Indonesian language. Anthropologically, food naming serves as a reflection of identity, social status, and strategies of cultural commodification.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the morphological forms of loanwords used in Indonesian food menu naming?
2. How can the use of these loanwords be examined anthropologically within social and cultural contexts?

1.3 Research Objectives

3. To describe the morphological processes of loanwords used in Indonesian food naming.
4. To analyze the socio-cultural functions of loanwords in food naming from an anthropological perspective.

1.4 Literature Review

- Morphological Studies: emphasizes the importance of morphological adaptation in loanwords [3].
- Cuisine as Cultural Text: Barthes (1961) argues that food is a system of communication.
- Anthropology: Sibarani (2018) asserts that language is a primary medium of cultural values.
- Previous Studies: discusses loanwords in Javanese culinary naming [4], while explores culinary branding practices, although neither study extensively integrates morphology with anthropology [5].

1.5 Contribution of the Study

This article contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by bridging linguistic morphology and anthropology to understand culinary practices as complex socio-cultural phenomena.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using a morphological linguistic and anthropological approach.

2.2 Data and Data Sources

Data: Food menus from traditional and modern restaurants in Medan.

Sources of Data: Documentation and interviews.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

1. Collecting menu names that contain loanwords.
2. Classifying them based on their language of origin (Dutch, Arabic, Chinese, French, English).
3. Conducting brief interviews with culinary business owners regarding the reasons behind their menu naming choices.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

1. Morphological Analysis: Identifying processes such as phonological adaptation, affixation, compounding, and clipping.
2. Anthropological Analysis: Interpreting social meanings, identity markers, cultural hybridization, and branding strategies.
3. Data Triangulation: Validating findings through comparison with literature and field observations.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Morphological Analysis of Loanwords in Indonesian Food Menu Naming

The phenomenon of lexical borrowing in Indonesian food naming reflects an intensive interaction between local and foreign languages resulting from historical processes such as colonialism, trade, migration, and globalization. Borrowing can be classified into three forms: loanwords (direct borrowing), loanblends (a combination of borrowed and native elements), and loanshifts (semantic shifts where foreign terms are adopted into new local meanings) [6]. Meanwhile, Sudaryanto (1993) and [7] argue that borrowed words are not merely transferred phonetically but undergo morphological adaptation to conform to the rules of the receiving language.

Based on food naming data collected in Medan, four dominant morphological processes were identified in the formation of loanwords: phonological adaptation, affixation, compounding, and clipping.

Phonological Adaptation. Phonological adaptation refers to the process by which foreign words are modified to fit the phonetic system of Indonesian. Notes that this often involves the simplification of consonant clusters, the replacement of foreign vowels with local equivalents, and the restructuring of syllables to fit the common CV (consonant–vowel) pattern [8].

Table 1. Phonological Adaptation

Original Form (Source Language)	Borrowed Form	Adaptation Process	Menu Example
<i>biefstuk</i> (Dutch)	<i>Bistik</i>	Final consonant /f/ → /p/; cluster /efst/ simplified	<i>bistik</i> <i>Jawa</i>
<i>soes</i> (Dutch)	<i>Sus</i>	Vowel /oe/ → /u/	<i>kue sus</i>

<i>croissant</i> (French)	<i>Kroisan</i>	Adaptation of /oi/ sound and deletion of nasal ending	<i>kroisan</i> <i>cokelat</i>
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This process is not merely linguistic but reflects a cultural domestication of foreign terms to make them feel *familiar* within the Indonesian soundscape.

Affixation. Affixation in borrowed terms indicates that foreign words have been fully integrated into Indonesian lexical productivity. As Chaer (2008) suggests, affixation demonstrates a high degree of linguistic assimilation.

Examples include:

burger → *burgeran* (“place selling burgers,” used in street food context)

sisis → *sisisan* (regional variation referring to processed sausage dishes)

steak → *setekan* (colloquial form for a small portion of steak)

These forms reflect linguistic creativity in *indigenizing* foreign terms through the morphological flexibility of the Indonesian language.

Compounding (Loanblend Formation). Compounding involves combining loanwords with Indonesian or local lexical elements. According to Haugen (1950), such hybrids belong to the category of *loanblends*, where foreign lexical material is structurally incorporated into the host language.

