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NAMING WHAT WE EAT: FOOD AND BEVERAGE NAMES IN THE CONTEXT OF SINGAPORE HAWKER CENTRES

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Abstract: *Despite efforts to document the heritage and significance of Singapore's hawker centres, the names of the food and beverage served at these food establishments do not receive the same attention. The present study critically examines the various etymological claims against the available evidence from a variety of disciplines, combining synchronic and diachronic linguistics with aspects of history, culture, food sciences, social sciences and Singapore studies. Analysis reveals that etymologies tend to be more reliable when they correspond to the Singapore language ecology (at both the national and hawker centre levels), linguistic features of the supposed language of origin, as well as facts established in the other aforementioned disciplines. Finally, the names studied demonstrate how naming processes in Singapore are heavily influenced by visual associations.*

Keywords: *Etymology; Language Change; Language Contact; Language Ecology; Food; Beverage; Hawker culture; Coffee Shop; Urban Environment; Singapore*

1. INTRODUCTION

Food culture is said to go beyond the simple act of enjoying what one eats by having the capacity to construct an individual's identity (Ichijo and Ranta 2016). On a larger scale, food can be used to construct the identity of an entire community as well. Singaporeans are no stranger to food culture – indeed, food has been traditionally lauded as an integral part of the culture of the island-state (National Archives of Singapore 2018). In 2018, the final results of a public poll opened by the Singapore's National Heritage Board (NHB) revealed “Food Heritage” to be of the highest importance to Singaporeans in their perception of the values of the intangible cultural heritage of the country (National

Heritage Board 2021a). Further discussions with experts, academics and members of the public found “hawker culture” to be one of the most beloved aspects of Singapore’s food heritage (National Heritage Board 2021a).



Figure 1. *Lau Pa Sat*, one of Singapore’s most iconic hawker centres (Hu 2020)

Ongoing preservation efforts have been largely focusing on documenting the heritage and significance of hawker centres as go-to neighbourhood dining areas, as well as sustaining the hawker practice through training programmes for the younger generation (National Heritage Board 2021a). However, there is currently a gap in the proper documentation of the etymologies of Singapore’s food and drinks which we hope to address and fill in this paper.

Hawker food and drinks were first introduced by different groups of immigrant settlers in the 19th century, coming from various parts of Asia (National Heritage Board 2021a). Owing to their different places of origins and the lack of linguistic regulation of the hawkers, the languages used in naming the hawker food and drinks differed as well (Lim and Perono Cacciafoco 2023). We continue to see a diversity of languages reflected in names of hawker dishes and even in Singapore’s drink ordering system today, which we posit to be indicative of their respective histories.

The primary aim of this article is therefore to critically examine the etymologies of these names against the available evidence and, through further analysis, offer alternative proposals, where necessary. This paper hopes to achieve a deeper understanding of the significance of Singapore’s language contact as realised in the naming processes of Singapore’s hawker food and drinks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last two decades, food studies have gained traction in both popular culture and various academic fields (Chrzan and Brett 2019). Responding to this rise in attention, Chrzan and Brett (2019) edited a three-volume set of research methods for food studies as a means to guide research study design in the discipline. Their work introduced socio-cultural food anthropology methods, linguistic anthropology methods, and food studies methods, reflecting some of the most popular methodologies used in food studies research. While comprehensive, it is less relevant to our current research, which takes on a convergent method combining etymology, historical linguistics, and sociolinguistics in uncovering the history of the naming processes behind some of Singapore’s foods and

drinks. Our focus remains centred on linguistic processes and components, whilst bringing in significant links to history and food studies in Singapore.

We draw inspiration from Durkin (2009) in our methodology as we explore possible etymologies and naming processes of food and drinks in our study. Durkin (2009) utilises historical and linguistic evidence to illustrate word histories, deciphering the history of names and places alongside their changes due to a myriad of socio-cultural factors, linguistic processes, or both. His work has been valuable in our research as we likewise make use of historical evidence, such as the population movements in Singapore during the 19th and 20th centuries, in conjunction with linguistic evidence to support our proposed etymologies.

On another note, Newman (1997) details the processes of eating and drinking as sources for metaphors in the field of cognitive linguistics, describing the metaphorical mappings of eating and drinking beyond their literal acts. For instance, the “internalisation” of eating and drinking can be extended to other domains such as the emotional domain in “feed my heart” or the intellectual domain in “hunger for knowledge”. Newman (1997) discusses eating and drinking as concepts rather than verbs and centres on their metaphoric potential in English. While we also made cognitive links to other domains in our research, our focus turns away from the concepts of eating and drinking, and moves towards the names of drinks specifically. We highlight the cognitive relationship of alternative ‘nicknames’ for drinks coined by local Singaporeans and the visual aspect in our discussion section.

Localised literature specifically relating to the etymologies of hawker food and drink names in Singapore is markedly lacking, as there is currently no existing etymological study on the names of Singapore’s hawker food and drink items. This article will hence be the first in consolidating data regarding the names of certain hawker foods and drinks and analysing the naming processes behind them.

Tangential to our topic, Leimgruber (2020) studies the naming practices of hawker stalls using a corpus of 211 hawker stall signages in Singapore to examine if either linguistic diversity of the country or the itinerant nature of street hawkers, or both, are reflected in hawker signages. Separately, Ong (2019) discusses the role of language and food, particularly that of hawker centres, in the construction of everyday identities in Singapore. Similar to Leimgruber (2020), Ong (2019) also uses signboard headers of hawker stalls for analysis. While these studies provide evidence of a multilingual society with multiple languages in a single signage (Lim and Perono Cacciafoco 2023), our current research goes a step further from an analysis purely of the languages present to investigate the origins of the names of the foods and drinks themselves.

Another point of divergence from the above research lies in the unity of the analysis; in addition to names written on signboards, we also take a great interest in those which are not reflected on these, but are instead spoken. This is especially so in the case of drinks, where there are unofficial ‘nicknames’ which are not usually found in writing, but are used when making orders via speech. Our article aims to go beyond purely written forms in the consideration of alternative spoken forms that have not been documented and analysed in depth yet.

Despite the differences and constraints resulting from our focus on etymology, our selection of the highly multicultural and multilingual Singapore context (Reddy and van Dam 2020) means that the effects of language contact remain an equally important theme in this article. In the next section, indeed, we will outline the language ecology of the island.

Before getting there, we must highlight, for completeness, that food is an important and universal cultural factor (and ‘motor’) in all societies. In a global world, it is also the ‘trigger’ of demands for specific experiences among tourists (Light, Crețan, Voiculescu, and Jucu 2020) and can influence the trends and the impact of cultural tourism. Singapore is no exception to this and, indeed, its local foods and beverages are not only a fundamental part of its population’s cultural identity, but also represent one of the main attractions for visitors, impacting both cultural identity in itself (and its discovery by non-local people) and consumer choices and attitudes (Tricarico and Geissler 2017; Reddy and van Dam 2020; Zhang, Chen, and Grunert 2021; Poeggel 2022).

3. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

3.1 History of Singapore’s Population and Languages

To examine and contextualise the origins of Singapore’s food and drink names, we will first take a brief look into the historical changes of Singapore’s racial make-up and linguistic ecology during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Singapore sits on the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia connecting the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Indonesian Archipelago (Turnbull 2009). Its location was ideal for commerce from time immemorial, given the busy sea routes that passed by and the abundance of natural resources in the area (Turnbull 2009). It is believed that there were roughly 1,000 indigenous inhabitants of Singapore before the founding of modern Singapore, comprising mostly local Malay tribes (Rahim 2009). 500 *Orang Kallang*, 200 *Orang Seletar*, 150 *Orang Gelam*, some *Orang Laut* and about 20 to 30 Malays from the *Temenggong* (a traditional Malay title of nobility) of Johor’s entourage made up the native population (Turnbull 2009; Ong and Perono Cacciafoco 2022).

In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with the *Temenggong* of Johor to allow the establishment of a British trading post on the island, leading to the founding of modern Singapore (Turnbull 2009). The news of Raffles establishing Singapore as a free port had attracted an influx of not only traders and merchants to the island, but also permanent settlers, leading to a boom in the local population shortly after.

As the British settled on the island, they also introduced the classification of local inhabitants by racial lines, following British colonial practices (Purushotam 1998). The use of the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model to categorise race in Singapore has been traced back to the first census taken in 1824 (Mokhtar 2017). While its use and significance has been up for debate in recent years, the model reflects the three largest longstanding racial groups in Singapore (Mokhtar 2017). Thus, we will be using the CMIO model in our discussion of the languages spoken in modern Singapore during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

There were about 3,000 Malays and 1,000 Chinese out of 5,000 inhabitants living in Singapore in 1821, increasing fivefold from three years prior (Turnbull 1989). The most frequently used language was Malay, not only due to the large size of the indigenous and immigrant Malay communities, but also because Malay was used as the main language of trade with neighbouring countries (Tan 2017). In the first official census taken in 1824, the Malays would continue to make up the majority of the local population (Leimgruber 2013). However, this changed drastically as the Chinese population

overtook the Malay population to become the majority race just three years later in 1827 (Leimgruber 2013). Lin and Khoo (2018) attribute this gradual but steady wave of Chinese migration to the establishment of Singapore as a British trading post which continually attracted Chinese traders to the island state.

The population increased exponentially by 1867, mainly as a result of the consistent mass migration from China (Leimgruber 2013). 65% of the population was Chinese, predominantly of Hokkien or Teochew descent, coming from the southern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong and introducing their regional Chinese varieties into the linguistic ecology of Singapore (Leimgruber 2013). Other labourers and craftspeople who migrated from China were mostly of Cantonese and Hakka descent (Leimgruber 2013). As a result, Chinese varieties such as the Southern Min varieties, Hokkien and Teochew, as well as Cantonese, a traditional prestige Yue Chinese variety, were often used within the Chinese community (Lin and Khoo 2018). The fourth most dominant variety used in the Chinese community was Hainanese, another Min Chinese variety (Cavallaro and Ng 2014). Across the Chinese community, Hokkien was used as the main lingua franca as 80% of the Chinese community were able to speak or understand Hokkien (Kuo 1980) and 39% of the Chinese community had Hokkien as their first language (Cavallaro and Ng 2014).

At the same time, arriving from southern India, the Indians became the second largest group in the population by 1867, while the Malays were the third largest, in stark contrast to them being the majority in 1824 (Turnbull 1989). The Indian community ran schools in their own vernaculars while the Malays attended schools in Malay (Tan 2017). Fewer than 300 Europeans were in Singapore during this time, and mainly consisted of men holding powerful positions in civil service and business (Leimgruber 2013). Aside from the European settlers and those who had connections with the colonial administration, English was largely inaccessible to the rest of the population (Tan 2017).

Table 1. Speakers of the main languages in Singapore (%)*

Year	English	Mandarin	Chinese vernaculars	Malay	Tamil
1957	1.8	0.1	74.4	5.2	13.5
1980	11.5	10.2	59.5	3.1	13.9
1990	18.8	23.7	39.6	2.9	14.3
2000	23.0	35.0	23.8	3.2	14.1
2010	32.3	35.6	14.3	3.2	12.2

*Census figures are based on ‘the language most frequently spoken at home’. The figures in this table do not total 100 percent as the remaining speakers speak a variety of smaller languages. (Singapore Department of Statistics 2001; 2006; 2011; Kuo 1980; Lau 1992; Cavallaro and Ng 2014)

Census in 1957 revealed an overwhelming number of non-Mandarin Chinese vernacular (NMCV) speakers at home, totalling almost 75% of the entire population. The second most spoken language at home was Malay at 13.5%, followed by Tamil at 5.2%. At this point, Mandarin and English speakers were few and far between, with only 1.8% of the population using English at home and 0.1% of the population using Mandarin at home. Beyond the home environment, Kuo (1980) mentions that nearly half of the population spoke Malay, including 32.5% of the Chinese community and 88.3% of the Indian community.

Cavallaro and Ng (2014) note that Hokkien and Malay were the most frequently

spoken languages in Singapore during the 1950s and 1960s. With Hokkien being the main variety used by the largest community in the population and Malay being the main language used for trade between Singapore and its neighbouring countries, Bazaar Malay developed as the primary lingua franca in Singapore from the 19th century until the 1970s (Tan 2017). The word *bazaar*, meaning ‘market’ in Malay, reflects the language as one of trade and the market. Bazaar Malay had Hokkien as the dominant substrate language, contributing mainly to the grammatical structure of the pidgin, and Malay as the lexifier language, providing most of the lexicon (Platt and Weber 1980).

