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# The Impact of French Titles on Food Preference

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**ABSTRACT** *The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of food nomenclature on perceived desirability of various food items. Both understanding how to make menu items more desirable and increasing efficiency in food marketing is invaluable for corporations and businesses looking to bring in new customers and increase profits. Two hundred twelve participants were given one of two surveys evaluating desirability of ten food items entitled either in French or English. In addition to five demographic questions, participants were asked how much they would be willing to pay for, how likely they were to buy, and how delicious they expected the different food items to taste. Independent samples t-tests found a significant difference in the amount individuals were willing to spend on foods with French titles. The results of this study suggest that restaurant owners can charge more for menu items with French nomenclature without losing sales.*

All people, whether they are aware of it or not, are influenced simply by how everyday food items are named (Luomala, 2007). In general, food items and dishes are classified by composition and place of origin. Food naming follows a simple pattern, such as listing the featured ingredients and the cooking method, or naming the food after a particular place. In the English language, it is common practice to “borrow” liberally from other foreign languages in creating an optimally appealing menu. This concept is demonstrated in restaurants and food marketing campaigns. Understanding how nomenclature contributes to food preferences is crucial to corporations in learning optimum strategies to bring in new and loyal customers. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of food nomenclature on perceived desirability of food.

Menu optimization has been a frequent topic of both commercial and academic study. Research has shown that displaying the country of origin (Luomala, 2007), nutritional information (Kozup, Creyer, & Burton, 2003),

and price of food dishes (Di Monaco, Ollila, & Tuorila, 2005) influences consumer choice and appreciation of food items. Although the main function of a menu is to inform, studies have shown that American writers will make the whole menu in untranslated text, in order to leave it up to servers and waiters to describe the menu entries, thus changing the entire purpose of the menu from informing to impressing the customer (Zwicky & Zwicky, 1980). The findings of these studies are important to restauranteurs and food marketers who make their living persuading customers to make purchases, and organizations that seek to promote healthy eating and nutrition. The findings of this research will add one more piece in our understanding of variables that influence our spending and eating habits. Because of the customary association of France and fine food, we will be using the French language as a comparison. We hypothesize that food items presented with non-English (French) titles will be perceived as more desirable than the same dishes with English titles.

## Method

### Participants

Surveys were administered to 212 students at Brigham Young University (BYU), 90 male students and 122 female students. Over 90% of the participants described their ethnicity as “white”. Ninety-seven percent of the participants were native English speakers. Only eight of the participants spoke French. Students were recruited from various BYU undergraduate psychology classes through the SONA system.

### Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two tests (E or F). Both tests contained five demographic questions: age, gender, ethnicity, native language, and secondary languages. Each test contained titles and descriptions of

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Table 1  
*A comparison of French to English titles used*

Number	English Title	French Title
1	Peach Tart	Tarte Aux Pêches
2	Casserole-roasted Chicken	Poulet en Cocotte Bonne Femme
3	Tuna Steaks	Thon À La Provençale
4	Pork and Cabbage	Porc Braisé aux Choux Rouges
5	Open Faced Omelet	Pipérade
6	French Onion Soup	Soupe À L'Oignon
7	Crepe Cake	Gâteau de Crêpes à la Florentine
8	House Green Beans	Haricots Verts à la Maître d'Hôtel
9	Mediterranean Beef Stew	Boeuf À La Catalane
10	Steamed Lobster	Homard aux Aromates

the same ten food items; Test E contained items with titles and descriptions written in English, and Test F contained items with titles in French and descriptions in English. All the menu items were taken from a cookbook entitled *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (Childs, 1961). Participants were asked three questions about each of the ten food items. The first question was "How much would you be willing to pay for this item?" and was rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale in three dollar increments with 0-3 being the lowest and 12-15 being the highest. The second question was "How likely would you be to purchase this item?" and was rated on a Likert scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 4 (very likely). The third question was "How delicious do you expect this item to taste?" and was rated on a Likert scale from 1 (not delicious) to 4 (very delicious).

The purpose of the study was to determine whether foods with French titles are more desirable than foods with English titles. The rationale for choosing the questions is that people would be more likely to purchase, pay more for, and rate foods as more delicious if they were more desirable.

