

Acculturation of food: the case of Dutch Indonesian cuisine^{*}

Bram Hoogkamp, Tom Humbert, Diana Atopkina, and Roos van de Velde

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Abstract. The post-colonization period brought many dishes and ingredients from Indonesia to the Netherlands. To study this phenomenon, this project focuses on how Dutch food culture has changed and how the currently large acceptance and integration of Indonesian foods came to be. We used articles in digitized newspapers from 1945 to 1985 for this research. More specifically, we have chosen two Indonesian dishes to focus on: Nasi Goreng and Bami Goreng. Our methodology to collect and compile the necessary information consists of three parts. Firstly, by manually reading through digitized newspaper articles and extracting information that fitted a set of categories. Secondly, by conducting an interview with the owner of a Chinese toko. Thirdly, to be able to visualize the changes in the narrative of the two dishes over a 40 year time period, a Python script parsed data retrieved from the National Libraries online newspaper archive. The result of this project is a narrative, a timeline detailing the history of the two dishes. The discussion section then relates the findings to the theoretical background, connecting cultural and psychological findings to the narrative. The discussion section also discusses to what extent the computational method can be applied for similar purposes with varying topics. We conclude that to fully understand the timeline of a culture, many such narratives can be constructed from different sources, focusing only on one detail of the culture.

Keywords: newspapers · Dutch · Indonesian · cuisine · acculturation · discourse · historical · timeline · narrative.

1 Introduction

Food is an important facet of culture, being one of the cultural traits that humans learn first from childhood and something that people are reluctant to change once they are older. As every human needs to eat, food is central to our lives.[12] In recent decades, food culture has become much more international. Even though the popularisation of foreign food is one of the most important food trends of the 20th century, the process of how ‘foreign’ food became popular in the Netherlands is an avenue relatively unexplored.[13] Historically, Dutch eating culture is often described as conservative. “Hallmarks of Dutch cooks are

^{*} Supported by Marieke van Erp

simplicity, quality and a sort of conservatism which fends of gimmicks yet gives a slow and cautious welcome to beneficial innovations”. [13] This raises the question of how such a supposedly conservative food culture came into its relatively xenomaniac¹ form of today.

To gain more insight into this transformation, our project will investigate the process of acculturation² of one foreign cuisine extensively present in the Netherlands: Indonesian. With Indonesia being a former colony of the Netherlands, their two respective cultures, including that of food have had long, albeit distanced contact with each other. [4] After the Second World War, and Indonesia’s independence, a large group of Indo-Dutch and Indonesians migrated to the Netherlands, turning this relatively limited contact into something much more extensive. Given the limited scope of this project, the focus will be on two dishes; Nasi Goreng and Bami Goreng. Both Nasi and Bami Goreng belong to the most popular Indonesian dishes³ The literature on the process of food acculturation suggests the possibility that as part of the process, the groups could find new ways to use traditional food and still consume goods of the other. [9]

To observe the processes at play with the two selected dishes, relevant digitised newspaper articles in the period between 1945-1985 will be analyzed. Newspapers have a wide sphere of influence, and can potentially have considerable power in shaping societal opinion. Considering that other media sources such as television did not exist/gain much traction until the 60s, newspapers can offer a window, albeit tinted from a Dutch perspective, into the time period where the dishes were first introduced or became more popular.

1.1 Research Questions

Humanities RQ: Can the acculturation of food culture be traced through the lens of the introduction and appropriation of the Indonesian dishes Nasi and Bami Goreng in the Dutch newspapers?

Computer science RQ: How can information be extracted from newspapers to observe changes in a specific entity and is this method applicable for other topics?

2 Background

2.1 Historical background of the Indonesian immigrants

In the years after World War II, following a short independence war which ended in 1949, more than two hundred thousand people from Indonesia arrived

¹ An obsessive interest in all that is foreign.

