

# The Naming Principles of Novel Cultural Items: A Perspective from the Spice Domain

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## Abstract

When investigating the linguistic phenomena around the exchange of words along with items of trade in contact situations, linguists already have a good understanding of how loanwords and *Wanderwörter* operate. In this talk, I will try to approach the same event – *linguistic acculturation*, the “response in a language to new items that become known through cultural contact” (Cambell & Mixco, 2007) – but focus on words, specifically the names of novel items, that were not simply borrowed, but otherwise “innovated”. Aromatic substances, such as spices and incense, were frequent and practical products of long-distance trade early on, and thus represent an ideal set of cultural items with corresponding names in various languages. The question then is: How do people name spices, and specifically, new spices that they encounter? And what are the motivations and mechanism of the naming process when adopted by a community? We will see that besides *borrowing*, the strategies involve *innovation* using internal resources (compounding, blending), semantic *shifts* (narrowing, broadening, displacement), and the *extensions* of meaning by way of metonymy or metaphors. By analyzing hundreds of spice names in English, Chinese, and Arabic, I will introduce the typical structural requirements and salient features that influence the creation of a name and theorize how languages “generate” new names for novel materials based on existing prototypes. I will also discuss the highly sensory nature of these substances (taste, fragrance, colour, etc.), and their effect on the naming process.