Table 2. Loanblends

Compound Form	Type of Combination	Menu Example
<i>nasi + kebuli</i>	Local noun + Arabic loanword	<i>nasi kebuli ayam</i>
<i>bak + mi + ayam</i>	Hokkien loanwords + local word	<i>bakmi ayam spesial</i>
<i>martabak + manis</i>	Arabic loanword + Indonesian adjective	<i>martabak manis cokelat</i>

Rather than replacing local language, borrowing in this form coexists and collaborates, producing hybrid culinary identities.

Clipping. Clipping occurs when longer foreign terms are shortened for ease of communication. In culinary contexts, clipping also serves branding purposes, making menu names more memorable.

Examples include:

spaghetti bolognese → *spageti bolo*

cappuccino → *capcu*

chocolate → *cokelat / coklat*

As Kridalaksana (2013) notes, clipping indicates that the borrowed word is already perceived as *owned* by local speakers, allowing informal modification.

3.1.1 Theoretical Synthesis.

These four morphological patterns demonstrate that culinary borrowing in Indonesia is not passive imitation but an active process of creative adaptation. This aligns with Haugen’s (1950) concept of *double adaptation*, wherein the receiving language not only adopts foreign elements but compels them to conform to its internal structure. Thus, loanwords in Indonesian food menu naming should not be viewed as linguistic colonization by foreign languages, but rather as linguistic negotiation that reflects the cultural agency of the receiving community.

3.2 Anthropological Analysis of Loanwords in Indonesian Food Menu Naming

The anthropological approach positions language as a medium for transmitting cultural values (Sibarani, 2018) and as a tool for representing social identity [9]. In the culinary context, Roland Barthes (1961) asserts that food is not merely an object of biological consumption but rather “*a system of communication that conveys social and symbolic messages.*” Accordingly, food menu naming—particularly those containing loanwords can be interpreted as a cultural text embedded with ideology, status, and identity.

An analysis of menu names collected in Medan such as *bistik Jawa*, *nasi kebuli ayam*, *bakmi ayam*, *martabak manis*, *kroisan coklat*, and *burger crispy* reveals that the use of loanwords is never neutral. Each term carries specific cultural associations understood by consumers. Through the anthropological lens, four key dimensions of meaning can be identified:

Food as Cultural Text and Status Marker (Barthes, 1961). According to Barthes, food carries two levels of meaning: *denotative* (the literal type of food) and *connotative* (its social value). For example:

Table 3. Two levels of meaning

Menu Name	Denotative Layer	Connotative / Ideological Layer
<i>steak sapi lada hitam</i>	Grilled beef dish	Modernity, middle-to-upper class status, Western lifestyle
<i>latte macchiato</i>	Espresso-based milk drink	Urban sophistication, intellectual coffee culture, European café lifestyle
<i>bistik Jawa</i>	Localized version of steak	Negotiation between colonial and local culture; cultural reappropriation by the people

Thus, menu naming does not merely indicate *what is eaten*, but also *who eats it and within which social context*.

Culinary Language as Collective Identity (Sibarani, 2018; Duranti, 1997). Sibarani (2018) emphasizes that language functions as intangible cultural heritage carrying *local wisdom*. In food names such as *bakmi ayam*, *nasi kebuli*, and *martabak manis*, loanwords are not removed but *preserved* as a tribute to the historical legacy of Chinese and Arab communities in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Duranti (1997) describes culinary language as part of “*identity performance*,” whereby a group expresses its existence through food terminology. For example:

A food stall using the label “*Kebab Turki Asli*” aims to assert ethnic authenticity even if the product has been fully localized.

Conversely, street vendors naming their product “*burger abang-abang*” reflect a localized reinterpretation of a Western dish, proudly asserting a *local alternative to global standards*.

Loanwords as Branding Strategy and Symbolic Capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Within Bourdieu's framework of symbolic capital, loanwords serve as instruments of social differentiation. Restaurants targeting middle-to-upper-class consumers tend to employ fully foreign terminology such as: "*Grilled Beef Steak with Mushroom Sauce*" or "*Choco Lava Cake*."

