

Exploring Thai Cuisine Through Language: Ingredients and Global Perceptions

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Abstract—The study aims to identify types of food ingredients, frequent words, and key terms, as well as to explore global perceptions of Thai cuisine on social media. A total of 155 Thai dishes were collected from TasteAtlas, and KH Coder was employed to analyze linguistic data for high-frequency words and the co-occurrence network of key terms. Three linguistic strategies—English transliteration, translation with descriptors, and loanwords—are used to present Thai food names, ingredients, and descriptions. The words ‘sauce’, ‘garlic’, and ‘chili’ were found to be the most common ingredient-related terms, indicating the fundamental role of these items in Thai flavor profiles. Network analysis revealed key functional clusters, such as aromatic herbs and flavor-balancing agents. The terms ‘Thailand’, ‘traditional’, and ‘originate’ highlighted sensory details and the authenticity of Thai cuisine. Transliteration of ingredient names and culinary terms from the Thai language, as well as translation, helps disseminate Thai cuisine globally.

Index Terms—frequent words, linguistic, social media, TasteAtlas, Thai food

I. INTRODUCTION

Thai cuisine is famous for its rich flavors and variety of ingredients, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage and regional diversity. The global popularity of Thai food has led to an increased interest in understanding its unique components, particularly the ingredients that define its distinctive dishes. A comprehensive wordlist of Thai food ingredients is essential for various stakeholders, including linguists, culinary professionals, educators, and food enthusiasts, to facilitate accurate communication, translation, and preservation of culinary knowledge.

A corpus-based approach offers a systematic method for compiling such a wordlist by analyzing authentic language data to identify and categorize terms related to Thai food ingredients. This methodology ensures that the wordlist reflects actual usage patterns, capturing both common and specialized vocabulary pertinent to Thai cuisine.

The development of a Thai food ingredient wordlist has practical applications in various domains. In the culinary arts, it aids chefs and restaurateurs in maintaining authenticity and consistency in Thai dishes, especially in international settings. Educationally, it serves as a resource for teaching Thai culinary terms to non-native speakers, enhancing cross-cultural communication. Moreover, in the field of natural language processing, such a wordlist can improve the accuracy of machine translation systems and support the development of applications related to food and nutrition.

Digital platforms and governmental initiatives play complementary roles in promoting Thai culinary culture internationally. Online resources such as www.tasteatlas.com and www.allrecipes.com provide extensive information on traditional Thai dishes, ingredients, and regional culinary practices, thereby facilitating global access to and appreciation of Thai cuisine. The use of language on these platforms plays a crucial role in preserving the authenticity of Thai culinary traditions, as detailed descriptions, culturally specific terminologies, and accurate translations help maintain the integrity and richness of the original culinary context.

At the same time, governmental organizations such as the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2024) have developed strategies that emphasize gastronomy tourism as a mean to attract international visitors, while the Government Public Relations Department (2024) promotes Thai food as a key component of the country's cultural diplomacy. Through both online and governmental efforts, language serves as a critical medium in conveying cultural meaning, ensuring that Thai culinary heritage is not only widely visible but also accurately understood and respectfully adapted within global food cultures (Government Public Relations Department, 2024; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2024).

The integration of data from diverse sources, including governmental publications, culinary websites, and linguistic corpora, is crucial for developing a comprehensive and accurate wordlist. A corpus-based approach allows for the systematic analysis of large datasets, ensuring that the resulting wordlist encompasses the full spectrum of Thai food

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ingredients, from common staples to rare and region-specific items.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify types of Thai food ingredients on the global social media.
2. To develop a list of key words or high-frequent words in Thai cuisine.
3. To categorize and examine the high-frequent words of Thai cuisine.
4. To explore and analyze how Thai dishes are perceived and described by non-Thai perspectives on social media.

The research study aims to respond to the four research questions:

1. What types of food ingredients are found in Thai cuisine from the international perspective / on international social media?
2. What are the high-frequent words or key words of Thai food ingredients?
3. What categories are the high frequent words?
4. How are Thai dishes perceived and described from non-Thai perspectives on social media?

By achieving these objectives, the research will contribute valuable insights into the linguistics of Thai culinary terminology, supporting both academic endeavors in corpus linguistics and practical applications in the culinary arts and education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguistics is a quantitative methodological approach involving compilation, examination, and analysis of large bodies of text, with notable usage in the language study area (McEnery, 2019). With an enhanced comprehension of words' frequency and collocation, linguists have gained further insight into the pattern of language usage (Barlow, 2011). Despite several challenges associated with this methodology, including the demands regarding the size and diversity of corpora (Pomat, 2024), it has evolved and gained prominence in the fields of linguistics and educational research (Farr, 2008).

A corpus or a language database (plural: corpora) serves as a resource for linguists to investigate, analyze, and study natural language, and in order to answer various linguistic interrogations, researchers commonly build differently focused corpora (Dash & Selvaraj, 2018). While a small database such as PowerPoint slides for a specific English language course can be used to create a word list on a particular area topic such as food (M Nordin et al., 2013), there are also attempts to gather natural language in larger sources in specific domains such as marketing to create materials for special needs language classrooms (Pomat, 2024).

