

# MAPPING THE LANGUAGE OF SPICES

A CORPUS-BASED, PHILOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE WORDS OF THE SPICE DOMAIN

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— INITIAL SUBMISSION FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSE —

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✂ Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University  
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## A CORPUS-BASED, PHILOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE WORDS OF THE SPICE DOMAIN

*by*

GÁBOR PARTI



*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

— INITIAL SUBMISSION FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSE —

August, 2022



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(Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Gábor Parti* (Name of Student)



# Abstract

The majority of existing literature on spices is found in the areas of gastronomy, botany, and history. This study investigates spices on a linguistic level and aims to be a comprehensive linguistic account on the items of the spice trade. Some of these dried plant matter were highly desired at certain points in history, due to their attractive aroma and medicinal value, thus they were ideal products of trade early on. Cultural contact and exchange, and the introduction of new cultural items begets situations of language contact and linguistic acculturation, and so in the case of spices, we not only have a set of items that traveled around the world, but also a set of names. This domain is very rich in loanwords and *Wanderwörter*, but also supplies us with a myriad of cases where spice names are conventional innovations. To make it more interesting, the thesis compares English, Chinese, and Arabic, languages that represent major powers in the spice trade at different times. The thesis has two main parts. Part one identifies the spices under scope with a brief discussion on their botany and history, followed by a presentation of the geographic and linguistic diffusion of spices and their names. Basically, we track and explain word origins and subsequent spread by tracing the materials and the propagation of the accompanying *Wanderwort*. This part relies on philological literature, and tools from historical linguistics, such as etymological research. Part two examines the language of spices, the terminology and nomenclature related to the spice domain from linguistic-cognitive perspectives. On one hand, it is a systematic investigation on how humans name spices: what are the mechanism and motivations behind the naming principles, and how this relates to the salient sensory features of the products (strong gustatory, olfactory, or visual stimuli). On the other hand, it looks at to what degree spice terminology is used in daily language; which is proposed to be a gauge of a spice's embeddedness in a culture. This part relies on corpora and corpus linguistic tools. Conclusions are made on the connections between the physical properties of the spices, their patterns of diffusion, and the prototypical spices and their effect of naming principles. Besides being a novel and original approach to research and categorize spices from a linguistic point of view, this study offers new insights to our knowledge about (wandering) loanwords, and the effect of the highly sensory nature of spices in the naming process when adopted by a community. It is also intended to be a useful working database for future research, and aims to dispel some of the chaos and confusion surrounding spice names.





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# Glossary

Ayurveda	traditional Indian medicine <a href="#">13</a>
bencao	本草, the Chinese term for <i>materia medica</i> , books that record the sources and applications of medicinal materials <sup>1</sup> <a href="#">12</a>
Glottolog	comprehensive reference information for the world's languages, especially the lesser known languages <a href="#">47</a>
Glottolog	... <a href="#">27</a>
materia medica	an encyclopedic treatise of medicinal substances of the plant, animal, and mineral kingdoms <a href="#">12</a>
Periplus Maris Erythraei	[Periplus of the Erythraean Sea] — 1 <sup>st</sup> c. AD <a href="#">23</a>
pharmacopeia	... <a href="#">12</a>
taxon	taxonomic group or unit, esp. when its rank in the taxonomic hierarchy is not specified (back-formation from 'taxonomy', it refers to a group or species as a unit in biology.) <a href="#">19</a>
Wanderwort	a word borrowed from one language to another across a broad geographical area often as a result of trade or adoption of newly introduced items or cultural practices <sup>2</sup> <a href="#">3</a>
Wiktionary	... <a href="#">27</a>

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<sup>1</sup>Z. Zhao et al., [2018](#).

<sup>2</sup>Merriam-Webster, [n.d.](#)



# Acronyms

<b>BHL</b>	Biodiversity Heritage Library 20
<b>CBETA</b>	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Texts Association 24
<b>CTP</b>	Chinese Text Project 24
<b>EHBC</b>	English Historical Book Collection 24
<b>FoC</b>	Flora of China 20
<b>GBIF</b>	Global Biodiversity Information Facility 20
<b>IPNI</b>	International Plant Names Index 20
<b>KSUCCA</b>	King Saud University Corpus of Classical Arabic 24
<b>MC</b>	Middle Chinese 17
<b>MW</b>	Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary 4
<b>OED</b>	Oxford English Dictionary 4
<b>PIE</b>	Proto-Indo-European 30
<b>POWO</b>	Plants of The World Online 20
<b>PWN</b>	Princeton WordNet 33
<b>QTS</b>	Quan Tangshi 全唐詩 [Complete Tang Poems] 24
<b>SkE</b>	Sketch Engine 24
<b>SS</b>	Scripta Sinica 24
<b>TCM</b>	Traditional Chinese Medicine 12
<b>TLFi</b>	Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé 29
<b>TPL</b>	The Plant List 20
<b>WALS</b>	The World Atlas of Language Structures 25
<b>WFO</b>	World Flora Online 20
<b>WOLD</b>	The World Loanword Database 39



## Primary Sources

al-Qānūn fi l-Tibb القانون في الطب [The Canon of Medicine] by Ibn Sīnā — 1025. 12

Bencao Gangmu 本草綱目 [Compendium of Materia Medica] by Li Shizhen — 1578. 12

Hou Hanshu 後漢書 [Book of the Later Han] 5<sup>th</sup> c. 10

Lisān al-‘Arab لسان العرب [Tongue of the Arabs] — 1290 23

Shennong Bencaojing 神農本草經 [Shennong’s Classic Herbal] — ca. 200 12

Shuowen Jiezi 說文解字 [Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters] — 100 AD 23

Youyang Zazu 酉陽雜俎 [Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang] by Duan Chengsi — 9<sup>th</sup> c. 22





# Symbols and Notation

*	reconstructed form
<	developed from
>	developed into
<?	uncertain development
†	obsolete
a.	<i>ante</i> , attested before the year
ca.	<i>circa</i> , around the year/century
<i>fragrance</i>	italic: lexical item, a word or phrase
[fragrance]	square brackets: gloss, literal meaning
'fragrance'	single quotation marks: meaning, sense
FRAGRANCE	small capitals: a concept



# Introduction

UNDERSTANDING the language of spices is a key to open a door to this world. A door that leads to the realization that our cultures—and our foods—are deeply interconnected, and that they have been so for thousands of years. I will try to demonstrate this by introducing these fascinating substances from a new perspective, the perspective of language. It is trendy nowadays to talk about *foodways*, a term that refers to “the eating habits and culinary practices of people, regions, or historical periods” (Allen et al., 2013, vol. 2, p. 289), and food history, a relatively young interdisciplinary academic field is starting to gain traction as well, but the connections between language and food are one of the most interesting examples of contemporary humanities research I have come across Jurafsky (see 2014). There is a segment of this topic—the spice domain—which encompasses products that have had profound effects of human imagination, culture, and history. Although overshadowed by the serious and heavy questions of nutrition, scientific research on spices was never a fringe field; it is enough to look at the many pharmacological studies that dive into the chemistry of these materials to see that people are still interested in their health effects, as much as their taste and aroma.

As spices are not a necessity to human survival, but rather constitute an enthralling phenomenon that can be studied from many angles, research on spices has been embraced by many historians, a few botanists and literary critics, and countless culinary enthusiasts. It may be so that spices are not vital for humans, but sustenance itself is just enough to maintain life, not to enjoy it or live it to the fullest. Spices today represent the excitement, the vigor, as it is so clear from expressions in our language: to *spice up* your life is to enliven it!

## Original Contribution

This thesis aims to do a systematic investigation on spice names and related terminology, including products that were used (or still being used) medicinally, as incense, or as perfume. Aromatics that were at some point considered spices, have been traded and transported across long distances since antiquity and before, and the most coveted ones have slowly dispersed throughout the globe. Spices and the spice domain as a topic are usually discussed within the broad areas of history, botany, chemistry, and gastronomy, all concerned by very different aspects of these materials. To the best of my knowledge, there is no academic work that puts the field of linguistics in focus when discussing spices as a whole, and so this project is a unique contribution to our linguistic knowledge about the spice domain.

But why should anyone care about spices and their names? Because exploring the names of the products of the spice trade—traveling on vast networks of historic trade routes such as the Silk Road (small volume of trade), and its nautical counterpart the Maritime Silk Road (large volume of trade)—helps us to map and better understand linguistic contact and cultural exchange. These ever-

expanding trade networks, first regional, later connecting East and West were a precursor to today's globalized, interconnected world, and one of their most lucrative products was dried plant-matter. These aromatic substances were lightweight, easy to transport, and resistant to spoilage. And, of course, they were highly valued for their fragrant and pungent properties, and their reputed—both putative and real—benefits for the human body and soul. Exotic and rare spices and their role in rituals, medicine, and later cuisine made them sought after. The spice business inspired people to trade, travel, explore, and wage wars. Spices are important in world history as they are directly responsible for discoveries, colonization, and the birth of capitalism. We know a great deal about the nature of spices thanks to botanists and naturalist, their medicinal effects thanks to pharmacists and chemists, and their uses and culinary values thanks to experts of gastronomy. There is also a vast literature on the story and spread of spices thanks to researchers of history, but the careful study of their names is often neglected. This work was born due to a fascination with the global journey and etymology of spice words, in the “true sense” of the word etymology.

### Problem Statement

Soon, my attention slightly shifted towards a problem that could be best described by a lack of consistent and comprehensive understanding of spice names. The absence of proper research regarding spice terminology results in a lack of a standard, and decline of trust in secondary literature. Authors often give misguided and contradicting information regarding the origins of a name, or speculate on their meaning. There are no two authors that use the same set of names when discussing a spice, which in itself is not a problem in most cases, but it leads to problems in case of lesser known or exotic items. There is a great deal of confusion on names and identities in the spice literature, especially in lay areas aimed at the general public, such as popular histories or guidebooks. The reasons for this are several. Firstly, the experts of herbs, spices and other aromatics are chiefly botanists, food industry professionals, chemists, chefs and food writers, merchants and historians. Most people in research related to spices focus on aspects of the products other than their names: from plant morphology, chemical composition, and pharmacological effects, to social and cultural histories, their symbolism in literature, not to mention the myriad of ways on how to buy, store, mix, and use spices in creative recipes discussed by the handy spice encyclopedias tailored for gastro-enthusiasts. Relatively few linguists devoted their time and attention to trace spice origins. In short, the topic of spices requires a highly multidisciplinary expertise, and when a plant taxonomist writes about linguistics, or a culinary writer approaches history, some mistakes are due.

Secondly, there is no agreed upon inventory or reference work of spice names to cover the multitude of spices that exist, and their many names in various languages; least of all a complete list of *all the spices*. Truthfully that seems rather impossible, or at least quite a daunting task to embark on. Although the internet nowadays is full of compact guides and indices of spices assembled by people who are fascinated with spices and their colorful uses listing their names in many languages, these are not always trustworthy, and often cite no sources. Similarly, blogs and articles are most often than not dubious, and almost always require fact checking, as many are just permutations of historically

inaccurate anecdotes and origin stories. Until today there is no comprehensive treatise on spice terms within academia, and no database that focuses on, clarifies, explains, or compares their names.

This is not to say that there is no work done on spice terminology, there are a number of high quality writings from philologists, linguists, and historians well versed in one or more relevant linguistic and cultural area. The problem is that this kind of research requires a highly specialized knowledge, and in result the information already out there is sporadic, less accessible, and grossly unorganized. Key pieces of information are often hidden between the pages of books on traditional philology, literary critique, botany, medicine, economic history, and archaeology of a given region. Not to mention the many old works that are the primary sources for the aforementioned publications. Consequently, since little effort have been made to collate the data, there is a chasm between the critically researched reliable information and what the end user—whether it is a fellow researcher or a spice zealot—can easily access.

## Goals

The original goal in the beginning of this work was to gather and augment the existing information about spice names, their origins, and track their diffusion on spatial and temporal trajectories. This still constitutes the core of this thesis, and I hope to achieve this by combing through the existing literature and collecting the names of spices, amending the gaps, and correcting possible errors on the way. Doing so, the result should be a carefully researched compendium of spice names, grounded in philology and linguistics, but with the awareness of what spices are to botany, and what their role was in history. ?? presents this process and displays the data seriatim, in a linear manner.

This procedure shall manifest in a dataset of spice names, with complete lexicographical annotation including etymological information and attestation dates. This in turn, would allow me to trace the words and track the linguistic diffusion of spices through space and time, which is then can be discussed hand in hand with the physical spread of the materials. Eventually, the mapping of the spices will be the basis for a discussion on the implications of linguistic and cultural contact, and exchange, and it makes up chapter 4 This chapter ties well together with the concept of *Wanderwörter*, ‘wandering loanwords’, a phenomenon known in the field of historical linguistics related to the topic of borrowing and material culture.

In addition to this, the data of spice names will also be the basis of a linguistic analysis, focusing on the characteristics of terms themselves presented in chapter 5. This part will include a deep dive into how spice names are created or borrowed, how prototype items beget prototype words to generate new names for novel items of trade, and into the mechanisms and motivations of linguistic acculturation and spice name propagation.

Finally, spice names will be discussed according to their role in daily language, how spice words entered the lexicon and what is their role in metaphors and idiomatic expressions. This is to trace spices’ embeddedness in a culture, and to see how significant they are in the everyday human experience, as can be seen in chapter 6.

## 1.1 Definitions

The first step is to clarify what is meant by spices. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the definition of *spice* is as follows: “One or other of various strongly flavoured or aromatic substances of vegetable origin, obtained from tropical plants, commonly used as condiments or employment for other purposes on account of their fragrance and preservative qualities.” Similarly, the first meaning for *spice* as a noun in *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* (MW) is “any of various aromatic vegetable products (such as pepper or nutmeg) used to season or flavour foods”. The Wikipedia entry on *Spice* gives slightly more information, hinting on which plant parts are frequently used as spices and mentions their food-coloring properties, while also—very appropriately—ventures beyond the culinary stance of usual dictionary definitions, stating that “spices are sometimes used in medicine, religious rituals, cosmetics or perfume production.” This notion is much more important than expressing it with a mere ‘sometimes’ could imply as we will see; before modern times, spices were much more important for the medicinal properties.

There is no universal definition on what a spice is; botany, pharmacology, gastronomy, and history all have different perspectives. However the idea about “spices” that the reader currently has in mind, is bound to be a culinary one. Some authors try to give a definition according to plant morphology, Czarra (2009, p. 9) writes about “an aromatic part of a tropical plant”, and goes on to mention bark, flower, root, and seed. Turner (2004, p. xix) adds gum and resin, fruit, and stigma to this listing. For a full picture, we must complement it further, as spices can come in many forms: dried tree barks (cinnamon, cassia); twigs (cassia twigs); flower buds (cloves); stigmas or styles (saffron); fruits (pepper, chili); fruit walls or pericarps (star anise); berries (allspice, juniper); seeds (nutmeg, coriander); seed coverings or arils (mace); seed pods (cardamom, vanilla); and roots and rhizomes (ginger, turmeric). Technically, every dried part of a plant can be referred to as spice, except the leaves. The green leaves — fresh or dried, but mostly used fresh — are considered herbs, and they are used for similar purposes to spices nowadays: flavouring, seasoning, garnishing. Dried leaves of herbs can be categorized as “spice herbs” (see van Wyk, 2014). The category of herbs can be problematic, because there is a botanical definition, and also a culinary definition, and the literature often confuses the two. Botanically, a herb is an annual?? plant that has a soft stem, while a culinary herb is where the leaves are used in food preparation, similar to a medicinal herb...

O’Connell (2016, p. 9) backs this view in his informative compendium, but also cites Rosengarten (1975, p. 16, as cited in O’Connell, 2016), who maintained that it is “extremely difficult to determine where a spice ends and a herb begins”. According to him, culinary herbs are just one group of spices. Along these lines, Britannica (n.d.) for example treats herbs and spices in a single entry. The above distinction – that herbs are the greens and spices are every other (dried) parts of a plant – is essentially nonsense to a botanist since it echoes the needs of a chef. We can give examples for both spice and herb from the same species: coriander seeds and coriander leaves (also called cilantro or Chinese parsley in the US) are both from the plant *Coriandrum sativum*. Another often mentioned difference is that herbs are soft stemmed, annual plants that die each year, in contrast to woody, spice yielding trees or bushes. This, on the other hand, is a botanical definition, and not very useful for

somebody active in the culinary arts (Allen, 2012, p. 10). Moreover, most plants we consider herbs grow in temperate climates, while spices tend to grow in tropical regions (Turner, 2004), a further classification on botanical basis. Herbs can also be categorized into culinary and medicinal herbs, and in both cases, the leafy, green parts of foliage are used for their aroma and flavour, and supposed health benefits, respectively. Defining spices and herbs is difficult because the definitions vary by discipline, depending on the needs of the expert: the gardener, the herbalist, the chef. In the present study, we focus on dried – mostly plant-based – aromatic commodities that traveled long distances due to trade and were at certain points in history considered a desired commodity or even a luxury. This is basically the definition of the historian, where the implications of climate and remoteness translated as value; spices were a produce difficult to obtain, and thus obviously expensive. Long distance transportation was possible when the plant products were hauled across deserts and oceans in a dried form, making them lightweight and less susceptible to rot. Culinary and medicinal herbs had their value in their freshness, and thus were not ideal products of trade; they spread through naturalization and were generally available locally. Historically, anything rare and aromatic can be considered a spice, including incense for burning, coffee in the early days, fragrant perfumes, or even exotic fruits; anything “special” (even if today nobody would agree so). This is well observed in the origins of the English name: the word ‘spice’, via Old French *espice*, comes from Late Latin *speciēs* (plural) “spices, goods, wares” with the original meaning in Classical Latin being “kind, sort”. English ‘species’ and ‘special’ are obvious cognates of the same Latin etymon: *speciō*, which referred to anything observable: a sight, “spectacle” (cf. ‘inspect’), and also anything extraordinary, “specific” kind of item (Glare, 2012, pp. 1983-1984) This implies that in different periods, the meaning of the term ‘spice’ covered different substances, based on what products were considered special, desirable, and difficult to obtain; the definition constantly changed. From this point on, whenever spices are mentioned, we refer to this broad definition, using ‘spice’ as an umbrella term for any historic exotica. These definitions, and the differences between the terms spice, incense, herb, condiment, etc. will be explored in detail in the dissertation, as well as a shift in meaning considering spices.