During the late 1950s, formal education policy was established alongside an emphasis on Singapore’s four official languages: Mandarin, English, Malay and Tamil (Cavallaro and Ng 2014). A handful of schools using Mandarin, Malay and Tamil as the languages of instruction would continue to run post-independence in 1965 (Cavallaro and Ng 2014). However, as a result of a gradual decrease in the number of student intake, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil medium schools would close by 1987 and be fully replaced with English medium schools (Tan 2017). English became the main language of instruction in Singapore’s education system while the remaining three official languages were taught as Mother Tongue languages (MTL) (Pakir 2004).

Education policies were hence a part of the motivating factors of the drastic shift away from NMCV from 1957 to 2010 (Cavallaro and Ng 2014), with its home use reducing from 74.4% to only 14.3% as seen in Table 1. Home use of Tamil and Malay also fell, albeit less significantly compared to NMCV. The two languages that experienced an increase in usage were English and Mandarin, reaching 32.3% and 35.6% respectively in 2010.

3.2 History of Singapore’s Hawker Culture

Before there were hawker centres, travelling hawkers took to busy streets and road intersections to sell food, drinks and sundries during the 19th to mid-20th century (Thulaja 2004). Minimal skills and capital were needed to join the hawking industry, making it a popular occupation for new immigrants (Thulaja 2004). Food hawking was the most prevalent type of hawking, rather expectedly as food is in perpetual demand as a daily necessity. This was compounded by the shortage of dining spaces in the city during this time, making it convenient for labourers and office workers to get their meals from roadside vendors (Thulaja 2004). An estimated 10,000 travelling food hawkers, both licensed and unlicensed, roamed the streets of Singapore to peddle food and drinks in the 1930s, consisting mainly of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Javanese vendors (Thulaja 2004).

Two main issues led to the regulation of travelling hawkers and their eventual shift into hawker centres. Kong (2007) notes that the poor hygiene of travelling hawkers resulted in a spread of infectious diseases such as cholera and malaria. Without clean water and proper storage, the sanitation standard of the food preparation process was highly questionable (Kong 2007). Travelling hawkers were therefore viewed as a threat to public health. On top of that, hawkers were free to set up their stalls anywhere along the streets in the absence of any rules and regulations, leading to a disorganised and unsightly street environment. The obstruction of pedestrian paths and vehicles on the road was another negative consequence of the street-side hawkers, particularly at central city locations where traffic flow was heavy (Thulaja 2004).

Although the first official proposal to regulate hawking would come as early as

1903, it would take more than 50 years for the hawking industry to make significant improvements. Initially, the government solely passed a law to enforce the licensing of night hawkers in order to curb the number of hawkers on the streets in 1906 (Hawkers Inquiry Commission 1950). This was only expanded to include travelling and day hawkers in 1919, restricting the time and location that all hawkers could operate (Hawkers Inquiry Commission 1950). Despite this, many unlicensed hawkers persisted in their businesses and the problems of sanitation and traffic obstruction persisted. A Hawkets Inquiry Commission was elected in 1950 to tackle these issues and oversee all aspects of the hawking trade (National Archives of Singapore n. d.). The Commission recognised that hawking had become a “social phenomenon that cannot be [stopped]” and thus sought alternative solutions instead of a total prohibition of hawking (National Archives of Singapore n. d.).

From the 1960s, the government rolled out a mass relocation exercise for street hawkers to be moved away from the main roads and to side or back alleys instead (Thulaja 2004). This offered temporary relief as plans to construct proper shelters and markets to house hawkers would take years to implement. While the relocation to purpose-built hawker centres would begin in 1968, street hawkers could still be seen up until the 1970s (National Heritage Board 2021a). An injection of \$5 million to build permanent hawker centres in 1971 crucially aided the large-scale relocation project (National Archives of Singapore n. d.) which would last until 1986 (National Heritage Board 2021a). As of 2021, there are more than 110 hawker centres island-wide (National Heritage Board 2021a).

Notably, hawker centres in Singapore are often referred to as coffee shops. This is not to be mistaken for the European or American concept of a coffee shop or coffeehouse, which primarily serves caffeinated drinks and light snacks in an enclosed air-conditioned environment. Hawker centres do not simply house food stalls, but also offer seating areas for dining-in at open-air complexes (Tung 2010). Similar to hawker centres, coffee shops are also open-air complexes housing food stalls and seating areas for diners. Where hawker centres and coffee shops differ the most is in their origins; hawker centres were purpose-built in the late 20th century to contain mobile hawkers in sanitary dining spaces, whereas coffee shops were built in the 19th century as small-scale eating houses for immigrant workers to dine in, and not specifically for the housing of existing travelling hawkers (Lai 2015). Additionally, the Hainanese dominated the coffee shop industry and played a crucial role in the proliferation of coffee shops from the 1920s to the 1950s. Male Hainanese immigrants who worked as domestic servants gained recognition from European and Peranakan households as reliable “cook-boys”, earning a reputation for themselves in the cooking scene (Lai 2015). On the other hand, the Hokkiens, who dominated the hawking industry, only earned the title due to the sheer size of their community (Thulaja 2004). As street hawking ceased to exist by the late-20th century, it could be said that any open-air food complex built since then are technically coffee shops, since stallholders are no longer relocated street vendors from the days of travelling hawkers. Both terms have been rather interchangeable in local literature as there are several overlapping features between them. In this article, we will differentiate hawker centres from coffee shops where an acknowledgement of their contrasting origins is significant.

Efforts to preserve Singapore’s hawker culture have been at an all-time high in recent years. Singapore’s National Heritage Board has teamed up with several public agencies and food experts to document hawker centres and food to preserve their culture

in Singapore (National Heritage Board 2021a). Both the public and private sectors have organised numerous events to commemorate and promote hawker culture, such as the Singapore Food Festival hosted annually since 1994 and the City Hawker Food Hunt held by City Gas and Shin Min Daily News (National Heritage Board 2021a). The establishment of more than 110 hawker centres island-wide as well as the reflection of Singapore's multiculturalism in the variety of food options available were highlighted as the two main reasons behind the significance of hawker culture in Singapore (National Heritage Board 2021a). Singapore's hawker culture was officially inscribed as the island-state's "first element on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" in late 2020 (National Heritage Board 2020). From the early days of unlicensed street vendors prior to the 1970s to the multicultural 'community dining rooms' of today, hawker centres have preserved and reflect the multilingualism of the local community. Since the local government largely does not regulate the local linguistic landscape, signboards of these hawker stalls are entirely left up to the businesses themselves. While street vendors would distinguish themselves from competitors, their resettlement into spaces specifically designed for communal dining would require them to urbanise and have signboards with written names of their dishes. Consequently, this would suggest that the forms these early hawkers adopted would become fossilised into the memories of Singaporean diners and establish an unofficial yet widely accepted form (Lim and Perono Cacciafoco 2023). Indeed, hawker activities, today, extend way beyond economic motives and involve profound layers and elements of cultural identity. This is a pattern that can be found in different parts of the world and in different contexts and which is always connected with the history of local populations and their struggle to safeguard their roots and origins (Light, Lupu, Crețan, and Chapman 2024).

Rüdiger and Mühleisen (2020) also highlight how hawker centres would often have a number of different stalls selling the same items. Therefore, visuals such as images and colours would be important in differentiating between them. Moreover, it is logical to assume that the visual imagery would also assist consumers in making their meal choices, especially if they were to order from a cuisine foreign to their culture. This method of communication is effective and efficient, because the images and names of their counterpart dishes are literal reflections of one another.

With that being said however, the written signs as documentations of the names of beloved local food and drinks do not include widely understood lingos or nicknames that the community has come to coin for them. As such, this article is interested in exploring further the gap in this research.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Materials

Food and beverage names can be semantically obvious by themselves because they reveal their key ingredients, such as *chicken rice*, *fishball noodles*, and *chilli crab*. All of these names readily present their etymologies and thus have been excluded from the selection of names. In addition to etymological opaqueness, the selection criteria is the frequency of appearances in popular sources, such as food blogs, commentaries and hearsay. These sources are often the only places where etymological claims exist, but because their primary interests usually lie in food tourism, information on their preparation processes or their histories, these etymological descriptions do not extend

beyond a line or two and understandably lack critical analysis. However, it is exactly the popularity of such sources that makes these food and beverage names especially relevant for the present article which strives to be one of the first attempts to closely examine Singaporean food and beverage names. The final selection of names are thus *laksa*, *carrot cake*, *Chinese rojak*, *bandung*, *ang ji gao*, *tak kiu*, *diao he*, as well as *teh*, *kopi* and their numerous variants.

4.2 Procedure

The main aim of our study is to reconnect forms of food and beverage names with the relevant lexicological ancestors that would make their semantics clearer not only to scholars, but also to the general public. Since the etymological proposals described here are recounted from existing sources, whether academic or part of popular culture, the procedure for analysis will, therefore, focus on the integrity and likelihood of these etymologies, based on a range of diachronic and synchronic factors outlined below.

Section 2 led us through the language ecology of Singapore, which lays the groundwork for how plausible it is for a lexical item to have originated from a particular language. The easy assumption to make is that it is more likely for a word to be immediately linked to a language that is part of this ecology rather than one from outside of it; however this is not always the case, especially when a language within the ecology has historical links with languages outside of it. Hence, these links will need to be examined. Even so, when all the proposed languages of origin for a particular name are indeed found *within* the ecology, there still remains competition between these languages (Tan 2017) and the plausibility of one language being the more likely source of origin would be assessed through other factors as described here.

The interactions between languages in a language contact situation has many implications. The multi-directional borrowing of lexical items across its languages demands us to explore the different linguistic processes that names may have undergone (Durkin 2009), such as phonological nativisation, initialisation, clipping, compounding and eponymy on the morphological end, and narrowing, broadening and meaning shift on the semantics end. Language contact also means that certain names have produced translations or transliterations for speakers of other languages. Translations can reveal the ways in which equivalent words from different languages carve out semantic spaces differently (Nida 1945), while transliterations can be notorious for misleading etymologies (Aroonmanakun and Rivepiboon 2004; Benjamin 1997). These linguistic factors present as important considerations for etymological plausibility.

Analysis is certainly not restricted to linguistic factors. Particularly, foods and beverages, being physical ‘objects’, cannot be divorced from the history and material culture of the speakers interacting with them (Durkin 2009). Our study is therefore quite necessarily an interdisciplinary one, combining linguistics with aspects of history, culture, food sciences, social sciences, and Singapore studies. To address these needs, we have expanded heavily on the diversity of sources to include local and regional literature on food, newspaper articles, government statistics, government agency websites, library archives, transcripts of talks, food blogs and last, but not least, personal anecdotes from among most of the authors, who are native to Singapore. These work together to fill in large contextual gaps in etymological arguments which linguistics alone cannot adequately occupy.

Our methodology, as highlighted by what written so far, associates an

etymological approach with a field investigation on food and beverage terms (and the related actual products). At the etymological level, our research is documentary and (to some extent) comparative, dealing with the diachronic development and usage of the examined words among the local communities and getting back in time till their reasonably reconstructable origins. At the sociological level, we provide the readers with an agile, but precise picture of the foods and beverages whose names we analyse, contextualised in their social and cultural environment, where both words and objects are, every day, ‘in action’. Our approach is, therefore, diachronic and synchronic at the same time and depicts a significant aspect of the human, urban, and cultural geography of Singapore. This kind of etymological reconstruction necessarily needs to rely on an indispensable documentary strategy (not based only on academic sources, but also on popular documentation), corroborated by investigations on the field, personal experiences, and local, traditional knowledge, examined through a ‘real-time’ analysis. The sociological aspect of the research, indeed, involves both the study of historical and (*lato sensu*) cultural sources and the assessment of people’s experiences from the Lion City.

The present article does not pretend to be ultimately conclusive. Instead it merely presents its case from the available evidence and, where evidence is insufficient, hypotheses are provided and their considerations are brought to light for future academic works that can afford to be even more specific in their scope.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Food and beverage names will be discussed in four subsections with different levels of complexity:

1. Items with singular names — *laksa*, *rojak* and *bandung*.
2. Items whose names index more than one type of dish — *carrot cake*.
3. Items which are not only identified by their ‘official’ name but also an alternative ‘nickname’ — *ang ji gao*, *tak kiu* and *diao he*.
4. Items which are heavily customised by consumers such that they have, over time, developed a complex system of variant names that form a specialised lexicon and syntax — *teh* and *kopi*. For example, *teh* can be modified with *C siew dai gao peng* to produce *teh C siew dai gao peng*. Not only will attention be given to the etymologies of *teh*, *kopi* and their modifications, the way in which these modifications combine and interact with one another syntactically will be discussed.

