

“Bon Appétit, Lion City”

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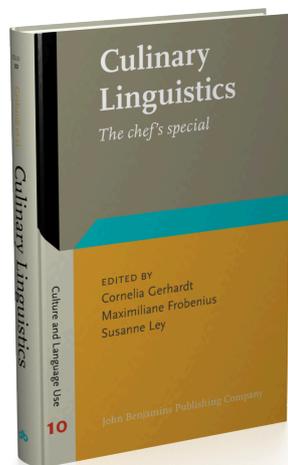
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“Bon Appétit, Lion City”

The use of French in naming restaurants in Singapore

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In multilingual Singapore, French can frequently be found in the names of local food retailers and restaurants. This study attempts to investigate the form and function of French in these business names. By considering which meanings French expresses in the local corporate context, the reasons behind the use of French will be discussed. At the heart of the analysis is a corpus of 47 names found on shop signs in different locations of Singapore. Results suggest a link between form, the type of food retail business, and the food served. Functionally, French expresses cultural and social meanings, while stressing individual and collective identities. We present evidence for the use of French as an emergent commercial register peculiar to Singapore.

1. What's in the name of a restaurant?

Already Confucius stressed the importance of naming things appropriately realizing the close link between language and social context (Watson 2007). Since his times our lives may have become more complex, but the fundamental idea of the social impact of naming remains true. This is particularly so for commercial enterprises whose names are vividly displayed in public space. The sizeable budgets that the corporate sector spends on branding and name development each year reflect the importance attached to effective naming (Fox 2011).

Naming a business is a meaningful semiotic act, the result of which often gains material form in a shop sign. An example is the one in Figure 1 below.

Such a sign is a complex semiotic ensemble whose various elements (shape, font type, image, writing, layout, etc.) are all able to express meaning (Kress 2010). The most salient element, however, is the written mode. So, let us focus on what the words on the sign in Figure 1 are able to tell us (in no particular order of preference):

As a speaker of a European language (and most other languages), I will be able to identify the type of business appropriately. The place this sign is attached to is thus a restaurant. If I have a faint idea about features of the French language, I will

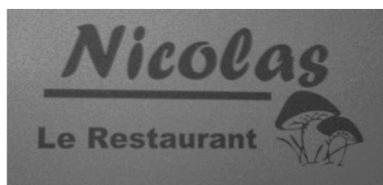


Figure 1. Nicolas: Le Restaurant

classify the language on the sign as French, due to the use of the masculine definite article *le*. The fact that I identify these words as French will probably lead me to think that the food that is served here is also French. The arrangement and size of the words suggest that *Nicolas* is the actual name of the establishment. Again common sense recommends that this may be the first name of the patron or the chef, and, should I have a more than rudimentary knowledge of French, that it will be pronounced without the final sibilant. The choice of the first name as the main restaurant name over a family name, e.g. Monsieur Sarkozy, may call forth a welcoming atmosphere. And last but not least, if I should guess in which place on this planet this sign is found, I may be inclined to say Europe, or France, or a French-speaking environment, because of the language these words are apparently in. Would I now be surprised to know that this restaurant is actually located in Southeast Asia, in Singapore to be exact? Would I find it puzzling, if the food served is actually Asian and not French? Would I not be curious to find out why other food retailers use this naming practice? Those were the questions that came to our minds.

By studying a collection of 47 business names from the food retail sector in Singapore, all of which make use of the French language to different degrees, this paper aims to elucidate three issues. First, we intend to discover the forms of French that are used in naming eateries. Second, we shall shed light on which meanings are signaled via the use of French, so as to, third, come to an understanding of what motivates the authors of these names to use French.

In the following section, we will set the frame by presenting the language situation in Singapore and how French fits into the scene. We will proceed with a review of the literature on the value of foreign languages in advertising, before we discuss the approaches that inform our analysis and the methods of data collection. Finally, we will examine the forms and functions of French in the names of food retailers in Singapore.

2. Singapore's linguistic market and the status of French

The Republic of Singapore is a multilingual nation with four official languages: three languages that represent the three dominant ethnic groups (Mandarin

Chinese, Malay and Tamil) and English. Nearly all Singaporeans are literate in an ethnic language and English. From the founding days of the republic English has assumed the status of language of wider communication and public life. It is the medium of instruction in schools and universities, it is the dominant language of political and commercial life, and as such is a gatekeeper to academic and professional success (cf. Cavallaro & Serwe 2010; Ong 2011; Ong & Zhang 2010). In the business world Mandarin has undoubtedly become another major player challenging the status of English, yet recent controversies have shown that English is still considered the default trade language among Singaporeans, even between those of the same ethnicity (The 2010; Wee 2003). Consequently, shops that intend to reach the broadest customer base will use English in service and advertising. Even most ethnic businesses, e.g. Chinese pharmacies or Malay clothing stores, use English as the dominant display language. All in all, English in writing and speech rules the commercial linguistic landscape of contemporary Singapore. So how does French fit in here?