Salad herbs Potherbs Microgreens Culinary herbs Spice herbs Spices Spice mixtures Seasonings & Condiments Seasonings Condiments Sauces Dips Pickles and preservatives Essences Vinegar Herbal extracts and liqueurs Food coloring Garnish

Main uses: spice/herb/coloring/flavouring

herb (botanical) herb (culinary) spice (culinary) spice (historical)

1. Spices as *pharmacia* 2. Spices as *aromata* 3. Spices as *pigmenta* 4. Spices as *condimenta* (Halikowski Smith, 2001)

guide checklist index inventory

The main contribution of this thesis would be a working database of spice names that can serve as a basis for further study. Spices and aromatic products with varying importance and relevance in different places and in different times are essentially endless, so there is always a room (and need) to expand. This dataset is to be grounded in the following principles: correct botanical identification of a plant and the obtained substance; awareness of the substance’s physical and botanical properties, origin, spread, history, uses and cultural/religious significance; collection of names denoting the substance

#	Species	English	Chinese	Translit.	Arabic	Translit.
1	<i>Pimenta dioica</i>	allspice	多香果	<i>duōxiāngguǒ</i>	لفل إفرنجي	<i>filfil ifranjī</i>
2	<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>	anise	茴芹	<i>huíqín</i>	ينسون	<i>yansūn</i>
3	<i>Ferula assa-foetida</i>	asafoetida	阿魏	<i>āwèi</i>	حلتيت	<i>hiltīt</i>
4	<i>Carum carvi</i>	caraway	葛縷子	<i>gělwǒzi</i>	كراويا	<i>karāwiyā</i>
5	<i>Elettaria cardamomum</i>	cardamom	荳蔻	<i>dòukòu</i>	هال	<i>hāl</i>
6	<i>Cinnamomum cassia</i>	cassia	肉桂	<i>ròuguì</i>	سليخة	<i>salikha</i>
7	<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	chile	辣椒	<i>làjiāo</i>	لفل حار	<i>fulful hār</i>
8	<i>Cinnamomum verum</i>	cinnamon	錫蘭肉桂	<i>xīlánròuguì</i>	قرفة	<i>qirfa</i>
9	<i>Syzygium aromaticum</i>	clove	丁香	<i>dīngxiāng</i>	قرنفل	<i>qaranful</i>
10	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	coriander	芫荽	<i>yánsui</i>	كزبرة	<i>kuzbara</i>
11	<i>Cuminum cyminum</i>	cumin	孜然	<i>zīrán</i>	كمون	<i>kammūn</i>
12	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	dill	蒔蘿	<i>shíluó</i>	شبت	<i>shibitt</i>
13	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	fennel	茴香	<i>huíxiāng</i>	شمر	<i>shamar</i>
14	<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i>	fenugreek	胡蘆巴	<i>húlúbā</i>	حلبة	<i>hulba</i>
15	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	ginger	薑	<i>jiāng</i>	زنجبيل	<i>zanjabīl</i>
16	<i>Piper longum</i>	long pepper	萆撥	<i>bībō</i>	دار فلفل	<i>dār filfil</i>
17	<i>Myristica fragrans</i>	mace	肉荳蔻皮	<i>ròudòukòupí</i>	بسباسة	<i>basbāsa</i>
18	<i>Myristica fragrans</i>	nutmeg	肉荳蔻	<i>ròudòukòu</i>	جوز الطيب	<i>jawz al-ṭīb</i>
19	<i>Piper nigrum</i>	pepper	胡椒	<i>hújiāo</i>	لفل	<i>filfil, fulful</i>
20	<i>Crocus sativus</i>	saffron	番紅花	<i>fānhóngghuā</i>	زعفران	<i>za'farān</i>
21	<i>Zanthoxylum bungeanum</i>	Sichuan pepper	花椒	<i>huājiāo</i>	لفل سيتشوان	<i>filfil sītshuwān</i>
22	<i>Illicium verum</i>	star anise	八角	<i>bājiǎo</i>	ينسون نجمي	<i>yansūn najmī</i>
23	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	turmeric	薑黃	<i>jiānghuáng</i>	كرکم	<i>kurkum</i>
24	<i>Vanilla planifolia</i>	vanilla	香草	<i>xiāngcǎo</i>	فانيليا	<i>fānīliyā</i>

Table 1.1 The set of 24 spices included in this project, white page references.

in the literature, including pre-modern periods; reviewable by marking sources and references. The fundamental idea is that these information can tell us a story from a new angle: by tracing the diffusion of spices and their names we can potentially find patterns in trade, contact, and blabla.

Besides this, a linguistic analysis on the names attributed to a spice product will shed light on blabla

An attempt to group and categorize the aromatic materials of the spice domain based on linguistic-cognitive features has not yet been made and constitutes an original approach. The quest for exploring patterns of spice diffusion and spice terminology could yield new insights and open possibilities for future research.



## Background

### 2.1 Literature Review

**K**NOWLEDGE and familiarity about spices varies greatly from person to person. One can live a life of actively pursuing, disseminating, and creating knowledge about spices, while others die without caring or knowing a thing about them. However, presumably both kinds of people would use and consume similar amounts of these ingredients, depending on which culinary tradition they were born to. Spices are various, mainly plant-based substances that have played essential roles in human civilization for millennia. As I mentioned earlier, the assumed roles can be numerous: culinary, medicinal, cosmetic, and ritualistic, and different cultures display varying degrees of importance to different products. In this section, I will explore the different fields that have generated information about spices, review and evaluate the existing literature, and present the available, and appropriate sources for investigating these materials relevant to this project.

#### 2.1.1 On Spices

When we hear the word ‘spices’, our imagination rushes through far-flung tropical islands, busy seaports, lush jungles, and arid deserts; it invokes the sight of massive ocean-going ships, oriental traders, and camel caravans. A quick internet image search on the ‘spice trade’ shows us antique maps in sepia and neatly arranged Moroccan spice markets in eclectic colors. We can almost smell the word ‘spice’. These envisioned, heavily stereotypical landscapes go hand in hand with stories of exotic peoples, fantastic creatures, prized commodities, and fables of exploration, and much less glorious accounts of colonization. What I described here is an exclusively westernized viewpoint. While most of the images in our minds are distorted under the influence of romantic orientalist paintings, and tales of triumphant discoveries retold over generations, the essence of the image is very true, and much more gruesome. Arguably the peoples living in the native habitats of a once overvalued plant species have different experiences etched in their collective memories. One could argue that Europeans imported spice, but often exported horrors. The spice trade and its romantic imagination gave birth to many books, from historical non-fiction on influential characters, such as *Nathaniel’s Nutmeg* (Milton, 1999), to popular histories, such as *The Spice Route* (Keay, 2006), and more popular science accounts, such as *Fruit From the Sands: The Silk Road Origins of the Foods we Eat* from paleo-ethnobotanist Spengler (2019a).

Today, spices are mostly discussed from a culinary point of view. The volumes of cookbooks and spice & herb companions are almost infinite. Gastronomy professionals, chefs, food writers, and hobbyists all participate in an endeavour to introduce spices to us in a fashionable manner, creating references for home cooks and health enthusiasts. Many authors tend to attempt an overarching collection, presented in encyclopedic directories (Craze, 1997; Farrell, 1985; Herman, 2015; Lakshmi,

2016; Norman, 2002/2015; O’Connell, 2016; Opara & Chohan, 2021).

On a more scientific note, we find authors from the plant sciences, such as plant taxonomist and ethnobotanist van Wyk (2014) who delivers an excellent compendium titled *Culinary Herbs and Spices of the World* where he introduces dozens of aromatic plants, with a clear explanation on their uses and categorization. In her *Food Plants of China* Hu (2005) describes hundreds of edible plants relevant to Chinese eating habits, with the precision of a true botanist. Agricultural ecologist and ethno-biologist Nabhan (2014) takes the reader on a “spice odyssey”, with his illuminating *Cumin, Camels, and Caravans*, discussing the materials in chronological steps of global trade—the Incense trail, Silk road, and the Spice trade.

Beyond general and introductory histories of spices, such as those offered by Turner (2004)’s *Spice: The History of a Temptation*, or Czarra (2009)’s *Spices: A Global History*, most historians and philologists approach the topic in depth, from their own areas of expertise. Culinary historian Krondl (2007) compartmentalized the story of spices, and writes about Venice, Lisbon, and Amsterdam, “the three great cities of spice” in his *The Taste of Conquest* and presents the story of spices through vying eyes of European powers. Spices in Greek mythology are explored in *The Gardens of Adonis* by an expert in ancient Greece, Detienne (1994), while Schivelbusch (1992), a cultural historian discovers the social history of spices, stimulants and intoxicants in his *Tastes of Paradise*. Freedman (2008), a historian and expert on medieval cuisine, in his book *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* explores how the European fascination with spices fuelled the quest for new lands and colonial expansion. The initial voyages to America by Columbus, Pizarro, and others were motivated by the search for spices, and the mirage of *La Canela*, a legendary valley abundant in cinnamon, equally promising to that of gold in El Dorado (Dalby, 2001). One of the most valuable works for us is Dalby (2000)’s *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices*. Andrew Dalby is a linguist and historian, and besides Latin and Greek he has command of other languages, such as Sanskrit and Burmese, which allows him to present the topic of spices with the pen of a truly versatile philologist and convey authentic scholarly information on spice names bridging East and West. A thought-provoking volume titled *The Poetics of Spice* by Morton (2006) is a literary critical study that discusses how spices were represented in Romantic and Victorian era English literature, and how the topic connects to romantic tropes; ideologies, such as consumerism, capitalism; and ideas, such as abstinence and luxury. “Spice is a complex and contradictory marker: of figure and ground, sign and referent, species and genus; of love and death, epithalamium and epitaph, sacred and profane, medicine and poison, Orient and Occident; and of the traffic between these terms (Morton, 2006, p. 9).

Looking beyond holistic, comprehensive tomes on the history of spices attempting to gather all of them in a single book, some commodities have already been explored thoroughly in a more concentrated approach. The history of salt (Kurlansky, 2002), tea (Mair & Hoh, 2009), pepper (Shaffer, 2013), and vanilla (Rain, 2004) are worth mentioning, and treatises on other popular substances of trade (chocolate, sugar, tobacco, etc.) are abundantly available. Even more outstanding are the works that focus their investigation on a specific cultural area, whether it is the “biography” of the chile pepper in China (Dott, 2020)—retelling an unquestionably influential incorporation of a new item to a diet—or the allure of musk and perfume in the Islamic tradition (King, 2007). These works contain

valuable linguistic information as well, regarding the origins and spread of the names of spices, and they will help us to investigate their spread and diffusion.

Studies on specific spices are one of the most important sources for this thesis, and highly related to the project for example are the articles on the loanword status of ginger (Ross, 1952), on the diffusion of chile (Wright, 2007), on the identity and etymology of Sichuan pepper (Austin & Felger, 2008), and on the “trade-language origin” of turmeric (Guthrie, 2009). Recent advances regarding the name and identity of cinnamon and cassia in ancient vs. modern times published by Haw (2017), and the Eurasian itinerary of asafoetida (Leung & Chen, 2019) are crucial pieces of research in order to trace the products accurately. These and similar types of research will be highly influential in the preparation of this thesis.

For an overview about the concept, function, and uses of spices in the classical Islamic periods, please refer to Dietrich (2004); for the same in a Chinese cultural and historical context, please see Hu (2005, pp. 147–153).

### 2.1.2 On Plants and Plant Names

A brief section on botanical nomenclature.

### 2.1.3 On Food and Foodways

Literature on gastronomy and the culinary sciences is plenty, but high quality scholarly works are fewer. Reference works include Davidson (2014) and Katz (2003)’s *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* other key publications are Toussaint-Samat (2009)’s *A History of Food*. Remarkable contributions to ancient and medieval culinary history were made by Dalby, focusing on the cuisines of Rome, Greece, and Byzantium (Dalby, 1996, 2003, 2010; Dalby & Grainger, 1996)

In the Chinese context the definitive work is still Chang (1977)’s *Food in Chinese Culture*, while in the Islamic tradition, medieval cuisine and recipes are explored in details by Zaouali (2007). A few works on the culinary history of the Middle East are also results of great scholarship, including the translation of Nawal Nasrallah, who made a 10<sup>th</sup>-century Baghdadi cookbook accessible for us in the *Annals of the Caliphs’ Kitchens* (Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq, 2007), and Lewicka (2011) who introduced us the “*Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes*”.

### 2.1.4 On Trade

I must point out that that spices are mostly explored through their trade. And, as most spices originate in tropical Asia, our centre of attention will be directed towards the continent. The term *spice trade* loosely refers to the cross-cultural, economic, and diplomatic ventures of historic kingdoms, empires, and companies, agglomerating around the Indian Ocean, and other regions such as the Mediterranean, East Africa, Maritime South-East Asia, and by land Central Asia. The history of the spice trade is one of its own, covers hundreds of years and it is fundamentally connected with the history of globalization. Naturally, the story of spices is intertwined with trade routes and geopolitical events, involving contact between peoples, cultures, religions, ideas, and languages. See general works on economic history,

such as the *Spice Islands* (Burnet, 2011), on political history *The Scents of Eden: A Narrative of the Spice Trade* (Corn, 1998). Specific eras and regions related to our topic include the ancient Indo-Roman trade (Cobb, 2019; Sidebotham, 2011), the medieval Indian Ocean sea trade spanning from the Persian Gulf to China championed by Arab seafarers (Hourani, 1975; Pearson, 1996), and the Southeast Asian maritime trade (Donkin, 2003; Hall, 2010; Reid, 1988). Young scholars are also doing incredible work, I would like to highlight the thesis of Hoogervorst (2012), who combines historical linguistic and archaeological approaches in the research of Southeast Asia the in the ancient Indian Ocean world. Besides a degree of domestication and long-standing cultivation practices, the abundance of spices today are a result of long-distance trade and cultural exchange. New advances in the field of archaeobotany concerning Roman and Islamic times for example, helps us to map the routes of the materials and trade-connections better (see van der Veen & Morales, 2015; van der Veen, 2018).

One surprising fact that I have learned from my reading, is that the Silk Road, the trade network roads and desert pathways connecting Central Asia with China did not really feature spices. Valerie Hansen's well informed book based on unearthed documents of the region show a trade that is small in volume, and much less lavish in terms of luxury goods than I previously thought. Most of the trade covered short distances and whirled around every day goods and just a minute amounts of exotic perfumes and aromatics, especially musk. Silk often acted as a currency. The word *spice* only occurs two times in her book. This is not to say that spices did not exist at all—we know that many spices were introduced to China on the silk roads, and that traveling merchants carried pepper—but that the bulk of the spice trade did not happen overland.

Many of the contemporary works I mentioned that trace the initial steps of certain spices and other foodstuff relay accounts from primary sources. For example Spengler (2019b) writes that the black pepper of tropical India is first mentioned by Chinese sources in during the Han dynasty (202 BC–9 AD; 25–220 AD), in the *Hou Hanshu*, quoting Laufer (1919, p. 374). I noticed that in a lot of cases, the reports are thanks to a few giants, legendary scholars whose research we still use and reference. These are the people who laid down the groundwork for future studies by their hard work and language skills, including Berthold Laufer and his invaluable *Sino-Iranica*, which catalogues “Chinese contributions to the history of civilization in ancient Iran, with special reference to the history of cultivated plants and products”; and Edward H. Schafer, and the *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, which lists luxury exotica that reached the Tang court, exploring cultural interactions with other regions. I would also like to mention Isaac Burkill (1935), who recorded every economically important plant and mineral under the sun of the Malay Peninsula, annotated with local names and traditional knowledge in his monumental *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of the Malay Peninsula*. Their command and knowledge in history, sinology, and botany is immeasurable.

Moving on to the study on spices, incense, and aromatics through the tools of Semitic philology, I should mention the recent addition of Amar and Lev (2017)'s *Arabian Drugs in Early Medieval Mediterranean Medicine*, and Lev and Amar (2008)'s *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean According to the Cairo Genizah*, but we cannot leave out *Domestication of Plants in the Old World* by plant geneticist Zohary et al. (1988/2012), which supplies a great overview of the agronomic development of the region, or *Duke's Handbook of Medicinal Plants of the Bible* (Duke et al.,

2008).

Besides history, archaeology, and botany, progress in spice related research in recent times are predominantly from the field of medicine. There are uncountable pharmacological—clinical and in vitro—studies on the effects of various medicinal plants (Boy et al., 2018), and many of them are motivated by food and nutritional science research, such as Baker et al. (2013)’s survey on the effects of cooking with and ingesting cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. In the dissertation I will try keep away from deep deliberations of scientific treatises from medical, biochemical, and pharmacological journals as much as possible, however, I might comment on issues related to folk uses and traditional knowledge if it is relevant for the greater cause.

### 2.1.5 On Medicine and Healing

Further moving away from history, we must briefly mention the fields closely knit with the food industry: chemistry and pharmacology. The authoritative *Handbook of Herbs and Spices* (Peter, 2012) and *The Encyclopedia of Herbs & Spices* (Ravindran, 2017) are for industry professionals. These works detail the physical and chemical properties of the materials, and the plants and their products are described in detail. Besides botanical information, the plants’ chemical compounds and volatile oils are in focus, but general knowledge about the origins, names, uses, and functions are also presented. The chemistry of spices is an interesting topic, scientific and popular books were both published on it.<sup>1</sup> The science behind how spices work is a fascinating one, there are two questions we should pose, one: “Why are spices spicy?”, and two: “Why humans like spices?”. The answer to the first question is that the pungency we feel—a mild rush of heat or minutes of tingling lips—is in fact a toxic shield, it is the plant’s evolutionary response to herbivores, bugs and pests (Turner, 2004, p. 21). However, this is not a crucial component in the organism’s life cycle; these substances (the volatile oils causing flavour and pungency) are so-called secondary metabolites, they are insignificant to the plant’s biology (Parthasarathy et al., 2008, p. 18). The heat to the chili is effectively the same as thorns to the rose. The spiciness of a spice is a weapon, and while bugs and insects would run amok trying to have a taste of the fruit of *Myristica fragrans* (the tree of nutmeg and mace), it made humans—quite ironically—sail to the end of the world to find it. No obstacle was great enough to stop mankind’s appetite for fragrant, pungent, and spicy flavours. In answering the second question, we can expect that if the spiciness of spices has a Darwinian explanation, the human desire for them should also sound like one. Sherman and Billing (1999) in their influential, and aptly titled article *Darwinian gastronomy* claimed that spices taste good because they help us fight hostile bacteria and microorganisms responsible for digestive issues such as food poisoning; they are beneficial for our health. The authors also compared cuisines of the world based on how much spice they use in their everyday cooking. The piquancy of some capsicums is essentially an irritation, Spence (2018) explores, why do so many people find the “oral burn” so appealing, Carstens et al. (2002) investigates the neural mechanism of oral irritation from spices and carbonated drinks, and we can learn about pungency and personal preference from Prescott and Stevenson (1995). The antibacterial and antioxidant effects

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<sup>1</sup>For a highly visual and novel take on a book introducing the chemistry of spices, see Farrimond (2018)

of spices are known for millennia, and recent research (Billing & Sherman, 1998; Nilius & Appendino, 2013; Yashin et al., 2017) shows that the old wise ones were not at all wrong compiling their *materia medicas* and *bencaos* to guide future generations on herbal healing. Of course, there were plenty of exaggerated claims on the potential healing effects of some products, from them being an antidote for snake venom to the cure for death itself.

### **Materia Medicas, Pharmacopeias, Bencaos**

*Materia medica* (Latin for ‘medical material’) refers to a descriptive collection of knowledge about substances—plant-based, mineral, or from an animal source—with therapeutic properties, usually in the form of a book, often illustrated. It is a term from the history of medicine, named after the highly influential book of Dioscorides, a Greek physician and pharmacologist from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The term *pharmacopeia* is closely related to this, but this refers to a more technical book that contains directions on how to combine different materials for effective healing remedies. Basically, it is a drug making manual.

*Bencao* (本草) [measure word for books-herb] is essentially the Chinese equivalent of *materia medica*. It refers to compilations of classical Chinese medicinal literature. The *Shennong Bencaojing* from circa 200 AD, although lost, is generally considered the first (see Nugent-Head, 2014; Yang, ca. 206 B.C.E.–220/1998). A great explanation of the *bencao* tradition can be found in the introduction of J.-N. Wu (2005)’s *An Illustrated Chinese Materia Medica*, and Z. Zhao et al. (2018) offers a brief overview on the classification of *bencao* literature, and how it connects to traditional Chinese medicine. The most famous *bencao* however, is the *Bencao Gangmu*, 16<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese encyclopedia of *materia medica* and natural history written by Li Shizhen. It is probably the most important book of *Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)*, building on the knowledge of earlier Chinese pharmacological works. It is often translated to English as the *Compendium of Materia Medica*, and the first complete English translation project is currently under way headed by Paul Unschuld (2022). A modern, scientific example for a *materia medica* style compilation would be Duke (2002)’s *CRC Handbook of Medicinal Spices*.

In the Arabic context on the other hand, we must acknowledge the advances of Islamic medicine, and the fruitful decades of the Islamic Golden age that saw many scholars publish extensively, forwarding the tradition of the Greeks, building on the works of Dioscorides, Galen, and Hippocrates. The writings of philosopher and polymath Ibn Rushd (Averroes), physician and pharmacologist Ibn Juljul, botanist Ibn al-Bayṭār, and alchemist Abū Bakr al-Rāzī were all influential in the history of Western medicine and pharmacology. Maybe the most prominent of all was Ibn Sīnā (c. 980–1037; latinized as Avicenna) inspiring many future scholars for over centuries, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) (Smith, 1980). His book *al-Qānūn fī l-Ṭibb* completed in 1025 was used as a standard textbook at universities up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Musallam, 1987–2011). Scholars still discuss him and his contributions (Sajadi et al., 2009), and compare his findings with recent pharmacological studies. For example, on the traditional uses and health benefits of saffron (see Hosseinzadeh & Nassiri-Asl, 2013).



### 2.1.6 On the Role of Spices Through Time

I must also touch on the change in meaning on what spices once were, and what they are now. It can be now clear that in the past spices were more valued for their ceremonial or medicinal use, but I would like to make the shift in usage explicit.

For example, the ancient Romans imported and used cinnamon in large quantities, but they did not eat it or cook with it. They treasured it as incense and medicine instead. It is often repeated that emperor Nero have burned (as incense and offering) a year's supply of Rome's cinnamon on his wife's funeral (whom probably he himself have killed) in 65 AD (Toussaint-Samat, 2009, pp. 437–438). Even if we stopped burning cinnamon, is not because of these practices disappeared—the catholic church still uses 50 tons of frankincense a year (Ash, 2020)—it rather seems that most materials in question gradually gained more favour for their culinary appeal.