For the benefit of an international readership, descriptions of food or beverage, their histories, and preparation processes are detailed from time to time. Many names are from languages other than English or are romanisations from them, and are thus accompanied with transcriptions in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to better reflect pronunciation. Tones have been excluded due to the various systems found across languages. English speakers may also note that many plosives within these names are unaspirated or unreleased, e.g., *kopi* /ko.pi/, rather than /k^ho.p^hi/ (least of all the pronunciation of *copy*).

5.1 Singular Names

Laksa, *rojak*, and *bandung* are names which appear opaque at first glance, but become clear once their culinary descriptions are known and their names translated into English from their languages of origin. Further discussion seems redundant, however, as described in section 4, it is still crucial to consider the Singapore language ecology. *Laksa* and *rojak* in particular are claimed to have languages of origin that do not immediately belong to the ecology and hence their respective subsections focus heavily on addressing the links of those languages to the ecology. While the existing etymologies of *bandung* are claimed to have languages of origin already within the ecology, it is still necessary to assess which of those are better supported through evidence and analysis.

5.1.1 *Laksa*



Figure 2. Singapore *laksa* (Keep Recipes n.d.)

Description and History

The ingredients found in Singapore *laksa* /lak.sa/ are vermicelli, prawn, fishcake, cockle, and tofu puff in rich gravy made from coconut milk, prawn paste, and curry spices known as *rempah* in Malay (A. Tan 2019). The vermicelli is usually short enough to be slurped up using a spoon. *Laksa* is notably the dish which is most emblematic to intercultural mingling (A. Tan 2019). Described as a Peranakan dish, it was born out of the intermarriages between Chinese traders and local Malay women from the 15th century, created from infusing Malay spices into Chinese method of cooking soup (Cheema 2019).

Preparation

To cook *laksa*, a blended spice paste is prepared, consisting of fish curry powder, ground coriander, dried and soaked shrimps, chopped candlenuts, turmeric root, red chillies, ginger, shallots, garlic, *belachan* (dried shrimp paste), lemongrass. Oil is added as when necessary, so that the blender blades can turn easily. Salt and sugar are then added for seasoning and the paste is set aside. Oil is heated in a pan over low heat and the spice paste is stir-fried for five minutes until fragrant. Coconut milk and chicken stock are then added, while stirring continually, until the broth is brought to a boil. Then, the heat is reduced and seafood and tofu are added, seasoning with salt and pepper. The broth is allowed to simmer until cooked, for around three minutes. Finally, the dish is served

with vermicelli, bean sprouts and boiled egg, garnished with laksa leaves (note that *laksa* is not named as such because of the laksa leaf which also goes by the name *Vietnamese coriander*; rather, the reverse is true) (Wong and Wibisono 2005).

Etymology

The word *laksa* has three widely believed etymologies. The first is from Sanskrit, लक्ष /lək.ṣá/ (IAST: lakṣá), meaning ‘hundred thousand’, referring to the numerous strands of vermicelli used in *laksa* (Malay Literary Reference Centre 2017) or the myriad of ingredients required to cook *laksa* (Cheema 2019). Malay today has a huge proportion of Sanskrit-derived words, through borrowings. Sanskrit vocabulary which entered the Malay language had origins from various Prakrits and Middle Indo-Aryan languages (Ribeiro 2016). In fact, the Old Malay language system (7th -14th century) adopted traces of Sanskrit scriptures in phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and other scholarly works pertaining to Indian culture and the Hindu-Buddhist religion (Wurm et al. 1996). For example, a proportion of Malays have Sanskrit names originating from the names of Indian Hindu deities or heroes, such as Puteri, Putera, Wira and Wati. It is not difficult to imagine that *laksa* has Sanskrit origins.

Another theory would indicate that it originated from Persian, لاکسه /lə:k.tʃe/, which refers to vermicelli (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia). The period of Classical Malay (14th -18th century), due to Islamisation and booming trade with the Muslim world, has seen the penetration of Arabic and Persian vocabulary into the Malay language, through borrowings (Collins 1998). Although there are some Persian loan words in the Malay language, originating from the 15th to 17th centuries, they are limited in number. According to etymological surveys done by Jones (1978), Bausani (1964) and Beg (1982), around 300 lexical items of Persian origin have been identified (Guillot 2020). Due to the restricted number of Persian loanwords in Malay, the likelihood of *laksa* having Persian roots is slim, although not entirely improbable: both Sanskrit and Persian belong to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family and thus share many cognates and similarities.

A third etymology of *laksa* is from the Min Nan group of languages 辣沙 /lak̚.sa/ (Tan et al. 2019), meaning ‘spicy sand’ (McMahon, 2019), to refer to the sandy or gritty texture found in the *laksa* broth caused by the ground dried prawns used in the soup (Asian Inspirations 2022). From 1896 to 1941, Singapore as well as other Southeast Asian port cities saw the influx of Chinese immigrants from southern China such as Fujian and Guangdong provinces, who were attracted by the economic opportunities on the island (Ee 1961). Many of these early Chinese immigrants, including Chinese merchants from Malacca, spoke Southern Min or Minnan varieties such as Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, and Hokkien (How, 2019; Lim, 2019). The earliest emergence of *laksa* in Malaysia can be dated back to the early 19th century in Malacca, born out of intermarriages of Chinese traders and the local women. In Singapore, *laksa* was first introduced in the district of Katong in the 1940s, by Peranakans who came from the Malayan Peninsula (Banerji 2016). During Singapore’s pre-independence era, the Chinese community formed the largest ethnic group. While different groups spoke different Chinese languages within the Chinese population, Hokkien was the main intra-ethnic *lingua franca* (Lim 2007) primarily because Hokkien speakers formed the largest group among the Chinese in Singapore (Bokhorst-Heng 1998). In the 1957 national census, 30% of the total population were Hokkien speakers, followed by Teochew speakers who comprised 17%

(Kuo 1980).

However, language contact between the different ethnic groups was the situation in reality where borrowings and loanwords across languages could have happened. In this regard, it may be difficult to ascertain the original etymology of the dish *laksa*. As previously discussed in the above section, the Minnan etymology proved the most plausible, followed by the Sanskrit etymology, and the least plausible of all would be the Persian etymology.

5.1.2 Chinese *Rojak*



Figure 3. Chinese *rojak* (Miss Tam Chiak n.d.)

Description and History

The Singapore Chinese *rojak* /ɪo.ɖʒak̚/ tantalises the taste buds with a mix of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy flavours, as well as being crunchy and juicy all at the same time. It commonly features bite-sized chunks of pineapple, cucumber and Chinese turnip, *you tiao* (deep-fried dough fritters) and *tau pok* (fried tofu puffs) in a dark and sticky sauce made from *hae ko* (dried shrimp paste), tamarind, sugar, salt, lemon juice or vinegar and topped with chopped peanuts (Wan and Hiew 2010). The Chinese *rojak* is not to be confused with the Indian *rojak* which features potato chunks, fried tofu, coconut flour balls, prawn fritters, vegetable fritters, fried *sotong* (squid), cuttlefish, *sambal* eggs (boiled eggs cooked with spicy chilli paste) and fried *tempe* (fermented soya bean strips) (Wan and Hiew 2010).

Until the 1980s, *rojak* was sold by roadside peddlers, often illegally, using mobile stalls and bicycles and whereas earlier in the 1960s, pushcarts were used (Chua 2007). Fresh ingredients would be stored in a wooden box with a glass panel. The only tools which the peddler needed was his cutting board, a knife, a large mixing bowl and a wooden spoon. Ingredients would be cut and mixed immediately (Tee 2001). Back in the olden days, the finished *rojak* would be packed in a *daun upeh*, a leaf folded into the shape of a cup (Thien 2002) and toothpicks would be pierced through the first few ingredients, which act in place of forks (B. Tan 2019).

Preparation

To prepare Chinese *rojak*, cucumber, pineapple, mango, green apples, *you tiao*, and *tau pok* are cut into bite-sized pieces. A sauce is created by combining *hae ko* (shrimp paste), tamarind juice mixed with warm water, brown sugar, white sugar, salt, lemon

juice, *chilli padi* (small red chilli), and toasted chopped peanuts. The ingredients and sauce are mixed in a large bowl, tossed evenly, and the dish is ready to be served (Seow 2014). This dish can be both enjoyed as a snack, an appetiser, or as part of the main meal (B. Tan 2019).

Etymology

Rojak is the Malay word for ‘mixture’ (Wan and Hiew 2010), a name especially apt for a dish that is evidently a mixture of many ingredients. The word can be traced back to Old Javanese ꦿꦫꦗꦏ꧀ /*ɤ.ɔ.ɖʒaʔ*/ (Malay Literary Reference Centre 2017), the name of a traditional Indonesian salad of mixed raw fruits and vegetables served with a spicy *gula melaka* (palm sugar) dressing (Yuen 2012). In colloquial Indonesian, a variety closely associated with Malay, *rujak* also bears the meaning of a ‘mixture’, or a ‘mishmash’ (Kamus Basa Jawa n.d.).

As Singapore grew in national consciousness, the name *rojak* later came to be adopted to describe and epitomise the rich cultural diversity of Singapore by drawing a parallel between the island’s cultural makeup with the combination of ingredients common in Chinese and Malay cuisines (B. Tan 2019).

5.1.3 Bandung



Figure 4. *Bandung* (Wikipedia n.d.)

Description and Preparation

Sirap bandung, *air bandung*, or simply, *bandung* /'ba:n.dʊŋ/, is a well-loved dessert drink in Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei. Characteristically pink, *bandung* is made out of rose syrup, condensed milk and served with ice. Rose syrup, an ingredient featured in numerous Indian beverages, is made from combining melted rose petals with sugar. Variations of the drink include adding grass jelly or swapping out condensed milk with evaporated milk for the less sweet palate.

Etymology

There are two possibilities for the etymology of the *bandung* drink. The first theory is attributed to the Malay *bandung* ‘pairs’, generally used to describe anything that

comes as such, for instance *rumah bandung* ‘semi-detached house’ (Abetterman21 2021). The *bandung* drink would be one such type of ‘pair’ with its two ingredients. Although *bandung* in truth comprises three ingredients, water, rose syrup and condensed milk, the ‘pair’ likely refers to the rose syrup and condensed milk for they give the drink its defining character. Another way to assess this diachronically is to hypothesise that the original pair in *bandung* was water and rose syrup, with milk only being added at a later point in time; in this case the word *bandung* is currently associated closely with its milk component due to attitudes within food culture having evolved over time. In any case, *bandung* can occasionally be used to describe a set of more than two items, which would then accommodate all three ingredients of *bandung*. Although the drink is also referred to as *air bandung* ‘water pair’ and *sirap bandung* ‘syrup pair’, it is so commonly referred to (unanimously) *bandung* that *bandung* itself has in addition to its original meaning ‘pair’ developed this ‘lateral’, semantically-narrowed sense of the ‘drink’.

On the other hand, an alternative pareymology takes into account English, rather than the Malay language. Lore exists that an Englishman was the creator of the *bandung* drink during the British colonial period, referring to it as *banned dung* (G 2009). The Englishman reportedly held a distaste for tea, claiming it was “as foul-tasting as dung”. In search of tea alternatives, he discovered rose syrup used in an Indian drink. The man later added rose syrup to his tea in hopes of countering the bitterness of black tea, although this was not achieved. Subsequently, he added milk and sugar to create a sweeter and thickened drink that became *bandung*. The audience at his afternoon tea assumed he had mispronounced the name of the Indonesian city Bandung, which he had previously visited on a missionary trip.

Between a proposal that connects an existing Malay word with a drink made in the region of Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, and a proposal of a single unknown foreigner’s invention that spread throughout Malaya, it is more likely that the former is the case. There is no record of the said Englishman to our knowledge. His *bandung* creation differs from typical *bandung* drinks served in eateries with the inclusion of tea. Furthermore, the drink has no relation to the Indonesian city Bandung, hardly being found in Bandung or even Indonesia itself. It is far more probable that *bandung* was created by Malay communities in either Singapore, Malaysia or Brunei, who then named the drink with their language. While rose syrup is featured as an Indian ingredient brought over by Indian migrants, the beverage *bandung* in which it is used has developed a distinct identity in the region. Not only is the name *bandung* as we know it already present in the Malay language, littered throughout Malay expressions, it is highly applicable to the concept of the drink.

