

FEATURES OF WORDS USED IN RESTAURANT MENUS: A Sociopragmatic Perspective

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Abstract

The culinary business has been growing so fast and competitively that it needs specific ways to attract customers. The food names, one thing people can directly see in restaurants or cafes, should be attractive and persuasive as they can be used as an indirect advertisement. This research aims at tracing the features of words used in naming foods for restaurant menus and how they fulfill the function of informing, attracting, and persuading customers. This study used a qualitative method to explore the naming of food on the menus of fifty restaurants in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The finding showed the words related to the element of the ingredient were mostly found in the naming of dishes on the menus. There were food names consisting of only one feature of the word, such as Krengsengan, Lodeh, and Mendol, which were the traditional food names; however, there were also names that used a combination of those features.

Keywords: Features of Words, menus, food names.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melacak fitur-fitur kata yang digunakan dalam memberi nama makanan di menu restoran dan kafe, serta bagaimana kata-kata tersebut memenuhi fungsi untuk memberi informasi, menarik, dan meyakinkan pelanggan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi penamaan makanan di menu dari lima puluh restoran di Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kata-kata yang terkait dengan elemen bahan makanan sebagian besar ditemukan dalam penamaan hidangan di menu. Terdapat nama makanan yang terdiri dari hanya satu fitur kata, seperti Krengsengan, Lodeh, dan Mendol, yang merupakan nama makanan tradisional; namun, ada juga nama-nama yang menggunakan kombinasi fitur-fitur tersebut.

Kata kunci: Fitur-fitur kata, menu, nama makanan

INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important element in human life because people need to communicate with each other to convey intentions, ideas, and feelings. As a business communication tool, language is one of the determinants of business success. In running

a culinary business, the name of the food menu is a very important aspect. This is because the food menu is the first impression for the customer to buying your product.

As the culinary business has been growing so fast and competitively, it is necessary for restaurant practitioners to create good menus to attract customer. McCall & Lynn, 2008 in Szende, P., & Sridhar, N. (2020:1) stated, “From the start, menus have been a customer’s first impression into the restaurant’s culinary experience.” Menu is the first thing that customer see when they come to a restaurant or before they decide to choose which one they want to dine in. Therefore, naming the dishes on a menu is important for a culinary business. Gavrieli, A., et al, (2022:2) said “Appealing language, that is, the use of descriptors that evoke positive attitudes and grab attention, is a marketing tool proven to influence consumers’ choices.” It means creating good menus lead a good profit for the business.

A name is the identity of every object, activity, creature, or other things. The naming of a thing cannot be separated from the things behind them, (Lisa Allawiyah Inril, 2021). “One of the most important elements of the naming process concerns the meaning and associations of the name. In this case, the term is radically different from that in the case of common nouns, in which the “meaning” is their ability to be used in reference to a class of entities, to denote or designate them” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/name/The-naming-process>).

The basis for naming food is based on one of the elements of the linguistic unit that forms the name of the food without considering other linguistic units, (Mahendra, D., Azzahra, F., & Khasanah, E. N. U. (2021). These names can have certain language functions. They are not only used to inform but also to attract and persuade readers or customers. Winiasih, T. (2018:206) remarked, “By creating interesting information media, the information media will become the center attention so that visitors are expected to pay attention and read it.” Even though the names are only small pieces of language, they mean something to the culinary business. By giving unique names on the menu, it makes people curious to buy and taste the food.

One of the customer’s attitudes is choosing the foods and beverages based on the foods’ unique brand or name, (Sari, S. W., Martiwi, R., & Nisa, B., 2021). The more unique the name and shape of food are, the more interest people have in buying them, (Nuari, P. F. (2020:76). Moreover, “When comprehending verbal information such as dish names, people tend to construct mental images (Wyer et al., 2008) or try to visualize the dish based on its name”, (Rane, 2009 in Hou, Y., Yang, W., & Sun, Y. (2017). Szende, P., & Sridhar, N. (2020) mentioned, “Restaurant menu experts have begun to find that using consumer psychology to design their menus has a direct impact on guest purchases and total revenue. These experts have noted that how a menu item is named can influence the guest's perception of the dish.”

There are many ways of naming food. Schumacher recommended two main factors: to mention their main ingredients and the way they are prepared. Secondary designations,

such as geographical or personal names can then follow, (<http://www.theoldfoodie.com/2015/09/rules-for-naming-of-dishes.html>). Kho, K. L. (2016:228) stated, “A cooking technique combined with a main ingredient is considered the most common way of naming a dish.” For examples Steamed Sea Bass, Stir-Fried Asparagus. To describe a dish in more detail, Kho said supplementary and sauce ingredients were often included in addition to the main ingredient. Green Pepper Beef, Broccoli in Oyster Sauce are examples of those dishes. He also stated the shape of the main ingredient or cutting method used to obtain it can be used to more accurately describe a dish; Potato Wedges, and Meatballs. According to Giyatmi, G., Wijayava, R., & Arumi, S. (2018:158), there are also some food names created from a blending of two or more words; Jasuke (jagung+susu+keju), Prospericheese (Prosperous + Rich + Cheese), Cheetos (Cheese + Potatoes), Fritato (Fried + Potatoes).