In the notion that the role of spices changed over time, there is a universally observable pattern: the gradual shift from their relevance in medicine towards gastronomy. Freedman (2015) writes on social and cultural implications of the role in spices and their importance in health and wealth during the Middle Ages. The shift is mainly due to the emergence of modern medicine and the marginalization of traditional folk medicine, especially in developed, western societies. What can be more telling than the term “alternative medicine”, clearly indicating the switch: what was the “only” medicine once, is now a secondary (and sometimes frowned upon) option, as opposed to just “medicine” or in some places “Western medicine”. In many cultures with strong roots in folk healing, the widespread use of medicinal plants, herbs, and spices are thriving and in recent years these practices are even gaining international popularity. We could think of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Indian *Ayurveda*, or the Indonesian practice of *jamu*.<sup>2</sup> Besides this well-known shift regarding spices and the healing factor, it is important to point out that in the past the line between food and medicine were much more blurred, this can still be observed for example in modern Chinese food therapy, 食療 *shiliao*, rooted in ancient dietetic traditions (Engelhardt, 2001).

### 2.1.7 On Food and Language

One of the best examples for a linguistic study related to gastronomy is *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu* by Jurafsky (2014). Dan Jurafsky, a computational linguist and authority in the field of Natural Language Processing (NLP), explores our connection to food and eating in a series of interesting studies. From tracing the historic and linguistic origins of ketchup, macaroni, or salami, to what the wording of a restaurant menu can tell us about prices. From a Chinese perspective, food and menus are explored by Yao and Su (2019), while the topic of fruit-words is presented by Depner (2019).

This thesis will involve sensory words—nouns, verbs, and adjectives of gustation, olfaction—surrounding spices and other aromatics, and in this aspect, previous studies of linguistic synaesthesia will definitely prove useful (see Huang & Xiong, 2019; Q. Zhao et al., 2019). Some cognitive studies on

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<sup>2</sup>*Jamu* is the name for the traditional medicine of Indonesia, encompassing practices or herbal healing with Javanese origins, usually in the form of mixing ingredients in drinks and potions. For more, see Beers (2012)

sensory information have been conducted involving spices, most interesting are the ones that explore cross-modality relations. For example, an fMRI experiment concluded that reading words with strong olfactory associations, such as ‘garlic’, ‘jasmine’, or ‘cinnamon’ activates the olfactory regions of the brain (González et al., 2006). Another unique study looked at the possible corresponding sound attributes to spiciness/piquancy, and a series of experiments found that fast tempo, high pitch, and distortion are indeed linked to the sensation (Q. J. Wang et al., 2017). On a more linguistic note, Zhong and Huang (2020) explored taste, examining the sensory lexicon around the realm of desserts. They showed that “mouthfeel”, a multi-sensory concept plays more important role than the quality of “sweetness”. Bagli (2021)’s *Tastes We Live by* is a very recent publication that deals with the linguistic conceptualization of taste in the English language.

## 2.2 Research Gap

I have started this chapter with discussing the literature on spices through the eyes of different disciplines. I mentioned gastronomy, botany, history, trade and economics, and after a brief touch of classical medicine I have circled back to philology, and finally landed on research combining language and food, and the sensory modalities. So far, we saw that studies on spices—specific or in general—are available, most notably in the form of historical works focusing on some aspect of the spice trade or tracking the story of the material itself. Besides history, the availability of literature from food and nutritional science, biology and medicine is satisfactory, quenching the need of industry professionals. In this field we see a more rapid development, new studies and findings are relatively frequent, especially about popular spices.

What we also have seen is the obvious lack of linguistic studies themed around spice. A handful of scholars have investigated questions related to language, almost exclusively from a historical linguistic point of view—trying to unearth etymologies. The few available findings however are not collected, knowledge on spice names and related terminology is found sporadically in many disciplines. In the face of such scarcity of linguistic studies on spice terminology it is not surprising that the *Handbook of Herbs and Spices* of Peter (2012)—a standard reference work for chemistry and food industry professionals—often relies on an online blog to list spice names! This online blog created in the early 2000s is a personal website of one Gernot Katzer, who currently rules over the internet with his exhaustive collection of spice information, also including spice names in numerous languages. Katzer (2012b) supplies a massive amount of valuable information to the public, but his lists on spice names are often inaccurate, and—since he is an individual writing about his own travels and empirical experiences and not aiming at academia—poorly cited.

Up to date, a comprehensive study on spices from a linguistics perspective is lacking. The information already out there is sporadic and unorganized, and as I have introduced above it was botanists, historians, chefs, and historical linguists who contributed to the research on aromatic products, their origins, and their place in the human culture and lexicon. In a few cases, findings happen to be misinformed, thanks to some authors making presumptions along erroneous lines, which only adds to the confusion. This is bound to happen when botanists attempt venture into the lands of etymology,



or when food writers choose to sail the high seas of historiography. For a good illustration of this problem, see the criticism of Haw (2017) on Austin and Felger (2008)'s attempt to trace the etymology of *fagara* (Sichuan pepper) where the authors with a background in botany have made questionable assumptions related to Classical Arabic phonology and morphology. We must be careful and not make similar mistakes, never give in to the temptation of baseless speculations, especially outside the realm of linguistics and philology. With that being said this dissertation would fill the gap that exists regarding research on spice terminology.

### 2.2.1 Research Questions

In order to do so, I will now try to formulate the questions I aim to answer. The first two questions arise from the investigation on the “diffusion of spices” and are more related to the philology component of the thesis. The third and fourth questions are more related to the corpus linguistic component of the study, investigating the “language of spices”.

- Q1 Does the propagation of *Wanderwörter* within the domain of the spice trade follow the diffusion of the materials?
- Q2 Is there any underlying pattern behind the mechanisms of spice diffusion, considering both the materials and the nomenclature?
- Q3 Is there any underlying pattern behind the language use surrounding spices, in terms of sensory words and synaesthetic properties?
- Q4 Do the presence or absence of various spice related lexical categories in a language show their level of embeddedness in a culture?
- Q5 Would the different patterns of spice name propagation and linguistic-cognitive characteristics correlate or show differences in any way?



# Methodology

**R**EALIZING that there is little work done on building a spice name database, or on analyzing spice nomenclature from historical and linguistic-cognitive perspectives, I have set out to assemble one that would facilitate this kind of analysis. To introduce very briefly, I have built a database of spices and spice terminology by combing through secondary and primary literature, botanical databases, encyclopedias and dictionaries, and searching for the spices in contemporary and historical corpora. I then used a few selected features of these materials (region of origin, spreadability, etc.) and the corresponding terms (borrowed status, word formation, etc.) and looked at the set of spices as a whole, trying to find patterns and make some interesting observations about the diffusion, naming, and other aspects of spices.

## 3.1 Research Design Principles

To achieve these aims, I first needed think of an ideal way to compile and arrange these very complex pieces of information, data that are highly interdisciplinary in nature. From the very beginning of the design of this study, the following principles were kept in mind regarding the database of spice names:

(1) The database must be grounded in the close study of the materials—the plants and their products—especially from a historical and botanical standpoint. Awareness of the material’s physical journey will help us to contextualize some of the ways the associated names spread. Take for example the Sanskrit term referring to asafoetida (the dried oleoresin gum from *Ferula assa-foetida* et al.): हिङ्गु *hingu*, which is the etymon of both Chinese 興蘂 *xīngqú* (*Middle Chinese (MC)* /hiŋ giʌ/), and English *hing*, but they took very different paths: while the Chinese term is a learned loan from during the spread of Buddhist scriptures on the overland Silk Road, the English word is a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century borrowing via the sea trade with Mughal India. And if we study the source of the materials and learn about the plants, we will also realize that all the hing that was exported from India in the early modern period was in fact imported from Persia and Afghanistan.

(2) The database must be thoroughly cited; every word, statement, date, or other piece of information should be carefully referenced. I have already explained the motivation and necessity behind this practice in chapter 1, it is enough to say that currently no one is citing sources for the names they give (except philologists), and sometimes it hard to find the motivation and inspiration behind a term. It is always a good scholarly practice to record where we found certain pieces of information, and when it comes to spice etymologies, this should make it easier for experts to verify or refute the findings on a specific item or stage.

(3) The database should be easily expandable. Because of the limited time, it is impossible for me to include *every* spice. Therefore, I try to create a pipeline, where a new material and its names can be easily added to the fold, and quickly analyzed. This in principle can also accommodate for the future inclusion of incense, perfume, and herbs, which I will mention in section 6.3 when discussing future

plans to expand on this research.

### 3.1.1 Identification, Confusion, Adulteration, Clarification

The ideal first step of all types of research related to spices, herbs, incense, and other aromatics is to identify the product exactly. In the case of spices and incense, this is overwhelmingly a botanical question, while in the case other exotic aromatics, such as musk or ambergris, we must involve the animal kingdom. Medical, pharmaceutical, and food industry studies are heavy on the hard sciences—chemistry, biology—but they sometimes also contain valuable information about both common and scientific names. All medical studies must start with the proper identification of the substance, in fact, there is a range of studies about various techniques on identification and differentiation (cf. Ford et al., 2019). The reasons for this are twofold.

Firstly, in many cases it is not a straightforward task to tell the substances apart, different spices can have very similar physical qualities. E.g., the fruits of Chinese star anise (*Illicium verum*) and Japanese star anise (*Illicium anisatum*) basically look the same, but the latter is toxic; see the excellent points made by Small (1996) on the confusion of their common names. Uncertainty in nomenclature and identity poses a further challenge to clinical trials if the origins of a substance is not properly identified. Take for example Oketch-Rabah et al. (2018), who writes on the confusion of cinnamon and cassia nomenclature and its implications in pharmaceutical research. Consider first cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum* syn. *C. zeylanicum*). Common names include *true cinnamon* and *Ceylon cinnamon*. However, the cinnamon sold in the US and in the UK markets are generally not the same spice: most of the product labelled as cinnamon on American shelves is in fact cassia (*Cinnamomum cassia* syn. *C. aromaticum*) (Oketch-Rabah et al., 2018), which is sometimes called ‘fake cinnamon’ or ‘bastard cinnamon’. In retrospect, the Latin scientific name of the former makes bit more sense now: *verum* means ‘real, true, genuine’. But why is cassia fake cinnamon? This is due to historical reasons, from when the introduction of the much cheaper cassia pushed down the cinnamon prices drastically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wijesekera & Chichester, 1978). Most scholars consistently refer to *C. zeylanicum* as cinnamon, and to *C. cassia* as cassia but it is not uncommon in everyday language use to confound the two, especially in referring to cassia as cinnamon, out of innocent ignorance. For more detail and on the identity of cinnamon and cassia please see ???. Uncovering confusions from under heaps of synonyms lead us to interesting historical events that sometimes explain the vernacular names of a particular product, such as the case of cinnamon and cassia shows.

Secondly, adulteration and contamination are rampant in the industry. Saffron (*Crocus sativus*)—the most expensive spice by weight nearing the price of gold—is famous for being knocked up (and substituted) with the much cheaper flowers of safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*). Even their names reflect these practices: although the two are very different and unrelated plants, their similar dyeing properties and constant confusion have left its mark. *Safflower* has been influenced by the French word for saffron, even if they have different origins (both ultimately from Arabic). And, on account of the adulteration, safflower have also came to be known as *bastard saffron*, attested in 1548.

We do not need to lurk modern pharmacological studies to find examples of confusion, the identity

of saffron was also elusive in ancient China, where at its introduction in the early Middle Ages, it was confused with safflower, and both were casually called 紅花 *honghua*. It is said that Buddhist monks picked up saffron in Kashmir on their way from India to China, but the knowledge about it was not clear until the Yuan dynasty, when it was actually used and imported (Laufer, 1919). During Tang times, it was also connected with the—also strongly yellow—turmeric. Turmeric came first, and got the name 鬱金 *yujin* [yü-gold], and later saffron was named 鬱金香 *yujinxiang* [yü-gold-aromatic] (Schafer, 1985). The confusion of saffron and turmeric (and truthfully every other yellow spice used as a dye) is also observable in Classical Arabic, *kurkum* ‘turmeric’, historically also ‘saffron’ (etymon of the word *curcuma*), and the perceived “similarity” of Sanskrit कुरकुम *kuṛkuma* ‘saffron’ did not help to clear the waters either (Guthrie, 2009, see).

Keeping all this in mind, I feel I must lean on rudimentary botanical identification in the investigation, linking the plants and plant parts to the products and their vernacular names. This is important, as it can clear up some of the confusion when two or more products are used interchangeably, and it will highlight problematic cases from the start.

## 3.2 Data Collection

The data collection for this project was conducted in three stages. One for assembling the set of spices, one for gathering their names, and one for researching etymologies. The result of these three stages are open for inspection in the electronic files `spices.csv`, `names.csv`, and `etymologies.csv`, available on the corresponding GitHub page. ?? will introduce and explain the data in all three levels. Where is that?

### 3.2.1 Collecting the Spices

In the first stage, after I have assembled the set of spices, I collected information about them from encyclopedic handbooks written by experts in the plant sciences and spice industry professionals. I have made great use of van Wyk (2014), Peter (2012), and Hu (2005) at the start, especially when matching plant products to plants. At this stage, I have focused on the identity and characteristics of spices including geographical distribution and native habitats, especially where I saw any room for confusion. As I collected scientific names, I also recorded the common/vernacular names for each spice as an initial exploration, and I linked them to a botanical database that can supply further information. I have also collected information regarding their basic uses especially in traditional medicine.

Surprisingly, the abundance of synonyms is also palpable in the scientific nomenclature, sometimes one plant species has dozens of binomial *taxa*. In an attempt towards standardization of taxonomic data, collaborative efforts have sprung across numerous authoritative institutions to assemble and link their respective databases and sources. These online projects are usually run by a consortium of leading botanical institutions worldwide, among the key entities are the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and Edinburgh, the Missouri Botanical Garden, the Harvard University Herbaria & Libraries, Geneva Conservatory and Botanical Garden, the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle

in Paris, the South African Biodiversity Institute, the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and the Kunming Institute of Botany, just to name a few.

When it comes to botanical information, navigation in the ocean of scientific binomial names hiding the identity of a plant can be overwhelming. To alleviate this, I turned to a range of botanical databases for the purposes of correct identification, and information gathering. I used databases such as *The Plant List* (TPL) (<http://www.theplantlist.org>), which was recently superseded by the *World Flora Online* (WFO) (<http://www.worldfloraonline.org>); the *International Plant Names Index* (IPNI) (<http://www.ipni.org>); *Plants of The World Online* (POWO) (<http://www.plantsoftheworldonline.org>); the *Global Biodiversity Information Facility* (GBIF) (<https://www.gbif.org>); the *Flora of China* (FoC) hosted on eFloras (<http://www.efloras.org/index.aspx>) and the *Biodiversity Heritage Library* (BHL) (<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/>). TPL for instance claimed to be “a working list of all known plant species”, now under WFO it is “an online flora of all known plants”, and as such also connects different plant checklists and biodiversity databases using the nomenclatural and publishing information. In my dissertation I will frequently refer to POWO, which contains botanical descriptions and geographic data (native and introduced habitat), besides the usual taxonomic and botanical information.

In addition to online databases, I will occasionally also turn to reference books from the field of food technology and nutritional science, such as the *Handbook of Herbs and Spices* (Peter, 2006, 2012), and *The Encyclopedia of Herbs & Spices* (Ravindran, 2017). These encyclopedias, although aimed at chemistry-focused food industry professionals, also contain holistic information on the plant-based products and discuss the origins and vernacular names, besides the usual particulars on usage and medicinal qualities. It is also worth noting that various dictionaries usually mention the scientific names of plants.

Regarding traditional medicine systems, I frequently consulted modern inventories of TCM to identify materials and extract Chinese names, including the the connecting databases of Hong Kong Baptist University: the HKBU Medicinal Plant Images Database<sup>1</sup>, the HKBU Chinese Medicinal Material Images Database<sup>2</sup> HKBU Chinese Medicine Specimen Database<sup>3</sup>; and the PolyU Chinese Herbal Medicine Database<sup>4</sup>. Armed with the botanical knowledge, we shall have an ideally clear picture on the spices, and a firm base to connect linguistic data to.

### 3.2.2 Collecting and Annotating the Names

In the second stage, I have collected the names of spices by combing through the published literature and online databases; whether botanical as described above, historical, or culinary. Always, prioritizing the existing linguistic and philological treatises, of course. I have linked the collected spice names to the respective spices and the result of this is an inventory of nearly 400 spice names that link to the initial set of 24 spices. For each spice, I tried to collect their names in the three languages, and it was

<sup>1</sup><https://library.hkbu.edu.hk/electronic/libdbs/mpd/index.html>

<sup>2</sup><https://library.hkbu.edu.hk/electronic/libdbs/mmd/index.html>

<sup>3</sup><https://libproject.hkbu.edu.hk/was40/search?channelid=44273>

<sup>4</sup><https://herbaltcm.sn.polyu.edu.hk/>

also my goal to record where I have found these names. Therefore, thorough citations are available in the dataset pointing towards books, journal articles, databases, dictionaries, or sometimes even Wikipedia. As a preparatory step for the linguistic analysis, I have added some annotations.

### Conventionalized Terms

First and foremost, I have checked the words against dictionaries to see if their use is conventionalized or not, and I have marked words that appear in a dictionary. If a word occurs in multiple dictionaries, I only recorded the one that I deem the most authoritative or reliable, unless they are both extremely interesting entries or contradict each other.

### Present Status of the Terms

Then, as an internal operational measure, I have assigned the names into categories regarding their lexicographic status as spice words: default, alias, historic, archaic, and obsolete. This was mostly for myself to better orientate after the terms started to accumulate, and I used the following scheme: “Default” marks the names the spices are mostly known today, they comprise the words that should be most commonly found in a dictionary, or most frequent in a corpus. These are the names what you see as section-headers in the thesis. This indicator is somewhat arbitrary, since there is no reason for one item not to have several equally relevant synonyms, but I needed to chose one main term to represent one spice. The reasons for this are the following: (1) I needed a convenient way to “call” each item, so they can be efficiently compared across the three languages. (2) I needed an identifying key for all the other names for the same spice, and (3) I wanted to avoid any possible confusion between item that have overlapping common names (i.e. pepper vs. pepper). The rationale behind the default set of names is further explained in chapter 5 [The Names of Spices](#).

“Alias” refers to any other current alternative name that a spice can be known by, regardless of popularity, context, or reason. For example, *aniseed* is an alias for *anise* (the default term). “Historic” refers to once important terms that were the at a certain point in history would have been considered default, and—due to their role and popularity in the past—still relevant today. This category especially includes cases where spice was attested under a different name from what it is known by now. “Archaic” refers to historic words that are rare and not relevant today, but still recognizable, and “obsolete” refers to names that are essentially dead. If a dictionary uses these remarks, (e.g., obsolete), I comply with the dictionary. I have identified a few more cases that could be best characterized as “speculative”, this refers to spice names that are not attested anywhere, and I assume them to be the author’s invention/translation.

I have highlighted the so-called default items as they also act as a keys or identifier (ID) to the rest of the alternative names corresponding to the same spice.

### Borrowed Terms

Lastly, indicated if the name is a loanword or not, or whether it needs further checking.

## Meanings, Literal Meanings, Glosses

For every term in Arabic or Chinese, I added a gloss, so the literal meanings could be decoded, and most names also have written notes and comments on their logic, formation, origin, or any other remarkable aspect. Sometimes a short explanation is needed to understand the emergence of a term, or the grounds for its existence. Soon, the dataset of spice names was populated with terms corresponding to the botanically informed binomial names and the materials they represent, and based on the information from stage one, the names were also annotated with the macro-areas of their native geographic origin.

## Attestation

I have also recorded the details concerning attestation where available, noting a date, approximate date, century, and period (i.e. early Old English, Tang dynasty, etc.). For this information I used dates from the [OED](#), in English, and historical corpora for Arabic and Chinese where available. The source of the attestation dates are noted in the dataset. I have also tried to gather the pre-modern documents where each name was recorded, with the title and author of the historical works for future reference.

### 3.2.3 Collecting Etymologies

In the third stage, I have collected detailed etymological information on selected names: the terms that were marked as default. Doing so, I now have a parallel set of spice nomenclature of the three languages for 24 spices, and I can compare them in terms of borrowed status, and their etymological development and origins. Here as well, I have included a few other historically relevant terms.