5.2 Names with More Than One Referent: Teochew *Carrot Cake*



Figure 5. Teochew *carrot cake* (Cooking with Lu n.d.)

Description

The *carrot cake* which locals can order from hawker centres and food centres in Singapore is very different from the beloved *carrot cake* of the West, of which one of the chief ingredients in the latter is the carrot. This flavourful dish is created by adding steamed grated white radish to rice flour till the mixture solidifies (Wan and Hiew 2010). The cake is then separated into blocks and stir-fried till somewhat charred. Ingredients such as egg, soya sauce, white pepper and chilli sauce are also added, topped off with spring onions as garnish. *Carrot cake* has both ‘black’ and ‘white’ versions. The main difference is that the black version is cooked with a liberal drenching of dark sweet soy sauce, whereas the white version contains only a drizzle of light soy sauce (Wan and Hiew 2010).

Preparation

To prepare this dish, radish is first boiled in water for around five minutes, until translucent. Water is then drained and the radish is set aside. Rice flour, tapioca flour and chicken stock are next added to a bowl and mixed evenly until combined, before the addition of boiled radish. Following that, a wok is set on medium heat. Once the oil is heated, garlic is added and fried for a minute. The radish mixture is added until it thickens up and resembles a thick cake batter. The mixture is then poured into a round cake pan and steamed for an hour. Once the cake solidifies, the steamer is removed and the cake is allowed to cook. It is left to refrigerate for three hours, sometimes even overnight. After refrigeration, the cake is cut into small rectangular cubes. Oil is then heated up in a wok and brought to high heat. When it begins to smoke, the cubes are added and stirred occasionally until they give a slightly charred appearance. With the heat turned down to medium, chopped garlic, pickled radish (also known as *chai poh*), light soy sauce (for the white version) or dark sweet soy sauce (for the black version), and fish sauce are added. The mixture is stir-fried for a minute until each cube is evenly coated with sauce, after which eggs are added, slightly separating them once they become cooked. Before serving,

the dish is typically garnished with sliced spring onion and chilli paste (VisitSingapore 2022).

Etymology

The biggest mystery surrounding this dish is its name — *carrot cake*. Both its components *carrot* and *cake* are problematic. Firstly, radishes and carrots may look similar, but they are not the same plant and have two distinct names in English; secondly, the savoury dish does not fulfil the most common criteria of what most would understand as *cake* which is typically associated with a sweet flavour. How may these concepts be reconciled?

One of the earliest versions of this dish hails from Chaoshan, China, 米糕 ‘rice cake’ or 糕粿 ‘starch cake’, later brought over to Singapore in the 1950s by the Teochews. At the time, it was referred to as 炒粿 /tsh^ha.kue/ (sometimes romanised as *char kueh*) ‘fried cake’. The addition of radish, eggs, garlic and soy sauce would later prompt its evolution to 菜头粿 /tsh^hai.t^hau.kue/ (sometimes romanised as *chai tow kway*) ‘radish cake’, a name that hawker by the name of Ng Soik Theng has claimed credit for (Tan 2022). The given English name, *carrot cake*, is thought to be a calque or a loan translation from its existing Teochew name 菜头粿 /tsh^hai.t^hau.kue/. A breakdown of this compound gives the components 菜头 ‘radish’ and /kue/, which has no English equivalents, although the latter is frequently translated as *cake*. Our task then, is to draw the connections between *carrot* and ‘radish’, as well as *cake* with the Chinese lexeme 粿.

The first obvious consideration to get out of the way is the historical-linguistic context where the English translation would have emerged. It is not clear when exactly the English translation carrot cake first appeared nor who the translators were, but we do know a few things from what was explored in section 3.2. The rise of hawker culture occurred during a time when English was not yet the *lingua franca* of the general public; Bazaar Malay would continue to play this role till the 1970s and NMCVs would persist to be the dominant language spoken at home till as late as the 1980s. Therefore, the earlier the name was translated, the less we expect a proficiency in English nor a precise translation. Assuming translators had limited English vocabularies, they may not have been equipped with the full range of names assigned to various vegetables. Although radishes and carrots are indeed different vegetables, they are rather similar in physical appearance. In such situations the next best word would have to suffice for English speakers with limited proficiencies, who then loosely referred to radishes as *carrots*. What this does not explain, however, are two matters: one, a situation where the translation emerged much later as English proficiency rose and a more exact translation is expected, and two, the reasons that 粿 /kue/ would be translated as *cake* even if one had a low English proficiency, given how different they are in appearance.

Crucially, the lexical-semantic space between different languages are divided differently, with the relationship between the English language and the Chinese varieties being no exception. In English, *carrot* and *radish* are distinct, clearly denoting different vegetables. However, in the Chinese languages, both ‘carrot’ and ‘radish’ are referred to as 萝卜 and disambiguation is achieved through the addition of 红 ‘red’, so that 萝卜 continues to refer to ‘radish’ and 红萝卜 (literally ‘red radish’) differentiates ‘carrot’ (Loke 2014). This same dynamic is observed with the usage of 菜头 /tsh^hai.t^hau/, the preferred equivalent in Teochew and Hokkien. Given the flexibility of what 菜头

/ts^hai.t^hau/ denotes, it is understandable that it did not occur to translators of *carrot cake* that the English *carrot* does not exhibit the same fluidity. Although an English speaker would presumably have the capacity to differentiate *carrot* from *radish*, one cannot assume that every English speaker has the same proficiency, especially in a country with a complex and ever-evolving language ecology.

The case of *cake* is, unfortunately, more complicated. Despite being translated as such, 粿 /kue/ in truth covers a large variety of food items that an English speaker might categorise rather differently, including cakes, rice cakes and pastries, among many others that have no near equivalents in Western cuisine. To add to this complexity, its Malay equivalent *kueh* or *kuih* often used interchangeably in Singapore, further expanding what 粿 /kue/ denotes with a larger range of cultural and culinary variations. Although it has been described as “both sweet or savoury”, “often baked or steamed, traditionally using a charcoal fire” and “made from glutinous rice, coconut and *gula melaka* (palm sugar)” (National Heritage Board 2021b), it is notoriously difficult to narrow its characterisation and deserves its own independent study. For the purposes of the present article however, we focus on trying to explain why among the many possible translations *cake* in particular has made its way to *carrot cake*. One of the prominent characteristics of Teochew *carrot cake* are its radish cubes (see Image 2), which are made from a combination of shredded radish, steamed rice flour and water. Crucially, these ingredients are bound together in blocks that hold together and can be later cut without losing their structure. When viewed this way, the common denominator for the concept of ‘cake’ — at least for speakers who produced the English translation — lies in the shape of the dish, rather than its ingredients and taste. In other words, this is the same set of mechanics that allow the English modifier *rice* to alter *cake* away drastically, but successfully from its Western conception to form *rice cake*. With 粿 /kue/, issues of translation supersede any consideration of the proficiency of speakers who made the English translation; if this lexeme is difficult for an English speaker to translate, what then of speakers with weaker proficiencies?

For all the reasons above, the English translation *carrot cake* is sometimes labelled as a “misnomer”. Some go further to speculate that it could have even boosted the popularity of the dish, with tourists eager to find out exactly what the “carrot cake without carrots” tastes like. Alleged marketing ploys aside, at least it could be established that the linguistic demography in Singapore’s history as well as issues arising from translation were factors contributing to the derived name *carrot cake*.

5.3 Names with Local Alternatives

Aside from the etymology of indisputable food and beverage names, there exists a realm of alternative drink names in the coffee shop menu. These names are communicated verbally and are highly unlikely to be found on physical menus at drink stalls. The three alternative names discussed in the following section are Hokkien, the language which is a resource to numerous other names and monikers of food and beverage in Singapore. The popularity of these Hokkien alternatives is largely attributed to the aforementioned Hokkien Chinese majority and role of Hokkien as a lingua franca in the mid-19th century.

Although popular media has embraced Hokkien nicknames like *ang ji gao* or *tak kiu* for its unique cultural input, it is unascertained if Singaporeans use them in effect. Coined by the older NMCV speaking generation, Hokkien monikers may have lost their relevance in the local drink ordering scene as the usage of NMCV by younger generations

declines (Cavallaro and Ng 2014). Nevertheless, Singapore’s distinctive hawker culture is clearly evident with the education of these endearing nicknames for younger customers. A sense of hawker, or linguistic, pride can be detected as articles explaining these alternative names are littered with phrases such as ‘order like a local’ and ‘true Singaporean’ (Ong 2016). This niche set of names is worth exploring to uncover the cognitive links that underline the Singaporean hawker culture, and also the histories of certain local, or localised, drinks.

5.3.1 Guinness Stout and *ang ji gao*

Description

Guinness stout is a popular alcoholic beverage that is easily accessible in most coffee shops and hawker centres. It is a favourite amongst customers who appreciate a richer, full-flavoured beer over other alcohol typically available such as *Tiger* beer - a local pale lager, similar to those offered by *Heineken* or *Carlsberg*.

Etymology

A common alternative name for an order of *Guinness stout* is the Hokkien name *ang ji gao* 红舌狗 /aŋ.tsiŋ.kao/ ‘red-tongued dog’. While the dark lager may seem to have no connection with the aforementioned animal, a look into the history of Guinness in Singapore would provide a clearer view.

Distribution of the Irish stout in Southeast Asia began in the 1860s, and merchant bottlers were employed to distribute bulk exports (Guinness 2022a). Of the few companies that held trade rights in the region, Blood Wolfe & Co was the dominant distributor in Singapore. In order to identify the country of export, local distributors made use of animal symbols. In Singapore, a black wolf with a red tongue was used. Other countries including Malaysia and Indonesia were assigned a black bulldog and cat respectively (Lainey 2015). The trademark wolf’s head plastered on bottle labels were widely recognisable, therefore attaining the nickname from the then majority Hokkien population, *ang ji gao* for ‘red-tongued dog’, or more simply *orh gao* for ‘black dog’.



fig. 94. Blood Wolfe 1896 neck label.

Figure 6. Guinness wolf’s head label (Guinness 2022b)

Preference for *ang ji gao* Over *Guinness Stout*

Apart from aiding the distribution process, Blood Wolfe & Co. claimed the animal symbols were tailored to foreign consumers who were most often illiterate in English (Guinness 2022a). Based on the earliest available data of literacy rates in Singapore, approximately half of the population were literate in 1960 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2022). Therefore, it is not unlikely that Guinness would be better off known by Singaporean drinkers as the red-tongued dog brand, rather than its Irish English name.

The beginnings of using the name *ang ji gao* may be explained through the population dynamic in Singapore in the mid-1800s. With the majority of coffee shop patrons as Chinese immigrants, English was unlikely the language of communication between customers and drink stall owners. Furthermore, the pronunciation of *Guinness Stout* exhibits features not found in the phonology of Mandarin as well as NMCVs in Singapore. In these Chinese languages, consonant clusters do not exist and the only consonants found in syllable-final position are nasals and/or stops, i.e., the consonant cluster /st/ in *Stout* and the fricative /s/ in *Guinness* would present a challenge to these speakers. The chances of *Guinness Stout* having been picked up by speakers wholesale is unlikely.

Curiously, the icon on past Guinness labels is not a dog, but a wolf. It is explicitly stated in historical records and on the label itself that the wolf's head is the symbol for Singapore exports. It is not the case that there exists no word for wolf in the Chinese varieties, hence the immediate cognitive link between the symbol and a dog may be drawn from the local environment. As a tropical country, Singapore is not home to wolves which are native to Eurasia and North America. Unlike in Europe, where Blood Wolfe & Co originate, Singaporeans in the 1800s may not recognise a wolf's head from not having encountered one. Animals familiar to the Singapore environment, however, include wild dogs that have inhabited the land way before immigration and colonial societies (Barnard 2019). Furthermore, there was no need for distinguishing a wolf's head from a dog's in order to communicate which beverage one desired, given that there were no other prominent dog symbols on other drinks. With the understanding that a wolf bears sufficient resemblance to a dog, the alternative name *ang ji gao* is unsurprising.

While literacy may have motivated the use of the Hokkien nickname and its visual association, it is not entirely true that the original 'Guinness' could not have been understood by customers. Languages and names alike have the potential to be transmitted orally, therefore the illiteracy of the population may not in fact support the hypothesis that *ang ji gao* was used for this reason. Rather, the literacy of the population is a factor among many for the preference of the moniker over the original name.