² i.e. The process of one group taking over dietary habits and food choices of another

³ Nasi and Bami Goreng are both stir-fried dishes with vegetables, the main difference is that the former uses rice and the latter noodles as main components.

in the Netherlands.[11] Most were “Indo-Dutch” and were born in the former Dutch East Indies. They were the first major group of migrants to come to the Netherlands. The arrival of the Indo-Dutch confronted the Dutch populace with Asian and mixed Dutch-Indonesian eating habits, which differed fundamentally from the eating habits of the Dutch who had lived all their life in the Netherlands. There was considerable social pressure for Indo-Dutch to conform to the standards and behaviour of their new home country. As the Indo-Dutch people wanted employment, a good education for their children, and a home, they were expected to assimilate themselves thoroughly to the Dutch culture and eating habits. This expectation was accompanied by the underlying, orientalist assumption that Dutch living and eating habits were superior to the habits of the Indo-Dutch.[11] However, as most of the Indo-Dutch were familiar with the cultural norms as a result of their partial Dutch upbringing, assimilation into Dutch society went relatively unhindered. Nonetheless, the one thing the Indo-Dutch did not forget and firmly stuck to were their old eating habits, and as soon as it was possible, they again started to eat rice with side dishes. Over time, the Dutch people joined them and tried these dishes, and came to like these dishes to the extent that they became integrated into Dutch food options.[11]

2.2 Dutch food culture

Historically, Dutch cuisine has been rather simple and high in fat and carbohydrates.[6] For example, the austere, frugally spiced, and repetitive warm meal of a Dutch household mainly consisted of potatoes and some boiled vegetables, gravy, and sometimes a little piece of meat.[11] Next to the simplicity of most Dutch cuisine, Dutch people were also generally seen as conservative eaters. They did not like to eat things they had not seen before, meaning they could be reluctant to try new things. The Indonesian cuisine did not escape this fate of dealing with the recalcitrant attitude of the Dutch, as Cottaar and Willems stated: “We cannot fully deny the impression that people in the fifties were partly dismissive towards Indonesian food because it was so different: ‘those weird little pots with sharp herbs’ and ‘those weird smells’”.[?] Through the media, authors helped to guide Dutch people through these unknown foreign recipes. Originally, many Dutch people were frightened by the unknown ingredients, but the food column authors provided substitute ingredients that one could easily find, or offered substitute recipes resulting in a similar hybrid dish. These guiding efforts of authors supported the Indonesian and other foreign cuisine’s integration in daily Dutch life.[13]

3 Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical framework concepts relevant for answering the research question will be briefly discussed, explained and connected to each other. The concepts we will discuss further are discourse and acculturation, more specifically focusing on food acculturation. In the final subsection, we will review psychological factors that influence one’s perception of food.

3.1 Discourse

Discourse in general terms refers to a ‘conversation’, or network of communication, which is performed through the medium of language, or other non-verbal semiotic systems.[3] Influential in the discourse debate is the view of Michel Foucault. His explanation defines discourse as: “an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices”.[5] Inherent to this Foucauldian sense of discourse is the notion of power. Considering that powerful actors are exceedingly more capable of (re)producing their desired discourse, certain discourses can be more powerful, or dominant than others.[14] As discourse profoundly shapes how we apply meaning, it is an appropriate concept for our research, as it helps us to discover how people view Indonesian cuisine and how it is represented in the Dutch newspapers.

3.2 Acculturation

Acculturation is a term commonly used in immigration studies, meaning: the process of all the changes “that take place when individuals of different ethno-cultural groups come into prolonged contact with one another”. [2] It can result in changes for the original culture patterns of either the migrant group or both the migrant and the dominant population. Acculturation occurs at two levels. It is important to distinguish psychological (micro, individual) acculturation from acculturation (macro, group). [9] This research will focus on the macro level.