## 3.3 Sources

### 3.3.1 Primary Sources

One core component of this study is philological research. Philology is the meticulous study of literary texts, primarily of historical documents, to study language, history, philosophy, literature, culture, religion, or any traditional knowledge of exceptional importance strongly connected to a society, primarily through the analysis of historic texts (sometimes written in now dead languages). Modern philological research relies on two types of sources: primary and secondary literature. Primary literature denotes historical texts, the so-called classics, for example, the already mentioned *De Materia Medica* of the Greek physician Dioscorides (c. 40–90 AD) (Dioscorides, [ca. 50–70/2005](#)), books of Roman historians, such as Pliny the Elder (23/24–79 AD) and his *Naturalis Historia* (Pliny the Elder, [77/1855](#)) are good examples, not to mention the or 1<sup>st</sup>-century cookery book by Apicius (Apicius, [1977](#)). There also available [materia medicas](#) from the Islamic scientific golden-age, such as the *al-Qānūn fī l-Ṭibb* [*Canon of Medicine*] of Ibn Sina/Avicenna (980–1037) (Ibn Sīnā, [1025/1329](#)) and fantastic miscellanies from the Tang dynasty era, such as the *Youyang Zazu* [*Miscellaneous Morsels*]



from *Youyang*] from the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Duan, ca. 860). Indeed, we must not forget the Bible or Quran, as they are also rich historical and linguistic sources for our topic. A number of these primary texts are available in their original form through museums' and libraries' online databases, as transcribed editions in historical corpora, and of course published English translations. A vast number of classical texts (Greek and Latin) can be accessed through the Perseus Digital Library (Crane, n.d.). Critical editions of a classical text, such as that of the famous *Periplus Maris Erythraei* by Casson (1989), or de Goeje (1870)'s *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* series are also considered primary. Ancient and Classical dictionaries, such as the *Shuowen Jiezi*, or the *Lisān al-ʿArab* are also an integral part of philology. Secondary literature is everything else building on these works, monographs, histories reviewing a multitude of authentic texts, published in recent times.

### 3.3.2 Etymological Dictionaries

Besides the literature itself discussed earlier, a core part of the philology component in this research are etymological dictionaries. Etymological thirst, the seeking of word origins was one of the cardinal thrills for early thinkers ever since Plato, and we will make use of the advances made in the past centuries. The OED has detailed etymological information based on previous works on English and for other languages, a couple of works to be mentioned are for Greek Beekes and van Beek (2010), Hebrew, Klein (1987), Old Chinese Schuessler (2007) and Chinese Liu et al. (1985). Unfortunately, Arabic lacks an authoritative etymological dictionary for many reasons<sup>5</sup>, but we can still turn to essential reference works such as the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*<sup>6</sup> (Bearman et al., 1960–2005) or the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*<sup>7</sup> (Foundation & Yarshater, 1996–present).

### 3.3.3 Reference Dictionaries

Key dictionaries were consulted throughout the data collection process, the following is an enumeration of the general or historical dictionaries I used:

**Note 3.3.1.** References to dictionary entries are made very frequently in this dissertation, and so I made the decision to use a compact way of citing dictionaries. Instead of following the standard APA 7<sup>th</sup> guideline and referencing every entry separately, I will indicate the entry as a page number or headword and reference every dictionary just once. This would save us from the pain of reading (Oxford University Press, n.d.-a) (Oxford University Press, n.d.-b) (Oxford University Press, n.d.-c) and its endless permutations. This minor deviation from the APA style will make the number of dictionary entries in the bibliography less oppressive, and the running citations more reader-friendly. I will also use footnote citations whenever I reference a dictionary, and I stick to this practice throughout the dissertation to make reading more comfortable.

<sup>5</sup>For a brief overview on the matter, see Blažek (2006)

<sup>6</sup>Limited access online at <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>

<sup>7</sup>Accessible online at <https://iranicaonline.org/>

language	type	period	corpus	words
English	web	modern	enTenTen20	36,5 billion
Arabic	web	modern	arTenTen12	7,5 billion
Chinese	web	modern	zhTenTen17	13,5 billion
English	books	historic (15–19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	EHBC	826 million
Arabic	books	historic ( 7–12 <sup>th</sup> c.)	KSUCCA	47 million
Chinese	books	historic ( –20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Chinese Text Project	25 million (characters)
Chinese	books	historic ( –20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Scripta Sinica	797 million (characters)

Table 3.1 The list of corpora consulted in the thesis.

### 3.4 Corpora

The second major component of this study is corpus linguistics, and I will use corpora from three major languages: English, Arabic, and Chinese. I chose these languages for two reasons. One, they represent three influential civilizations in the history of spices, as well as powers actively participating in trade throughout history, each having its zenith at slightly different historical periods, as I described previously.

For modern corpora, I will use the English Web 2020 (enTenTen20, circa 36.5 billion words), the Arabic Web 2012, preprocessed with the Stanford tagger (arTenTen12, ca. 7.5 billion words), and the Chinese Web 2017, Simplified version (zhTenTen17, ca. 13.5 billion words), all hosted on the *Sketch Engine* (SkE) (<https://www.sketchengine.eu/>) (Kilgariff et al., 2014; Kilgariff et al., 2004). Enormous web corpora such as the above contains billions of words, therefore I will certainly have enough instances even for spices more rare.

In terms of historical corpora, I have consulted a few collections. For English, I relied on the *English Historical Book Collection* (EHBC) (EEBO, ECCO, Evans) hosted on the Sketch Engine, that is around 826 million words and contains books published between 1473–1820, with a vast majority written around 1600. English also has a good coverage on the Google Books project ???. For Arabic, I have settled on using the *King Saud University Corpus of Classical Arabic* (KSUCCA), which is around 47 million words containing literature on various genres between the 7–11<sup>th</sup> centuries, ranging from books on medicine, geography, law, history, and religious texts (Alrabiah et al., 2013; Alrabiah et al., 2014). As for Chinese, I have frequented the *Chinese Text Project* (CTP) (Sturgeon, 2021, n.d.) which has base of 25 million characters pre-modern Chinese documents, not including the community edited texts. I also used the *Scripta Sinica* (SS) (around 754 million words), containing classics ranging from ancient times up until 1949 (Academia Sinica, 1993–2008); the *Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩 [Complete Tang Poems] (QTS) [Tang poetry collection], which contains around 48,900 poems; and the *Chinese Buddhist Electronic Texts Association* (CBETA) project, which contains the Chinese Buddhist Canon, also known as the Chinese Tripitaka (Ch'en, 1964, pp. 365–386). Thus, accommodating textual heritage from ancient times up until the 20th century.

# The Diffusion of Spices

**I**N this chapter, I will present the findings on the diffusion of spices, through the investigation of spice names and their spread on spatial and temporal dimensions. In order to present these results in a convenient, reader friendly way, I will use geospatial mapping. The plots seen in this chapter are made by using the etymological data on spice terminology, collected and introduced in ??.

Fig X shows the spatial trajectory of all English words included in the set, and we can observe a few trends off glance. First of all, there is a

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## 4.1 The Case of Cinnamon

### 4.2 One

This chapter aims to give an overview on the terminology used by various languages when referring to cinnamon. These words are connected to the spread of material culture, and a (not-so) specific plant product used and coveted for its aroma, used as spice and medicine. Known by humans for millennia, cinnamon is now present essentially on a global scale, and by exploring its names in multiple languages, we can reconstruct its linguistic genealogy. These results also tell a story; they tell us an account on the linguistic history of *cinnamonic* words, their origins, diffusion, and ultimately, the story of cinnamon. We can infer information on the trade routes and the peoples who transmitted it, and identify the cultures that used and diffused knowledge on it.

To those of us who interested in the spread of words, especially *Wanderwörter* and their underlying cultural, historical, and geo-political significance, the map of tea might come to mind. This is a map that shows the journey of words for tea (either from Sinitic *cha* or Minnan *te*), and their distribution in a sample of the world's languages. The point of this map is that it clearly shows if the name for tea arrived by overland trade or via a sea route. This peculiar phenomenon is a feature on its own (138A) in *The World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS)*, and have been described in a chapter by Dahl (2013).<sup>1</sup> Discussions and maps of the land vs. sea distribution of tea terminology have since made it into popular science magazines and articles, made rounds on Twitter, and hence relatively well known.<sup>2</sup> On a more scientific note, the distribution of tea words are discussed in detail by (Mair & Hoh, 2009, pp. 261–270) in an appendix titled *A Genealogy of Words for Tea*, with including a discussion on historical phonology.

<sup>1</sup>The accompanying map is available online at <https://wals.info/feature/138A#2/25.5/143.6>

<sup>2</sup>See for example Sonnad (2018) in Quartz: <https://qz.com/1176962/map-how-the-word-tea-spread-over-land-and-sea-to-conquer-the-world/> or Netchev and Macquire (2022) in the World History Encyclopaedia: <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/14112/movement-of-tea--cha-around-the-globe/>

## Words for tea

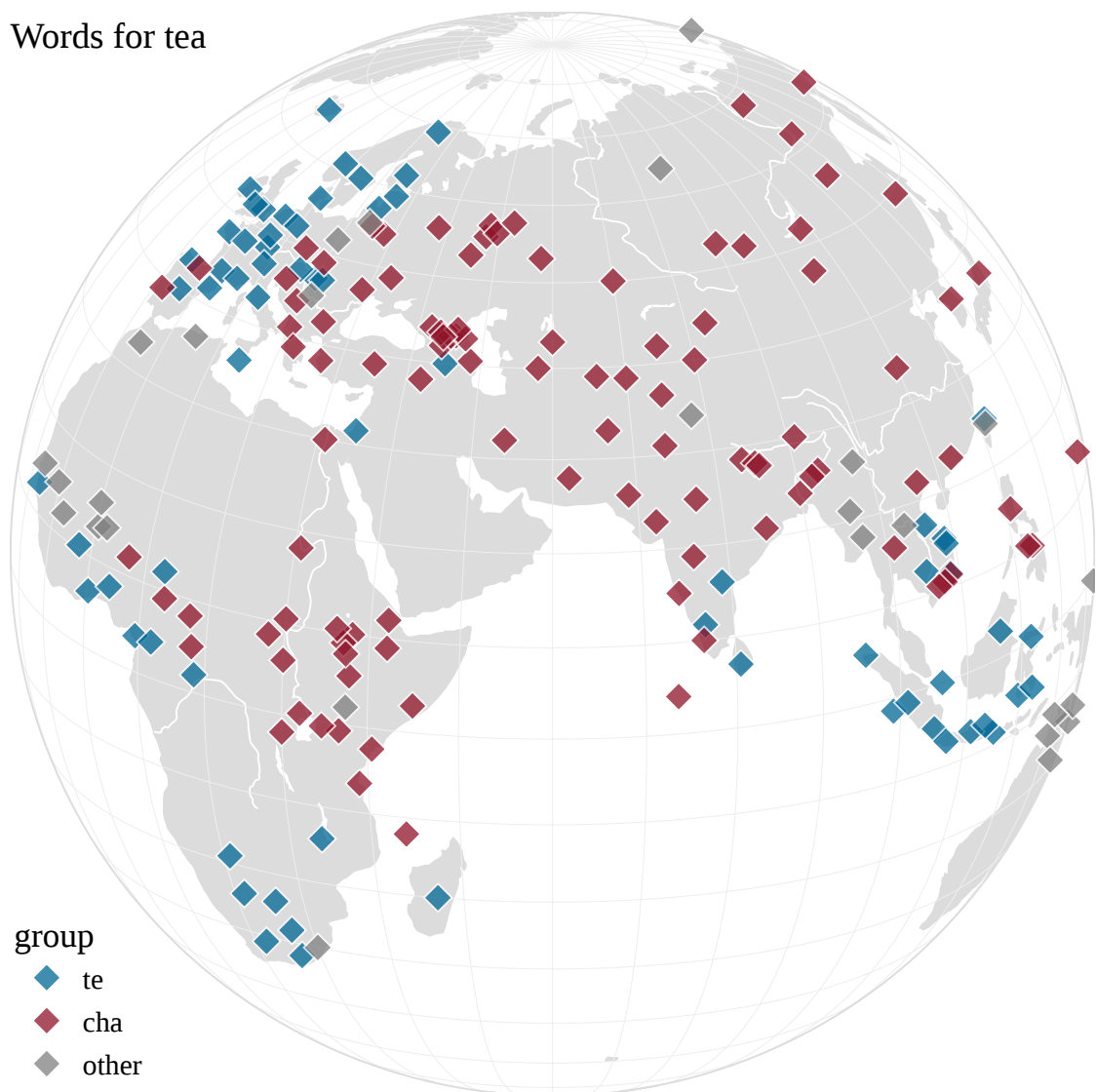


Figure 4.1 Distribution of words for tea from Sinitic *cha* and Minnan *te*, based on the data around the globe.

Cinnamon as a spice is relatively well known around the world, and the history of its diffusion goes back to thousands of years, with words attested as early as the Bible itself, as it was discussed in ???. This is in contrast with the story of tea, in the sense that the international spread of tea is a relatively recent process in the economic history of plant products and colonial powers, and so we have a much clearer picture on the exact ways it was transmitted. Although tea-drinking in its homeland was practiced from time immemorial, and trade allowed it to spread regionally on networks, such as the Tea Horse Road, its present global domination is a result of 17<sup>th</sup>-century European fascination and large scale shipping. While the tea map illustrates the long haul trade connections of the time, such as those between Europe and the Far East, the map of cinnamon shows traces of an older, more gradual spread that happened in stages, outlining a more geographically contiguous development, and incremental trade networks. The propagation of cinnamonic *Wanderwörter* mirrors the historical

processes, and just as the story of cinnamon, the words' origins are sometimes obscured by the sheer time-depth that is covered.

### 4.3 Methods and Data

Informative geospatial visualizations such as figure 4.1 above are a powerful tool in conveying the information about spread and distribution of words, and they can also help us to notice patterns and connections faster and easier than studying long tables of words, especially when the distributions are more complex than the somewhat neat duality of tea. In this case study, I will attempt a classification for the words for cinnamon by looking at clusters and categorizing them according to their source, to see what the distribution of names today can tell us about the spread and history of cinnamon.

Because words for cinnamon or other spices are not included as features in balanced typological datasets, such as **WALS** (tea is an exceptional feature in this database), I have attempted a manual collection of words for cinnamon based on dictionary entries. As a starting point, I have crawled data from the **Wiktionary** (<https://en.wiktionary.org>), which is the closest resource we currently have to an open- and crowd-sourced multilingual dictionary. Similarly to the Wikipedia, the Wiktionary is edited and reviewed by the community, which has both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, information on the Wiktionary is free, broad in scope, it usually represents the public consensus, and often well cited. On the other hand, it is not always complete, the available languages do not represent a balanced sample from a typological point of view, and the information can sometimes be ill-informed or deprecated. In any case it is a rich resource to start with.

For cinnamon, first I scraped the translations for the word *cinnamon* in the sense 'spice' (Wiktionary, [n.d.](#)), and cleaned the data using regular expressions. After this, I have performed a round of manual checking where I fixed obvious mistakes in word forms and transliterations by consulting other dictionaries and reference works, in the languages and scripts I felt competent to do so. I proceeded to add a few missing translations with the help of other lexicographical resources and the Google Neural Machine Translation engine's Python API (Y. Wu et al., 2016).<sup>3</sup> Then, I analyzed each word in terms of etymological origin, and assigned them to categories. For example, words derived from Greek *kinnámōmon*, such as Lithuanian *cinamonas* or English *cinnamon* constitute one category, and words derived from Persian *dârcîn*, such as Turkish *tarçın* or Hindi *dālcīnī*, make up another. I continued this categorization for all instances, and created a new category for every group that has at least three attested members. Instances that do not belong to any group or undetermined were assigned to "other". Finally, I merged this dataset with language data obtained from the databases of both **WALS** (Dryer & Haspelmath, 2013) and **Glottolog** (Hammarström et al., 2022) to prepare for geospatial plotting. The datasets were handled using the **pandas** library in Python, and the visualizations were created using the **plotly** Python library (McKinney, 2011; Plotly Technologies Inc., 2015).

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<sup>3</sup><https://pypi.org/project/googletrans/>

## 4.4 Results and Discussion

Figure 4.2 shows the results of the analysis above, on a geographical scatter plot. As it can be seen, there are six groups in total: canela, kinnamon, korica, qirfa, darchin, and gui, with a seventh one — other — containing those that do not belong to any of these. It is also noticeable that the groups that were manually identified form geographical clusters, for example, the gui group appears in East Asia, while the canela group is mainly found in Europe. Lastly, I would like to draw attention that the “other” group has a high number of members in regions where cinnamon (or cassia) is native. The canela group represent words that derived from Latin, the kinnamon group contains words going back to Greek, and the korica group represent mostly Slavic languages. Qirfa words are derived from Arabic, darchin gathers terms from the Persianate world, and gui embraces some terms from the Sinosphere. Let us now look at these categories one by one.

### Words for cinnamon

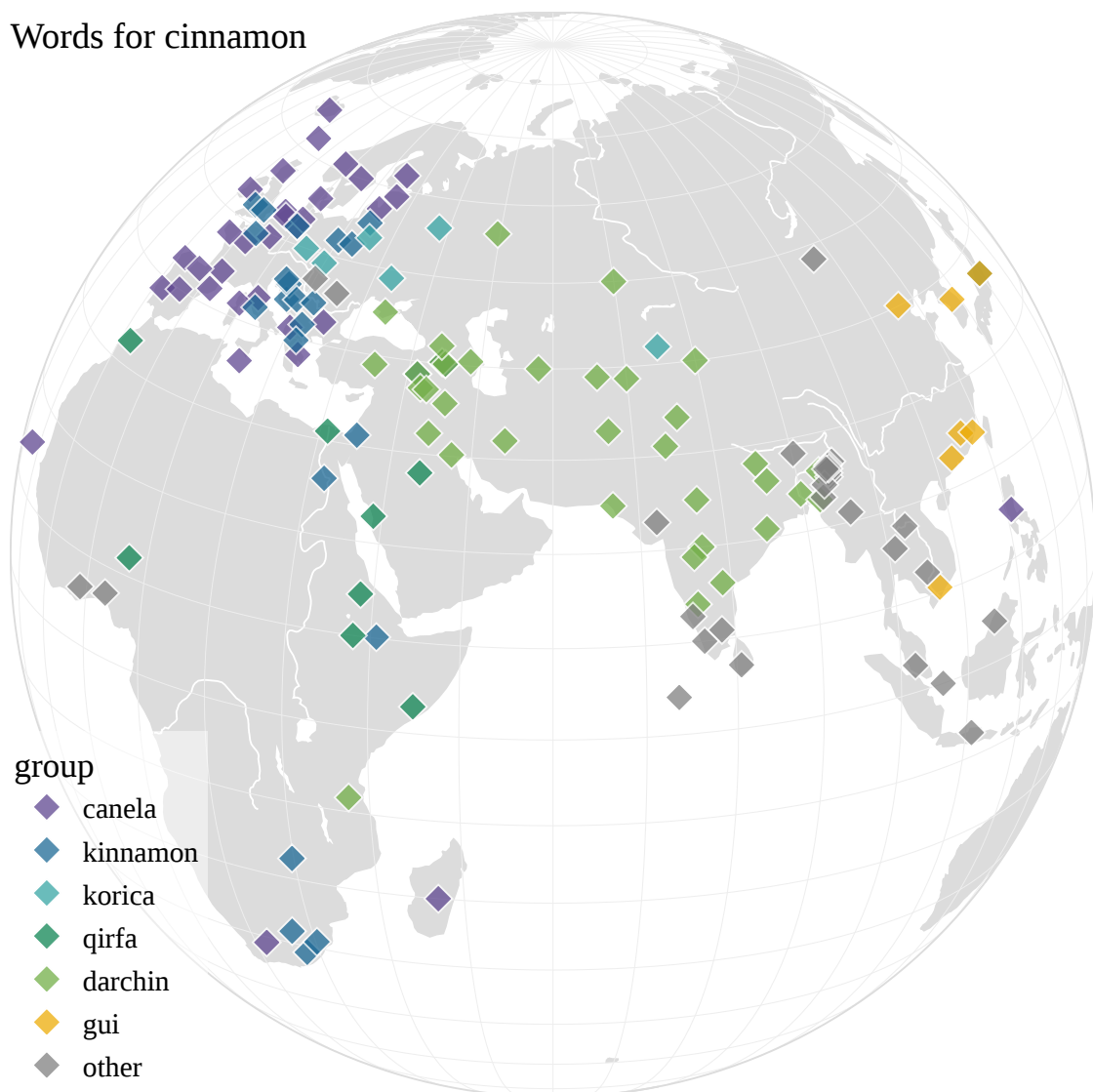


Figure 4.2 The distribution of *cinnamonic* words in a few languages around the globe.