The rules mentioned above have been applied in many restaurants. It can be seen from the following names of the dishes offered by certain international restaurants:

Herb Goat Cheese with Roasted Garlic

Chimichurri, smoked paprika, olive oil and roasted garlic bread

(<https://www.greenhousegigharbor.com/>)

Char-broiled Chilean Sea Bass

Seasonal vegetables & orange miso sauce (<https://110japan.com/dinein-menu/>)

Spicy Rice Cake

Fried rice cake stick with sweet & spicy sauce (<https://www.genkoreanbbq.com/menu-1>)

Salisbury Steak

Fried or broiled ground beef patty mixed with egg, breadcrumbs, onions, and seasonings. (<https://www.infoplease.com/culture-entertainment/food/famous-food-dishes-and-how-they-got-their-names>).

Sweet

Alabama

Sweet potato & chickpea crumbed patty. Cheese. Pickles. Tomato & onion salsa.

(<https://www.surlys.com.au/menu/>)

On the above menus, the dishes come with detailed descriptions to make them more attractive and clear to the customers. One of the simplest ways to influence food consumption based on the principles of behavioral science is by changing the design of restaurant menus (Wansink & Love, 2014) in Bacon, L., & Krpan, D. (2018:6); how individual items are described (Wansink, Painter, & Van 127 Ittersum, 2001) in Bacon, L., & Krpan, D. (2018:6). Moreover Wansink et al., 2001; 137 Wansink, Van Ittersum, & Painter, 2005 in Bacon, L., & Krpan, D. (2018:6) stated, “The way food is described has been shown to impact the choice that people make.” In addition McCall and Lynn (2008) in Peters, K., & Remaud, P. H. (2020) advocated that “A detailed description of a

menu item can increase perceptions of food quality.” Spence, C. (2018:2) even emphasized that the dishes given more complex menu descriptions were rated as more desirable in terms of their perceived quality.”

As this research is taken place in one of the cities in East Java, Indonesia, the background factors influencing the way of communication may have particular characteristics. Those things may also affect the words used in composing the name of the dishes on restaurant menus. Therefore, this research looks at the words features used in naming the dishes for restaurants or any food establishment menus in this region. It also focuses on which those words fulfill the function of informing, attracting, and persuading. Besides, it is also to see any factors of communication that are considered in naming the dishes.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method. Qualitative work is focused on particular individuals, events, and contexts, lending itself to an idiographic style of analysis, (Gerring, J. ,2017). Using this method, the researcher should arrange direct contact with the respondents to get more information. Aspers, P., & Corte, U., 2019:152 mentioned that essentially in the qualitative method, researchers should get into direct close contact with those who are being investigated and/or the material, such as texts, being analyzed. In this study, the researcher arranged interviews to get more information. The data were the food menus of 50 restaurants in Malang, East Java. Collecting data was conducted by observing menus in some restaurants and interviewing the owner of the restaurants. In the first step, the researcher investigated some restaurants' menus to decide the appropriate places for the research. Since the names of the food had already been obtained, the researcher established some interviews with the owners of the restaurant. From the menus collected, the same name was only taken once. The result of the data reduction showed there were 558 food names that were sorted according to the type of naming. Those data become the elements that the researcher analyzed. In the last stage, the conclusion was taken by the researcher.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result of the analysis, the features of words used in the food names were found. There were thirty-five patterns altogether. The terms of words used were related to traditional food names, the ingredients, the way of cooking, the way of serving, size, color, geographical names, taste, appearance, texture, restaurant names, foreign (original) names, personal (actor/actress) names, and unique names.

The names were composed using one or more words from the above list. The words related to the element of ingredient were mostly found in the data. There were food names consisting of only one feature of the word, such as Krengsengan, Lodeh, and Mendol, which were the traditional food names; however, there were also names that used a combination of those features. The examples of the names are as follows.

Rawon Buntut (tail ‘rawon’); ‘rawon’ is a traditional food.

Fu Yung Hai (foreign/original name).

Aneka Sayur Seafood (Seafood with various vegetables).

Oseng -oseng Jagung Muda (sauteed baby corn).

Gurami Bakar (roasted ‘Gurami’); ‘Gurami’ is a kind of fish.

Steak Tepung Sirloin Double (double sirloin steak with wheat flour).