3.3 Food/dietary acculturation

The specific type of acculturation we will be looking at is food and dietary acculturation. Satia-Abouta et al. denote dietary acculturation as follows: “‘Dietary acculturation’ refers to the process that occurs when members of a minority group adopt the eating patterns/food choices of the host country.” [9] For example, dietary acculturation of an Indonesian migrant to the Netherlands might be characterized by increased consumption of ‘Dutch foods’ (i.e. potatoes) and a decrease in consumption of rice. Research that has been done on this topic indicates that: “as part of the acculturation process, immigrants may find new ways to use traditional food, exclude other foods and/or consume new goods”.[9]

3.4 Psychological factors

The preference for a specific kind of food depends on multiple psychological factors. The first factor is mere exposure which means that the more one is exposed to something, the more one likes it and the bigger the chance the preferences of the individual will change.[7] The second factor is evaluative conditioning, the contingent pairing of appearances and different kinds of tastes can lead to acquiring likes or dislikes for certain dishes.[8] The third factor is social influence. For example, when seeing someone you admire enjoying a particular food, it can lead to enhanced liking, or for the opposite case, a decreased liking for that particular food.

4 Datasets Methods

4.1 Delpher Dish Database

The Delpher dish database was created from newspapers archived by the Dutch National Library on their website Delpher.⁴ Making a completely new data-set was decided after the realization that the Historical Recipe Web[10] did not carry the name of the dish it was listing its ingredients of. With the goal of looking at the narrative, the full article text was also needed.

The National Library provided a data dump for a requested query. This query was looking for the two terms ‘nasi’ and ‘bami’ in the years between 1945 and 1985. Also, only results from 4 newspapers were looked for, namely ‘Trouw’, ‘Volkskrant’, ‘Het Parool’ and ‘NRC’. The files that were received from the National Library were a table of contents, XML⁵ files, and folders of text files. For each newspaper in the table of contents the XML was scanned to find every article or advertisement that mentions either of the dishes. The information collected this way contains several identifying columns, including the date, and the article type, the dishes that were mentioned and the full text of the paragraph mentioning the dish. The data-set has a total of 263 rows, 62 of which are articles, one is an illustration with title and 200 are advertisements. Appendix X shows the distribution of document types over time. The data-set can be found in the project’s GitHub.⁶

4.2 Methods

With a two-fold goal of answering research questions in the domain of both humanities and computer science, there are many factors influencing the research design. To achieve a better understanding of our research questions, we opted for a multiple case study. This means that the two research questions will be answered by looking at two dishes: Nasi Goreng and Bami Goreng. From here, three different methods (both quantitative and qualitative) were selected with the main goal of mapping out a timeline of the two dishes of interest. One part of this timeline is created by manual reading. The other part is the Delpher dish database and the visualizations derived from it.

The first methods used to approach the digitised newspaper articles are that of a qualitative content analysis and a partial discourse analysis.[3] Through a framework on discourse theory (Appx. Fig.1), the documents were manually searched for underlying themes and keywords relating to the two dishes. The reading and analysing the articles was divided into four decades: 1945-1955, 1956-1965, 1966-1975 and 1976-1985. Secondly, the data that was gathered through a Python script in the before mentioned data-set contains articles and advertisements and is structured such that multiple insightful graphs could be derived

⁴ <https://www.delpher.nl>

⁵ <https://www.w3.org/XML/>

⁶ <https://github.com/tomhumbert/delpher-dish-data>

from it. One type of graph that was created is a word cloud (Appx. Fig.3-7), illustrating the most frequently used words in connection to the topic.

Thirdly, to be able to gain insights in smaller details of the period of our interest and develop an overall contextual understanding of the documents and their significance, a semi-structured interview was held with Mr. Dun Yong, owner of a Chinese toko in Amsterdam .

5 Data Analysis

For the data analysis section, we will present the information chronologically. Looking at the first decade of our 40 year period of interest, the first articles and advertisements that start mentioning the dishes originate from as early as 1948 and begin increasing around 1950. Interestingly enough, when analyzing the first occurrences of Bami and Nasi Goreng, seem to have already been introduced to the Dutch population at an earlier point. The first articles in the database that mention the dish hold no introductory language, or descriptions. Instead, the dishes are discussed in a way that expects the reader to already know what they are. In a Trouw article from 1948 Nasi goreng is for example mentioned in combination with the word ‘ingeburgerd’, which translates to ‘integrated’⁷.