**Note 4.4.1.** For a full, interactive and explorable version of the plot, please visit the following link: <http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/cinnamon.html>.<sup>a</sup> The interactive plot can be rotated, zoomed in and out, and the groups of data points can be isolated with a double-click on the group name/icon. Hovering over a data point will bring forward further information on the term, its transliteration, associated language and language family.

<sup>a</sup>For an annotated version, please visit [http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/cinnamon\\_annotated.html](http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/cinnamon_annotated.html)

#### 4.4.1 The canela group

Words belonging to this group are cognates of Spanish *canela* and its variants in Romance languages, which have been formed with the diminutive of Latin *canna* ‘reed, cane’. It is named so after the curled shape of the cinnamon sticks resembling a little, hollow reed-pipe (OED, “cannel”). Latin *canna* itself is a loanword from Greek *κάννα* *kánna* ‘reed, pole’, which is probably a borrowing from a Semitic language (cf. Arabic قنّاة *qanāh* ‘hollow spear, cane; conduit, canal’, Hebrew קָנֶה *qāneh* ‘stalk, reed, cane’, Aramaic קָנְיָא *qanyā* ‘id.’<sup>4</sup>) (OED, “cane”). According to Beekes and van Beek (2010, p. 636) the Greek word is from “Babylonian-Assyrian” (Akkadian) 𒊕𒍪𒍪𒍪 *qanû* ‘reed’, which may come from “Sumerian-Akkadian” (Sumerian) 𒊕𒍪 *gin* ‘id.’ (cf. Roth et al., 1968/2004, vol. 13, p. 85), and proceeds to give Ugaritic *qn* and Punic *qn*’ as further Semitic attestations.

The distribution of this group is overwhelming in Europe, which seems to echo the strong influence of Latin vocabulary, especially in the developing Romance languages. One example would be Old French *canele* (modern *cannelle*), which was formed within French from *canne* ‘cane’, and first attested in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century from an epic poem describing a fictional expedition of Charlemagne to Jerusalem<sup>5</sup>, and the local vendors selling cinnamon, pepper, and “other fine spices” (*Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* (TLFi), “cannelle”)<sup>6</sup>. The TLFi explains that this word exists in most romance languages and it is impossible to determine its progress, and also notes that the medieval Latin is not attested in the ‘cinnamon’ sense. Either French or Italian was the usual donor for other European languages, take for example Dutch *kaneel*, or Finnish *kaneli* through Swedish *kanel*. Spanish *canela* is attested around 1250, from “Italian” (Medieval Latin) *cannella* (Corominas, 1987, p. 125; Gómez de Silva, 1985, p. 98). Due to later colonization by European powers, many of these terms spread elsewhere, e.g.: Tagalog *kanela* from Spanish, or Haitian Creole *kannèl*.

<sup>†</sup>*Cannel*, also earlier as *canel* had entered English usage in the 13<sup>th</sup> century from French, but is now obsolete. It existed in Early Modern English up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and was gradually replaced by *cinnamon* (also arriving through French), which was first attested in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (see Etymology ??). Neo Latin *canella* also appeared for a brief time, but its meaning as ‘cinnamon’

<sup>4</sup><https://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=qnh+N&cits=all>

<sup>5</sup>*Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* [*The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*], or *Voyage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople* [*Charlemagne’s Voyage to Jerusalem and Constantinople*], (c. 1140).

<sup>6</sup><https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/cannelle>



waned, and now it is used in botany to refer to a plant genus.

In many other languages of Europe the opposite happened, and an existing word from Greek was replaced by the Latin term. Even Modern Greek uses *kanéla*, re(?) -borrowed from Italian *cannella*, instead of the Ancient Greek *kinnámōmon*.

#### 4.4.2 The kinnamon group

This group centers around Ancient Greek *kinnámōmon*, most possibly a loanword from a Semitic language as I discussed in ???. *Kinnámōmon* is the source of words for cinnamon in many European languages (e.g.: German *Zimt*, Lithuanian *cinamonas*, and English *cinnamon*), prominently in Central Europe and the Middle East. In most cases, these words represent an area where words derived from Latin *cannella* (or one of its descendants) did not replace the earlier word derived of *kinnámōmon*. This group also contains South Slavic languages in the Balkan linguistic area (e.g. Slovenian *cimet*, Serbian *џимет* *cimet*) where it arrived via the earlier German term *Zimmet* (now *Zimt*), and therefore it diverges from West and East Slavic branches for this lexical item. It reached Southeast Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Snoj, 1997, s.v. *cimet*)<sup>7</sup>, from which we can assume that cinnamon started to arrived here from the West during this turbulent time in the Balkans, in the middle of the Ottoman Empire's European expansion.

#### 4.4.3 The korica group

The korica group contains languages that use words derived from the inherited Slavic lexicon, in this case the East and West Slavic branches. Proto-Slavic *\*korica* 'bark' is a derivative of *\*korà* 'bark'<sup>8</sup>, the suffix *-ica* is diminutive. Old Church Slavic *korice* meant 'cinnamon', and further cognates are Russian *koríca* 'id.', Ukrainian *коріця* *korýcja* 'id.' (East Slavic), Czech *skořice* 'id.' (West Slavic). In other cases, words derived from *\*korica* can mean 'bark, crust' (e.g. Serb-Croatian) or 'cover (of a book), binding' (e.g. Bulgarian) (Derksen, 2008, p. 235). Due to the influence of Russian during Soviet times, some Central Asian Turkic languages ended up with a foreign words in their vocabularies, e.g. Kirghiz *корица* *korica* ??.

#### 4.4.4 The qirfa group

The qirfa group contains languages from Africa and the Middle East, whose words for cinnamon were borrowed from Arabic *qirfa*, for example Hausa *kirfa* (Newman, 2007, p. 114) and Amharic ቀረፋ *qäräfa* (Leslau, 1996, p. 74).

#### 4.4.5 The darchin group

Names for cinnamon in this category originate from Persian, as it was explained in ??. According to the data this cluster has the largest geographical extent, and by number of instances constitutes the

<sup>7</sup>Fran — <https://fran.si/193/marko-snoj-slovenski-etimoloski-slovar/4285437/cimet?View=1&Query=cimet>

<sup>8</sup>Proto-Indo-European (PIE) *\*(s)kor-* 'to cut' ??



largest group, almost head to head with the group of canela. Darchin represents the earliest stage of cinnamon's westward spread from South, Southeast, or East Asia, depending which cinnamon or cassia we think became the first cinnamon of commerce. Consulting the plot we can witness the huge influence Persian had in this step of transmission to the Middle East and Central Asia. We can also see that central and north Indian languages use a loanword from Persian, which can be explained by the Persianate<sup>9</sup> societies that resulted from the Islamic conquest of India, starting from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The first sultan to ravage the land, Mahmud of Ghazni was a Persianized *mamluk* Turk, who laid the foundations with his raids in the 11<sup>th</sup> century for a series of Muslim dynasties on the Indian subcontinent, culminating in the Mughal Empire (1526–1857) and what we define today as Indo-Persian culture (Eaton, 2019, p. 33).

#### 4.4.6 The *gui* group

The *gui* group contains terms from the Sinosphere, words that borrowed the Sinogram 桂 *gui* (see ??), such as Japanese 桂 *kei* 'cinnamon or cassia tree', synonym with 肉桂 (肉桂) *nikkei*, Korean 계 *gye* as 계피 (桂皮) *gyepi* and 육계 (肉桂) and the Sino-Vietnamese quế. This shows that the Chinese transmitted their cassia to their immediate neighbors East and Southwest, together with the word and character for it. However, there is little evidence for trade in cinnamon between China and Southeast Asia in early history, G. Wang (1958) does not give any information on it in his "The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea." (G. Wang, 1958) This makes sense if we remember that all regions active in the South China Sea maritime trade — from Guangdong to Sumatra to Lanka — had their own source of cinnamon, and traders would only transport it westwards.

#### 4.4.7 Others

We can see that the category of "other" is prevalent in areas where cinnamon of various kinds is native and therefore these languages often have native words to refer to it. Many words from these group are derived from the meaning of 'tree bark, skin, peel' Malay/Indonesian *kulit kayu manis* [bark-wood-sweet] 'sweet wood bark', where *kulit* 'skin, bark' is often omitted, or Dhivehi *fonithoshi* [sweet-bark].

Hungarian *fahéj* [tree-bark] is made by compounding and was attested in ca. 1395 (Zaicz, 2006, s.v. *fahéj*),

Romanian *scorțișoară*<sup>10</sup>, is perhaps modeled after Slavic *\*korica*.

*scortea*,

*scortum*

*\*(s)ker-* ("to cut")

<sup>9</sup>For a discussion on this term, see Green (2019).

<sup>10</sup>Diminutive of *scoarță* 'bark', from Latin *scortum* 'hide, skin', PIE *\*(s)ker-* 'to cut'.

#### 4.5 Two

So what does this tell us exactly? It shows that in East Asia Chinese, especially the Chinese writing had influence over its neighbors...?

#### 4.6 Conclusion

#### 4.7 Limitations

## The Names of Spices

Now that the detailed introduction of the spices is complete, let us look at the analysis and findings. As a result of the data collection set forth in ??, the database now contains 369 spice names. Of these, 159 are in English, 88 are in Arabic, and 122 are in Chinese; figure 5.1 shows this distribution. The total number is the accumulation of the lengthy process of carefully compiling the nomenclature for the set of spices as defined at the beginning of the thesis, which consists of 25 different spices. The data collection was detailed in section 3.2, and this chapter aims to showcase the many ways we can interpret, analyze, and visualize the data.

### 5.0.1 Challenges in Categorization

One of the most challenging parts of this project, is to chose a meaningful way to categorize spices and spice names. The design should make sense on multiple dimensions: botanically, historically, and maybe even gastronomically, but at all times keeping in mind the linguistic focus. The main goal is to assign a spice name to the appropriate product/material, which is correctly identified on a botanical level. This is not always straightforward, as some materials can have multiple botanical sources, one plant can yield multiple differently used plant products, and the same names can be used for different substances. We have already discussed the question of spice names vs. plant names in ??, but there are several other issues.

One problem arises from the fact that many terms can have a meaning on different levels of specificity, depending on context and intent. Spice words are rich in senses. For example, according to the *Princeton WordNet (PWN)* *black pepper* can be both a hypernym and a hyponym to *pepper*, depending on if it refers to the plant, or the dried fruits with the husks on. In this specific case, *black pepper*#2 and *white pepper* are sister terms, but *white pepper* is also a subordinate to *black pepper*#1. This situation is then further complicated with the fruit of the *Capsicums*, that also have the name *pepper*. Thus, it is not immediately clear if we should treat black and white pepper as two different spices, or two manifestations of the same spice. There are many other examples, where a term can be understood on different levels: as a plant, a family of similar plants, a specific spice, or a group of spices. In an everyday setting, lexical semantic hierarchies are not always adhered to, and people organize spices in their heads according to their own convictions. One author might mention white pepper under the heading black pepper on account of their biology (a botanically driven categorization), while another might separate them and discuss them as different spices based on their different uses (a culinary approach). As for the historian, mentioning white

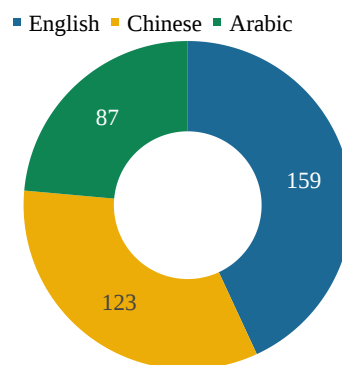


Figure 5.1 The distribution of spice names across the three languages.

pepper might be just not at all important. The reasons for these variations are usually determined by what is the intention of the categorization, and who is the target behind the treatise. For us layman however, spice entities are most prominently structured by way of their names: the words are the handrails to cling to if we are not familiar with an item.

Even more challenging for categorization, is when we are not sure which spices were meant under certain names in different times. Cinnamon and cassia are a great example for this, as we saw in ???. But, parallel to the question of identity, we also have seen that it does not always matter. Attitudes differ from place to place: while Europeans do sometimes differentiate, in China and the U.S. the concept of cinnamon is singular. For the analysis, I had to decide if I treat them as one item, or make a distinction. In a few cases, a spice name became obsolete and got “lost”, meaning that it cannot be identified with certainty, and we have to guess what the name referred to based on botanical and historical data, and categorize accordingly; as it is the case with *amomum*. The most extreme situation is when a spice goes extinct, as it happened to silphium in antiquity. At present, this thesis does not contain such items. In these cases, we need historical knowledge to say anything about the identity of said spices and where they belong in between the others.

Our knowledge or lack thereof also determines the concept we have of a certain item. For example, most people who know that nutmeg and mace come from the same fruit of the same plant and from the same place will always connect the two in their heads, the two spices are literally inseparable (until harvest, of course). From historical records however, it is clear that the knowledge regarding these substances was spiked with misunderstandings and inaccuracies, even among people who were in the spice business. According to an anecdote, during the Dutch monopoly of the Banda islands, an officer back home have written an angry letter to the colony on the Spice islands, ordering them to plant more mace trees, because there was a higher demand for it than nutmeg — a request that must have raised some eyebrows on the plantations. This shows that botanical organization is accessible to those with botanical knowledge.

Lastly, we must also mention that the language and words we use for these materials also defines our understanding of them. Analyzable, descriptive names help us to identify certain materials, while loanwords with forgotten original meanings (cf. *mace*) might not say much. For example, no Chinese would have the above misconception of mace, when faced with its name: 肉豆蔻皮 *roudoukoupi*, which means the ‘skin/cover of the nutmeg’, which is what it actually is. On the converse, the Chinese initially confused some cardamoms and nutmeg (unrelated plants), simply because they were both round, and sourced from the same region. Today, both are 豆蔻 *doukou*, with modifiers attached to distinguish between them.

Another point to make is the myriad of “fake” spices that feature especially in English. False peppers, false cardamoms, bastard cinnamon, and bastard saffron, are a reflection of historical economic attitudes, often pointing at the problem of adulteration. Names, such as *true pepper* and *true cinnamon* summon a sense of originality. This however, is highly subjective to a culture and language, after all, bastard cinnamon is just “normal” cinnamon for others, and false cardamoms are just cardamoms to those who have a different prototype for what is a cardamom. In a sense, it all boils down to translation, which can be arbitrary. Who decides if Chinese 桂 *gui* should be rendered

*cinnamon* or *cassia* in English?

To avoid getting lost in the details of lengthy binomial names or botanical genera, I have opted to use a set of common names of the spices to be used for identification, under which the various spice names belong. These IDs are sometimes arbitrary (e.g.: all spicy, red, hot, chili peppers of the *Capsicum* genus and their names go under “chile”), but always clear cut and explained in the data chapter. I have therefore grouped some spices and spice names into larger categories, trying to find a smallest common denominator within the three languages. This only affects a few items: various false cardamoms in the *Amomum* genus will be grouped under the umbrella term: false cardamom. One better way would have been to divide the categories on a purely botanical basis, but I prefer this solution to make this set of closely related spices more accessible to the reader and avoid these items to fritter away in the crowd. Also, they constitute a linguistics and conceptual category as well, using similar prototype words in all three languages in their names. Using common names as identifiers also facilitates for a linguistically driven comparison, and so the IDs are essentially the same as the set of spices determined earlier: allspice, anise, asafoetida, black cardamom, caraway, cardamom, cassia, chile, cinnamon, clove, coriander, cumin, dill, false cardamom, fennel, fenugreek, ginger, long pepper, nutmeg, pepper, saffron, Sichuan pepper, star anise, turmeric, vanilla.

## 5.1 Stats and Figures: The Spices in Numbers

### Name Counts

On average, a spice has 14 names, where the max is 44 (chile), the min is 4 (fenugreek and mace). Figure 5.4 show the top ten and the bottom ten spices that have the most and least names, respectively. This is a very good indicator of which spices are more complex in their nomenclature, and therefore which are the most “problematic” to untangle.

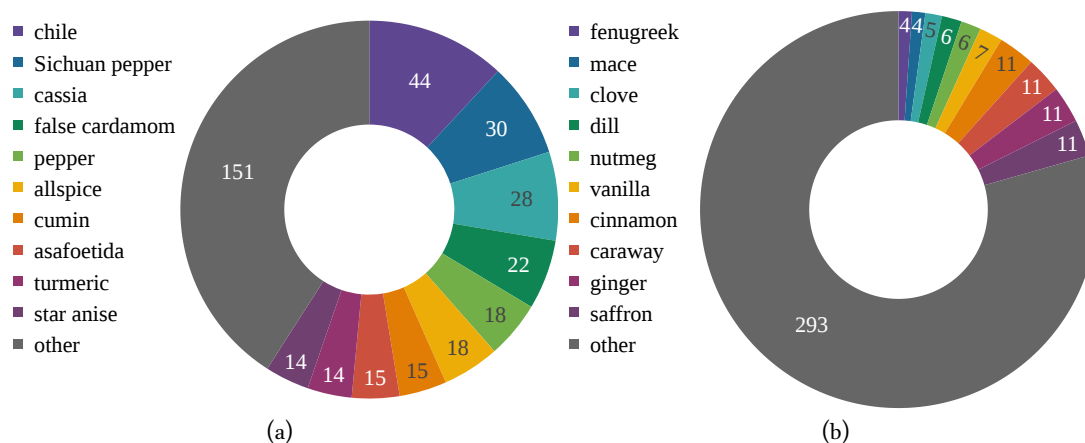


Figure 5.2

As we can see, spices that can boast many names include the chili pepper, Sichuan peppers, and false cardamoms. On the other hand, spices with the lowest number of names are presumably the

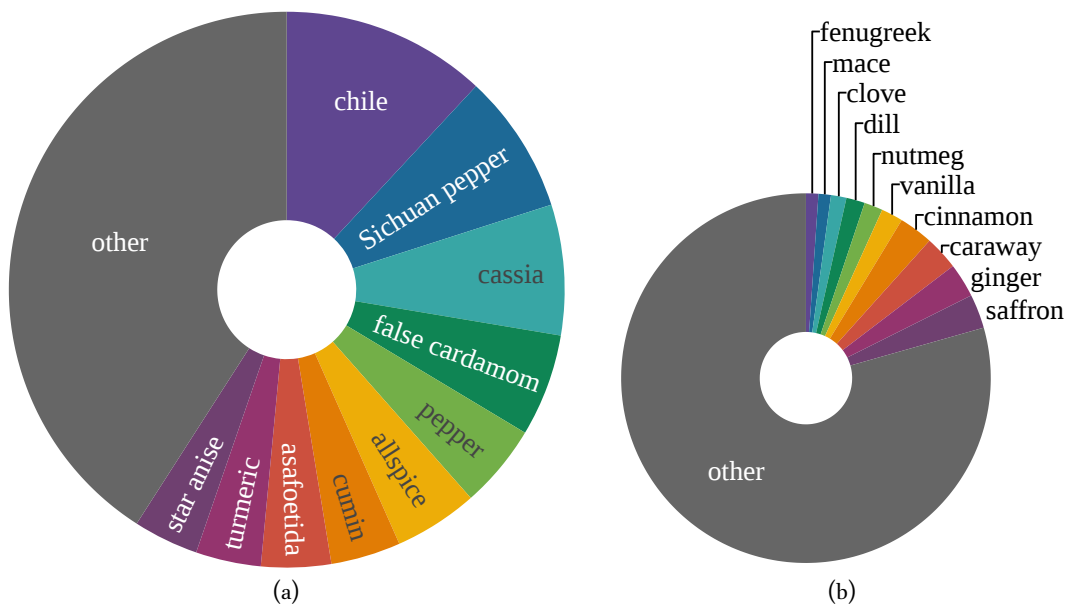


Figure 5.3

most “straightforward” items, take for example cloves, or vanilla.

Now let us look at the same charts deconstructed by language.