B. Word List

Word lists are structurally organized lists of words that are extracted or derived from the corpora. They can typically be categorized into high-frequency, mid-frequency, and low-frequency. With assessment over time, firstly, the high-frequency word list included the initial 2,000 common words, and the low-frequency word list began with the 10,000th word onwards (Nation, 2001). Later, the recent readjustment expanded the high-frequency word list to the first 3,000 words and adjusted the low-frequency word list to begin at the 9,000th (Nation, 2016).

The word lists can be classified as general word lists, which comprise the most frequently occurring words in the English language, with one of the world's most renowned examples being the General Service List (GSL) (West, 1953). Subsequently, building on the concept of frequency-based lists for general language, Coxhead (2000) developed the Academic Word List (AWL) to cater to vocabulary needs in academic contexts. In addition, technical word lists are compilations of vocabulary used specifically in certain fields, often assigned unique meanings within those domains. Due to their utility, they have gained extensive attention from researchers, particularly language teachers (Rungrueang et al., 2022).

Advancements in corpus linguistics have enabled researchers across fields to generate tailored word lists for specific disciplines. The domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has seen significant practical applications. For instance, Low (2018) addressed students' needs in terms of English vocabulary. In media and television studies, MacFadden et al. (2009) gathered vocabulary appearing predominantly on TV, noting that only a quarter of these terms overlapped with Coxhead's Academic Word List (AWL) (2000).

Food-related word lists have seen increasing development. Rungrueang et al. (2022) invented the Food Service Word List (FSWL) by analyzing a Food Service Corpus (FSC) containing 1,871,271 running words from four food-service industry-related websites. Similarly, Lueangseree and Phoocharoensil (2023) created the Western Food Wordlist (FWWL) specifically for students in culinary arts and food service. Beyond educational purposes, a study has also analyzed and ranked food ingredients appearing in approximately 1.6 million recipe sets from various recipe websites (Chatterjee et al., 2016).

C. Previous Studies on Food and Menus

A study on food vocabulary in an ESP course, English for Food and Beverage Service, conducted by Low (2018), identified five groups of food vocabulary that students wanted to learn: 1) herbs, spices, and food seasoning; 2) vegetables;

3) fruits; 4) meat and poultry; and 5) fish. Among these groups, two food groups were considered necessary: herbs, spices, and food seasonings, as well as the fish and shellfish group.

Research studies utilizing online data on food and menus have been conducted (Jurafsky et al., 2016; Low, 2019, 2021) using various sources, including TasteAtlas (Cheng et al., 2024; Rungrueang et al., 2022), Open Recipes (Chatterjee et al., 2016), Allrecipes (Popovski et al., 2019), RecipeDB (Batra et al., 2020), Twitter (Fried et al., 2014), and Instagram (Meluzzi & Balsamo, 2021).

Previous studies have demonstrated efforts in developing specialized vocabularies for the food industry. For instance, Low (2019) identified specialized words of Thai cuisine, such as “chili”, “curry”, “spicy”, “lime”, “sour”, and “tamarind”. These words highlighted the distinct flavor and characteristics of Thai food. Thai cuisine is commonly perceived as spicy and exotic (Lai et al., 2019; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Low, 2021; Putra et al., 2023; Sadiku, 2023). Sadiku (2023) even pointed out that five different tastes could be found in a single bite of Thai food.

Putra et al. (2023) highlighted key ingredients commonly used in traditional Southeast Asian cuisine, including coconut milk, lemongrass, galangal, tamarind, fish sauce, shrimp paste, chilies, and various herbs. They also noted that popular dishes from the region often feature curries, stir-fries, noodles, and rice-based meals.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

The data of Thai food ingredients were collected in December 2024 from a famous food website called TasteAtlas, which presents itself as ‘an encyclopedia of flavors’ providing local ingredients of traditional dishes and authentic restaurants (TasteAtlas, n.d.).

The Thailand page on the TasteAtlas website was used for the study. There were 170 Thai dishes on the page as shown in the Figure 1. All 170 dishes were collected in an Excel format to be analyzed for word frequency and word categories.

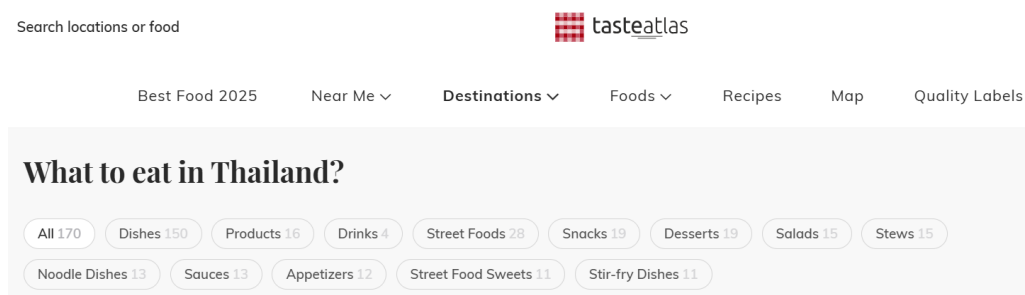


Figure 1. An Image of the Thailand Page on TasteAtlas
Source: <https://www.tasteatlas.com/thailand>

B. Data Processing

Collected data of Thai dish recipes were cleaned by removing words that showed amounts, adjectives, adverbs, and past participles. Only nouns were kept for analysis. Both singular and plural forms of the same word were counted as one term.