Although production of the red-tongued dog labels ceased in the 1950s, its prominence has persisted through the generations. Favour for the distinctive nickname *ang ji gao* is portrayed in the local linguistic scene. In 2016, limited edition packaging for the drink was released to commemorate Guinness' 150 year anniversary in Singapore. A revised design of the red-tongued dog was promoted on bottles, cans and advertisements stating, "We made it our own. The Guinness red tongued dog." The ownership of the moniker is proudly embraced by the Singaporean community, including the younger generation. For instance, Orh Gao Taproom is a hip craft beer establishment that has been running since 2019. The taproom takes a contemporary spin on Singaporean hawker culture and cuisine, while its name pays homage to the unique naming practices of Singaporean dishes. The adoption of *ang ji gao* and *orh gao* is a celebration of

Singapore's distinct personality (Guinness 2022a). Today, an order of *ang ji gao* or *orh gao* is still widely understood in old school coffee shops and even in modern drink establishments.

5.3.2 Milo and *tak kiu*

Description

First developed in Australia, Milo is a chocolate malt drink produced by Nestlé and is extremely popular in Singapore and Malaysia (Tin et al. 2016). Marketed as a drink with nutritional value and its association with sports and energy, Milo has become a staple drink in these countries with a stable reputation held by both older and younger generations. A study on the eating habits of Singaporean youth has even proven Milo's presence as an essential breakfast drink (Ang and Foo 2002). Singapore and Malaysia assume the top two positions for the highest consumption per capita of Milo in the world (Pakiam 2019).

Milo is available in all coffee shops, hawker centres, school canteens and most beverage stalls in Singapore. Made by dissolving the Milo powder in either hot water or milk, Milo also has several variants for customers to enjoy - Milo Dinosaur, Milo Godzilla, and Milo King Kong. Milo Dinosaur refers to iced Milo generously topped with undissolved Milo powder. Milo Godzilla is a step up from Milo Dinosaur, including a scoop of vanilla ice cream or whipped cream on top. Lastly, Milo King Kong is exactly the same as the Milo Godzilla, with either an additional scoop of ice cream or a double scoop.



Figure 7. Milo Dinosaur (left) and Milo Godzilla (right)
(The Straits Times 2015)

Etymology of *tak kiu* and Milo Variant Names

The Milo drink is broadly known as *tak kiu* 踢球 /tʰat̚.kiu/ which means 'kicking a ball' in Hokkien. In line with the beverage's promotion for nutrition and energy, the branding of Milo products depict images of athletes on their packaging. Although Milo Singapore presently features a range of local athletes on their products, the most recognised and original image is that of a soccer player kicking a ball.

Milo variant names associated with monstrous creatures, that is, dinosaurs, Godzilla and King Kong, are possibly attributed to the rising cinema culture in the 1990s in Singapore (Pakiam 2021). The release of popular movies such as Jurassic Park resulted

in the widespread knowledge and imagination of giant lizards, apes and extinct animals. Reportedly invented by Indian-Muslim eateries in the mid-1990s, longstanding and popular eateries A&A Muslim Restaurant, Al-Ameen Eating House and Al-Azhar Eating Restaurant have claimed credit for these Milo creations (Pakiam 2019). These casual eateries likely took advantage of the cinema trend to entice customers with entertaining and playful drink names for the pre-existing Milo drinks.

Preference for *tak kiu* Over Milo

While the aforementioned Guinness may have proven difficult for Chinese customers to pronounce, there is no clear reason for the preference of *tak kiu* over Milo. Phonetically transparent, Milo would most likely be easily used by customers and store owners, not restricted to speakers of Chinese varieties.

The relevance of *tak kiu* in the coffee shop scene presently is unascertained. Looking at the recent linguistic trends in the country, the alternative Hokkien name may lose its significance in the ordering scene. Factors include the majority of the current population being literate, an increasing trend of first language English speakers and a shift away from NMCVs such as Hokkien (Singapore Department of Statistics 2022; Ng 2017; Goh and Lim 2021).

Nonetheless, there is an eagerness to integrate and preserve these quirks as part of the unique Singaporean identity. Singaporeans have taken pride in their localisations of the Milo beverage, with Milo arguably counting towards one of their heritage foods despite being produced by a multinational foreign company (Pakiam 2019). The iconicity of Milo in Singapore is evident in ‘uniquely Singaporean’ items that celebrate Singapore’s food culture, with novelty items sold by local design and lifestyle company, Wheniwasfour, featuring caricatures of a ‘Milo Dinosaur’.

5.3.3 Chinese Tea and *diao he*



Figure 8. *Diao he* (Ong 2016)

Description

Chinese tea or *diao he* /tiao.hə/ refers to plain tea of the green, oolong or pu erh tea varieties. This is distinct from *teh* or black tea served with condensed milk, a practice influenced by the British rulers and Indian migrants after World War II who added milk and sugar to their tea (Tan 2013; Lim 2020).

Diao he originates from Hokkien 钓鱼 /tiao.hə/ ‘fishing’. The drink is typically served as a glass of hot water with the tea sachet remaining, often as it is still in the process of steeping. What the name does in effect is to draw a parallel between the physical action of dipping the tea bag in with free lining during fishing. Its Mandarin equivalent *diao yu* 钓鱼 /tiao.y/ (Pinyin: diào yú), is also recognised at beverage stalls.

While perfectly logical for *teh* to be referred to as *diao he* as well, this is never used by Singaporean speakers. The key reason for this lies again in the practices of beverage stall workers: *teh* is not made with smaller sachets of tea, but are brewed with tea dust in large batches of pots, and the dust is strained away before customers are served. Further descriptions on *teh* can be found in section 5.4.

Preference for diao he over Chinese tea

Because *teh* is associated with a completely different drink, neither this nor with *tea* in English would be sufficient to order Chinese tea. Greater specification must be made with the modifier 中国 ‘China’ as in 中国茶 /tioŋ.kək.te/ ‘China tea’ in Hokkien or its Mandarin equivalent /tʂoŋ.kuo.tʂʰa/ (Pinyin: zhōng guó chá). While there is also *Chinese tea* in English, this is most certainly not the language choice amongst Chinese customers (and is probably a translation from its Chinese equivalents). These names allow both customers and sellers alike to eliminate confusion with *teh* and decipher the correct beverage order, but why does *diao he* coexist among them? The disyllabic *diao he* may be more effective than the trisyllabic Chinese variations given the brevity of coffee shop orders, but this is not particularly convincing.

The best explanation we have at present for the preference with *diao he* surfaces after comparing *diao he* with *ang ji gao* and *tak kiu*. While Guinness stout has some degree of phonetic evidence to suggest why its moniker *ang ji gao* would outcompete it, none exist with Milo (*tak kiu*), and the present 中国茶 is particularly puzzling because unlike Guinness stout and Milo, 中国茶 is itself Chinese. This may well explain why the use of *diao he* remains more popular amongst older Chinese customers while declining in use with subsequent generations. However, a similarity runs across the three beverage monikers, namely, they result from a general tendency for Singaporeans to draw a cognitive association between the beverage and their visual appearances, an observation we will comment on and close the section with.

5.3.4 Alternative Naming

The need, or rather preference, to source for alternative names in the Singapore beverage system gives insight to the culture and cognitive tendencies of Singaporeans.

While the example of Guinness stout seems to suggest that perhaps illiteracy or a lack of familiarity with another language’s phonology has a role to play in encouraging the rise of a moniker, we might point out that surely names can be learnt through speech and we might question why a nativised pronunciation did not develop among the Chinese population. Speakers could have dropped “stout” in Guinness stout, and /'gɪn.nəs/ could have, for instance, shifted to /ki.ni/, a pronunciation composed of phonemes that are

present in many Chinese languages. /'maɪ.loʊ/ is even less of a challenge and would at the least have changed to /maɪ.lo/. Finally, not much remains to be said for *diao he* with its painfully obvious 中国茶.

The weakness of illiteracy and phonological unfamiliarity as primary arguments redirects us to the hypothesis that visual processes occupy the greatest space in the minds of Singaporeans when naming or recalling a beverage. The three beverages have revealed a pattern of Singaporeans drawing linguistic inspiration from visual cues, such as prominent symbols or images on packaging labels in the case of *ang ji gao* (a wolf) and *tak kiu* (football), or comparing an activity which resembles another in the case of *diao he* (fishing). This is not particularly odd when one compares these monikers to the way in which an individual or community might coin a nickname using landmarks known to them, as opposed to the existing name of a place or street. For example, Sago Lane named after the numerous sago factories in the area in the mid-1800s holds an alternative nickname *sei yan gai* 死人街 /sei.yən.kɑ:i/. Directly translating to ‘dead people street’ in Cantonese, this alternative name derived from the death houses and funeral parlours of the past (Lee 2017). Death houses were a defining feature of the street and likely bore more significance in the minds of Cantonese Chinese Singaporeans, who mostly occupied the surrounding area, than sago factories (Thulaja 2016), explaining the preference for *sei yan gai* over Sago Lane. Generally, descriptive naming of places is highly prevalent in Singapore's ononyms (Perono Cacciafoco and Tuang 2018), such that numerous street names in Singapore have been coined either by the primary economic activity or landscape of the area. Visual inspiration, as strongly demonstrated, plays an important role in the naming practices of not only food and beverage but also objects and places in Singapore.

For example, the Hokkien moniker *goo cia chwee* 牛车水 /gu.ts^hia.tsui/ for the Malay place name Kreta Ayer, meaning ‘bullock cart water’, which referred to the oxen-led vehicle that supplied water in the area (Ng 2018). Although Kreta Ayer similarly means ‘water cart’, the translation may not have been made familiar to the Chinese population.

In addition to a close cognitive relationship between the visual and linguistic, a further look into the concept of nicknames can reflect both material and mental aspects of a community (Tsepikova 2013). The former supports the idea that items can be given nicknames for their obvious characteristics. On the other hand, the mental aspects that may be retrieved from nicknames highlight social and individual considerations of its users. Nicknames are inherently communal (Duckert 1973; de Pina-Cabral 1984). Its prevalence and usage by a group can be recognised as an expression of the community, drawn from shared experiences. The discussed alternative names originated from Chinese communities as early as the 19th century, but have continued to be significant as part of Singapore's hawker culture. Despite the availability of original names, the choice and knowledge of alternative names could propose a community or in-group identity. With respect to local beverages, the alternative names that have been influenced by visual features carry social significance both at the point of origin and presently.

5.4 Names within a Specialised Lexicon: The Singaporean Beverage Ordering System

Although tea and coffee have established an impressively international presence today, the well-travelled expect their tastes to vary from country to country. What may

come as a surprise is that ordering tea or coffee to begin with can be a rather perplexing experience for a consumer not from Singapore, as it has developed a conventionalised system that can be difficult for an outsider to master. Knowing that tea and coffee are called *teh* and *kopi* respectively is barely sufficient, because they are prepared in a particular fashion. Moreover, many kinds of modifications (or customisations) are available, with each denoted by a different name that is part of a larger, specialised lexicon. This will henceforth be referred to as the “*teh-kopi* lexicon”. The etymologies of these names are not always obvious nor agreed upon by natives, in part due to how the *teh-kopi* lexicon developed in the highly multilingual ecology of the insular city-state. These complexities make *teh* and *kopi* particularly deserving of an etymological investigation.

5.4.1 Coffee and Tea versus *Kopi* and *Teh*

The first part of a beverage order is where one decides between tea and coffee. The tea found in *teh* is made from the dust of black, highly-oxidised leaves. On the other hand, the coffee in *kopi* is made from highly-caffeinated Robusta beans roasted with margarine and sugar, which imbues the resulting beverage with a distinct caramelised flavour (Loh and Yang 2015). The tea dust and ground beans are both brewed into a concentrate with sock filters, a process which customers can often witness in full view when waiting their turn in queues. Although these concentrates are further diluted with water before customers are served, the resulting beverages are frequently strong in taste. Yet, there is still one more important difference between *teh* and *tea*, and *kopi* and *coffee*, that not only surfaces from the culinary aspect, but also manifests in the linguistic.