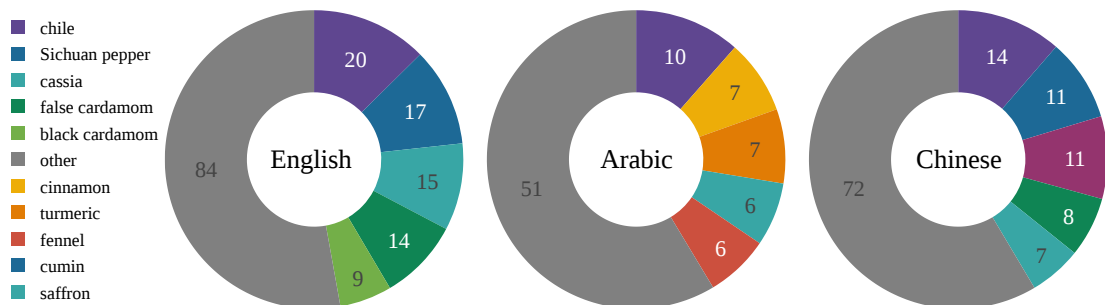


Figure 5.4

## 5.2 The Attestation of Spice Words

From the nearly 400 names, I have chosen a selected few that — for lack of a better word — I marked as “default”. These are the names most people are familiar with, the most people search by, and the most prevalent in corpora. These are the names that act also as IDs in my dataset.

One of the most exciting parts of this thesis, is the data that was collected regarding dates of attestation. In other words, I tried to find out the earliest possible mentions for each spice, then combine this information in a way that enables us to see the diffusion of spices throughout the history of a language and culture. In essence, we could see the history of the spice trade in the words, how and

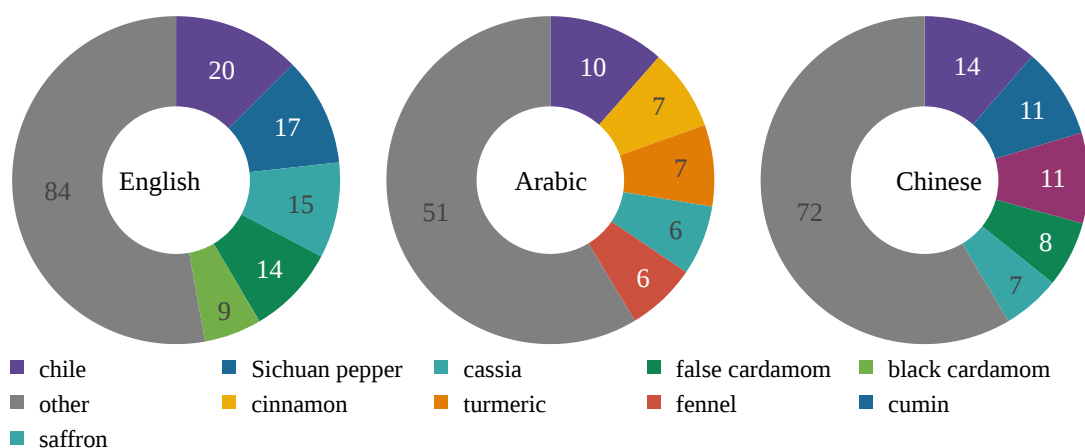


Figure 5.5

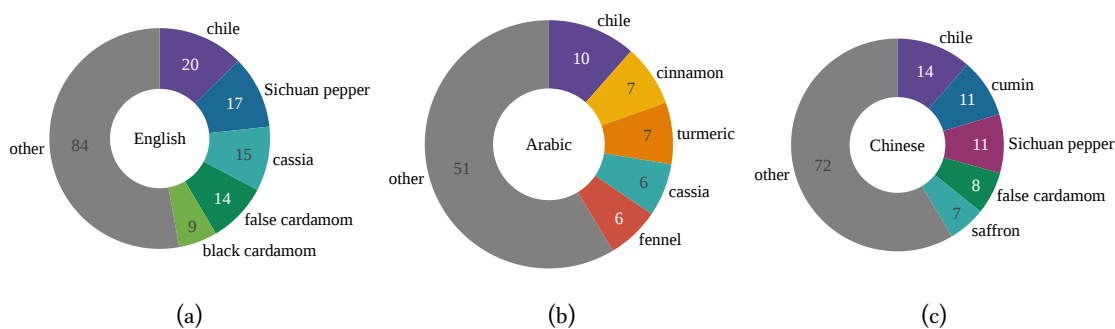


Figure 5.6

when they arrived, which spice were the earliest recorded, and which ones make the latest additions to in our vocabularies and spice cabinets.

and then have a bird's eye view of at them altogether, to see how the set of spices spread to the speakers of these languages. In English, I had a relatively easy job, as the OED is very rich in etymological information, full of quotations.

compare these dates in the different languages. This kind of information is a valuable indicator, as it shows the approximate times of the earliest

### 5.3 The Analysis of Spice Nomenclature

This chapter will present the analysis on these spice names, and try to answer the main question: How do people name spices, specifically, new spices that they came into contact with? Immediately, we can think of two ways: languages either borrow, or conceive a name. But how does this naming process work exactly? What are the underlying mechanisms and critical factors that influence the naming, and how does the nomenclature reflect the contact situation? How does borrowing work, and how languages invent new names for novel materials and substances? In an attempt to give answers to

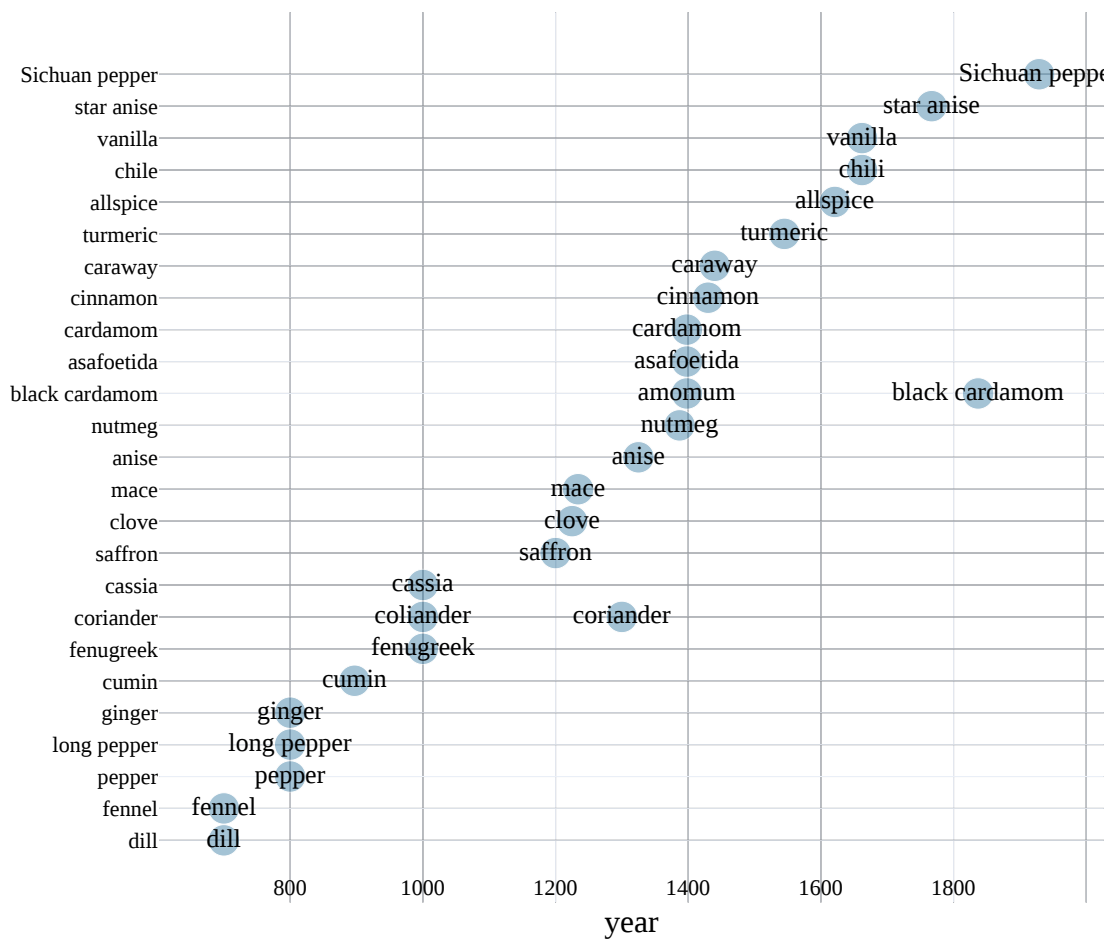


Figure 5.7

these questions, I will take a bottom-up approach and look at examples from the data I collected to arrive to some conclusions.

### 5.3.1 Terminology

During the analysis, I will take into account the term's (a) analyzability, their (b) borrowed status, and inspect the ways spice terms are generated using (c) prototype words and distinguishing words.

#### Analizability

Analyzability of words is an idea from the 20<sup>th</sup>-century philological movement and method *Wörter und Sachen* (words and things in German), which had a big influence on linguistics and ethnography. Outlined by Hugo Schuchardt and based on the titular journal started by Indo-Europeanist Rudolf Meringer in 1909, it proposed the close study of the etymology of words together with the artifacts/concepts (Ortutay, 1977–1982).

“Ohne Sachwissenschaft keine Sprachwissenschaft mehr!” There is no linguistics anymore without the study of material culture!



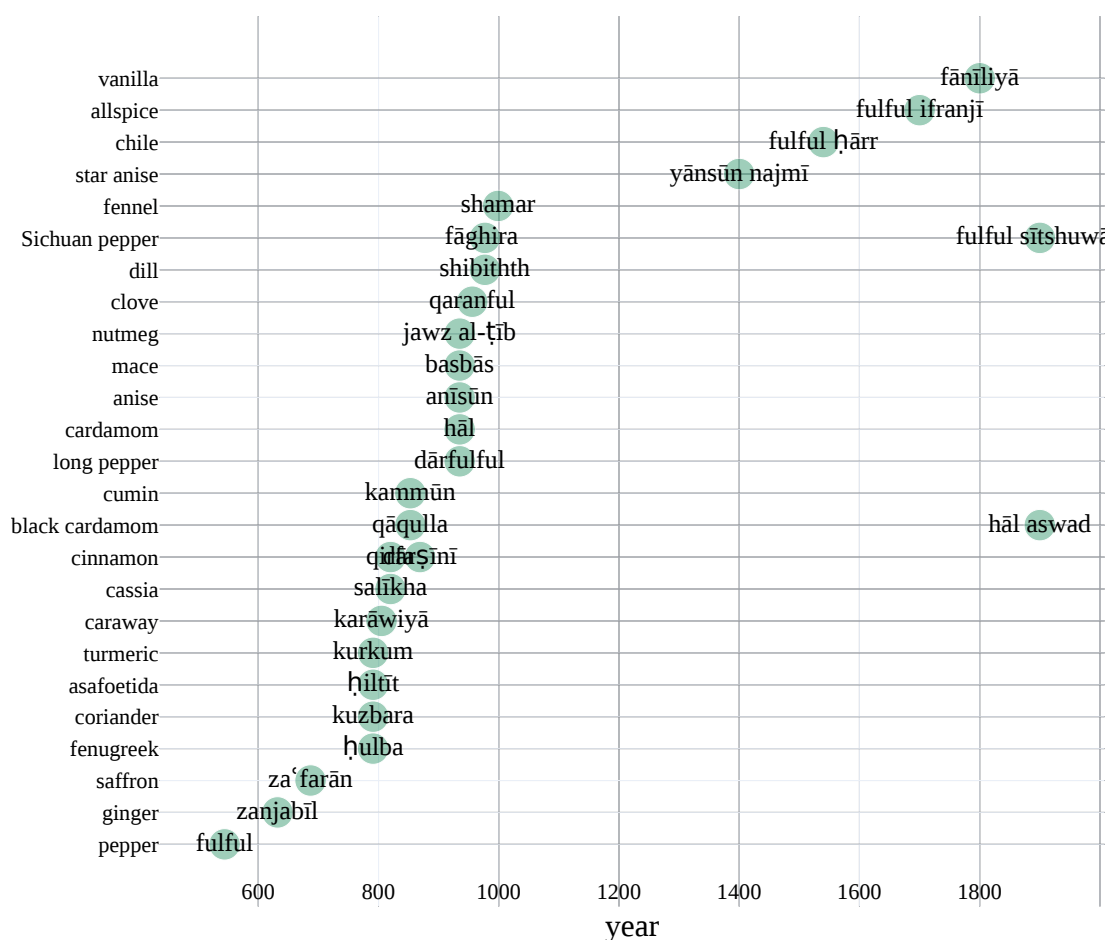


Figure 5.8

Basically, the more opaque a name is in terms of morphological analysis, the longer it is assumed to be present in the language. A basic example would be *York* (monomorphemic) vs. *New York* (analysable), which provides a potential chronology for the concepts the words signify. This approach was incorporated into historical linguistic research and philology, often studied in parallel with findings in archeology. SOURCE??

Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009a, p. 12) also used the term “analyzability” in the creation of their loanword database (*The World Loanword Database (WOLD)*) as a first step to assess a word’s loanword status, although — to the grief of — in a purely linguistic way.

If the word is morphosyntactically complex, “it was almost certain that it was created by speakers of the language rather than borrowed from some other language” — we can read. The authors also state that these are not considered loanwords, even when they contained borrowed elements.

### Borrowed Word or Native Invention

Closely related to analyzability, is the question if a term is borrowed or not.

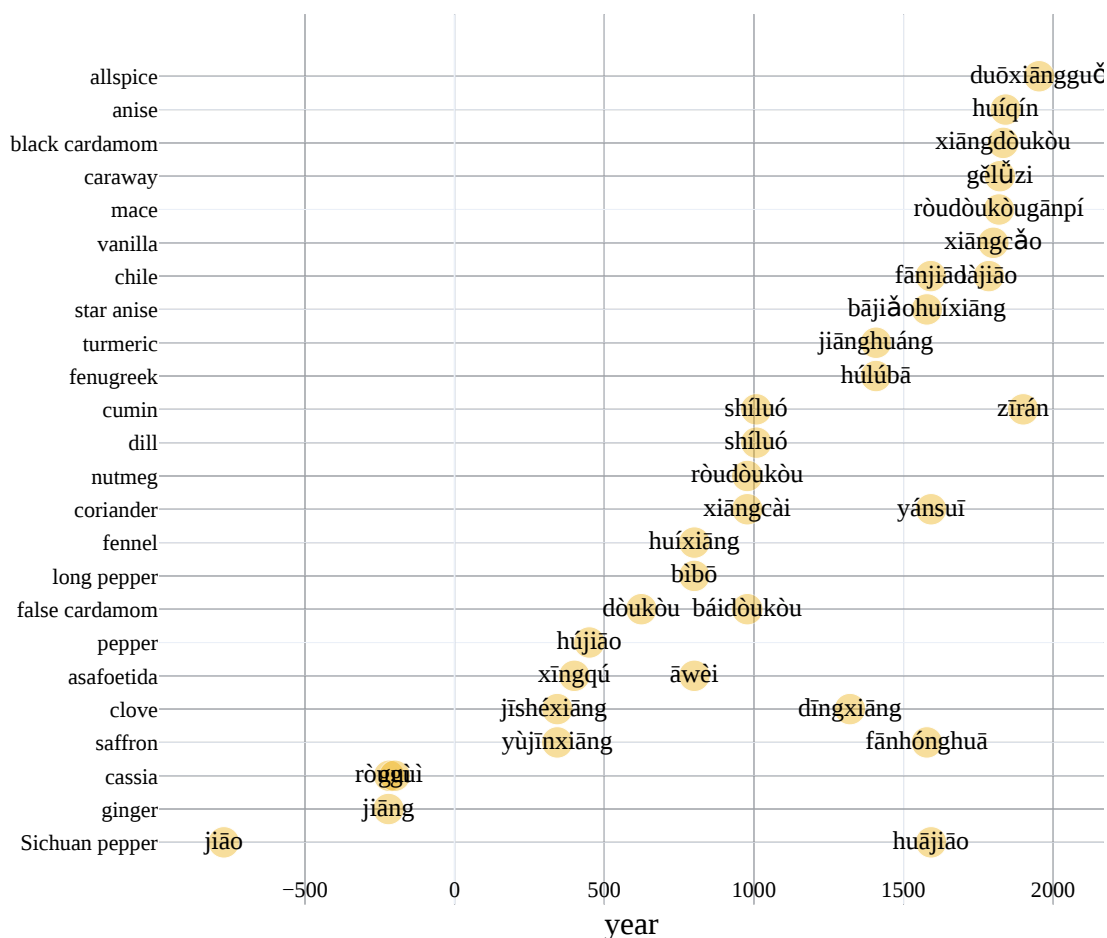


Figure 5.9

## Prototype and Distinguishing Words

### 5.4 The Case of Star Anise

Let us consider the nomenclature of star anise in the three languages (see ??). In English, there is the default *star anise*, which is a native invention, obviously after the fruit’s unmistakable appearance. On a rare occasion, we have information on the exact time of star anise’s arrival to England, which is dated to 1588, as it was introduced in ??. The same idea for a name is found in most European languages, either influenced by 16-17<sup>th</sup>-century spice dealer terminology, or devised on their own conviction, looking at its recognizable shape. I used the word “native”, even though the phrase is obviously mixed from an etymological point of view: *anise* is a loanword ultimately from Greek. However, when faced with this type of phrases, I consider that at the time of the contact situation, *anise* was already part of the English lexicon — as well as *star* — therefore, this phrase was coined within English, and deemed as a native creation. This practice is consistent with the approach took by the team of Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009b) at WOLD. English also has the term *Chinese anise*, which is a phrase consisting of *anise*, again, and *Chinese*, referring to star anise’s geographical location and the origin of

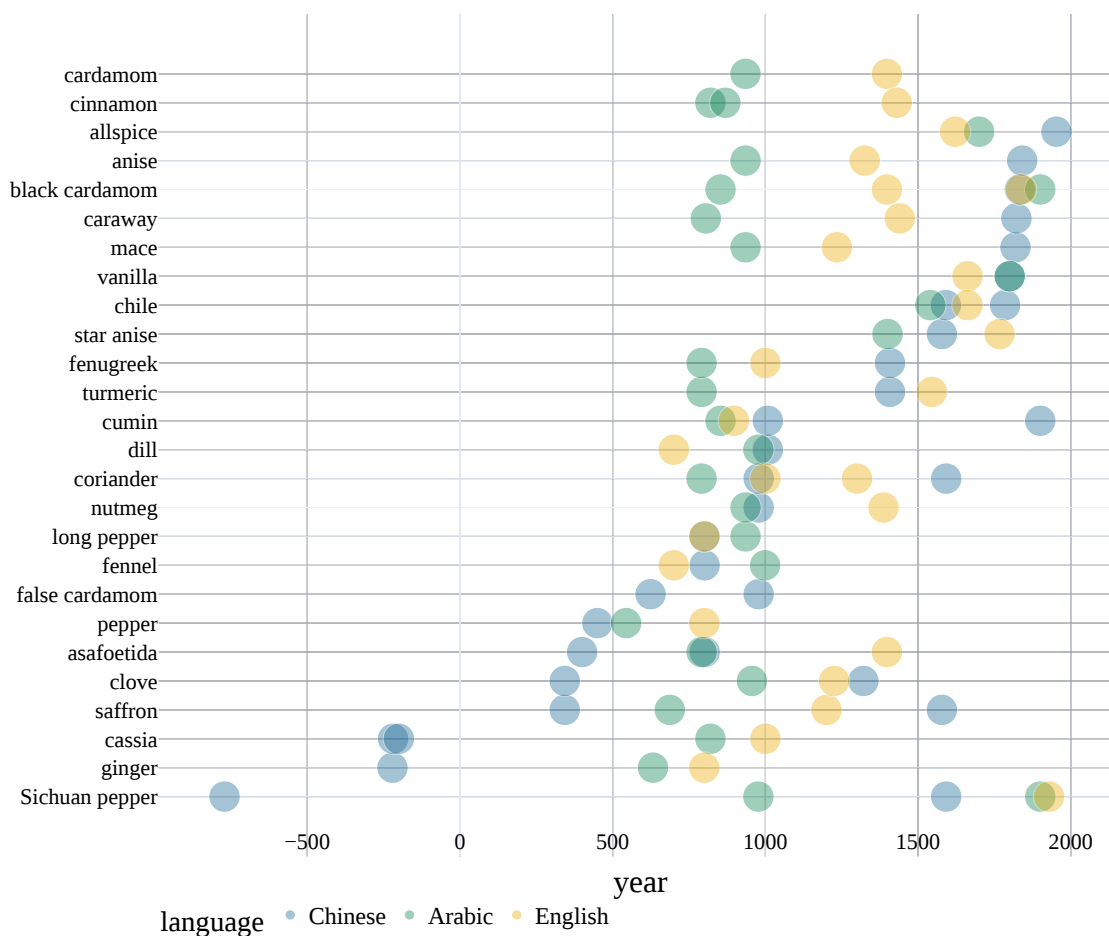


Figure 5.10

its procurement for the English. Both phrases utilize the term *anise*, which refers to the small anise seeds of the Mediterranean, used as a spice, and flavouring for liqueurs and confectionary (see ??). Why is there a connection to anise? The two plants could not be more different, they are geographically distant, they are botanically unrelated. The only thing that connects them is their highly similar flavor profile, dominated by the volatile oil anethole, the same nauseating and sweet chemical compound that is found in fennel and licorice. And so, for the Europeans who were familiar with anise and its taste, the novel product reminded them of anise's aroma. Hence, the names are in part inspired by taste/plant chemistry, defining anise as a prototype spice and prototype term. To avoid confusion, (the existence of which will be clear to anyone who tries to do a brief search about anise or star anise), distinguishing words are used for the new material. These modifiers are attached to the head word, and in one case inspired by the spice's shape, on the other hand referring to its geographical origin. The existence of a Chinese star anise could be explained by the fact that there is a Japanese star anise as well, a similar looking but poisonous fruit and tree, *Illicium anisatum*. In short, the two phrases have different ways to identify this spice. English also has a now archaic form referring to star anise: *badian* from French, which arrived via a land route through Persian, perhaps a phonetic loan from Chinese, but there is no documentary evidence for this (see Etymology ??).