While already having passed the stage of unfamiliarity, it is clear that the dishes were still a relatively novel concept in the early 1950s. For most Dutch people, the fifties was the period of first contact with foreign cuisine.[13] This development coincided with the rise of the culinary industry. Many new restaurants opened, among them a lot of Chinese. The Chinese restaurants were remarkably successful, offering large quantities of food for cheap prices, in a way that did not cross the scepticism that many Dutch customers had towards unknown and ‘strange’ foods.[1] Furthermore, they played into the high demand for Indonesian food, which partly resulted from the arrival of a large number of Indo Dutch migrants and military personnel previously stationed in the Indies. By hiring ‘kookies’, who made these Indonesian dishes for them (the most common being Nasi and Bami Goreng), a fair number of these Chinese restaurants turned into Chinese-Indonesian diners (Dun Yong, 2021, Appx. Item 1). As a result, there is a clear trend of the dishes rising in popularity. This observation can be seen evolving in the word clouds of the newspapers (Appx. Fig.3-5), with ‘Chinese’ being among the words often connected to the dishes in the first 3 decades of interest.

In the next decade, 1956 to 1965, the Goreng dishes continued their meteoric rise in popularity. The dishes still appear regularly in the newspapers as menu suggestions and simple recipes. Sometimes the Goreng dishes are even proposed for a menu without giving the recipe⁸. Nasi and Bami Goreng score on their simplicity, but also their cheap ingredients. Consequently, this affordability popularised the dishes among students⁹ and the simplicity explains why many

⁷ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010870703:mpeg21:a0148>

⁸ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010876604:mpeg21:a0144>

⁹ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010836569:mpeg21:a0433>

housewives adopted it into their repertoire. Signs of acculturation also appear in the recipes themselves, with recipes including Dutch ingredients, such as ham, spiegelei or shrimp. Industrial food producers were aware about the success of the dishes, Conimex had been selling canned versions of the dishes since some time (Appx. Fig.8). It is this decade that also the American brand Heinz decides to launch an advertisement campaign promoting their version of the dishes.¹⁰

Now, the Dutch population can find the dishes anywhere, in the small chinese tokos, restaurants, student mensas¹¹ and ready-to-eat in supermarkets. The popularity even starts bleeding over the countries borders, with tourists wanting to taste the exotic dish¹² and the British military serving it to their soldiers as a Dutch dish.¹³

Entering the second half of the 60s, Nasi and Bami Goreng have firmly embedded themselves in Dutch food culture. Numerous articles from the period between 1966 and 1975 illustrate how the dishes are much appreciated and a part of the weekly eating pattern of the average Dutch citizen, ranging from prisoner inmates¹⁴ to fishermen¹⁵ and military. The dishes are also eaten during special occasions, such as the 80th anniversary of Albert Heijn¹⁶. To some extent, the act of eating Bami or Nasi Goreng is even seen as a marker for 'being Dutch'. For example, when an English theater performer discusses her non-English upbringing as a result of her mom being Dutch, she gives the following example: "We celebrated Sinterklaas and ate Nasi Goreng and Dutch cheese."¹⁷

Finally, in the last decade, not much seems to change, by now the dishes have been completely integrated in Dutch food culture and no novelty is expressed whilst talking about these dishes. Nasi Goreng is consumed so casually that it is used as a basis against which other international dishes are evaluated¹⁸. At this point, one in three restaurants in the Netherlands is Chinese or Indonesian - Chinese. Even though they may not be the 'new and exciting food', both Goreng dishes are still constantly emphasized in the newspapers due to their cheap price, both in these restaurants and in ads by Albert Heijn, Conimex or Iglo.

6 Discussion

This section will first present the discussion of the humanities question and in the subsequent subsection the computer science question will be discussed.