France maintains close ties with Singapore. Singapore is France’s third biggest trading partner in Asia and is host to approximately 6000 French expatriates. International French brands are visible in the shopping districts of the city, and French food and beverage is as popular here as in any other urban center around the world. From the 1970s onwards, educational policy has supported the learning of French as a modern foreign language at secondary and tertiary levels making it, besides Japanese and Korean, the most popular foreign language today. All this goes to show that Singaporeans in general are exposed and accustomed to the French language, while those with secondary and tertiary education may even possess a running knowledge of the language.

Secondly, in Singapore, like in the other leading Asian economies Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, the French language has made noticeable inroads into public space. An article in Singapore’s biggest daily newspaper relates the occurrence of lexical forms such as *de* or *d’* in names of local businesses as the owners’ attempts to associate their shop with “French chic” or “French air of sophistication” (Rahmat 2008). Another newspaper report claims to explain the reasons behind housing developers’ frequent choice of European foreign languages as a resource for building names as an attempt to “complement and enhance the development and help to brand and define its positioning” (Tay 2009). The perceived increase of French for commercial names has recently been the topic of an episode of a satirical television series suggesting compulsory French lesson for taxi drivers as a remedy for their inability to pronounce the names of private housing estates adequately (mediacorpch5, 24 November 2010).

In summary, while English firmly remains Singapore’s leading commercial language, a trend to use foreign languages and in particular French, or scripts that visually appear to be French, exists. Similar phenomena have been reported for

other Asian cities. In the following section we thus want to take a closer look at what scholars have found out about the use of French and other foreign languages in advertising and commerce.

3. Foreign languages as added value

Foreign languages can be effectively exploited to establish a favorable image of a business. In print and television advertising they often function as adornment. Kelly-Holmes (2005) demonstrates for Europe that non-native varieties in advertising texts tend not to transmit factual information. They lack any referential function, while their symbolic meanings take center stage. Kelly-Holmes (2005) calls such use of foreign languages *linguistic fetish*. With respect to French, Piller (2003) argues that its symbolic meanings comprise a cultural stereotype based on the perception of continental French culture.¹ French in advertising text across Europe, as well as Japan, has been found to convey elegance, sophistication and femininity (Haarmann 1989; Martin 2007). Yet, as Kelly-Holmes (2005:24) stresses, the outcome of the symbolization process is not fixed and static but always locally constructed as “the product of social, political, economic, historical and linguistic relations between different countries”. Interestingly, this associative force does not diminish, according to Piller (2003: 173), even if the items are “ludicrously incorrect”.

What counts for advertising texts in newspapers and magazines has also been detected for public display signs. Backhaus's (2007) study of language use patterns on public signs in metropolitan Tokyo revealed that the use of foreign languages is most prevalent on signs that belong to the corporate sector. The foreign language material comes in the form of what Backhaus (2007) classifies as slogans, catchphrases and titles. English dominates, while only a few signs make use of French. Backhaus (2007: 109) concludes that signs that quantitatively and/or visually emphasize foreign elements either serve an indexical function of stressing the national origin of the business or a symbolic function “to imply a foreign background that actually does not exist.”

1. While French, German or Italian trigger ethno-cultural, usually country-specific, background knowledge, Piller (2003) argues that the use of English as an exogenous variety in advertising is disconnected from the culture of its two most populous speech communities on the British Isles and in North America. English expresses instead a social stereotype as opposed to a cultural stereotype: “a general symbol of modernity, progress, and globalization” (Piller 2003: 175).

In Hong Kong, construction companies have been shown to make use of English, Italian and French to adorn private housing developments. Jaworski and Yeung (2010: 176) show how these languages and the layout of signs are used to “turn their dwelling spaces into idealized oases of tranquility, Edens of happiness and pleasure, and castles of sovereignty” by invoking interpretive frames of spectacle and brand. The use of foreign names gives a sense of exclusivity, luxury, high culture or sophistication to the edifice by transforming the mundane reality into something extraordinary.

In a survey of signs in Taipei’s shopping districts, Curtin (2007, 2009) highlights the distinctive character of using French. While generally all foreign languages appear on signs connected to the sale of global fashion and high quality service, Curtin (2007) notices that significantly more French is used in names for clothing and beauty products, restaurants and housing complexes. Moreover, she discusses examples of *pseudo-French*, which is writing that appears to be French due to the use of diacritics. Curtin (2007) concludes that all instances of French serve a decorative function, because the Taiwanese audience has no access to the referential meaning. On the other hand, this allows the sign creators to make creative use of the language. For Curtin (2007) these forms of French and pseudo-French express a social, localized stereotype: they “point to both a globalized world of fashion and European cosmopolitanness and to a local Taiwanese prestige that indexes a shop and its clientele as having the distinctive taste of Taipei’s modern, urban scene” (Curtin 2009: 229).