For the extraction of word frequency and keyword identification, the study utilized a free software tool called KH Coder (Higuchi, 2016). This tool enhanced the systematic extraction and analysis of linguistic data and identified keywords of the textual corpus.

IV. RESULTS

Thai food on the TasteAtlas page showed the total at 170; however, 155 dishes could be collected from the website and the data excluded products and drinks. The page lists Thai dishes in order of popularity, showing their ratings. An image of the first three popular Thai dishes is shown in Figure 2. All dishes are presented with an overview giving information about cooking methods, ingredients, flavors, condiments, and garnishes.

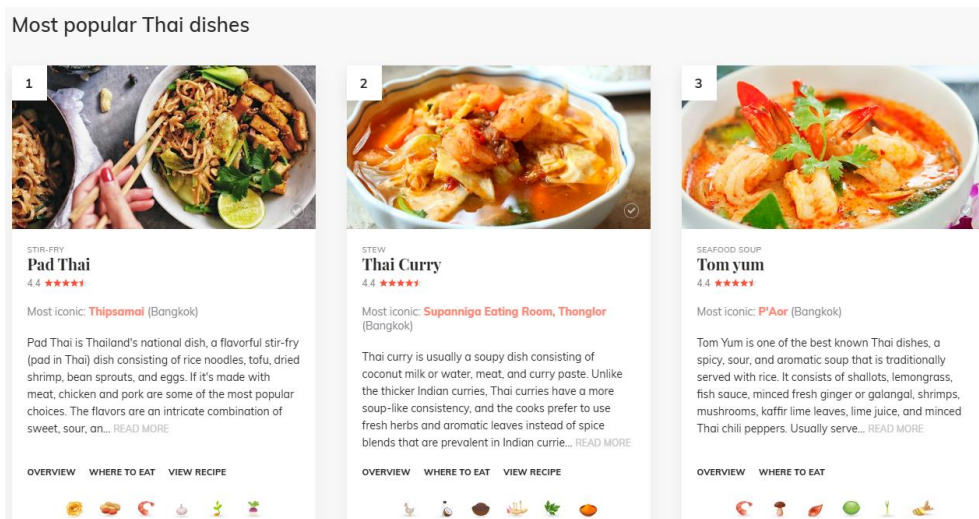


Figure 2. Examples of Popular Thai Dishes
Source: <https://www.tasteatlas.com/thailand>

STIR-FRY, STREET FOOD, NOODLE DISH

Pad Thai

(Kway Teow Pad Thai, Phat Thai, Phad Thai, ผัดไทย)

Pad Thai is Thailand's national dish, a flavorful stir-fry (*pad* in Thai) dish consisting of rice noodles, tofu, dried shrimp, bean sprouts, and eggs. If it's made with meat, chicken and pork are some of the most popular choices. The flavors are an intricate combination of sweet, sour, and salty, with a well-balanced contrast of textures.

Pad Thai is probably one of the most popular Thai dishes abroad. Its origins can be traced to a period of nationalism in the country, after the 1932 revolution that ended the absolute monarchy. There was a public contest to find a new national noodle dish, and the winner was a Pad Thai consisting of noodles, radish, sprouts, peanuts, and eggs.

Tender rice noodles are additionally flavored with sugar, tamarind, lime juice, vinegar, and fish sauce, and the dish is traditionally served with ground red chilis, white vinegar, sugar, fresh lime wedges, and fish sauce on the side, so each consumer can garnish the meal to their preference.

Figure 3. Example of an Overview of a Thai Dish
Source: <https://www.tasteatlas.com/pad-thai>

The dishes are presented with star ratings from no stars to five stars. The highest star rating is 4.6 for two Thai dishes: Phanaeng Curry and Roti Canai. The dishes with 4.5 are Tom Kha Gai, Massaman Curry, Khao Soi, curry paste, and Thai grilled chicken (Kai Yang). Eight dishes are at 4.4: Pad Thai, Thai Curry, Tom Yum, Green Curry, Red Curry, Phat Kaphrao, Khanom Khrok, and Nam Phrik Phao. There are 41 dishes without any ratings.

Q1: What types of food ingredients are found in Thai cuisine from the international perspectives/ on international social media?

Objective: To identify types of Thai food ingredients on the global social media.

The analysis of the data set reveals a categorization of 11 distinct types of food ingredients, each representing a unique group based on shared characteristics. By synthesizing the data, these categories were formed to allow for the generalization of terms with similar attributes. This categorization method not only helps in organizing the ingredients but also aids in identifying the most commonly used items across various food recipes.

Among the 11 categories, the most commonly used ingredients are meat and poultry as well as fish and shellfish, which frequently appear across multiple dishes. Common examples of meat and poultry include pork, chicken, duck, beef, and sausages, while fish and shellfish are represented by ingredients like fish, shrimp, and crab. These ingredients are integral components of numerous culinary traditions and are frequently seen in the majority of the dishes analyzed.