Nasi Bakar Tahu Tempe Penyet (Rice baked and served with smashed soya cake and tofu). Kolokee Asam Manis (sweet sour ‘kolokee’); ‘kolokee’ is original name.

Ayam Kampung Goreng Laos (fried chicken with ‘laos’); ‘laos’ is special ingredient.

Sapi Lada Hitam (beef with black pepper).

Nasi Goreng Merah (red fried rice).

Sosis Bandung (‘Bandung’ sausage); ‘Bandung’ is a geographical name.

Bubur Ayam Jamur (Porridge rice with chicken and mushroom).

Nasi Cap Cay (Rice served with ‘cap cay’); ‘cap cay’ is Chinese food.

Bakso Halus (soft meatball).

Bandeng Presto Dalam Sarang (Pressed ‘Bandeng’ in a cage); ‘Bandeng’ is a kind of fish.

Sate Daging Tanpa Lemak (beef ‘sate’ without fat); ‘sate’ is a traditional food name.

Mie TOM TOM (‘Tom Tom’ noodle); ‘Tom Tom’ is the name of Nozomi Beef Teriyaki Restaurant (‘Nozomi’ is the name of a character in cartoon film).

The names of the dishes show the elements of ingredients, way of cooking, way of serving, texture, size, the origin or style, taste, color, appearance, name of restaurant, and personal name.

Besides those kinds of patterns, more interesting things were also found; The ‘unique’ words are used either as a single name or a combination with other features previously explained. The examples of those patterns are as follows.

Buto Ijo (it is a name of a big giant that is given to big size burgers)

Buto Long Keju (it is given to big long cheese burgers)

Burger Buto Uuuups Keju (it is given to big cheese burgers with lots of cheese); ‘uuuups’ shows the surprised of seeing the cheese.

Nasi Goreng Kasmaran (‘kasmaran’ fried rice); ‘kasmaran’ means falling in love.

Bakso Bledek (‘beledok’ meatball); ‘bledok’ is Javanese word for thunder.

Mie Galau (‘galau’ noodle); ‘galau’ means confused.

Nasi Ayam Mercon (‘mercon’ rice with chicken); ‘mercon’ means fire-cracker.

The features of words used in the ‘unique’ names are related to the following matters.

a. Devil or ghost, such as:

‘setan’, ‘buto’, ‘buto ijo’, ‘tuyul’, ‘pocong’, ‘kuntilanak’, ‘gendruwo’, ‘iblis’, etc.

It can be seen in ‘rawon setan’ (sattan ‘rawon’; ‘rawon’ is native food name), ‘mie gendruwo’ (‘gendruwo’ noodle), etc.

b. Behaviour or condition, such as:

‘gobyos’ full of sweat, ‘jingkrak’ to jump around, ‘sumuk’ clammy, ‘ndoweh’ protruding, ‘ndower’ pouting, ‘girang’ excited, ‘ganas’ wild, ‘sopan’ polite, ‘ngamuk’ to rage, ‘gila’ crazy, ‘sadies’ sadist, ‘games’ a mix feelings of intense love and hate, ‘tjhenthil’ flirtatious.

Those words show the behavior or feeling as the effect of eating the foods. Actually, it shows implicitly that the foods are hot and delicious. It can be seen in the names such as ‘Goerami Ndoweh’ (Goerami is a kind of fish) and ‘Mie Ganas’ (‘wild’ noodle).

c. Results obtained from eating the foods, such as:

‘panjang umur’ long life and ‘sehat’ healthy.

It is found in the names such as ‘Mie Panjang Umur’ (long life noodle) and ‘Sop Sehat Ayam’ (healthy chicken soup).

d. Quality of serving and the elements, such as:

‘komplit’ complete, ‘biasa’ general, ‘special’ special, ‘polos’ plain, ‘super’ super, ‘hemat’ economical, ‘import’ import. It is found in the names such as ‘Rib Eye Import’ and ‘Iga Bakar Special’ (special roasted rib).

e. Feeling, such as:

‘cinta’ love, ‘kasmaran’ falling in love, ‘pingin’ longing for, ‘ria’ happy. It is found in the names such as ‘Nasi Goreng Cinta’ (‘love’ fried rice).

f. Satisfaction, such as:

‘nyos’ wheeze, ‘kriuk’ crunchy, ‘uuuups’ (used to show surprise), ‘ngelauk’i’ (used to show the food is very delicious side-dish).

g. Something that causes tension or fear, such as:

‘mercon’ fire-cracker, ‘ranjau’ caltrop ‘bledek/bledex’ thunder, ‘gludhug’ thunder, ‘horeg’ earth-quake, ‘lautan api’ big fire, ‘petir’ thunderclap, ‘maut’ death. Those words are used to show the spicy taste of the food. It can be seen in the names such as ‘Ceker Maut’ (‘death’ clay) and ‘Bakso Bledek’ (‘thunder’ meatballs).