Meanwhile, small vendors and traditional eateries prefer hybrid forms such as: "*nasi kebuli ayam goreng*," "*spageti goreng pedas*," "*kroisan isi srikaya*." Foreign terminology becomes a marker of prestige, while hybrid forms function as strategies of cultural inclusion.

Loanwords as Cultural Hybridization [11]. Examples such as:

nasi kebuli ayam bakar madu (Arabic + local)
burger rendang (English + Minangkabau)
martabak manis topping keju kacang (Arabic + Dutch + local)

illustrate cultural hybridization, namely the fusion of global and local elements into new culinary identities. This is not passive imitation, but rather a *creative negotiation* by Indonesian society in constructing an inclusive national culinary identity.

Loanwords as Symbolic Capital and Branding Strategy. Within Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) framework, every social practice can be interpreted through the concept of *symbolic capital*—that is, the prestige value attached to a cultural symbol or marker. In the context of food menu naming, loanwords from foreign languages (particularly English, French, or Dutch) are often employed not merely for linguistic necessity, but for their ideological and commercial functions.

Menu labels such as "*Chicken Steak Blackpepper Sauce*," "*Macchiato Caramel*," or "*Choco Lava Cake*" do more than describe food ingredients; they construct an image of modernity, urban sophistication, and class distinction. Consumers are not simply *purchasing food*, but are also *consuming identity and prestige* associated with it. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of *distinction*, which refers to differentiated consumption styles across social classes, expressed through cultural symbols—including language.

These findings are reinforced by Mulyani (2022), who demonstrates that culinary business owners deliberately use foreign terms as a branding strategy. In her study on the naming patterns of modern cafés and restaurants in Indonesia, she concludes: "*The use of foreign terminology in culinary branding not only reflects the influence of globalization, but also functions as a marketing strategy to elevate perceived quality and price value.*" (Mulyani, 2022). Conversely, traditional food vendors or small-scale culinary often employ hybrid or localized forms such as:

"burger abang-abang"
"spageti goreng pedas"
"kroisan isi srikaya"
"nasi kebuli ayam goreng"

These forms reflect a branding compromise strategy, borrowing the prestige of foreign terminology while retaining cultural familiarity and affordability in perception. Thus, it can be concluded that: Loanwords function as symbolic capital that structures social hierarchy within the culinary sphere, while simultaneously serving as a branding instrument to shape product image and consumer segmentation.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that loanwords in Indonesian food menu naming are not merely a linguistic phenomenon involving lexical borrowing from foreign languages, but rather a complex cultural practice. From a morphological perspective, foreign borrowings undergo various adaptation processes such as phonological adaptation, affixation, compounding, and clipping, as emphasized by Sudaryanto (1993), Chaer (2008), and Kridalaksana (2013). These processes confirm that Indonesian does not passively absorb foreign elements; instead, it compels them to conform to its linguistic system, consistent with Haugen's (1950) concept of double adaptation.

From an anthropolinguistic standpoint, the findings reinforce Barthes' (1961) view that food functions as a *cultural text that communicates social messages*. Loanwords such as *steak*, *latte*, *burger*, or localized forms like *bistik Jawa*, *nasi kebuli*, and *martabak manis* do not merely denote types of food, but also mark social identity, historical memory, and consumer ideology. Sibarani (2018) and Duranti (1997) affirm that culinary language serves as a *collective identity marker*, where each borrowed term retains traces of the cultural communities from which it originated—whether Dutch, Arab, Chinese, or Western.

Furthermore, within framework of symbolic capital, the use of loanwords functions as both a tool of social differentiation and a branding strategy [10]. Fully retained foreign terms such as “*Caramel Macchiato*” or “*Grilled Beef Steak*” are typically employed to construct a middle-to-upper-class image, whereas hybrid forms like “*spageti goreng pedas*” or “*kroisan isi srikaya*” serve as inclusive strategies targeting broader audiences. This underscores that culinary language operates as a negotiation space between prestige and cultural familiarity.

In sum, this study concludes that: Culinary naming in Indonesia constitutes a site of encounter between language and culture, between global and local dynamics, between prestige and popular intimacy.

Accordingly, the study of loanwords in food naming is not only relevant to linguistics, but also crucial for understanding national identity, creative economic dynamics, and Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in the era of globalization.

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