Teh /te/ ‘tea’ originates from the Min Nan 茶 /te/ (Dahl 2013), while *kopi* /ko.pi/ ‘coffee’, though a word found in Hokkien and Teochew as 咖啡 /ko.pi/ is originally a loan from the Malay *kopi*. Incidentally the English *tea* also originates from the same pronunciation /te/ albeit indirectly through other languages (Dahl 2013). Indeed, the full etymology of *tea* and *coffee* is fascinatingly rich and can hardly be done justice here, making it the task for a different article. What is more relevant in the Singapore context is that *teh* and *kopi* have both borne an additional, narrowed sense in meaning. When one orders *teh* or *kopi* at a coffee shop, one is referring specifically to hot tea or hot coffee which has been prepared with condensed milk; its temperature and condiments are assumed. In other words, one would have to intentionally make their modifications known to coffee shop workers if one wants their tea and coffee neat. Semantically speaking, one can still use *teh* and *kopi* to refer to both the broader and narrower senses outside of the coffee shop, but at the beverage stall, these words are always understood with the narrower sense exclusively.

5.4.2 Modifying Beverages

We noted that to order *teh* or *kopi* without milk, customers would have to modify their beverage. They can in fact modify their cup of *teh* or *kopi* in a variety of ways beyond this, such as:

- the overall temperature of their beverage,
- the concentration of tea or coffee,

- the type of milk added, if desired at all, and
- sweetness.

For example, an iced tea with evaporated milk would not be ordered in this manner, and would instead be expressed as *teh C peng*. Not all words found in this system are simply direct loans from non-English languages, therefore we also have the opportunity to examine language change and its underlying variety of morphological and semantic processes in this specialised lexicon.

Among the different types of modifications, temperature and concentration are more easily stated and semantically transparent, but the etymologies of the milk and sugar modifications are opaquer.

5.4.2.1 Temperature

Teh and *kopi* are served hot by default, but one can have this iced by adding *peng* /peŋ/, from Hokkien 冰 /peŋ/ ‘ice’. Iced *teh* and *kopi* would be expressed as *teh peng* and *kopi peng*. While cafes can usually prepare a beverage ice-shaken such that it is served cold without leaving the ice in, no such service is offered at a Singapore coffee shop and thus one does not hear of *teh leng* (Hokkien 冷 /leŋ/ ‘cold’) generally. It is however possible to have one’s beverage lukewarm by adding *pua sio (leng)*, from Hokkien 半烧 (冷) /pua.sio.(leŋ)/ ‘half-hot(-cold)’.

5.4.2.2 Concentration

As *teh* and *kopi* are first brewed in large metal pots as concentrates, beverage stall workers prepare these for consumption by adding an appropriate amount of water to each cup. As such, customers can easily adjust the strength of the coffee or tea in their orders.

1. A dilute beverage is ordered through *po* /po/ (sometimes romanised as *poh*), from Hokkien 薄 /po/ ‘thin’,
2. a concentrated beverage is ordered through *gao* /kau/ (sometimes romanised as *kao*, *gau* or *kau*), from Hokkien 厚 /kau/ ‘thick’,
3. while the strongest concentration possible is ordered through *di lo* /ti̯.lo/, from Hokkien 直 /ti̯/ ‘straight, constantly’ and 落 /lo/ ‘to fall, to descend’. *Di lo* roughly translates to ‘to pour all the way’, which means that no further dilution is made to the tea or coffee concentrate.

As a side note, it is not clear why some romanisations transcribe 直 /ti̯/ without its final stop. What we do know is that plosive finals in Hokkien are unreleased (Saunders 1962) and therefore may not always be audible or noticeable at the level of the syllable, especially if one otherwise speaks a language without this phonetic feature. Depending on the speaker and recipient, the final /t̩/ may almost sound like it has been dropped altogether, whether it is due to rapid speech or, in this case, two adjacent consonants (i.e., /t̩/ and /l/). Therefore *di* is either the result of transcription issues or an intention to reflect language use. In any case, the more important observation made here is that transcriptions

are merely transcriptions; the present study strives to exercise caution with them.

5.4.2.3 Milk

Although *teh* and *kopi* are served with condensed milk, one can

1. replace this with evaporated milk by adding *C*, or
2. opt out of milk altogether by adding *O*.

If no further modifications are added, *teh C*, *teh O*, *kopi C* and *kopi O* are all served with sugar by default. Therefore:

- *teh/kopi* tea/coffee + condensed milk (which already contains sugar)
- *teh/kopi C* tea/coffee + evaporated milk + sugar
- *teh/kopi O* tea/coffee + no milk + sugar

It might seem unintuitive to English speakers that *C* would mean ‘evaporated milk’, who might associate this with ‘condensed milk’ instead. An explanation in Singapore so popular that it has even reached audiences outside the nation in *The Atlantic* (Tan 2010) and *The New York Times* (Tan 2012) recounts the idea that the *C* refers to the brand of evaporated milk that was used in coffee shops in their early days — *Carnation*. A less-known theory explains that *C* originates instead from Hainanese 鲜 /si/ ‘fresh’, itself shortened from 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/ (sometimes said in the order 牛奶鲜 /gu.nin.si/; literally ‘fresh cow milk’), understood in the sense of ‘evaporated milk’ (Ng 2012). While both proposals of etymology appear plausible at first glance, the *Carnation* one reveals itself to be the more problematic of the two.

Under the *Carnation* proposal, several morphological and semantic processes are at play. Initialisation and eponymy are certainly a few of them, but also witnessed is a case of narrowing followed by that of broadening. In order for this etymology to work, *Carnation* would have first narrowed from ‘Carnation brand’ to ‘evaporated milk from Carnation brand’, which would in turn broaden to mean ‘evaporated milk (of any brand)’. Unfortunately, it is exactly because so many linguistic processes need to be justified at the same time that this proposal becomes laboured.

- **Eponymy:** It is unclear why among various brands that produce evaporated milk, *Carnation* in particular was chosen to represent it. For *Carnation* to develop into an eponym it must have been so prevalent at some point of time that it developed synonymy with their evaporated milk, but documented evidence for this is scarce.
- **Narrowing:** One would also question why *Carnation* would be assigned to evaporated milk rather than condensed milk. Did condensed milk have a different brand with which it was associated that made using *C* useful for disambiguation? What happens in cases where stalls use both types of milk from the *Carnation* brand; would *C* catch on in those places? Again, the evidence to answer these questions is lacking.
- **Broadening:** With the uncertainty over the narrowing stage, we cannot logically

progress to the later broadening process as they are sequential.

- **Initialisation:** The abbreviation of *C* from *Carnation* presupposes a knowledge of the Roman alphabet. It is not known when exactly evaporated milk first became an option for tea and coffee beverages in Singapore, but for the purposes of a complete discussion, one must also entertain the possibility that this choice has existed for a long time. The earliest data on literacy rates from the Singapore Department of Statistics (2022), dating back to 1960, stood at a mere 52.6% in its earliest record. Furthermore, had one's job been of manual labour, it would have been even more unlikely that they were part of the literate half. Even if we were to imagine a scenario where workers learnt the name *Carnation* through speech rather than through reading, any kind of word clipping in subsequent linguistic innovations is more likely to bear evidence of retaining a syllable (e.g., /k^ha/) rather than the name of an isolated letter. Consistent with this idea, the retained syllable would have also begun with the velar stop /k/ as found in *Carnation*, and not the alveolar fricative /s/ that is found in the English name for the letter *C*. Therefore, the *Carnation* proposal can only really be plausible if *C* emerged at a much later time when basic literacy in English increased among the Singapore population. In fact, because literacy rates were historically so low, any innovations related to *Carnation* would have more likely been, for instance, visually inspired. (One such source of inspiration might have been from its product packaging, as the brand has long featured a prominent image of carnation flowers.)

Unless more evidence can be uncovered in the future, the *Carnation* proposal proves to be unlikely across multiple factors.

In contrast, the Hainanese 鲜 /si/ proposal holds together with far more ease. Despite their low population numbers amongst the Singaporean Chinese community, the Hainanese had a pioneering role in the coffee shop business and remained dominant up to about the late 1970s (Lai 2015; Lim 2019). Their influence in the sector would have likely left traces of their language in the specialised *teh-kopi* lexicon. Further, the sense of 'evaporated milk' in 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/ is indeed attested in Singaporean Hainanese and the compound word would only require the singular process of clipping to give the result of *C* /si/.

Despite its attestation, 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/, a curious feature of 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/ reveals itself in the first character, 鲜 /si/ 'fresh'. This feature does not necessarily problematise the Hainanese etymology of *C*, but it is still worth some exploration. Why would canned milk be considered 'fresh', since raw milk would better fit the bill? Ong Siew Ping, a former chairman of the Kheng Keow Coffee Merchants Restaurant and Bar-owners Association proposes one reason for the use of 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/, recounting that "before these milks [in cartons] were available, evaporated milk was the freshest one could get" (Ng 2012). His answer is revealing in the way that he does not mention raw milk as a source of 'fresh milk'; this aligns with trends in the public consciousness of 20th century Singapore, when processed milk began to be deemed as more hygienic, safer, and in this sense 'fresher' (Tarulevicz 2019). The meaning of 'fresh' as found in 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/ may have more to do with the idea of cleanliness, rather than how recently it

was procured from an animal.

Another contributing factor encouraging the semantic links between ‘evaporated milk’ and ‘fresh’ might also be attributed to the way evaporated milk is packaged. Being canned, evaporated milk does not spoil for long periods of time without refrigeration, and thus would be readily ‘fresh’ whenever one needs it. In addition, refrigerators were unlikely to be a common household item decades ago. Ownership remained below 50% of the Singapore population in the early 1970s, before increasing to nearly 90% in the latter half of the same decade (Lee and Yap 2012). Requiring refrigeration to prevent spoilage, uncanned milk was conceivably impractical for longer-term storage and evaporated milk would have the capacity to fill this vacuum. Thought in this way, 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/ in this sense does not strictly refer to milk that is the *freshest*, but also milk that is able to stay fresh for the *longest*.

Viewing evaporated milk as a replacement for regular milk also addresses another loophole that bears similarities to the discussion of the *Carnation* proposal: if both evaporated and condensed milk come canned (and would therefore be equally as fresh), why is 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/ specifically assigned to evaporated milk? The difference in their sugar content informs consumption habits. Sweetened condensed milk — referred to as 甜牛奶 /diam.gu.nin/ (literally ‘sweet cow milk’) in Hainanese — has a sugar content of about 55% (MasterClass 2021), up to a maximum of 64.5% . Hence, this milk is typically used as one of many ingredients in food or beverage items (Featherstone 2016). While unsweetened evaporated milk can also fulfil this role, it has a composition fit for nutritionally substituting a regular milk drink as well (Featherstone 2016). Between the two, the absence of added sugar in evaporated milk which allows its broader range of use would more closely match regular milk.

Together, the demography of coffee shop businesses, the attestation of 鲜牛奶 /si.gu.nin/, and the strong semantic links between the meanings of ‘fresh cow milk’ and ‘evaporated milk’ work in tandem to support a Hainanese etymology of *C*.

After having seen that the transcription *C* comes in the form of a single English letter, it is tempting to make an association between the similar shapes of the letter ‘O’ and the numeral ‘0’ (i.e., zero milk → O milk → O). In addition one may also speculate that some kind of analogical change might have happened to regularise all milk modifications: *C* might have first to be adopted to denote ‘evaporated milk’ which prompted the change from an earlier word denoting ‘no milk’ to the newer form *O*, or vice-versa. However, this explanation is unlikely not only because it assumes a literacy of Roman letters as has been earlier problematised, but also due to the fact that it is not always pronounced /o/ like the name for the English letter ‘O’, but /ɔ/, which coincides with a Hokkien word we will next explore.

It seems way more likely that *O* /ɔ/ originates from Hokkien 乌 /ɔ/ for ascribing something as ‘black’ or ‘dark’ (Fun Toast 2013). Although 乌 also indexes a ‘crow’ or ‘raven’, and a separate Chinese lexeme 黑 ‘black’ or ‘dark’ exists, it is common in Singaporean Hokkien speech to use 乌 /ɔ/ as a way of denoting the same meaning as 黑 does. *O*, used in *teh O* and *kopi O* would therefore mean ‘black tea’ and ‘black coffee’ respectively. Tea or coffee without milk retains its dark hue, and the intentional addition of *O* would be especially apt in coffee shops where *teh* and *kopi* are assumed to include condensed milk, lightening their colours considerably.

5.4.2.4 Sweetness

There are three ways to adjust the sweetness of one's beverage: one

1. reduces sweetness with the addition of *siew dai* /siu.tai/ (*siew* is alternatively romanised as *siu*; *dai* as *tai*)
2. increases sweetness with *gah dai* /ka.tai/ (*gah* is alternatively romanised as *ga*, *ka* or *kah*; *dai* as *tai*), and
3. skips sugar altogether with *kosong* /ko.sɔŋ/, from Malay *kosong* /ko.sɔŋ/ 'zero' or 'empty'.