These studies claim that across Asia, European languages are purposefully used in naming corporate ventures, in order to associate a business with contemporary high culture and luxury. The French language shows a high frequency of use in certain business sectors, such as clothing and food. In the following chapter, we want to explore how these meanings are made, which shall then enable us to discuss the motivations that inspire the sign makers.

4. Meanings and motivations of French in business names

The analytical tools employed by Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Blommaert (2010) on the use of foreign languages on signs aid in determining the types of meanings French makes in the name of a food retailer in Singapore. These authors differentiate between three ways of meaning making or semiosis: *indexical*, *symbolic*, and *emblematic*. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), a shop sign produces situated, local meanings through its placement, its written content and its shape. This way of making meanings describes its indexicality. A sign featuring a French name to designate an eatery in Singapore, for instance, may point to the

type of cuisine available in the premises. At the same time, the use of French on the sign can conjure up “something else which is not present or which is ideal or metaphorical” (Scollon & Scollon 2003: 133). This is its symbolic meaning, which is based on the current social and/or political ideology attached to the language. In the case of French in Singapore this may be luxury fashion and fine dining. Moreover, since formal acquisition of the language is largely restricted to those with a university education, using French in the name of a restaurant may appeal to the knowledge of this stratum of society and thus exude an air of sophistication and exclusivity. A special type of symbolic meaning making is what Blommaert (2010) refers to as emblematic meaning. Words on a sign convey emblematic meaning, if they are void of any linguistic meaning or denotational value in their context of use. The use of pseudo-French as discussed by Curtin (2007), or features such as diacritics and graphic accents, the gendered definite articles, or certain derivational affixes that are stereotypically perceived as features of French are examples. Scrutinizing the ways in which the French items in a restaurant name make meanings should lead us a step closer to uncovering the reasons why French is being used in the first place. Ben-Rafael’s (2009) structuration principles of linguistic landscapes allow us to better fathom possible motivations.

Trying to see through the apparent chaos of signs in public space, Ben-Rafael (2009) postulates a four-dimensional frame within which the motivations of a sign maker evolve. The sign is seen as the product of an actor’s rational considerations of the local context, and as emphasizing a particular type of motivation. The first parameter is called *the presentation of self principle*, in case the sign is primarily designed to create a memorable (corporate) identity. By using French in Singapore, for example, one can set one’s business apart from those of other competitors. On the other hand, a sign maker may judge the local socio-cultural context as more significant. Therefore, the design will “‘play on’ and anticipate clients’ cost-and-benefit considerations” (Ben-Rafael 2009: 45). This is the second parameter, which Ben-Rafael (2009) terms *good-reasons principle*. Considering the consumers’ tastes, an Asian business owner may choose French to bring about associations with high-quality products, elegance, and sophistication. Yet, the design of a shop sign may simply signal group membership. This third principle is *the principle of collective-identity*: A sign plays on conventionalized displays of group membership to act as an identity marker. Choosing a particular language may thus signal the geographic origin or the culinary style of the product. Lastly, the design of a sign may have to abide to publically imposed conventions. *The principle of power-relations* refers to legislative norms set by governments or trade organizations that guide the sign maker’s design choices. To the best of our knowledge, restrictions on the use of languages on corporate signs are not evident in Singapore. While English is the language of commerce and enjoys the greatest

reach among the different ethnic groups, there are no laws prohibiting the use of French, or any other language.

With these analytical tools, we shall subsequently analyze our collection of French in the names of food retailers. By doing so we will explore the connection between the ways French makes meaning and the types of motivation that spurred the process of naming.

5. The corpus of shop signs and the sample of food retailers

The collection of names of food-related businesses analyzed in this paper is part of a larger corpus of shop signs featuring French or French-like features that the authors have been collecting over the past four years in Singapore. Sparked by our interest in their form and function, we set out to photographically document instances of French on shop signs. We deliberately avoided to restrict data collection to the major shopping areas in the city center and surveyed residential neighborhoods as well. The names of businesses on signs or stickers were usually displayed outside the premises and fixed to the wall just above or beside the entrance, or on the shop-window. We documented the totality of the sign, including linguistic and non-linguistic materials. We also noted which goods or services were offered, and recorded the location of the shop. To verify the information gained in the field, we consulted the shop’s webpages, if available. For this corpus we only selected Singaporean-founded or owned businesses and excluded international or foreign brands. Overall we collected photos of 219 shop signs.