Additionally, herbs, spices, and vegetables are also highly prevalent, contributing significantly to the flavor profile and authenticity of Thai cuisine. Notable herbs and spices include chili, garlic, coriander, and lemongrass, while vegetables such as onions, shallots, and tomatoes appear frequently in the data set. These ingredients not only enhance the aroma and flavor of dishes but also embody the unique characteristics of the cuisine, highlighting the importance of local herbs and spices.

Furthermore, fruits like lime, mango, and papaya, as well as grains and starches such as rice, flour, and tapioca, form an essential part of the food landscape. The presence of nuts and seeds, including sesame seeds, cashews, and peanuts, also indicates their role in providing texture and additional flavor to many dishes.

Interestingly, edible insects stand out as a distinctive feature, underscoring the unique aspect of Thai cuisine that incorporates insects like grasshoppers and crickets, which are considered delicacies in certain regions. This reflects cultural diversity and resourcefulness in utilizing locally available ingredients.

In terms of seasonings and condiments, items such as sugar, salt, fish sauce, and soy sauce are frequently used to season dishes and enhance their flavor profiles. These ingredients are crucial in bringing out the depth of taste in Thai cooking, and their frequent occurrence in the data emphasizes their importance in the preparation of traditional dishes.

The analysis also identifies dairy and eggs as important ingredients, with butter, eggs, and ghee appearing regularly. These ingredients are often used to add richness and texture to various recipes. Among the animal-derived products, eggs rank highly, followed by chicken, indicating their widespread use in the preparation of diverse dishes.

Ultimately, the findings underscore the central role of these ingredients in the preparation of Thai cuisine, highlighting the combination of familiar items such as meats, vegetables, and spices, alongside more unique ingredients like edible insects, which contribute to the authenticity and cultural identity of the cuisine. The categorization and synthesis of these ingredients provide a comprehensive overview of the ingredients that define Thai food.

Q2: What are the high-frequent words or key words of Thai food ingredients?

Objective: To develop a list of key words or high-frequent words in Thai cuisine.

From the 155 food dishes, KH Coder software shows 2,864 tokens or 1,790 words in use. Additionally, there are 326 types, of which 309 were in use.

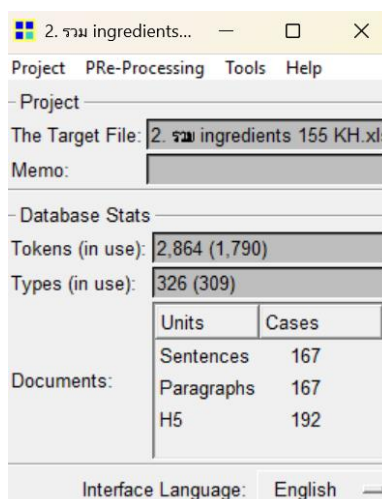


Figure 4. Number of Tokens of the 155 Dishes

A word frequency list was required to identify the key words for Thai food ingredients. The corpus analysis provided the list, including nouns reflecting prevalent ingredients in Thai cuisine, except for 'leave', which was identified as a verb. However, the researchers rechecked all the recipes containing the ingredient and insist that 'leave' is indeed the noun. The word 'sauce' tops the result as the most frequent word with 96 tokens. The other frequent words are 'sugar', 'garlic', 'pepper', 'fish', 'chili', 'lime', 'shrimp', 'coconut', 'pork', 'paste', 'leave', 'lemongrass', 'rice', 'chicken', and 'coriander' respectively, as shown in the Figure 5.

The high-frequency words suggest that Thai cuisine typically features a balance of savory, sweet, and spicy flavors, highlighting elements like sugar, sauces, and aromatic herbs.

#	Word	POS / Conj.	Frequency
1	sauce	Noun	96
2	sugar	Noun	64
3	garlic	Noun	59
4	pepper	Noun	58
5	fish	Noun	53
6	chili	Noun	46
7	lime	Noun	43
8	shrimp	Noun	39
9	coconut	Noun	35
10	pork	Noun	35
11	paste	Noun	33
12	leave	Verb	31
13	lemongrass	Noun	31
14	rice	Noun	30
15	chicken	Noun	29
16	coriander	Noun	29

Figure 5. List of the Frequent Words of the 155 Food Dishes

Q3: What categories are the high frequent words?

Objective: To categorize and examine the high-frequent words of Thai cuisine.

To categorize the key ingredients found previously, a co-occurrence network analysis was needed. The analysis on the software provided the networks, which contain 11 subgraphs. The most prominent and interconnected ingredients are described below.