Surveys were administered to participants online.

## Results

Two different sets of independent samples t-tests were administered: one analyzing all the food items together, the other analyzing each food item individually. In the first test, a significant difference was found ( $t(df) = 2.43$ ) with how much an individual was willing to pay for a food (See Table 2). Differences were found not to

Table 2  
*Analysis of perceptions of all food items*

	Language	Mean	Significance	T
How much would you be willing to pay?	English	21.6000	.016	-2.428
	French	23.7822		
How likely would you be willing to purchase?	English	22.8545	.445	-.765
	French	23.2871		
How delicious do you expect the item to taste?	English	24.5364	.458	-.743
	French	25.0495		

be significant between English and French titled foods within the measures of how likely they were to purchase the food and how delicious they expected the food to taste.

Further independent sample t-tests, administered to determine if there were significant differences between each individual food item, found that eight of the ten food items were rated significantly different with respect to how much an individual was willing to pay for the food item (see Table 4). Only one item was found to be

Table 3  
*A comparison of perceived deliciousness between genders*

Gender	Language	Mean	F	Significance
Male	English	25.620	2.877	.091
	French	25.282		
Female	English	23.633		
	French	24.903		

more delicious when titled in French.

Additionally, a two-way analysis of variance was run to determine the main effects of gender and whether the food titles were administered in English or French. These tests discovered that men rated food significantly more delicious than their female counterparts regardless of the variable of language (see Table 3).

## Discussion

### Limitations

While some significant findings came as a result of this study, some limitations of the study should be pointed out. As a byproduct of any survey method used to gather data, our study was somewhat lacking in external validity.

While the task asked the participants to imagine how they would expect certain menu items to taste and how likely they would be to order it, they were not in a restaurant setting. There is a possibility that the participants' opinions of the different food items would have been different if they had been hungry with the expectation of ordering something to eat.

Another limitation is the inexact results that we gathered about the amount participants would be willing to pay for each menu item. Participants rated French titled food items on average .22 points higher on the five point Likert scale in response to "How much would you be willing to pay for this item?" than the English counterparts. Each point on the scale represented a \$3 range of values. It is impossible from our scale to determine an exact amount more participants would be willing to pay for French titled food, though an estimate increase of \$0.66 ( $\$3 \times .22$ ) could reasonably be concluded.

### Application

The significant relationship found between French titles and participants' willingness to pay more for a menu item would be an important consideration for restaurateurs. These findings would suggest that restaurants could charge more for a menu item than they currently are if they change the title to French, and not worry about losing sales because of the higher price.

Restaurants can apply these findings in another way. Men were found to find all menu items more delicious than women, and there is a high correlation between how likely a person is to purchase a food item if they thought it would be delicious. These findings suggest that men might be more willing to try new food items. New menu items and higher priced menu items may be sold to male patrons easier than female patrons.

### Further Research

The largest opportunity for further research that this study suggests is a more externally valid study of the impact of menu titles on food preference. Such a field study would need to be conducted in an atmosphere where participants were already expecting to purchase food.

Our study also compared very straightforward English titles to French. Many restaurants use more flowery language in their menu descriptions. Further studies could compare these more stylized menus to French, or English menus to other languages.

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Table 4  
*Analysis of perceptions of individual food items*

Food Item	Question	Language	Mean	Significance	t
Peach Tart	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	1.35	.013	-2.510
		French	1.56		
	How delicious do you expect the item to taste?	English	2.49	.009	-2.632
		French	2.79		
Casserole-roasted Chicken	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	2.55	.000	-3.943
		French	3.02		
Tuna Steaks	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	2.30	.036	-2.116
		French	2.68		
Pork and Cabbage	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	2.39	.002	-3.126
		French	2.88		
Open Faced Omelet	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	1.48	.016	-2.433
		French	1.69		
French Onion Soup	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	1.93	.575	.562
		French	1.86		
Crepe Cake	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	2.08	.011	-2.555
		French	2.44		
House Green Beans	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	1.30	.002	-3.181
		French	1.57		
Mediterranean Beef Stew	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	2.31	.290	-1.062
		French	2.44		
Steamed Lobster	How much would you be willing to pay?	English	3.92	.147	1.457
		French	3.63		

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