h. Slang or jargon, such as:

‘ciyus’ from ‘serius’ serious, ‘banget’ extremely, ‘cetar’ cracking sound ‘sesuatu’ something, ‘selalu’ always. The later three words are usually used by a top singer. It is

found in the names such as ‘Mie Selalu’ (‘always’ noodle) and ‘Ayam Cetar Bakar’ (‘cetar’ roasted chicken).

i. Appearance, such as:

‘keceng’ very thin, ‘remuk’ crushed, ‘ceplek ceplek’ unorganized, ‘gotong royong’ in harmony, ‘perkasa’ courageous, ‘jumbo’ very big. It is found in the names such as ‘Ayam Goreng Remuk’ (crushed fried chicken) and ‘Penyet Gotong Royong’ (smashed of various elements such as soya cake, tofu, fish, etc.).

j. Special recipes, such as:

‘tante-qu’ my aunt, ‘resep mertua’ mother in law’s recipe.

It is found in the name such as ‘Nasi Bakar Ayam Resep Mertua’ (baked rice with chicken cooked using mother in law’s recipe).

k. Character in film, such as:

Nozomi, Hulk, ‘Suster Ngesot’ disabled nurse.

It is found in the names such as ‘Nasi Goreng Hulk’ (Hulk fried rice) and ‘Nozomi Beef Teriyaki’.

l. Address terms for public figure, such as:

‘jawara’ (fighter) and ‘ustaj’ from ‘ustad’ (religious teacher).

It is found in the names such as ‘Bakso Jawara’ (‘jawara’ meatballs).

m. Blending, such as:

‘Jeggo’ from Jegger original (Jegger is the restaurant name), ‘samjo’ from ‘sambel ij o’ (mix of green chili), ‘mentes’ from ‘mentega pedhes’ hot butter. It can be found in the name such as ‘Mie Samjo’ (‘samjo’ noodle).

n. Word games such as in the following names.

The repetition of sound: ‘Horny corny’ and ‘Mini Super Dupper’.

The insertion in a personal name: ‘Jacky ClayChan’, ‘Justin Prawnber-Lake’, ‘Bruce ChickenLee’.

The choice of ‘unique’ words used in naming the dishes may create an emotional response to the readers or customers as it may make them want to know more about the food. Therefore, it can be said that the use of ‘unique’ words is one of the ways to attract and persuade the customers toward the dishes.

Beside those features of words, it can be seen other factors; The names of food are also influenced by target visitors as young people, families, or foreigners. It can be seen through the use of slang words, names of characters in films, names of actors or actresses, or other words often used by young people in naming the foods. The restaurants often visited by foreigners use foreign words that are also translated.

Moreover, as the names are printed, the style of writing is also considered to make it more attractive. It is found in the words ‘pepes’, ‘gurami’, ‘bledek’, ‘tanteku’, ‘centil’ are written as ‘pepez’, ‘goerami’, ‘bledex’, ‘tante-qu’, and ‘tjhenthil’. This way is related with the ‘instrumentalities’ factor of Hymes’ theory.

In addition, it was also found the way used to show the level of hot taste. First is by using stars after the names such as ‘Mie Tuyul*’, ‘Mie Kuntilanak***’, and ‘Mie Iblis*****’. The more the stars used, the hotter the food is. Second is the use of title such as ‘Kapten’ Captain that means medium, and ‘Jendral’ General that means very hot. Another way is by using the word ‘level’ such as ‘level 1’ means medium, ‘level 2’ means hot, ‘level 3’ means very hot, or using level with stars such as ‘level *-cabe 12’, ‘level***-cabe 35’. ‘Cabe’ is chilli. The last is using temperature such as 27 C = ‘normal’ normal (without chilli), 32 C = ‘nggereges’ cold (110 chillis), 40 C = ‘menggigil’ trembling (21-30 chillis).

The use of ‘unique’ names, the way of writing, the choice of words are used to make the names attractive and persuasive so it fulfills the function of informing, attracting, and persuading.

The influence of culture is also seen in naming the dishes. It was found in the use of devil names such as ‘tuyul’, ‘setan’, ‘pocong’, ‘kuntilanak’, ‘gendruwo’, ‘buto ijo’ that are easily imagined by native people. Those are also words that are taken from native dialect such as ‘horeg’, ‘bledek’, ‘gludhug’ that are well understood and felt by the native speakers.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the features of words used in naming the dishes for restaurant menus are varied from place to place. Even though it applies to the rules that have been offered, people can create the names in their way. Hence, they not only have information about the dishes but can also be used to attract and persuade the readers or customers to know more about the dishes by trying them.

Even a tiny piece of language, the name of dishes can fulfill the function of language as a means of communication. And to create them, consciously or not, the creator considers certain factors that influence the effectiveness of communication.

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