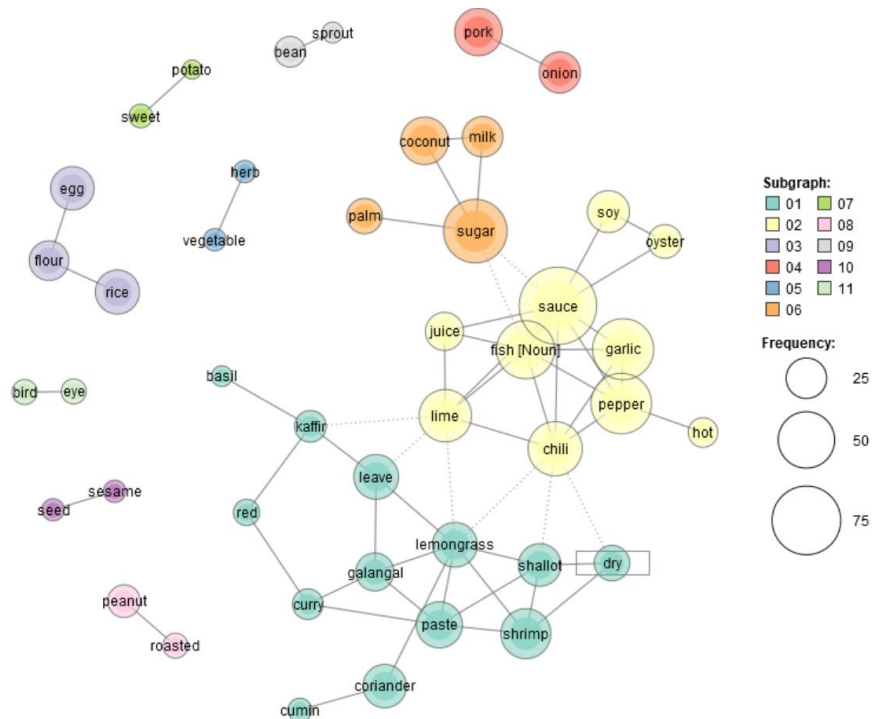


Figure 6. Co-Occurrence Network of Key Ingredients in the 155 Food Dishes

Subgraph 01 shows 13 major words: ‘shrimp’, ‘paste’, ‘shallot’, ‘lemongrass’, ‘coriander’, ‘galangal’, ‘cumin’, ‘dry’, ‘curry’, ‘leave’, ‘red’, ‘kaffir’, and ‘basil’. This subgraph reveals the importance of aromatic herbs and citrus elements in Thai dishes. These ingredients are central to Thai curry pastes and herbal broths.

Subgraph 02 shows 10 major words: ‘sauce’, ‘fish’, ‘garlic’, ‘pepper’, ‘lime’, ‘chili’, ‘juice’, ‘hot’, ‘soy’, and ‘oyster’. This subgraph focuses on staple seasoning and flavor enhancers like fish sauce, soy sauce, oyster sauce, lime juice, pepper, chili, and garlic. These ingredients are commonly blended in stir-fries, marinades, and dipping sauces.

Subgraph 03 shows 3 major words: ‘rice’, ‘flour’, and ‘egg’. This subgraph resonates with the fundamental component of Thai cuisine which is rice. It is the primary carbohydrate in various Thai dishes. Flour is another important ingredient in noodle-based menus. Eggs are also in a variety of dishes either fried as a topping, scrambled into stir-fries, or as a base for Thai-style omelets.

Subgraph 06 shows 4 major words: ‘sugar’, ‘palm’, ‘milk’, and ‘coconut’. In the center of the subgraph, sugar acts as the main connector between palm, sugar, and coconut, indicating their roles in both savory and sweet menu applications.

From the revealed connections, the key words can be categorized based on their functions and sensory contributions to the Thai cuisine:

A. Condiments and Seasonings

These ingredients play important roles in sharpening the flavor profiles of Thai cuisine by adding depth, richness, and balance. While soy sauce and oyster sauce provide the salty base, sugar and palm sugar balance out the heat and acidity from other ingredients. To intensify the dishes, pastes are used in many Thai curry menus. Lime juice, as a common acidic component, brightens Thai dishes.

B. Herbs and Spices

The ingredients in this category enhance the bold and aromatic characteristics of Thai cuisine. Garlic and shallot provide a rich and savory base in stir-fries and soups. Heat, an essential aspect of Thai food, is generated from pepper and chili. Moreover, citrusy and earthy aromas are derived from lemongrass, kaffir, lime, cumin, and galangal. Thai food is also well-known for its freshness, which comes from ingredients like coriander and basil. These ingredients are frequently put together in the internationally well-known Tom Yum soup and curries.

C. Fish and Shellfish

Fish and shrimp are particularly prevalent in the coastal cuisine and commonly used in seafood curries.

D. Meat and Poultry:

Pork and chicken are staple meats in stir-fries and soups, commonly paired with garlic, pepper, and basil for a more enhanced flavor.

E. Fruit and Vegetables

Potatoes, beans, sprouts, and onions, as the foundation vegetables, add substance to Thai dishes. Coconut, especially in the form of coconut milk, delivers a creamy consistency to curries and desserts.

F. Grains and Starches

While rice is the fundamental component of Thai cuisine, Jasmine rice is the most widely consumed variety. In addition, sticky rice is common in Northern and Northeastern dishes, and it is often paired with grilled meat and dips. In addition to being used in noodle-based dishes, flour is also used in dumplings and fried dishes.

Q4: How are Thai dishes perceived and described from non-Thai perspectives on social media?

Objective: To explore and analyze how Thai dishes are perceived and described by non-Thai perspectives on social media.