¹⁰ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010876361:mpeg21:a0056>

¹¹ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010876864:mpeg21:a0303>

¹² <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010830418:mpeg21:a0130>

¹³ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010876352:mpeg21:a0076>

¹⁴ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010838058:mpeg21:a0164>

¹⁵ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010815054:mpeg21:a0200>

¹⁶ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010849184:mpeg21:a0169>

¹⁷ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010837798:mpeg21:a0242>

¹⁸ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010841342:mpeg21:a0208>

6.1 Discussion of the humanities question

The results gathered in the timeline reveal much about the food acculturation of Nasi and Bami Goreng. From the content in the newspapers, it is clear that Nasi and Bami Goreng fully acculturated into Dutch food culture. Through the 40 years analysed in this research, they went from a dish that most people already knew, but had not tried before to a dish that was a staple food in many kitchens. A dish that is present in many corners of Dutch society. With its simplicity and cheap price, both dishes were highly accessible to the Dutch public. What is surprising about this process of acculturation is the speed at which the Dutch took over the foreign dishes and the depth of integration they achieved in a relatively short time frame. To some extent, Nasi and Bami Goreng became Dutch heritage and markers for Dutch identity. If the Dutch were partly dismissive towards Indo cuisine[13], Bami and Nasi Goreng certainly were not heavily affected by it.

A factor that may have contributed to this fast acculturation is the influence of the Indo-Dutch and the returning military personnel. Their desire for food from Indonesia considerably increased the general demand for the cuisine. This in turn led to a growing presence in the country, thereby increasing the exposure Dutch citizens received. As humans are psychologically more likely to change preferences based on the matter of exposure and are also liable to social influence,[?] their arrival undoubtedly helped fasten the process in many ways. Something that was also mentioned by Mr Dun Yong (Dun Yong, 2021, Appx. Item 1).

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of analysing newspapers. While newspapers do influence society, it is unwise to think of them as exact representations. In an effort to mitigate this problem, the interview was used as a contextual backdrop.

6.2 Discussion of the computer science question

The successful extraction of the necessary data relied in this case on the understanding of the folder structure of the received data dump and the internal structure of the XML files. Each single newspaper was represented by a XML file, which used a lot of nesting of tags. The folder structure was mostly logical and used the identifiers found in the XML file. Except for one depth in the folder structure that carried a seemingly random name, nowhere to be found in the XML or table of contents. The solution to finding single articles in the paper was to determine the correct depth in the nested tags in the XML, and check in each iteration of the parsing process for the correct set of tags describing the resource. This required multiple nested for-loops in the Python script. Every time an article was found, it was checked for the specified search terms. Regarding the reproducibility of this method with other search terms, this script could now be used to search for any other search term. Additionally, as it seems that every newspaper that was contained in the data dump had the same XML structure, it means that the script can handle any newspaper retrieved from Delpher.nl.

Followingly, this approach is limited to articles from Delpher.nl. It is unlikely that other archives would use the same XML structure. Even if they used a standardized structure for newspapers, the script is looking for specific tags, which are in Dutch, thus making it incompatible with newspapers in other languages. Other limitations so far are that it only retrieves the textual parts of newspapers, but newspapers also carry images that could be of use to researchers. There is also no check if the search term was not mistaken with the same word of a different meaning, it was not necessary in our case. The R scripts that were used to create visualizations for the search results can be used for any data-set that was created using the Python script with the Delpher data dump. The full code can be found on the GitHub page of this project.

7 Conclusion

The whole team is very satisfied about how this project turned. What started as a study that should solely look at recipes from the recipe web to observe changes in the composition of ingredients and heritage of included ingredients quickly evolved into something much bigger. The involvement of computational methods was reduced, but the combination of multiple approaches into one methodology proved to be truly interdisciplinary. Recreating the historical narrative of cultural assets, two specific dishes, instead of a whole food culture, became wildly intriguing to us. We tried to be as thorough as possible, but we are certain that there is still a lot to tell about these two dishes. We hold the opinion that only the culmination of many timelines of cultural aspects from many points of view, woven into one coherent story, could define the history of a culture. The information is still there, for now, either collected in archives, in digital data collections or in the memory of people.