We classified each item according to industry type following the Singapore Standard Industrial Classification 2010 (Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry 2010). The distribution of signs across industry types was:

- 24% retail in specialized stores
- 25% manufacturing and retail of food, as well as restaurants
- 42% other personal services (hairdressing shops, beauty salon and spas), 9% miscellaneous (e.g. consulting, interior design, IT, software development)

Following studies on public signage by Backhaus (2007) and Reh (2004), the signs in each industry category were classified according to the languages used:

- monolingual French signs (Category A)
- signs using French and another language (Category B)
- use of French function words and another language (Category C)
- coinages (Category D)

Within each category, except for D, we differentiated between idiomatic use (1) and non-idiomatic use (2) (see Table 1 & Appendix A). Thus we coded idiomatic monolingual French as A1. We classified a name as A2, if it lacked a graphic accent or was misspelled.²

6. Analysis and discussion of form and function

We will proceed with an analysis of the forms of French in the names of food-related businesses in order to determine the links between names and types of food businesses. Then we shall go on to examine the motivations that lie behind the preference for French.

6.1 Forms of French in the names of food retailers

Overall, 47 shop signs from the *manufacturing and retail of food, as well as restaurants* category qualified for analysis. Table 1 shows their distribution across the different formal types.

Table 1. Food signs according to form (*excluding signs from category D)

Category	Total number	Subcategory	Total number
A	23 (48.8 %)	A1	18
		A2	5
B	13 (27.7 %)	B1	8
		B2	5
C	9 (19.2 %)	C1	3
		C2	6
D	2 (4.3 %)		
		Idiomatic *	64.4 %
		Non-idiomatic *	35.6 %

Almost every second sign is a monolingual sign in French (Category A), while slightly more than a quarter are bilingual ones including another language besides

2. Labelling words on signs as either French or English can be problematic. In our corpus we counted lexemes such as *cafe*, *cuisine*, *boutique* and *patisserie* as English because they are either established loanwords or appear without graphic accent. If graphic accents are used, however, the items are classified as French.

French (Category B). Almost a fifth of the signs feature a French function word (Category C) and there are 2 coinages (Category D). Across categories A to C, the French content is predominantly idiomatic with only every third sign revealing some form of non-idiomatic use. Only the set of names that make use of French function words (Category C) reveals a higher proportion of non-idiomaticity. We can thus argue that, if French is used to name a food retailer or restaurant in Singapore, it is most probably idiomatic and the name will appear as likely on its own as it does in conjunction with other languages.

Looking at the distribution of types of food businesses and the type of food on offer across the categories of names reveals two interesting aspects (see Appendix A). Firstly, the majority of food businesses with a monolingual French name turn out to be restaurants. Cafes and cake shops bulk large in the other categories. The latter is particularly interesting, because many of these cake shops or bakeries sell Asian products under a French name. Secondly, among the restaurants, those that specialize in French food items almost exclusively come with a monolingual French title. With one exception, the names of these restaurants are also all idiomatic. The eateries that serve Asian food are usually bilingual. The level of idiomatic use of French is among these names significantly lower.

Armed with this knowledge, we will now proceed with our analysis of the possible motivations that lie behind the use of French to name food-related businesses.

6.2 Functions of French in the names of food retailers

Based on the insights from the quantitative analysis, we will look closer at two general types: signs or names that use French to sell French food; and signs that use French to sell Asian food. For each type we intend to uncover what the possible reasons are for choosing French. We hope to do so by analyzing how French makes meaning (indexical, symbolic, emblematic) and which type of motivation the name reflects. Moreover, we want to examine the signs in category C, meaning those names that make use of a French function word. Here we will look in particular at the use of the preposition *de*.

6.2.1 A French name for French food

The majority of eateries that make exclusively use of French on their shop signs (Category A) indeed offer French or French-inspired food. Only 5 out of 23 shops in this category do not offer French products. In this section we would like to focus on the 18 names that all belong to restaurants specializing in French cooking. Our data reveal two different naming patterns with respect to the use of French here: names that refer to the local context, and names that refer to a French cultural context. Let us begin with the former.

A sign of a French identity. 12 of the 18 monolingual French names that refer to restaurants specializing in French food refer to actual aspects of the business or the locality. For instance, the names shown below highlight the positive quality of the owner or staff (Figure 2), the product (Figure 3), the physical surroundings (Figure 4), or the physical size of the business (Figure 5).



Figure 2. Les Amis



Figure 3. Beaujolais



Figure 4. au Jardin: Les Amis



Figure 5. La Petite Cuisine

The sign in Figure 2 belongs to the flagship restaurant of the Singaporean fine-dining company *Les Amis Group*. According to the company’s website the restaurant *Les Amis* ‘the friends’ employs “knowledgeable ... warm and approachable” staff unlike other fine dining restaurants who tend to employ “stiff, snotty and unfriendly” service professionals (*Les Amis*, 24 November 2011). The French name obviously means business, because *Les Amis* ‘the friends’ indexes the personal quality of the staff. At the same time it may very well point to the quality of the relationship between the group of owners, who happen to be three men trained in the art of French cooking. Whatever the primordial reason, actual contextual factors motivate the French name.