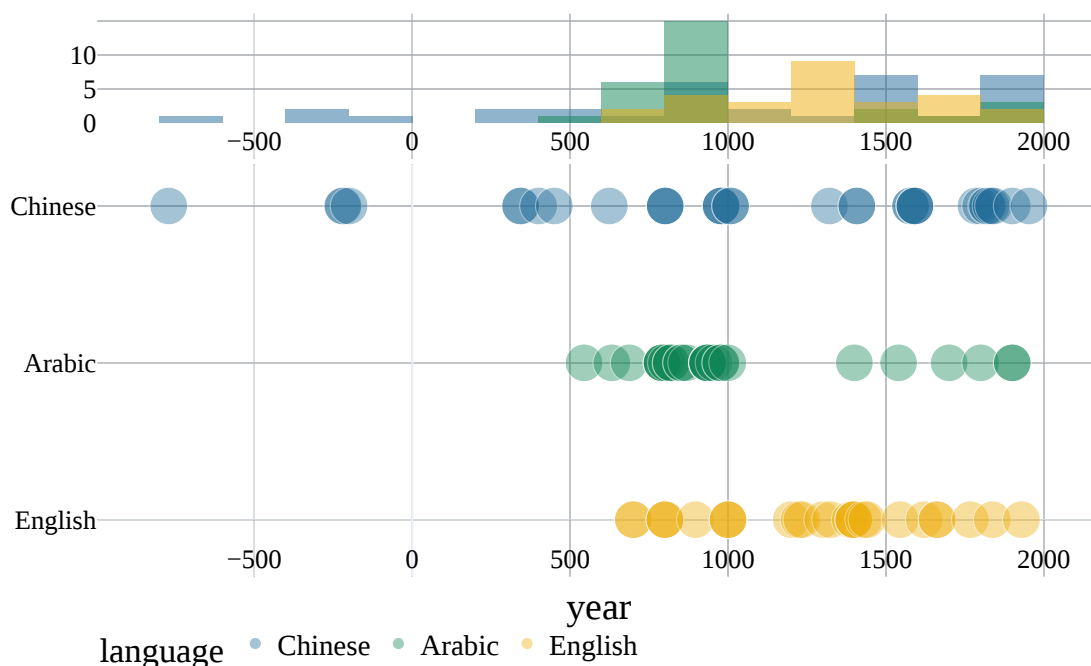


Figure 5.11

Arabic *yansūn najmī* [star anise] was devised along similar lines, using a native Arabic word for ‘star’, the prototype word is anise, and the more interesting instances are to be found in neighboring Persian. *Bādyān khatā’ī* or *khatāyī* [star anise] is star anise, while *bādyān rūmī* [Roman anise] is anise.<sup>1</sup> *Bādyān* alone could also refer to fennel.<sup>2</sup> This shows, that in Persian, the prototype word was *bādyān*.

As for Chinese, we do not find any loanword among the terms used to refer to star anise, all names are local “inventions”. The modern “proper name” for star anise is *bājiǎohuixiāng* [eight-horn-hui-spice], where [eight-horn] means ‘octagonal’, and [hui-spice] is fennel, therefore it can be translated as ‘octagonal fennel’, or ‘eight-horned fennel’. An other name, *dàhuixiāng* ‘big-fennel’ strengthens the assumption that in Chinese, *huixiāng* ‘fennel’ is the prototype. Again, the flavor profiles of fennel and anise are basically identical, hence the connection (and confusio). The formal Chinese names of star anise are not attested in historical corpora as we discussed in ??, and I assume that the vernacular name of *bājiǎo* [eight-horn] was first applied to star anise, and the formal name was modelled later driven by the plant sciences. In modern dialects star anise is also referred to as *huixiāng* ‘hui-spice’ (historically ‘fennel’) and *dàxiāng* ‘big-spice’. In modern TCM, fennel is referred to as *xiǎohuixiāng* ‘little-hui-spice’, contrasting the two spices that are confounded due to their taste, using size. In fact, the Chinese 大/小 *dà/xiǎo* ‘greater/lesser’ contrast is not necessarily a marker of size, but a semantic tool to convey unmarked/marked, or proper/imitator.

To summarize the points I intended to make above: First, I determined if the words and phrases are analyzable (morphologically, syntactically, semantically), then I examined those names further,

<sup>1</sup>Hayyim, 1934–1936, vol. 1, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Steingass, 1892, p. 140.

while also stating why a specific item is unanalyzable. E.g., *badian* as a loanword does not carry any useful information for an English speaker that is not familiar with the word, it cannot be dissected or interpreted alone. Next, I looked at the borrowed status of the names to determine if the word or phrase is borrowed, or devised locally. E.g., the Chinese names are native “lexical creations”, while English and Arabic use a non-native headword (*anise/yansūn*) and a native distinguishing word (*star/najmī*). Finally, I have looked at the inspirations behind these lexical inventions, and identified the rationale and motivation behind them. For phrases and compound words, we can separate a prototype word (headword), and a distinguishing word (modifier). In each case, we can discern the reasons why that prototype word was used, what feature of the prototype item (referent) is the most salient. The same is true for the distinguishing word(s). For example, *star anise* is named so after (1) similarity in taste + (2) shape; and *Chinese star anise* is named so after (1) similarity in taste + (2) shape + (3) geographic origin. In table 5.1, you can see a concise overview of the analysis of star anise terminology.

Term	Gloss	Analyz-ability	Borrowed	Prototype	Modifier
star anise		analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	shape
badian		unanalyzable	borrowed		
Chinese anise		analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	origin
Chinese star anise		analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	shape + origin
<i>yansūn najmī</i>	star anise	analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	shape
<i>bājiǎo</i>	octagonal	analyz-able	native	shape	
<i>bājiǎohuóxiāng</i>	octagonal-fennel	analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	shape
<i>bóhuóxiāng</i>	ship-fennel	analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	shape
<i>dàhuóxiāng</i>	big-fennel	analyz-able	native	similarity in taste	size*
<i>dàliào</i>	big-ingredient	analyz-able	native	function	size*

Table 5.1 Cap

In this sense, the space names are layered. Intuitively, the more layers a spice name has, the more distant the item was culturally, and on the converse, the less components there is to a term, more familiarity with the substance is presumed (e.g., anise vs. star anise in English). Therefore, spice names’ modifiers can be categorized according to what salient feature contributed to the naming the

most, and in this specific case, it is star anise's distinct shape. As we will later see, shape is just one of many properties that can distinguish/identify a spice, for others, different properties are salient, including color, taste, smell, and the geographical origin we mentioned. Furthermore, these names reflect on the materials' physical qualities, and the perception and importance of a spice for various sensory modalities in the human experience: vision, gustation, olfaction, etc.

#### 5.4.1 Borrowed

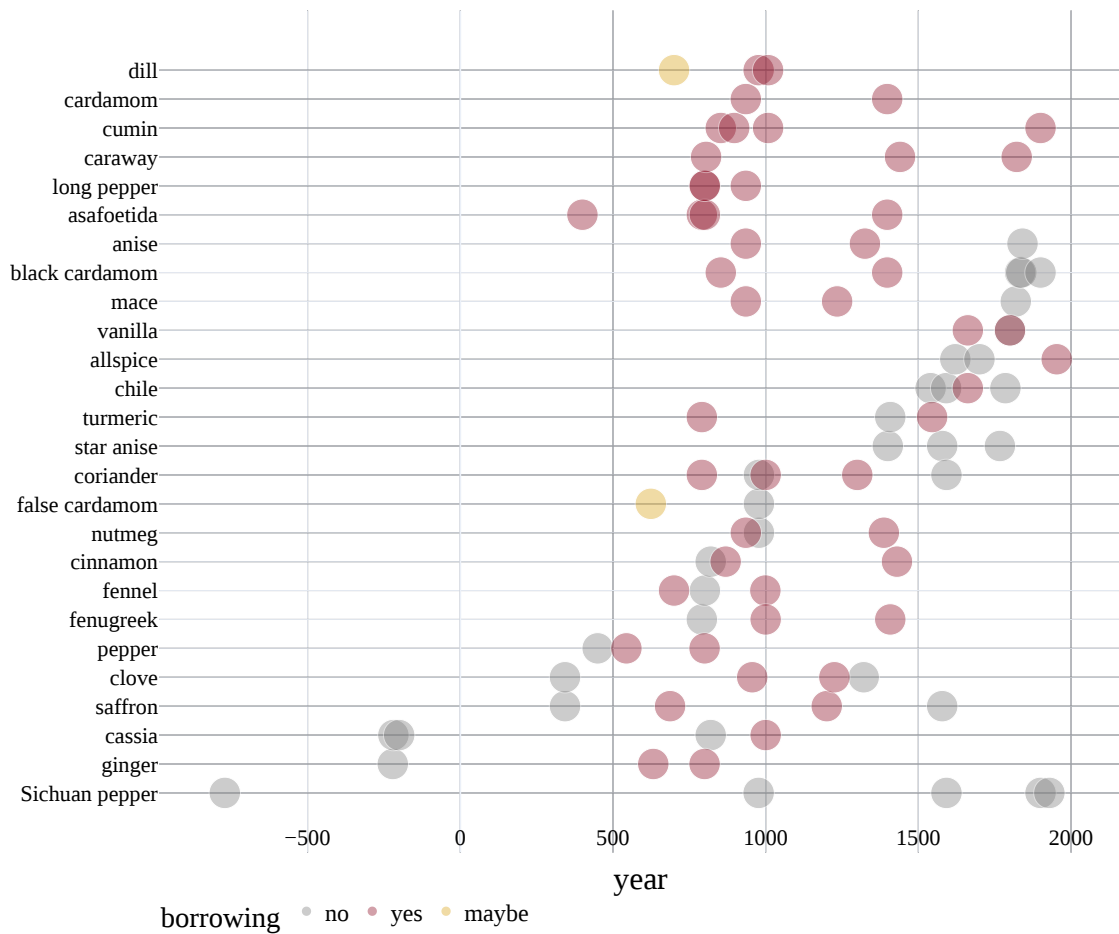


Figure 5.12

mechanism

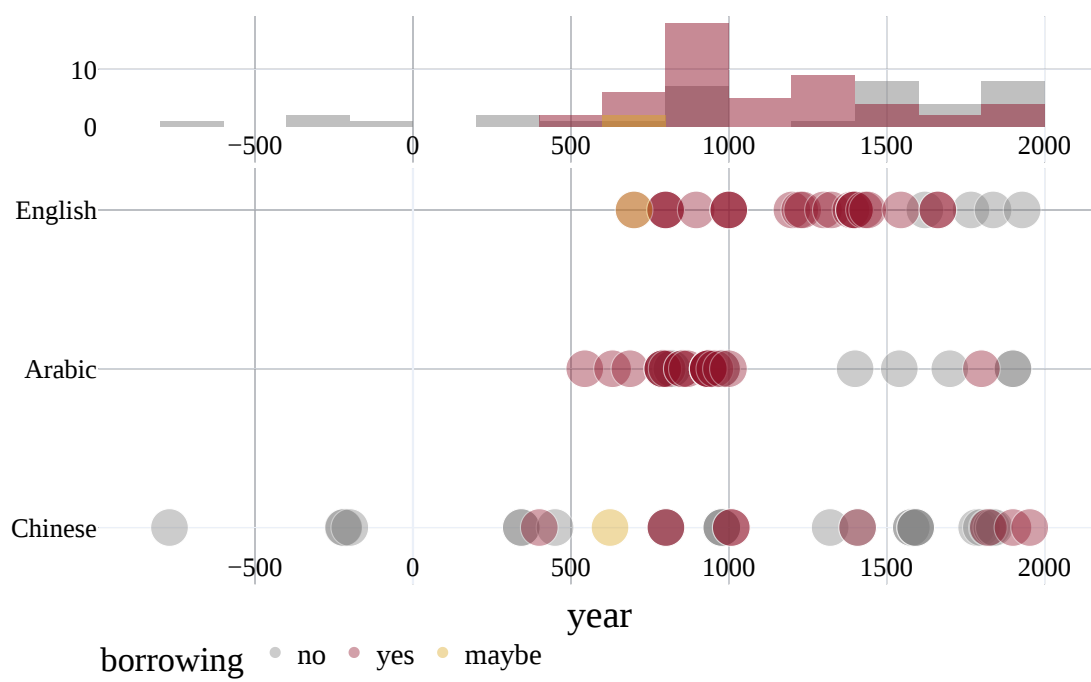


Figure 5.13





# The Language of Spices

## 6.1 The Case of Pepper

One of the most globally and cross-linguistically recognizable words of the spice domain is *pepper*. In the **WOLD**, it is ranked no. 7<sup>th</sup> when sorted by borrowability, following behind the olive, the sugar, the wine, the kettle, the beer, and the cheese, in the semantic field of food and drink (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009b). Pepper has a score of 0.66, making it the top spice meaning in this dataset of 81 entries (and the only spice besides the chili pepper). This metric, “borrowed score”, is an average of the scores of all the words that correspond to the meaning ‘pepper’, where individual meanings are scored according to their borrowed status.<sup>1</sup> “Thus, the higher the average borrowed score of a meaning, the greater its borrowability.” – it is explained on the database’s website. This suggests that if we were to collect the words for pepper in different languages and project them onto a world map, we should be able to see clusters that indicate the donor languages, and that gather around key areas of the globe that were important in the diffusion of this spice and **Wanderwort**. This in turn, would highlight the cultures and locations that were responsible for its transfer.

### 6.1.1 The Distribution of Pepper

Similarly to the analysis we conducted in chapter 4 with cinnamon and the distribution of its names seen in figure 4.2, we can also plot the names of pepper onto a world map, and look at how they are dispersed at present. First, I made the choice to collect words that correspond to ‘pepper’, and not compounds that gloss the more specific ‘black pepper’ (or not ‘chili pepper’ for that matter). Then, I have collected the names by scraping the relevant Wiktionary translations<sup>2</sup> for the word *pepper* in the sense ‘spice’, (and not in the sense of ‘fruit of the capsicum’). I then cleaned and manually checked the data for errors, and corrected the list to the best of my ability. Next, I augmented the dataset using other sources, such as dictionary entries, Katzer (2012a), and the “the pepper” meaning page from **WOLD** by Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009b), which contains 36 entries. Lastly, I have analyzed the words based on their etymologies, and grouped them into categories according to their etymons. After concatenating the collected data with language information and coordinates obtained from the **WALS** and **Glottolog** datasets, the plot could be generated, and it can be found under figure 6.1

Looking at figure 6.1 it becomes immediately evident, that there are a few large, clearly distinguishable groups forming among the scattered data points, each representing a word and a language. The following categories were identified: pippali, pigment, marica, and hujiao. Pippali contains all words that ultimately derive from Sanskrit *pippali* and this means most languages in Europe, including those

<sup>1</sup>The values assigned are determined as the following: clearly borrowed: 1.00, probably borrowed: 0.75, perhaps borrowed: 0.50, very little evidence for borrowing: 0.25, and no evidence for borrowing: 0.00. See more at <https://wold.clld.org/terms>

<sup>2</sup>“Pepper,” 2022.

## Words for pepper

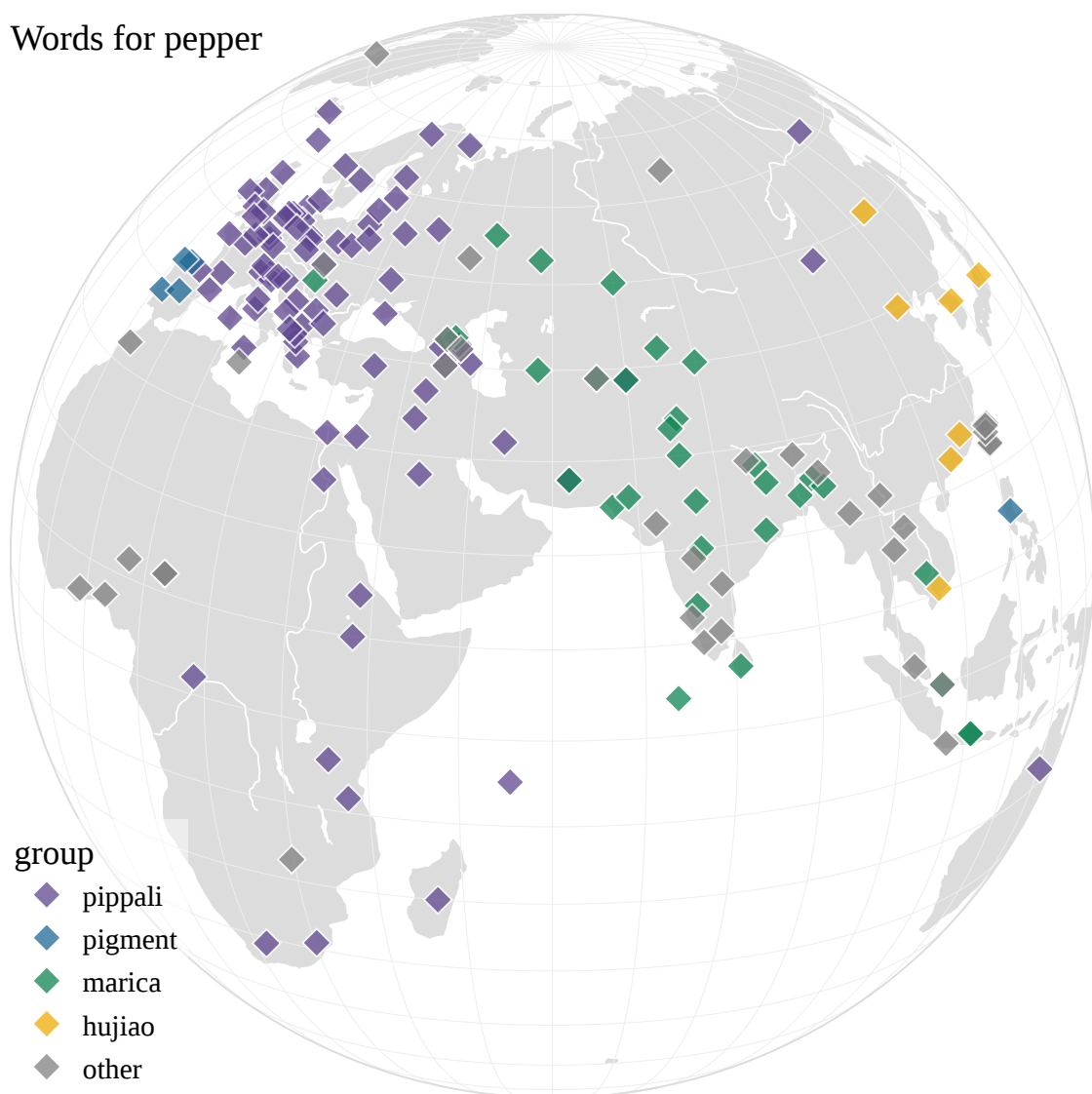


Figure 6.1 The distribution of names for pepper (*Piper nigrum*) in a few languages around the globe. For a full, interactive and explorable version of the plot, please visit the following link: [http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/distribution\\_pepper.html](http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/distribution_pepper.html).

that were influenced by Latin *piper*, and those that loaned this word through Persian *pilpil* and Arabic *fulful*. The pigment group covers West Iberian Romance languages, where the Latin word for pigment went through a series of changes by way of metonymy and specialization of meaning, explained under ???. The marica groups captures instances that originate in the “true sense” for black pepper, Sanskrit *marica*, which is distributed across South, Central, and to a lesser extent Southeast Asia. Lastly, words that belong to the hujiao group are those languages that borrowed their word for black pepper from Chinese, found across the Sinosphere. Instances that do not belong to any group or their origins I could not determine were assorted to “other”. Besides the apparent category of words derived from Sanskrit *pippali* (and spread generously through Persian and Latin), there are other major and minor groups that can be discerned, especially the category of words that derive from Sanskrit *marica*. The

piquancy of this ambivalence in the distribution of these two Sanskrit words is elevated by the fact that while *pippali* refers to long pepper (*Piper longum*), *marica* is the term that originally referred to black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) — forming a duo of closely related aromatic plants and spice terms.