7.1 Future Work

Due to the time constraint, we only produced a small part of a possibly larger project. As a building block from our project, it would be interesting to look further back in the past, to make a more detailed and precise timeline of food acculturation. This timeline could be extended to include the colonization period, as we only looked at the post-colonization period. Additionally, for further studies of a larger scope, we have proposed a research question: *How can references in Dutch newspapers of Indonesian dishes give insights about the integration of Indonesian culture into the Dutch culture?*

Furthermore, future studies could certainly improve on the computational method we have worked with. It could be possible to develop a unified pipeline that takes a set of search terms and generates not only a data-set, but also analyses the retrieved texts with i.e. topic modeling algorithms and finally creates a defined set of visualizations. Overall, we would like to invite other researchers to replicate this study in a similar approach but by choosing different dishes or culture of interest.

8 Acknowledgements

We first and foremost want to express our gratitude towards our supervisor Marieke van Erp, who had provided the most valuable criticism and helped us when we did not know how to proceed anymore.

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9 Appendix

Concept	Dimension	Indicators
Discourse	Conceptualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are the dishes defined? - Through which concepts do the newspapers try to comprehend the history and identity of the dishes?
	Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In which terms are the dishes discussed? - What are the frames used by the newspapers?
	Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the characteristics of the rhetorical language used by the data when speaking about the dishes and their origin?

Fig. 1. Operationalisation

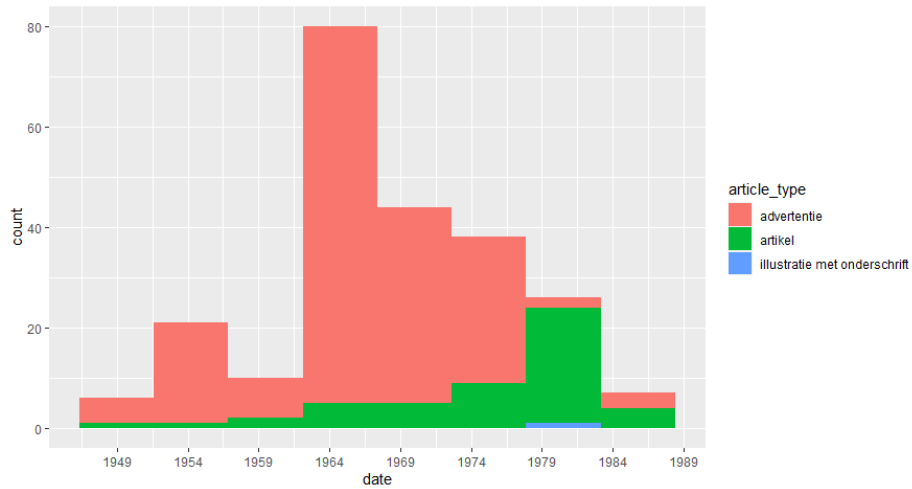


Fig. 2. Histogram of article type counts over years

Item 1. Link to the interview with Mr. Dun Yong.

– <http://bit.ly/3pzwrpB>



A word cloud visualization for articles from the years 1945-55. The words 'chinese' and 'keuken' are the most prominent, displayed in a large, lowercase, sans-serif font. 'chinese' is colored orange and 'keuken' is colored green. They are stacked vertically, with 'chinese' on top and 'keuken' below it.

Fig. 3. Word cloud for articles of years 1945-55



Fig. 4. Word cloud for articles of years 1955-65

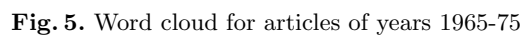


Fig. 5. Word cloud for articles of years 1965-75



Fig. 6. Word cloud for articles of years 1975-85



Fig. 7. Word cloud for articles of years 1975-85 without the words 'nitriet' or 'iglo'



Fig. 8. Advertisement for canned Nasi Goreng by Conimex