Apart from the quality of the staff or the owner, the product on offer may provide the reason for choosing French. The sign in Figure 3 is placed outside a food retail space where, according to the outlet’s website, patrons can “wine and dine in a cosy and charming ambience that captures the joie de vivre of France in ... Singapore” (*Beaujolais*, 20 January 2012). Obviously, the inspiration for the name *Beaujolais* is the most famous product of the region by the same name in southeastern France. Not only this particular type of red wine is sold in these premises: the name indexes metonymically the beverages this restaurant and bar specializes in.

The signs in Figures 4 and 5 exemplify French restaurant names that make direct reference to aspects of their geographical locale: the physical surroundings (Figure 4) and the size of the establishment (Figure 5). *au Jardin* ‘in the garden’ is located in the lush greenery of Singapore’s Botanic Gardens, while *La Petite Cuisine* ‘the small kitchen’ is literally housed in a low and narrow building, a fact that restricts the floor space of the restaurant significantly.

A symbol of authenticity. A different kind of motivation seems to be the basis of the remaining six monolingual French names. Unlike the names discussed above, these lack direct local contextual reference. Indeed they refer to specific socio-cultural concepts of French food culture.



Figure 6. *L'Estaminet*: Bar-Tabac



Figure 7. Les Bouchons: Steak Frites



Figure 8. Les Bouchons: Rive Gauche

The sign in Figure 6 hangs above a pub in Singapore, but *L'Estaminet: Bar-Tabac* is the generic name for beer pubs in the working class areas of northern France and Belgium. *Les Bouchons*, used on the signs in Figures 7 and 8, are small restaurants typical of the French city of Lyon that are known to serve quality local cuisine and wine.³ Two restaurants of the same name operate in Singapore: *Les Bouchons: Steak Frites* (Figure 7) in the traditional but fashionable Chinatown district, and *Les Bouchons: Rive Gauche* (Figure 8) at the shores of the Singapore river near the civic district, a traditionally popular area for dining and clubbing. *Rive Gauche* 'left bank' is an idiomatic expression that refers to the subculture of intellectuals and artists in Paris located at the left bank of the river Seine. Residents of these quarters are known for their refined culinary tastes. In comparison, *Steak Frites* 'steak and fries' refers to a popular everyman's French dinner feast. Both restaurants are run by a duo of French expatriate chefs who seem to have deliberately chosen these names to reflect their French origin (Ee 2007).

Summary. The discussion shows that restaurant owners in Singapore who specialize in French cooking and choose a monolingual French name for their business seem to use this as a strategy to signal their membership in the community of French restaurants. Choosing French over English therefore constitutes a claim for authenticity. Our analysis shows, however, that this can be achieved via two different routes: by contextualizing the local environment as French; or by symbolically transforming a retail space in Singapore into a typical French place.

3. That *les bouchons* can be translated as 'the corks' seems to be of secondary relevance here. The evidence from the newspaper interview cited supports such a non-literal reading.

6.2.2 A French name for Asian food

Let us now turn to those places that serve Asian dishes but go by a French name or whose name partly consists of French lexemes. As mentioned above, one type of food retailer stands out here, namely cake shops and bakeries. We shall discuss these in the subsequent section. Next, we will analyze those restaurants names that combine Chinese and French, in order to clarify which motivation may lie behind the use of French here.

French for bakeries and cafes. Using French on a shop sign in Singapore does not always indicate that the products are of French or European origin. Yet French appears to be a popular language used in names of local cake shops and cafes. The three monolingual French signs in Figures 9 to 11 below are examples.



Figure 9. Rive Gauche Patisserie



Figure 10. Petit Provence



Figure 11. Bon Goût

Rive Gauche Pâtisserie ‘Left bank pastry shop’ (Figure 9) and *Petit Provence* ‘Little Provence’ (Figure 10) are both franchises in the bakery business. *Bon Goût* ‘Good taste’ in Figure 11 sells bakery products and offers dine-in facilities, as well as a large collection of Japanese Manga comics. All three establishments specialize in the production of Japanese pastries, such as mochi or Japanese cheesecake, or Asian adaptations of French originals, such as green tea-flavored macaroons. Yet, no authentic French products are on sale. While the Asianness of shop and product in Figure 11 is arguably displayed via an icon that resembles a Japanese or Chinese character, nothing on the signs points to the Asian character of the products, but the names rather point to a French background.

So why is French used, if no French food is sold? Let us recall that across many Southeast and East Asian countries, fashion and beauty stores run under French labels or use French in their advertising largely for emblematic reasons (Blommaert 2010; Curtin 2009). These examples suggest that Singaporean businessmen in the bakery industry have adopted such a strategy. The French used in these examples is not primarily indexical as it is in the restaurant names in Section 6.2.1. On the other hand, along with Curtin’s (2009) findings, we would suggest that French makes for symbolic meanings here, as it conveys modern contemporary pan-Asian culture as opposed to traditional local Asian tastes. French is used almost completely devoid of stereotypes of French culture. Comparable to the use of English across countries in continental Europe, French in the signs in Figures 9 to 11 expresses a social stereotype. The shop sign in Figure 12 below is a further illustration.