While it has been proposed that *siew dai* comes from 少底 (literally 'less' + 'base' or 'bottom') and *gah dai* from 加底 (literally 'add' + 'base'), it remains unclear which particular Chinese language is the source of origin (Wiktionary 2022). Claims have been made that this is either Cantonese (Ng 2012; Old Tea Hut n.d.; Remember Singapore 2021) or Hockchew (Ang 2019; Fun Toast 2013; Rick 2020).

At the moment, the only parallel that we can draw is against present-day Cantonese speech in Hong Kong. 加底 /ka.tɛi/ (literally 'add' + 'base') and 扣底 /kʰɛu.tɛi/ (literally 'deduct' + 'base') are used in food orders to adjust the amount of rice or noodles, whilst 少甜 /siu.tʰim/ 'less sweet' is a request for less sugar (Anglo 2014). Different from Singapore,

- 底 'base' is extended to denote 'rice' or 'noodles' rather than 'sweetness',
- 'sweetness' is in turn referred to as 甜 /tʰim/ 'sweet', and
- 扣 /kʰɛu/ 'deduct' is used in favour of 少 /siu/ 'less'.

Despite these differences, similarities can most certainly be observed in two respects.

- Although the choice of lexeme is different between 扣 /kʰɛu/ and 'less' (少 /siu/), they communicate the same information.
- It follows that the structure of 少底 - 加底 and 加底 - 扣底 are both ADD/REDUCE + BASE.
- Moreover, the link between 'base' and 'sweetness' as found in the Singaporean use of *dai* can be justified. This will be elaborated upon shortly.

The equivalent terms for *siew dai* and *gah dai* in Hockchew are undocumented, although we can still perform a rudimentary comparison between Cantonese and Hockchew pronunciations. The lexemes found in Table 2 are compiled based on the above phrases from Hong Kong (加 'add', 扣 'deduct', 底 'base', 少 'less' and 甜 'sweet'), along with some additions conceivably relevant to the adjustment of sweetness levels (小 'little' and 糖 'sugar').

Table 2. Cantonese, Hockchew, and corresponding items in the *teh-kopi* lexicon (Chalmers 1907; Li 1998)

Lexeme	Cantonese	Hockchew	<i>Teh-kopi</i> lexicon
加 ‘add’	/ka/	/ka/	/ka/ (<i>gah</i>)
小 ‘little’	/siu/	/siu/	/siu/ (<i>siew</i>)
少 ‘less’	/siu/	/tsiu/	/siu/ (<i>siew</i>)
扣 ‘deduct’	/k ^h eu/	/k ^h au/	-
底 ‘base’	/tei/	/tɛ/	/tai/ (<i>dai</i>)
甜 ‘sweet’	/t ^h im/	/liɛŋ/	-
糖 ‘sugar’	/t ^h oŋ/	/t ^h ouŋ/	-

Despite some preliminary differences that seem to shift the odds in the favour of Cantonese as the supplier of pronunciation (i.e., 底 ‘base’ and to an extent 少 ‘less’), it must be stressed again that this is only a rudimentary comparison because our starting point is the set of phrases found in the Hong Kong variety of Cantonese. Additionally other Hockchew words which are not considered in Table 2 — especially if they are ‘non-standard’ vocabulary and thus not found in a dictionary — may have given rise to *dai*, rather than 底 ‘base’. Moreover, this comparison does not begin to consider differences in tone and such an examination would warrant a separate study. The more vital point to be made here is that Cantonese and Hockchew bear evidence for similar pronunciations, at least for this particular set of lexemes. This in part explains the opposing claims for the language of origin for *siew dai* and *gah dai*.

In addition to phonology, the demographics of the coffee shop business is also crucial to consider. One cannot disregard the Hockchew’s dominance together with the Hainanese; furthermore the latter’s would weaken from the late 1970s (Lim 2019). The strong, continued Hockchew presence in the coffee shop scene is likely to bear great influence on the specialised *teh-kopi* lexicon. There is also another reason that makes the presence of Cantonese in this lexicon odd, but this will become clearer when the distribution of languages across the lexicon is charted later on.

Since neither the Cantonese nor Hockchew proposals are particularly convincing nor falsifiable, it would be most prudent to assess that perhaps language contact, rather than a single variety of Chinese, has given rise to the Singaporean use of *siew dai* and *gah dai*. At the moment, the best guess from the patchy evidence available is that *gah* and *siew* are both Hockchew and Cantonese in origin, while *dai* is of Cantonese origin. Certainly, further academic developments may reveal this not to be the case.

Next, we turn our attention to the semantics of *kosong*, *siew dai* and *gah dai*. Of the three, the etymology of *kosong* is the most intuitive (i.e., ‘zero sugar’ or ‘empty of sugar’), but the same cannot be said of *siew dai* and *gah dai* — and that is if we assume that the lexeme 底 ‘base’ is what give rise to *dai* in the first place. We have seen that it is difficult to ascertain this, nonetheless, we will attempt to make connections between ‘base’ and ‘sweetness’ since this is what the present study has to work with. What is the possible semantic link between them?

As described in the *Milk* section, tea and coffee are sweetened in two ways. The condensed milk in *teh* and *kopi* already contains sugar, while the evaporated milk of *teh C* and *kopi C* does not, so white sugar is added to the latter. Condensed milk and white sugar, both being denser than water, would remain at the base of a cup especially if left

unstirred. *Siew dai* would in this manner translate to ‘less at the base’ (thus ‘less sweet’) and *gah dai* ‘add to the base’ (thus ‘sweeter’).

Why a word separate from the more straightforward 甜 ‘sweet’ and 糖 ‘sugar’ was opted for, might be explained in a few ways. For one, the Singaporean tendency toward visually-inspired naming processes has been well established with *ang ji gao*, *milo* and *diao he* in section 5.3, aligning perfectly with *siew dai* and *gah dai*.

In the case of *siew dai* and *gah dai* however, there are additional, practical considerations to minimise miscommunication between the beverage worker and the customer. It could be potentially confusing if one says “less sugar” in an order of *teh* or *kopi* where no white sugar is added in the first place, having already been sweetened by condensed milk. Certainly, while a worker might just interpret this as ‘less condensed milk’, there is also the possibility that the customer does not realise that (a) white sugar is not a part of *teh* and *kopi*, or that (b) a request for reduced sugar necessarily affects another component of the drink (i.e., its milk content). A word denoting ‘sweet’ seems to resolve this situation, since it should be understood that sweetness does not only come from white sugar. Yet, the reverse side of this issue can also be argued, that this still does not draw adequate attention to (b); when this is considered, the use of a word wholly separate from ‘sugar’ and ‘sweetness’ would promote clearer communication.

Another layer of complexity comes from factoring in language change. Theoretically, *dai* could have evolved in three possible ways:

1. It referred to both ‘condensed milk’ and ‘sugar’, meaning it denoted ‘sweetness’ from the start of its use (i.e., the assumption thus far).
2. It was first used to denote ‘condensed milk’ (as is suggested by Wiktionary 2022), before including white sugar to denote ‘sweetness’.
3. It was first used to denote ‘sugar’, before including condensed milk to denote ‘sweetness’.

How might the claim from Wiktionary (2022) hold up? The second and third hypotheses, being opposites of each other, will be analysed side by side. When *teh* and *kopi* are served in Singapore coffee shops or hawker centres, the condensed milk typically remains unstirred, forming a thick layer at the base of the cup. The image of a clean, white layer contrasted against the brown hue from the tea or coffee is visually striking, especially if seen through a cup made of glass. Although we previously noted that white sugar does indeed sink, its translucent, crystalline, and granular nature makes this effect less prominent, and the amount of white sugar added is typically less than that of condensed milk. The effect further pales in beverages containing evaporated milk. Evaporated milk, being less dense than condensed milk, begins to mix with the rest of the beverage once it is added, quickly turning the mixture opaque even without additional stirring — any sugar added is hardly seen. If physical appearances were indeed an indicator in word formation, the argument here is that the one which is more salient would be more likely to be a name’s source of inspiration. However, what makes it difficult to tell whether favour for the second hypothesis is well placed is the fact that it was only in the 1970s that coffee shops began to use glass cups in place of porcelain ones (Ng 2019). We know neither when *siew dai* or *gah dai* first came into use, nor when evaporated milk (that would obstruct the view of sugar) first became an option in tea and coffee beverages. Would the difference in appearance between condensed milk and sugar be as apparent

during a time when opaque cups were used? The second theory is more likely only if the terms *siew dai* and *gah dai* emerged after the 1970s.

What further complicates this issue are two contradictory observations from other parts of the *teh-kopi* lexicon. *Teh* and *kopi*, as used today, are understood as including condensed milk by default, and need to be modified to *teh/kopi C* before white sugar even enters the picture. This hints at the significance of condensed milk in *teh* and *kopi* culture, and in turn the position of condensed milk to allow the rise of *dai*. However, as will be later elaborated upon in section 6, *teh/kopi kosong* (tea/coffee with condensed milk, unsweetened) can be viewed today as an invalid order. *Kosong*, being the sweetness counterpart to *siew dai* and *gah dai*, would suggest to us that the sweetness component is more central to the concept of *dai*. Yet again, one could argue that these two competing observations are in the first place synchronic and may not necessarily have diachronic implications, i.e., just because these are true today does not mean it was true back then.

As one can tell, it is frustratingly difficult to give a nuanced account of how *siew dai* and *gah dai* evolved, apart from the fact that its present meaning has evolved to ‘sweetness’. Until such a time when more information can be uncovered, the only conceivable way forward would be to question the chances of these terms emerging in the first place *and* persisting in language use if not for condensed milk, versus a hypothetical situation where sugar was the only sweetening option. This in fact brings us back to the discussion of the need for clear communication between the beverage worker and the customer. Perhaps, rather than viewing the first and second hypotheses as separate, the truth may lie somewhere in between. The common denominator between sugar and condensed milk may be ‘sweetness’ in terms of semantics, but the likely catalyst which would have triggered the mental associations necessary for a new name to be created in the very first place would have been condensed milk.

5.4.2.5 Summary of Modifications

Table 3 summarises the beverages and modifications explored above, listed with their meanings, language of origin and the linguistic processes they have undergone.

The *teh* and *kopi* lexicon, comprising four of the languages spoken in Singapore, is a clear manifestation of the island’s language ecology. Of the two beverages and ten modifications listed in Table 3, Hokkien dominates with six items. One item is of Min Nan origin, the group of languages which Hokkien belongs to. Another one is from Hainanese, two are from Malay and two are from a possible contact between Cantonese and Hockchew. The distribution of the lexical items is unsurprising: we can attribute the dominance of Hokkien to how its people made (and continues to make) up most of the Chinese population in Singapore (Leimgruber 2013), the presence of Malay to the tendency for Hokkien speakers in Singapore and Malaysia to borrow heavily from it (Teoh and Lim 1999), and the presence of Hainanese and Hockchew to their people’s pioneering role in coffee shops (Lim 2019; Lai 2015). Despite the presence of the Cantonese language in Singapore, its presence within the *teh* and *kopi* lexicon is rather curious, for reasons explained later in section 6.

We also witness that most words have not undergone morphological change after their selection from the language ecology, save the processes of clipping (*C*) and compounding (*siew dai* and *gah dai*) which are common in the Chinese languages (Ronneberger-Sibold 2012). Being a specialised lexicon, items in the *teh* and *kopi* lexicon which have not undergone morphological change have narrowed in meaning. For

example, the modifications *gao* and *po* are always used in reference to the concentration of tea, not that of the milk nor sweetness. Similarly, the modification *kosong* exclusively refers to sweetness levels, and not milk. However, like *teh* and *kopi*, the process of lexical narrowing in these modifications only applies to the *teh* and *kopi* lexicon; outside of this context, the component words still retain their broader meaning in Singapore.