Words that derive from *marica* are dispersed throughout South and Central Asia, and Hungarian *bors* is probably the furthest instance geographically from the once Sanskrit heartland and the home of pepper. Hungarian tribes most likely loaned this word from Turkic speaking peoples (with many other words from the domain of commerce and agriculture) on their way to the Carpathian basin sometime before the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

We know for a fact that even in the early times of the Roman republic (510–31 BC), Indian long pepper was imported and used in Europe, but have evidently lost its prominence later on. From the history of this word, we can ascertain that at the time the Greeks borrowed the word for pepper from Aryan merchants, long pepper was definitely traded alongside black pepper. Unfortunately, we are not sure in what ratio they were imported, but they were both known to ancient writers of Europe. Hippocrates have discussed pepper and its medicinal benefits in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Theophrastus have distinguished them in his *Historia Plantarum* in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, and explained the difference between the two; stating that long pepper has a stronger flavor. According to Toussaint-Samat (2009), the pepper that the Romans preferred was in fact long pepper, and the round black peppers we now use “became popular in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and had replaced long pepper by the 14<sup>th</sup>”. It is often difficult to know which pepper ancient writers are talking about, because in Latin, both could be referred to simply as *piper* (Toussaint-Samat, 2009, pp. 442–443). The modern scientific names go back to these early times, *longum* means ‘long’ and *nigrum* means ‘black’.

If we rely on historians, it becomes rather trivial that the name *piper* and its other derivatives is a *Wanderwort* that have first traveled with the product (the long pepper called *pippali*), and went through a semantic shift later, when black pepper replaced long pepper. The word stayed, but its referent changed. And this change happened alike in many languages in this part of the world, even if the two kinds of peppers looked different, their flavor profile and functions were the same. This semantic change happened once more in history: when people became acquainted with chilies, the same shift happened, and people started to use their (local) words for the pepper they had, to refer to the red hot chili peppers that conquered the world.

### 6.1.2 The Diffusion of Pepper

The names of pepper on the above map demonstrate indirect evidence for the trails the material have left, and show the extent of trade networks at certain times. They reveal the cultures and civilizations located at the heartland of the product and the crossroads of its exchange. The distribution of clusters of words belonging to the same categories in this plot also indicate the possible ways of diffusion. This can be then studied from a historical linguistic point of view through investigating language contact and loanwords, reinforced with historical awareness, and supported by botanical information.

<sup>3</sup>Hungarian *bors* was attested in 1075 as a proper noun, 1395 as a common noun. Cf. Ottoman Turkish dialectal *burç*, Chuvash *pərs* ‘id.’, the Turkic words are from an Iranian language; cf. Sogdian *marč*, Pamirian *märč* ‘id.’ (Zaicz, 2006, p. 90)

Domain knowledge of spices is also crucial, if we want to answer specific questions about the spread of spices and spice terminology. For example, one of the reasons pepper (and its name) was so successful on reaching faraway places so early on is due to the fact that pepper does not spoil. Or at least, not fast compared to other agricultural products; it keeps its aroma and pungency longer than many other spices. Krondl (2007, p. 59) writes that “pepper, in particular, is remarkably stable and can be stored up to a decade as long as it’s kept reasonably dry.” This is one of the key features of spices, that allowed them to be shipped and carried thousands of miles away, during the course of several months if not years. Moreover, as dried plant matter, spices are also light, resulting in an extremely high price-to-weight ratio compared to, say, wheat, which made trading in pepper so lucrative in the past, and defined the fate (and face) of cities, such as Venice.

Turning our attention back to vocabulary, the most fascinating part of this phenomenon is that the word *pepper* originates so distant from English; both in time and space. Thanks to the hard work of historical linguists and philologists, we have a decent reconstruction of *pepper*’s journey, and we know that Germanic tribes must have loaned the term on mainland Europe, some time before their migration to England around the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Early Old English *pipor* comes from Latin, which originates in the Sanskrit word *pippali* by way of an Indo-Aryan transmission (see ??). The spatial and temporal trajectories of this word are remarkable, and follow the path of the material. Indian pepper (black and long) was known and coveted in Arabia and Rome long before the Anglo-Saxons got to taste it. Still, much of the story of pepper and its worldwide diffusion goes back to prehistoric times. Tracing its itinerary on Eurasian pathways is difficult at this time depth, yet we have breadcrumbs: its names. *Pippali* and its derivatives mark the way the spice has spread, even where written documentation and archaeological finds are missing.

Now, homing in on our scope of English, Arabic, and Chinese, we can look at the etymological stages of the words for pepper in these languages. In figure 6.2, I tried to illustrate the origins of the words for pepper in the languages under inspection. We see that the branch that leads to English is on the same trajectory as Arabic, both going back to the Sanskrit etymon. They also formed their words for long pepper with the prototype words *pepper* & *filfil*: English modeled it after Latin, while Arabic loaned a Persian term that compounded ‘wood’ and ‘pepper’ (*dar pilpil*), the reasons behind which we can only speculate. Either it reminded the Persians of a piece of stick, or there was maybe some type of analogy with the name of cinnamon: *dar chini*. Unmistakably, the Chinese did not loan a word for black pepper; they formed their own name by compounding their prototype word, *jiao*, appending it with *hu*, referring to foreigners, Western barbarians. Notwithstanding, Sanskrit *pippali* also survives in Chinese, in the form of *biba*, strictly referring to long pepper, known since ?? and still used in TCM. The questions beg to be asked: Why was one pepper adopted with a native word and designation, and why was the other loaned? I can think of two reasons. First, black peppercorns are very similar to the indigenous Sichuan peppers — in their shape, size, taste, and function — therefore it seems obvious to apply the term that already existed and conceptually very close to the new material. By way of their similarity, a metaphoric way of expression extended the set of referents for this word, *jiao*. Second, long pepper was a new item not incredibly similar to already existing Chinese products, it would place itself further away from Sichuan pepper in the semantic space. They do not match in

## Etymological stages of names for pepper

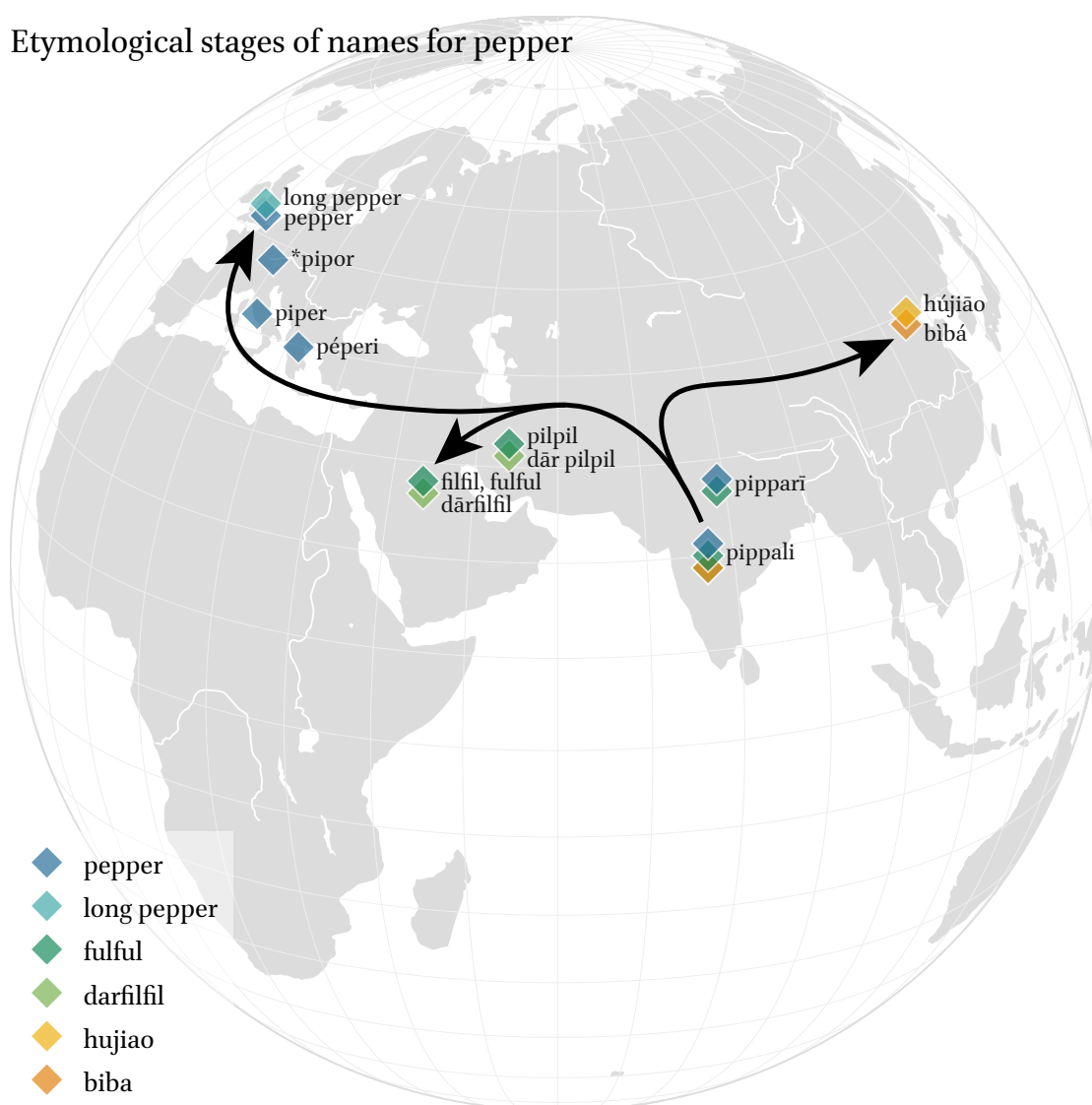


Figure 6.2 The diffusion of names for pepper (*Piper nigrum*; *P. longum*) in English, Arabic, and Chinese. For a full, interactive and explorable version of the plot, please visit the following link: [http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/diffusion\\_pepper.html](http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/diffusion_pepper.html).

color, shape, size, and even in its use long pepper was (and still is) rather a medicine than culinary spice. It was alien enough to be adorned with a loanword.

The etymologies were introduced in detail under etymologies ??, ??, and ??.

### 6.1.3 The Role of Pepper in English: A Brief Contemplation About Spiciness

Now that we have discovered that pepper as a product, and thus SPICE as a concept was at one point a novelty for the ancestors of English speakers, let us briefly consider life before pepper. We can safely presuppose a time, where pepper — and therefore experiences of spiciness — simply did not exist for certain communities. Or did it? Was there some wild garlic growing in Europe whose sharpness in taste could be compared to pepper? Some mustard, or horseradish? How did these people describe

spiciness before spice? Or peppery before pepper?

Sensory experiences of taste, such as sweet, salty, sour, and bitter, are encoded in the mappings of our evolutionary biology, and the same is true for pain. In fact, spiciness is a tactile sensory experience, roughly working along the same mechanisms as our perception of heat and pain. The technical term is chemesthesis, and it is defined as the sensitivity of our mucosal surfaces of the skin (e.g. the moist inner linings of the mouth) to outside chemicals. This system activates thermal, nociceptive (i.e. pain), and tactile sensations (Simons & Carstens, 2008). Substances such as piperine (in black pepper) and capsaicin (in chile pepper) cause a reaction that activates this system causing a burning, stinging sensation which — in moderate amounts — can be a pleasant. These stimuli also contribute to the overall flavor perception of food (Tewksbury et al., 2008). The first sense of the word *pungent* (now rare) shows well how strong the connection to pain was: “of pain: as if caused by a sharp point; piercing, stabbing; pricking.” The definition for the sense that is now generally understood is “affecting the sense organs, esp. those of smell or taste, with a sharp, penetrating sensation; acrid, irritant; intensely flavored, piquant.” Words, such as *pungent*, *sharp*, *biting* (also a cognate of *bitter*), and *hot* show that we do not necessarily need the word *spicy* (a loanword), to describe SPICINESS (i.e. pungency). However, the foreign concept of SPICE was influential enough to make way for new words and meanings attested in 13<sup>th</sup> century English.

Today, spices and their access ability is taken for granted, and the idea of not knowing how “spicy” tastes like, is — for most of us — unimaginable. The existence and abundance of spices around us, even if one does not prefer the heat on a daily basis, is now part of the human experience. This omnipresence is reflected in our words; spices have become the part of our vocabulary, the way we speak, and not just when we talk about the spices themselves. The following section will show how spices infiltrated our language, and how their characteristic features gave rise to new words and new meanings, metaphors, and idioms. I will examine the profound effect spices made on the lexis, through looking at the case of pepper in English.

## 6.2 *Pepper as a Lexical Item*

Pepper, and I mean black pepper, is undoubtedly a prototypical spice. In a significant portion of the world’s regions — or at least in the temperate areas — black pepper was the first pungent spice people have ever tasted. Although black pepper became indeed the first global spice, it is not the only one. Many other regions have their own prototypical pungent spices and relishes; some already famous worldwide, some still relatively unknown. As examples, we must mention the chile of the Americas, the prickly ash of China, the *cabai* of Southeast Asia, and the grains of paradise of West Africa. Now, if I would to list them again in the same order, but this time through a finer/different sieve of English, I could have written: chili pepper, Sichuan pepper, long pepper, and melegueta pepper. Mind you, these are all botanically different aromatic plants, distributed all over the globe, all culturally rooted in their respective regions. Yet in English, all of them can be referred to as some kind of pepper.

What we have here, is evidence that English speakers, going beyond the primary sense of the term *pepper* (used for the little round fruits of *Piper nigrum*) have developed the use of this word

for “any of certain other pungent spices derived from plants of other families, esp. ones used as seasonings”<sup>4</sup>. The meaning of *pepper* was extended by ways of its physical attributes (small, black, seed-like fruits), chemical characteristics (pungency), and role (spice, seasoning, condiment). Hence, other substances that matched or approximated one or more of the above-mentioned features, could be referred to as *pepper*. Often with a distinguishing word, today many plant products are known as peppers: *red, pink, bell, sweet, Jamaica, alligator*, etc. The list is long and functionally diverse, as distinguishing words and modifiers can have various different roles. They can identify, distinguish, or indicate some aspect of the produce, for example, its place of origin, flavor, or shape. *Pepper*, with the primary meaning referring to the fruits of *Piper nigrum*, was attested in early Old English, and the extended sense developed shortly after the European “Age of Exploration”, when the world opened up to the English sailors and merchants, and exotic, new products were brought back from Africa, Asia, and America. A 16<sup>th</sup>-century quote from a herbal shows this new use of the word *pepper*, and also the attitude towards a novel spice — Guinea pepper<sup>5</sup> — and simultaneously hints on the status of black pepper:

“Ginnie pepper hath the taste of pepper, but not the power or vertue.”

(Gerard, J. (1597) *Herball* (Vol. 2, p. 293).in OUP, n.d., pepper)

And so, a *pepper-genesis* started, a rather clumsy term I made up for this phenomenon when Europeans familiarized themselves with new additions from the fruits of the plant kingdom; both to the cargo hold of their ocean-going ships, their apothecaries and grocers, and their vocabularies. Pepper worked as a prototype, and lent its name to other fragrant plant materials that needed to be named,

Beyond this the ability to generate names of all kinds of peppers — true and false — there is an even more interesting aspect of the word *pepper* that I would like to discuss: the derivation of new words over various word classes.

We also assume that the more a language is familiar with a substance, more senses could exist in a language, and with this above assumption (4) we look for derivationally related linguistic categories of terms from the spice domain. Under these categories we will include:

the names (nouns) · names of the sensation induced by the spice (nouns, adjectives) · synaesthetic properties associated with the spice (adjectives, verbs) · cognate verbs of seasoning, cooking (verbs) · denominal metaphors, idiomatic expressions (nouns, verbs, phrases)

The English compound ‘pep talk’ appeared in colloquial American English in the 20th century, and contains ‘pep’, which is a shortening for pepper, meaning “energy and high spirits; liveliness, vigour, power” (OED). We can see the WordNet mappings showing ‘ginger’ as one of the synonyms for ‘pep’, and consulting a dictionary confirms the evidence of a second spice representing ‘liveliness’:

<sup>4</sup>OUP, n.d., pepper, n.

<sup>5</sup>An ambiguous name for an African source of “pepper”, it can refer to one of three different spice yielding plants: *Aframomum melegueta* (grains of paradise, melegueta pepper, etc.); *Piper guineense* (West African pepper, Ashanti pepper, etc.); *Xylopi aethiopica* (Grains of Selim, Senegal pepper, etc.)



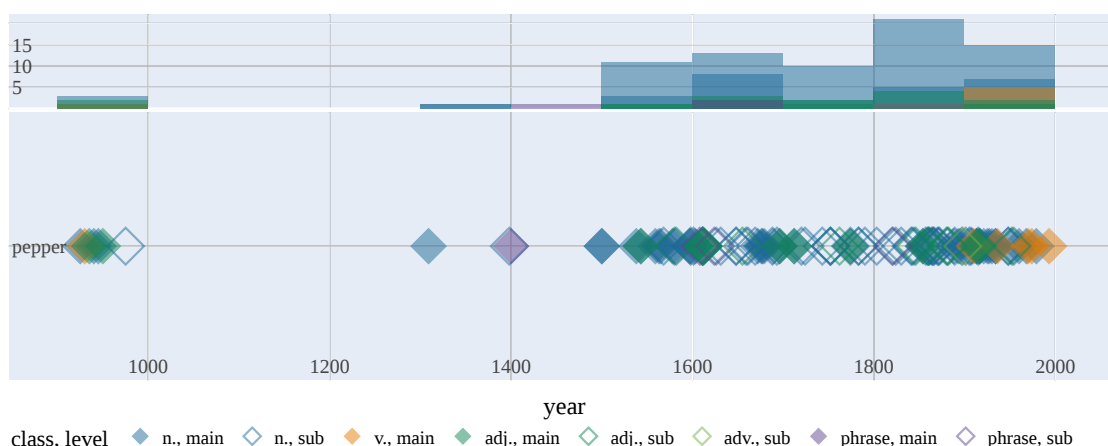


Figure 6.3 A timeline of words and phrases derived from *pepper*, based on main- and sub-level entries in the OED, and plotted by the dates of their attestations. A histogram on the top margin shows the number of attestations in 50 year increments. To explore the data points in an interactive plot, please visit the following link [http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/oed\\_pepper.html](http://htmlpreview.github.io/?https://github.com/partigabor/phd-test/blob/main/oed_pepper.html).

“Spirit, pep, energy; temper. Frequently in to put ginger (into), to show ginger.” (OED), in American slang.

We suspect that word frequencies in corpora would show their relative importance in a language, hence for example ‘Sichuan pepper’ and its variations<sup>34</sup> in an English corpus should have a smaller relative frequency (0.03 per million words), than ‘花椒’ huājiāo (“Sichuan pepper”) in a Chinese corpus (4.6 per million), or ‘हaldi’ haldi (“turmeric”) in a Hindi corpus should have a very high frequency score (27.29 per million words), which arguably shows the importance of this spice in Indian culture. These are merely examples from the preparatory stage, but similar observations shall be refined and collected in a tasteful and readable manner in the dissertation.



# Conclusion

CONCLUSIONS and Suggestions for Future Research (the latter being optional)

## 6.3 Future Studies



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