Figure 12. Bonheur Pâtisserie

In terms of form the name on the sign in Figure 12 is a French-English bilingual sign, because *pâtisserie* without a graphic accent was tagged as an English lexical item. The languages in bilingual restaurant names (Category B) often show a distribution of work: English (or another language) denotes the type of establishment or the product offered, while French provides the actual name of the shop. The name of the bakery in Figure 12 follows this structure: English identifies the type of shop (*Pâtisserie*), while French provides the actual name, *Bonheur* ‘happiness’. Also note that the whole noun phrase follows an English syntactic matrix with the head noun in second position, rather than a French one, where the head should come first (*Pâtisserie du Bonheur*).

In line with the argument developed above the choice of the French noun *Bonheur* ‘happiness’ as the name of the bakery is undoubtedly motivated symbolically, in order to position the shop as a contemporary Asian bakery. This interpretation finds further support at the level of word formation, as the semantics of the compound sticks to a traditional way of naming businesses among ethnic Chinese shop owners in Singapore (and the region). Stores often carry auspicious names that may foster the economic or psychological well being of patrons and owner, e.g. *Fortune Seafood*, *888 Eating House*, or *Happy Fish Soup*. *Bonheur Patisserie* ‘Happiness Patisserie’ uses this traditional cultural practice with a twist. The use of French in a traditional structure aligns the shop symbolically with contemporary culture without losing sight of its traditional roots. Like the names in Figures 9 to 11, this example illustrates how French is a medium that conveys associations of contemporary pan-Asian food culture. French in these names hardly connotes aspects of continental French culture, but instead, has become appropriated to express a social quality. This might also explain the declining levels of idiomatic usage of French in this category and the type of industry (e.g. the lack of gender agreement in *Petit Provence* above. It should be *Petite Provence*), since cultural authenticity is not intended.

French for Asian food in restaurants. A number of multilingual names in category B combine French and an Asian language. In this section, we would like to discuss the names of two restaurants that offer Asian food and combine French and Chinese on their shop signs. Again, we will ask the question how and why French is used here.



Figure 13. Café d'Orient



Figure 14. Le Chasseur

Figure 13 shows the name of the establishment in French printed in large letters, *Café d'Orient* 'Cafe of the Orient', with a subtext in Chinese characters smaller in size that says *xin xiang gang cha can ting* 'the new Hong Kong restaurant'. Figure 14 features Chinese characters above the French noun phrase, and both scripts are in an almost equally large font size. Here the translations are *le shi xuan* 'restaurant of eating pleasure' and *Le Chasseur* 'the hunter'. Similar to other bilingual signs, French provides the name, while the local language refers to the type of cuisine or establishment.

The use of Chinese characters in these names can be said to index the fact that Chinese dishes are served. However, the type of Chinese script is meaningful. The restaurant in Figure 13 is located in a middle-class residential area of Singapore. It has its own air-conditioned premises and serves currently fashionable Cantonese and Western-style dishes from Hong Kong. In comparison the restaurant in Figure 14 is one of many small stalls in a traditional open-air food market serving local Chinese Singaporean dishes at convenient prices. Based on their location and the food served, we can assume that they differ in clientele and social appeal. While *Café d'Orient* provides for contemporary modern Asian cuisine, *Le Chasseur* offers traditional local food. This fact is marked already in the type of Chinese characters used (cf. also Scollon & Scollon 2003). The sign in Figure 14 uses traditional Chinese characters, while the one in Figure 13 makes use of simplified Chinese characters. The latter were introduced after the Cultural Revolution and are currently used as the standard form of Chinese script in China, while the traditional characters are common among the Chinese diaspora and in traditional Taiwanese culture. Yet the question remains: why use French at all?

Let us now turn to the different meanings that the French parts make in these signs. In the sign in Figure 13 the French noun phrase makes contextual reference, because it informs about the origin of the food. It is noteworthy that even a lack of knowledge in French will not inhibit communication, since the nouns, *café* and *orient*, are also loanwords in English. But at the same time and more importantly, the phrase is clearly identifiable as French due to the stereotypical features of French writing, namely the graphic accent, the preposition *de* and the apostrophe. This has symbolic consequences based on the evidence presented in the previous section. French is the vehicle that carries over associations of culinary contemporariness and trendiness in modern, urban Asia: the new Hong Kong versus the traditional.

Different motivating factors apply to the use of *Le Chasseur* 'the hunter' in the sign in Figure 14. The name makes little indexical meaning in its immediate context: neither is fresh game sold here, nor does it refer to the owner's profession. Given the physical proximity of the business's immediate competitors in the

open-air food court the main reason for the choice of French seems to be the will to distinguish itself. The meaning is thus an emblematic one, as the foreignness of the name alone becomes most meaningful.