From the overview of the 155 dishes, there are 20,931 tokens or number of words. Of 20,931 tokens or 10,409 words in use, the most frequent word is ‘dish’ followed by the word ‘sauce’.

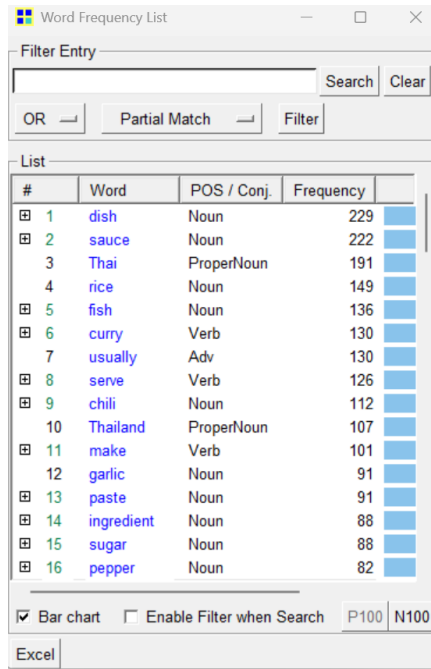


Figure 7. List of the Frequent Words of the Overviews

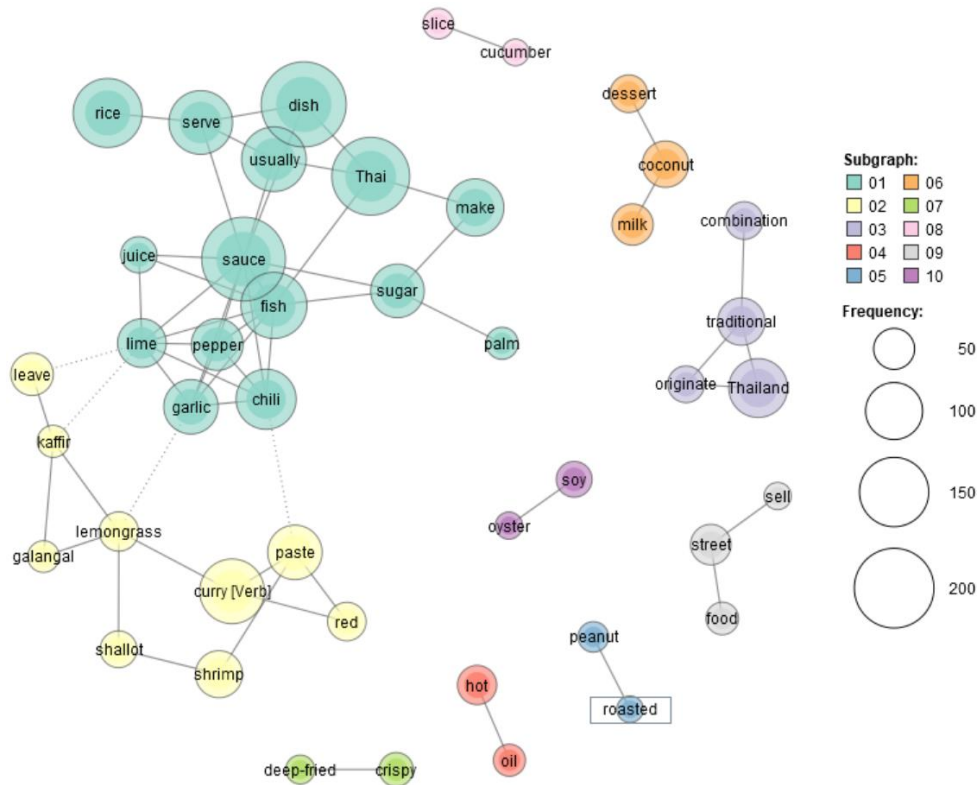


Figure 8. Co-Occurrence Network of Key Words in the Overviews

There are 10 subgraphs of the co-occurrence network of words. The top three subgraphs comprise most of the major words.

Subgraph 01 shows 12 major words: ‘dish’, ‘sauce’, ‘Thai’, ‘rice’, ‘fish’, ‘usually’, ‘serve’, ‘chili’, ‘make’, ‘garlic’, ‘sugar’, and ‘pepper’. Other related words are ‘palm’, ‘lime’, and ‘juice’. Subgraph 02 indicates two major words: ‘curry’ and ‘paste’, and the related words are ‘red’, ‘shrimp’, ‘shallot’, ‘lemongrass’, ‘galangal’, ‘kaffir’, and ‘leaves’. Subgraph 03 comprises four words with one major word ‘Thailand’. Other related words are ‘originate’, ‘traditional’, and ‘combination’.