Table 3. Summary of beverages and modifications

Category	Beverage or modification	Meaning	Language of origin	Morphological processes	Semantic processes
BEVERAGE	<i>teh</i>	hot tea with condensed milk	Min Nan	-	narrowing
	<i>kopi</i>	hot coffee with condensed milk	Malay	-	narrowing
MILK	∅	(condensed milk)	-	-	-
	<i>C</i>	evaporated milk	Hainanese	clipping	-
	<i>O</i>	no milk	Hokkien	-	-
SWEETNESS	∅	(default)	-	-	-
	<i>kosong</i>	no sugar	Malay	-	narrowing
	<i>siew dai</i>	less sweet	Cantonese & Hockchew	compounding	narrowing
	<i>gah dai</i>	sweeter	Cantonese & Hockchew	compounding	narrowing
CONCENTRATION	∅	(default)	-	-	-
	<i>gao</i>	strong	Hokkien	-	narrowing
	<i>po</i>	weak	Hokkien	-	narrowing
TEMPERATURE	<i>di lo</i>	maximum strength	Hokkien	compounding	-
	∅	(hot)	-	-	-
	<i>peng</i>	iced	Hokkien	-	-
	<i>pua sio (leng)</i>	lukewarm	Hokkien	compounding	-

∅ marks items that have assumed meanings in the absence of modifiers from that category

In the next section, we move beyond the lexical level to see how modifications are strung together syntactically, a vital component that if left out fails to explain the *teh* and *kopi* lexicon in its entirety.

5.4.3. Combining Modifications

How does one put the modifications together, since beverages are often modified in more than one way? A beverage with four different modifications, say a strong iced tea with evaporated milk and less sugar, would be expressed as:

teh *C* *siew dai* *gao* *peng*
 BEVERAGE MILK SWEETNESS CONCENTRATION TEMPERATURE

Note how this expression is structured: the beverage is positioned first and any modifications go after the beverage, stated in succession, without the use of prepositions, conjunctions or particles. In this way, the modifications function similarly to grammatical modifiers at a syntactic level. However, the use of the word “modification” as it is used in this article is intentional, as the term “modifier” may not be suitable in our case. First,

the *teh* and *kopi* lexicon is dominated by words from Chinese languages which pre-modify nouns rather than post-modify them (Brunner 2014). Second, since the use of this lexicon is confined to speech, one could argue that the position of the modifications are akin to sentence fragments that add afterthought (e.g., if we were to say “tea, evaporated milk, iced, less sugar” in English which also pre-modifies nouns), or that these modifications used to be described in fuller sentences (e.g., “May I get a cup of iced tea with evaporated milk and less sugar?”) by speakers who eventually clipped words for efficiency, leading to conventionalised expressions.

One interesting point of discussion surrounds the sequence of these modifications. Language use would suggest that the modification for MILK is always stated immediately after *teh* or *kopi* (Order Kopi Guide n.d.), however, the sequence in which the rest of the modifications are organised is controversial. It is not uncommon to hear Singaporeans recounting anecdotes of being chided by beverage stall workers who correct them, implying some kind of fixed sequence. In any case, any claim for a so-called ‘correct’ sequence probably has more to do with an issue of practicality rather than syntactic correctness for the reasons just discussed; practicality in the sense that it reflects the same sequence in which workers add ingredients while preparing beverages, thereby promoting efficiency and minimal error. This is especially important in a coffee shop culture where workers rely on memorising customers’ beverage orders and where queues form rapidly. Let us suppose someone claims that the sequence should be BEVERAGE + MILK + SUGAR + CONCENTRATION + TEMPERATURE and we take on their perspective:

1. MILK: Condensed milk, being a dense ingredient, would be added to the cup first, to prevent spills from less dense liquids (i.e., water and tea/coffee concentrate) had they been added first instead.
2. SWEETNESS: Since adjusting the sweetness of *teh* is done by adjusting the amount of condensed milk, these steps are one and the same, therefore any changes to sweetness should be stated at this point. For consistency, for all beverages that are served with white sugar (e.g., *teh O*, *teh C*, *kopi O*, *kopi C*), sugar adjustments should be stated here too.
3. CONCENTRATION: Then, the tea concentrate and the appropriate amount of water is added.
4. TEMPERATURE: Finally, if one orders the beverage iced, then the entire mixture is poured into a larger cup that can accommodate the ice cubes.

Of course, virtually any sequence may be justifiable depending on a worker’s beverage preparation process. As far as this argument is concerned, the ‘correct’ sequence of modifications would thus be one that is most orderly for the worker.

Before concluding the section, it is interesting to note that in a beverage ordering system that is not strictly compositional but rather relies on modifications and a knowledge of what is assumed in unmodified beverages, some semantic peculiarities arise. What I mean by this is that the system does not build a beverage from the bottom up starting from plain tea or coffee alone, instead, its base unit is *teh* or *kopi* — itself made of tea/coffee with condensed milk, assumed to be hot, of a default sweetness level and a default amount of beverage concentrate — therefore one modifies a beverage not only by adding components but also removing them. An additional layer of complexity arises

because although the beverage orders *teh O*, *teh C*, *kopi O* and *kopi C* seem to only contain BEVERAGE + MILK components, we previously noted that all four beverages are served with white sugar. The peculiarity that results from this complex system is that particular beverage orders do not exist in theory and to understand this requires a little analysis that combines the levels of semantics and syntax. *Teh/kopi kosong* is a case in point (Order Kopi Guide n.d.; Rick 2020). This translates to ‘tea/coffee with condensed milk, unsweetened’. However, sugar clearly cannot be separated from condensed milk, therefore *teh/kopi kosong* would necessarily mean removing the condensed milk altogether. This leaves patrons with options among:

- *teh/kopi O* (tea/coffee + no milk + sugar),
- *teh/kopi O kosong* (tea/coffee + no milk + no sugar), and
- *teh/kopi C kosong* (tea/coffee + evaporated milk + no sugar).

6. ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS

Dissecting these etymologies was not an easy task. The names used to identify food and beverages in Singapore have gradually become semantically opaque in varying degrees, an issue especially pronounced in the *teh-kopi* lexicon where modifications have become very specialised in the domain of the coffee shop. For example, when a Singaporean adds the modification *siew dai*, they may not always think of this in terms of its components ‘less’ and ‘base’, but rather as a complete compound to denote the meaning of ‘less sweet’. As time passes and people lose the semantic link, the origins of these terms become less and less certain. Here we list some challenges faced and the limitations of our analyses, and in doing so, illustrate how they relate to broader issues in etymological work more generally.

The most pressing of these issues is the availability and distribution of evidence in supporting etymological arguments. With *laksa*, we have had plenty of evidence to account for how an etymological proposal stands in terms of how the supposed languages of origin have connections to the Singapore language ecology, but this is merely a piece within a much larger etymological puzzle. A piece of the puzzle that is often missing, for example, are highly specific historical facts which could aid in supporting or eliminating etymologies based on how well they correspond to those facts. In the case of the *teh-kopi* lexicon, the presence and distribution of loan languages is justified with at least one explanation possible for each of the languages. However, further work will need to be done in order to propose a comprehensive timeline as to when each of the words in the *teh-kopi* lexicon became dominant, i.e., is the survival of one Hainanese word and two Malay words simply the result of Singapore’s linguistic demography, or are there untold histories within coffee shops? The existence of the Cantonese *siew dai* and *gah dai* propel this issue into the spotlight. While Cantonese is indeed one of the languages that is spoken in Singapore, why would a specialised lexicon dominated by Hokkien items that have mainly undergone semantic narrowing include Cantonese items that require the additional process of compounding to form *siew dai* and *gah dai*? One can only speculate a range of theories, such as an influx of Cantonese-speaking workers in the later years of coffee shop history coinciding with a rising Singaporean consciousness of sugar intake. In addition, information on the availability of condensed and evaporated milk in coffee shops would have also been an excellent tool to understand how they affected the

historical semantics of *siew dai* and *gah dai*. This brings our attention to the fact that evidence is not always preserved in written form, and collecting oral histories from hawkers and coffee shop workers should be more heavily sought out in future research.

Other issues are more specific to a group of languages, in this case, the Chinese languages. One of the main difficulties faced in tracing particular lexical items involves the variety of NMCVs, which presents unique issues in the Singapore context. An obvious issue is the drastic decrease of NMCV speakers over time (Cavallaro and Ng 2014) (see Table 1), which has reduced the transparency of meanings behind modifications for later generations. On another front, NMCVs are largely spoken and are not written in Singapore despite having Chinese writing systems at hand, thus even local native speakers of these NMCVs often do not know the written forms of their own speech. This means that correspondences between the spoken and the written may be misidentified (e.g., 烏 - 黑 and 底 - 糖 - 甜, see section 5.4.2, on milk and sweetness), and more importantly, any previous forms that were once used to describe these modifications would have been lost, without written records. The immediate consequence of this is that it is difficult to tell if the many Hokkien words in, for instance, the coffee shop lexicon are indeed of Hokkien origin, or are the result of earlier lexemes that were perhaps originally Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese or another Chinese language, having only remained in their later Hokkien pronunciations due to their popularity among speakers. Even though in more recent times have the modifications borne transcriptions in the Roman script, as used in this article, these transcriptions do not follow a singular system, such as Pinyin for Mandarin, Pêh-ōe-jī for Hokkien and Jyutping for Cantonese. The convergence of all the above conditions leads to the fossilisation of whichever transcribed form is the most popular. As we have seen earlier, one must be cautious with such transcriptions, as they can potentially lead to false analogies and etymologies such as that of *C*.

Finally, future work can continue expanding the range of food and beverage names studied. The selection of names are more typical of a Chinese-owned stall, for instance, Malay-owned stalls for instance will typically sell drinks like *teh tarik* ‘tea pulled’ (a frothy tea with condensed milk) and in beverage ordering systems, modifications like *siew dai* might be replaced with Malay *kurang manis* ‘less sweet’ and *peng* with Malay *ais* ‘ice’. It is our wish that future work can expand to integrate food and beverage names from other ethnicities in Singapore.

7. CONCLUSION

The rise of technology in the 21st century and the disruption brought about by COVID-19 have led to some older hawkers falling out of the hawker scene due to being illiterate and non tech-savvy, thus taking away “a piece of Singapore with them” (Naheswari and Wong 2021). While the future of Singapore’s hawker culture may be uncertain to some degree, its longevity appears to be in good hands with various forms of public and communal support displayed for hawker culture in Singapore (National Heritage Board 2021a). Through this paper, we hope to have contributed to the preservation of Singapore’s hawker culture by demonstrating and bringing to light the complexity and idiosyncrasies of a distinctive specialised lexicon native to Singapore’s hawker scene. By analysing the historical background of various food and drink items, this article proffers explanations behind their names and puts forth a case for the most plausible one. Aside from official names, we also discussed local alternatives such as nicknames for certain beverages and probed deeper into the beverage ordering system in

Singapore's hawker lexicon. Similarly, multiple etymologies are first presented before a contention of the most probable one is proposed.

Zooming out, the local hawker centre and coffee shop lexicon is just one of the many examples of how the broader language ecology of Singapore manifests. In a country where the use of NMCVs have drastically reduced over time due to language policies (Cavallaro and Ng 2014), the beverage ordering system of Singapore remains as one of the pockets where these NMCVs continue to survive today. NMCVs are also reflected in the names of Singaporean dishes with influences from Malay, indicative of Singapore's population history with the Malays being the earliest known majority in the early 19th century (Turnbull 1989). With this language ecology, we do not just witness simplistic borrowing in many different directions, but also how these loans interact and undergo the morphological and semantic changes we have just examined. It would be quite a disservice not to recognise the complex linguistic processes that 'non-standard' languages and varieties in Singapore undergo. Bazaar Malay and the use of *chapalang* /'tʃa.pa.laŋ/ (from Hokkien or Teochew 杂, Pinyin: zá, literally 'mix/mixed') terms in various languages for the ordering of hawker food and drinks in Singapore have brilliantly captured the essence of Singapore's multilingual and multicultural beginnings.

Yet, the proliferating use of English as a first language in the 21st century (Cavallaro and Ng 2014) begs the question of whether the hawker lexicon will change in the years to come or withstand the test of time. Already we see a declining usage of some names such as the nickname *diao he* for Chinese tea. On top of that, the beverage ordering system, though symbolic of language contact in Singapore, also appears to be less known amongst the younger generation. Infographics presenting the modification, such as switching out condensed milk for evaporated milk, and the respective modification name, C, are sometimes featured near the drink stalls in hawker centres and coffee shops. While they act as a straightforward visual representation of how one orders their drinks, the background and history behind *how* the lexicon came about is lacking. In the absence of proper documentation efforts, it is not impossible to fathom a day where people no longer know exactly *what* they are ordering. Will an arbitrary relationship between *laska* and a bowl of curry vermicelli develop? It is indeed quite intriguing to think of how the language ecology in Singapore will continue to evolve, and when that time comes, we hope attempts will be made to document its resulting lexicon.

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