Summary. Across all the examples in this section French makes for meanings largely disconnected from a cultural ideology of France. It is used to name food retailers that offer contemporary Southeast Asian and East Asian products. In these names French has the symbolic meaning potential of enhancing the business’s claim to being up-to-date and distinct from traditional outlets. On the other hand, eateries serving traditional local food may use the language to dis-align themselves from competitors. For both types of businesses then the motivation to use French appears to be the presentation of the shop’s uniqueness or distinctness. At the same time though, we may be observing the development of a new naming convention among food retailers that specialize in contemporary Asian cuisine. A French shop name may thus be an expression of a collective corporate identity. In summary, the use of French fails to appeal to particular cultural stereotypes here, but shows a potential to express a social stereotype, a function that in the past was served mainly by English in Singapore and Asia at large.

6.2.3 Using a French function word

The use of French prepositions, the definite articles or suffixes in business names in Singapore spreads across many industry sectors and has already been the topic of much media debate and online mockery. In our sample of food retailers, their use is less widespread. Nevertheless, we can distinguish two structures of use that also differ in meaning and motivation.

The restaurant names on the signs in Figures 15 and 16 below seem to have a French noun phrase matrix that includes the preposition *de* as the head of a post-modifying prepositional phrase.



Figure 15. Pasta de Waraku: Japanese Casual Pasta & Cafe Restaurant



Figure 16. Cafe dē Hong Kong

The restaurant in Figure 15 specializes in Japanese variations of the Italian classics and was set up by a Japanese expatriate businessman in Singapore. We should add that Japanese-style Italian food is very popular in Asia and many restaurants serving this kind of food exist. *Waraku* is, according to the restaurant's website (Ueki, 24 November 2011), a Romanized version of a binomial Chinese compound of *wa* 'harmony' and *raku* 'contentedness'. Together with the noun *Pasta* and the French preposition *de*, *Waraku* forms a complex codeswitched whole, which translates as *Pasta de Waraku* 'Pasta of harmony and contentedness'. The French preposition is responsible for the compound's structure and coherence. In Figure 16 the variant *dē* does likewise. This restaurant serves popular dishes from Hong Kong, which, as mentioned above, are often a blend between Western and Cantonese. The sign features a Chinese phrase as well as a French-matrix compound: altogether the name is *xin tian di xiao chu* 'food of the new world' *Cafe dē Hong Kong*. The Hong Kong Island skyline as a backdrop suggests that 'new world' refers to the city of Hong Kong.

So what is behind the use of a French preposition apart from providing textual cohesion? Firstly, using *de* makes sense emblematically: it creates a recognizably different structure as compared to the English equivalent (*Waraku Pasta* or *Hong Kong Cafe*) and makes for a distinct corporate identity. Secondly, since Singaporeans perceive the preposition *de* and its variants as a feature of French, as evident from media sources (Rahmat 2008), this construction conveys symbolically that the food served in these premises is contemporary Asian. The preposition thus captures the same associations of modernity versus tradition as the names discussed in the previous section. Moreover, the structure plays on names of popular and successful Asian brands that produce contemporary fusion food, such as Hong Kong's biggest fast food chain *Café de Coral*.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of instances of *de* in our sample (6 out of 8) are different from the kind just discussed and an expression of a much simpler but equally creative motivation.

Quite obviously the names on the signs in Figures 17 and 18 are not based on a French phrase structure, but the use of *d'* or *de* is based on an English matrix. *d'* reflects an approximation of the pronunciation of the English definite article



Figure 17. D'Garlic: Western kitchen



Figure 18. d'cottage

the in Colloquial Singapore English (Deterding 2007). Clearly, this is a strategy to create and emphasize difference, but also shows that the sign maker is attune to the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the local variety of English. Interestingly, this phenomenon spreads equally across companies of different types: from designers (*de marque espace design*), consultants (*De consultants*), hotels (*D'Kranji farm resort*), to florists (*De Flowers' House*).

The discussion of the examples in this section suggests that the use of *de*, if used as a French preposition, is triggered by largely similar reasons as French lexical items in the names of restaurants and bakeries that specialize in contemporary Asian cuisine. While a *de* in the name may reflect the motivation to present the business as something special, the medium chosen to do so, namely the French language, shows that the sign maker adheres to a certain degree to a conventionalized formula. As such the preposition *de* and the compound structure that it produces convey just like lexical items an image of contemporary, modern Asian food.

7. Conclusions

Throughout this paper, we have examined a corpus of business names in the industry sector of *manufacturing and retail of food, as well as restaurants* in Singapore that make use of the French language. Our intention was to describe the forms of French used in these names, to explore what kinds of meanings French makes, so as to analyze what motivates the sign makers to use a foreign language like French.

The formal classification of the names on the shop signs with respect to languages used, level of idiomaticity, type of food retail business, and type of product revealed a number of issues. First, a link between form and food seems to exist. Monolingual French names are used predominantly for restaurants that serve French food. The names are also almost exclusively idiomatic. In contrast, names that feature French and another language are more often used for bakeries and cafes. Interestingly, however, these outlets often do not specialize in French food per se. The bilingual signs also show a division of labor with respect to the languages used: French is overwhelmingly used for the proper name of the shop, while English, and at times Chinese, provide the information on the type of food business or the product.