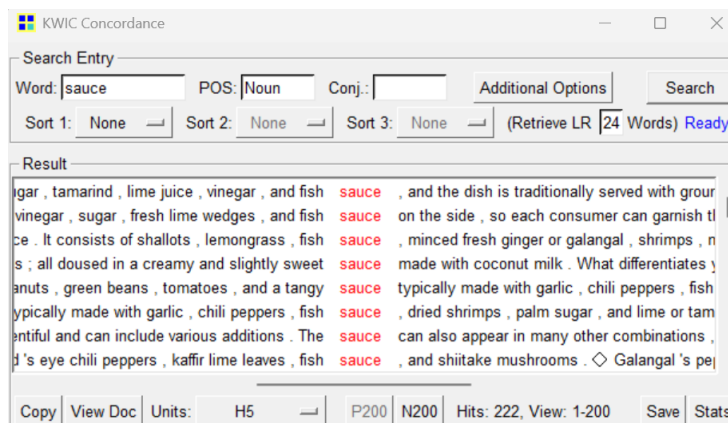


Figure 9. Example of the Contexts of the Word ‘Sauce’

Key frequent words in the top two subgraphs with contexts are shown as follows:

Subgraph 01: The frequent words ‘sauce’ and ‘fish’ indicate the staple ingredient of Thai cuisine ‘fish sauce’. The sauce is always used to season dishes and is a ‘must’ of Thai cooking. The word ‘sauce’ also refers to the flavor of mixing the ingredients of the dish.

Examples of contexts:

- Tender rice noodles are additionally flavored with sugar, tamarind, lime juice, vinegar, and fish sauce, and the dish is traditionally served with ground red chilis, white vinegar, sugar, fresh lime wedges, and fish sauce on the side, so each consumer can garnish the meal to their preference.

- Tom Yum is one of the best-known Thai dishes, a spicy, sour, and aromatic soup that is traditionally served with rice. It consists of shallots, lemongrass, fish sauce, minced fresh ginger or galangal, shrimps, mushrooms, kaffir lime leaves, lime juice, and minced Thai chili peppers.

- Apart from thin strips of green papaya, this salad usually includes roasted peanuts, green beans, tomatoes, and a tangy sauce typically made with garlic, chili peppers, fish sauce, dried shrimps, palm sugar, and lime or tamarind juice.

- The spices are usually combined with potatoes and onions; all doused in a creamy and slightly sweet sauce made with coconut milk. What differentiates yellow curry from the other types is the addition of yellow curry powder, giving the dish its distinctive color.

Subgraph 02: The frequent words ‘curry’ and ‘paste’ imply the staple Thai curry dishes.

Examples of contexts:

- Thai curry is usually a soupy dish consisting of coconut milk or water, meat, and curry paste. Unlike the thicker Indian curries, Thai curries have a more soup-like consistency, and the cooks prefer to use fresh herbs and aromatic leaves instead of spice blends that are prevalent in Indian curries.

- Red curry is one of the most common curry varieties in Thailand. It combines red curry paste, coconut milk, vegetables, and meat into a delectable and hearty meal. Red curry paste and coconut milk are the foundations of the dish, and their combination results in a perfectly balanced, creamy, and spicy broth.

- In many Thai homes, curry is consumed on a daily basis, and the cooks can choose from two varieties of Thai curry: water-based or coconut milk-based curries. The most popular water-based curry is sour curry, or Gaeng Sohml Phah, which is often prepared with fish or seafood, while the sour flavor comes from tamarind.

Subgraph 03: The only major word ‘Thailand’ emphasizes the uniqueness and origin of Thai cuisine. Other related words are ‘traditional’, ‘originate’, and ‘combination’.

Examples of contexts:

- Pad Thai is Thailand's national dish, a flavorful stir-fry (Pad in Thai) dish consisting of rice noodles, tofu, dried shrimp, bean sprouts, and eggs. If it's made with meat, chicken and pork are some of the most popular choices. The flavors are an intricate combination of sweet, sour, and salty, with a well-balanced contrast of textures.

- Tom Kha Gai is Thailand's delicious national dish, coming from the central part of the country and bearing the influence of neighboring Laos. It is a soup whose name translates to boiled galangal chicken soup, consisting of coconut milk, chicken chunks or shreds, galangal (a reddish-brown or pink woody plant related to ginger), lemongrass, garlic, bird's eye chili peppers, kaffir lime leaves, fish sauce, and Shiitake mushrooms.

- Interestingly, Phat Kaphrao is ranked as the fourth most common dish ordered by foreigners in Thailand.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Linguistic Strategies in Thai Food Naming

The linguistic presentation of Thai food names and ingredients demonstrates three primary strategies: *transliteration*, *translation with descriptors*, and *loanwords*. Each reflects how Thai cuisine negotiates between cultural authenticity and global comprehensibility.

(a). *Transliteration*

Transliteration attempts to preserve Thai pronunciation using the Roman alphabets while acknowledging the limitations of cross-linguistic representation (Eberhard et al., 2018; Low, 2025). Popular examples include Pad Thai, Tom Yam Goong, and Khao Soy, which have been adapted for international audiences. The corpus revealed significant inconsistencies in transliteration practices, exemplified by variations such as Pad versus Phat, illustrating the challenges of rendering Thai phonology in English (Enfield, 2013). Tonal and aspirated distinctions, as in Khao, are frequently lost, and multiple transliteration variants exist, e.g., Pad See Ew appears as Pad Siew, and others. These examples highlight the absence of standardization despite guidelines from the Royal Institute of Thailand (1999) and often stem from marketing considerations and audience familiarity (Smalley, 1994). Furthermore, English phonology may influence incorrect assumptions. For example, interpreting ‘ph’ as /f/ instead of aspirated /p/ (Sridhanyarat, 2017).

(b). *Translation With Descriptors*

Descriptive translation prioritizes ingredients’ transparency or preparation methods over linguistic authenticity to enhance accessibility (Baker, 2018). Examples include Tom Kha Gai translated as Chicken Coconut Soup, and Phla Kung as Spicy Shrimp Salad. These translations communicate core culinary elements rather than preserving original Thai terminology. Additionally, Green Curry hints at both color and flavor, prioritizing function over form. Our network analysis demonstrated that these translated descriptors often emphasize the primary ingredients identified in the key ingredients’ co-occurrence network subgraph 01 (lemongrass, galangal) and the key ingredients’ subgraph 02 (sauce, fish, chili), suggesting that translation strategies align with the actual ingredient prominence revealed by the corpus analysis. Low (2025) also emphasize the use of translation with descriptors in communicating Thai dishes.

(c). *Loanwords*

Loanwords in Thai culinary vocabulary—particularly from Chinese, Portuguese, and English—reflect centuries of cultural exchange (Winichakul, 1997). The corpus revealed bidirectional borrowing. First, terms adopted into Thai cuisine. For example, Roti from Indian Muslims and Suki from Japanese Sukiyaki. Other terms, such as mooncake and American Fried Rice, signify cultural borrowing and adaptation. Meanwhile, Thai terms also enter global culinary lexicons. For instance, traditional Thai names like Lot Chong and Thong Yip persist despite Portuguese influence, illustrating selective preservation (Siam Rat Blog, 2019).

B. Ingredient Terminology and Network Relationships

The corpus frequency analysis reveals ‘sauce’ as the most common ingredient-related term (96 occurrences), establishing its fundamental role in Thai flavor construction. This prominence is further validated by the network visualization, where sauce functions as the primary node in the key ingredients’ subgraph 02 with the highest degree centrality. The frequent co-occurrence of sauce with fish, garlic, and chili substantiates previous research on the complex flavor profiles of Thai cuisine (Chotechuang, 2012; Low, 2021).

The network analysis exposes functional relationships between ingredients that extend beyond mere frequency. The key ingredients’ subgraph 01 (the aromatic herb & paste cluster) demonstrates how aromatic ingredients—lemongrass, galangal, and kaffir lime leaves—form a distinct functional cluster despite their lower individual frequencies compared to core ingredients. This finding suggests that while certain ingredients may not dominate quantitatively, their role in creating distinctive Thai flavors remains crucial qualitatively, supporting Low’s (2023) observation that herbs and spices are emblematic of Thai culture and “Thainess”.

The key ingredients’ subgraph 06 centers on sugar, revealing important connections to coconut and milk, forming a discrete flavor profile that appears in both savory applications and desserts. This dual functionality of ingredients represents a distinctive characteristic of Thai cuisine that may not be immediately apparent from frequency analysis alone, highlighting the value of network visualization in understanding culinary systems.

C. Non-Thai Perspectives on Thai Cuisine

From non-Thai viewpoints, Thai cuisine is interpreted through its ingredients, flavor complexity, and cultural identity. The prominence of words such as sauce, chili, garlic, and lime (the dish overviews’ co-occurrence network subgraph 01) reflects sensory emphasis and flavor balance (Low, 2019; Putra et al., 2023). The dish overviews’ subgraph 02 highlights curry and paste, positioning Thai cuisine in comparison with Indian culinary frameworks. These associations serve as reference points for global audiences.

Cultural elements also surface in the dish overviews’ subgraph 03, where terms like Thailand, traditional, and originate frame dishes such as Pad Thai and Tom Kha Gai as not only culinary offerings but also cultural symbols (Watanasin, 2012). These findings underscore how food names carry national and cultural narratives, linking cuisine to identity.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thai dishes, as perceived and described by non-Thai individuals on social media, are celebrated for their cultural authenticity, sensory richness, and distinctive culinary elements. The uniqueness of Thai cuisine is emphasized through frequent references to its national identity, traditional roots, and staple ingredients like fish sauce and curry paste. The

intricate balance of flavors—spicy, sour, sweet, and savory—along with the aromatic and vibrant nature of Thai dishes, captures the attention of a global audience.

The linguistic framing, which often includes detailed explanations of ingredients and preparation methods, reflects an effort to make Thai cuisine accessible and relatable to non-Thai audiences. These descriptions not only highlight the complexity of Thai dishes but also serve as a gateway to understanding Thailand's cultural heritage.

One important aspect of Thai cuisine's global perception and understanding involves the transliteration of ingredient names and culinary terms from Thai language to Roman alphabets. This helps Thai recipes disseminate throughout the world, resulting in how they are perceived and recreated globally. To strengthen the impact of the Thai cuisine, a standardized system of transliterating Thai culinary terms is highly suggested. It would support the uniformity of Thai dish names and ingredient lists across different platforms, enhancing both the accessibility and reachability of Thai cuisine globally. Moreover, it could aid educational and cultural exchanges, ensuring the accuracy of Thai culinary heritage.

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