When it comes to the motivations for using French for the name of a food business in Singapore, our analysis was able to show that these are multifaceted. On the one hand, the use of French can function as an expression of a French cultural stereotype, as Piller (2003) argues, most probably to signal authenticity and culinary group membership. Seldom did we spot a purely decorative use spurred by the need to highlight an isolated commercial identity (Kelly-Holmes 2005). On the other hand, we observed French being used to signal social meaning: as a symbol to distinguish new local Asian cuisine from its traditional counterpart. In general, this finding is in line with the function that Curtin (2007, 2009) ascribed to the use of foreign languages in the signscape of Taiwan's fashion districts. While these businessmen may have chosen French for the sake of delineating their commercial venture from competitors, the concentration of French in names of bakeries and pastry shops as well as restaurants serving contemporary Asian cuisine suggests the development of a commercial register that is partially peculiar to Singapore (Agha 2005). Future ethnographic studies on attitudes of patrons and retailers are thus much called for, in order to elucidate and elaborate on the enregisterment of a Franco-Singaporean commercial register.

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Appendix A

Sample of business names in manufacturing and retail of food, as well as restaurants

Number	Category	Name	SSIC category	Food style
1	A1	L'Artisan	Restaurant	French/ Continental European
2	A1	Nicolas: Le Restaurant	Restaurant	French
3	A1	Le Bon Marché	Restaurant	French
4	A1	Les Bouchons Rive Gauche	Restaurant	French
5	A1	Les Bouchons: Steak frites	Restaurant	French
6	A1	La Fondue	Restaurant	Swiss/French
7	A1	Bistro Petit Salut	Restaurant	French
8	A1	La Petite Cuisine	Restaurant	French
9	A1	Au Petit Salut	Restaurant	French
10	A1	Les Amis	Restaurant	French
11	A1	au Jardin: Les Amis	Restaurant	French
12	A1	André	Restaurant	French
13	A1	Beaujolais	Restaurant	French
14	A1	L'Angélu	Restaurant	French
15	A1	Bon Goût	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Japanese
16	A1	Bistro du Vin	Pubs (including bars)	French
17	A1	L'Estaminet: Bar-Tabac	Pubs (including bars)	French
18	A1	Canelé: Pâtisserie Chocolaterie	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	French
19	A2	Petit Provence	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Japanese

(Continued)

Number	Category	Name	SSIC category	Food style
20	A2	Rive Gauche Pâtisserie	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Japanese/ French
21	A2	La Tanglin Boulangerie	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	French/ Continental European
22	A2	Le Chocolat Café	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Contemporary
23	A2	Le Carillon de L'Angelus	Restaurant	French
24	B1	Bonheur Patisserie	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Contemporary
25	B1	Pâtisserie Glacé: by Chef Yamashita	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Japanese
26	B1	ri shi xi yang shi: Ma Maison: Japanese Western Foods	Restaurant	Japanese/ Western
27	B1	Café d'Orient: xin xiang gang cha can ting	Restaurant	Hong Kong/ Cantonese/ Contemporary Asian
28	B1	Laurent Cafe & Chocolate Bar	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	French
29	B1	Baguette: the Viet Inspired Deli	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Contemporary Asian
30	B1	fine art café	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Contemporary
31	B1	le shi xuan: Le Chasseur	Hawkers and stall-holders selling cooked food and prepared drinks	Chinese
32	B2	Café Ma Maison: Pâtisserie et café	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Japanese
33	B2	The Patissier	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Contemporary
34	B2	Chateau de Chillon: Restaurant and Wine bar	Restaurant	French
35	B2	Lé Muria: Food & More	Restaurant	Asian
36	B2	Keen on crêpes	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	French
37	C1	li ying: Le Cafe Confectionary & Pastry	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Chinese
38	C1	Pasta de Waraku	Restaurant	Japanese/ Western
39	C1	De Coder's Café	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Contemporary
40	C2	D'Pastry	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Contemporary

(Continued)

Number	Category	Name	SSIC category	Food style
41	C2	shou zao bao dian chuang xin kou wei li man: D'bun: Freshly Hand Made Bun	Manufacture of bread, cakes and confectionary	Chinese
42	C2	xin tian di xiao chu: Cafe dē Hong Kong	Restaurant	Hong Kong/ Cantonese/ Contemporary Asian
43	C2	d'cottage	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Contemporary
44	C2	D'Fusion Prata	Hawkers and stall-holders selling cooked food and prepared drinks	Asian
45	C2	D'Garlic: Western Kitchen	Hawkers and stall-holders selling cooked food and prepared drinks	Western
46	D	saybons: French Food Factory	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	French
47	D	Teclique	Cafes, coffee houses and snack bars	Contemporary