

Cultural elements in English, Spanish and Italian Dictionaries: A Comparison

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People travel, and so do their language and culture

- Culture travels with people
- “Travelling” words
- Food vocabulary as an example of difficulties of treating cultural elements in language dictionaries

Why food vocabulary?

- Foodstuffs and food preparation have become more international
- Passive and active use of food vocabulary involves prototypes and cultural background and previous knowledge
 - for example:
 - color of eggs, apples, pears, plums
 - shape of bread
 - Color and shape are descriptive characteristics that might be included in dictionary definitions

The questions facing general purpose language dictionaries:

How much encyclopedic information should be included in dictionary entries?

Should the information be part of the definition, or should it be included somewhere else (such as in an example)?

Let's look at some examples

- Spanish → English
 - *gazpacho, paella*
- Italian → English, Spanish
 - *spaghetti, cannelloni, lasagna, pizza*
- French → Spanish, Italian
 - *quiche, fondue*

Dictionaries consulted

- Spanish:
 - *Diccionario de la lengua española*, Real Academia Española
 - *Diccionario de uso del español*, María Moliner, 3rd edition on DVD
- English:
 - *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*
 - *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*
- French: *Larousse Dictionnaire Illustré*
- Italian: *Dizionario della lingua italiana* (il Sabatini-Coletti)

gazpacho

- *DRAE*:

Género de sopa fría que se hace regularmente con pedazos de pan y con aceite, vinagre, sal, ajo, cebolla y otros aditamentos.

- *DUE-María Moliner*:

Plato elaborado con una mezcla en crudo de tomate, cebolla y otras hortalizas y pan, troceados o triturados y sazonados con ajo, sal, aceite y vinagre.

gazpacho

- *Merriam-Webster*:
a spicy soup that is usually made from chopped raw vegetables (as tomato, onion, pepper, and cucumber) and that is served cold.
- *American Heritage*:
a chilled soup made with chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, peppers, and herbs.

Oil, vinegar, garlic, and bread are missing

paella

- *DRAE*:

Plato de **arroz seco**, con carne, pescado, mariscos, legumbres, etc., característico de la región valenciana, en España.

- *DUE-María Moliner*

Plato **típico** de la región valenciana que consiste en arroz **guisado** con distintas legumbres, como guisantes, alcachofas o judías verdes, trozos de distintas carnes o pescados, mariscos o caracoles, etc.

paella

- *Merriam-Webster*:
a saffron-flavored dish containing rice, meat, seafood, and vegetables
- *American Heritage*:
a saffron-flavored Spanish dish made with varying combinations of rice, vegetables, meat, chicken, and seafood

No mention of Valencian region

spaghetti

- *Sabatini-Coletti:*

spaghetto

[spa-ghét-to] s.m.

(**spec. pl.**) Varietà di pasta asciutta filiforme, caratteristica della gastronomia italiana || ***spaghetti house, spaghetteria*** | ***spaghetti western***, con valore scherz., tipo di film western prodotto in Italia a imitazione del genere americano

spaghetti

- *American Heritage Dictionary*:
pasta in long, often thick strands
- *Merriam-Webster*:
pasta made in thin solid strings
- *DUE*-María Moliner:
espagueti (del it. *spaghetti*; pl. invar. o *espaguetis*)
m. Pasta de trigo duro que tiene la forma de una varilla fina y alargada

Spaghetti western

- *Merriam-Webster*:

a western motion picture produced in Italy

Spaghetti western presumably is related to *spaghetti*, yet their definition of *spaghetti* does not mention Italy

lasagna

- *Sabatini-Coletti:*

1 (spec. pl.) Pasta all'uovo tagliata in larghe strisce, cotta in genere al forno con besciamella e ragù

- *DUE-María Moliner:*

lasaña (del it. *lasagna*)

2 Plato de origen italiano que consiste en una serie de capas de carne, pescado u otro relleno separadas por láminas de pasta.

lasagna

- *American Heritage Dictionary:*

1. also la·sa·gne. Pasta in flat, very wide strips.
2. A dish made by baking such pasta with layers of sauce and fillings such as cheese or meat.

Etymological information about the word states that it is from Italian.

quiche

- *Larousse:*

Tarte salée en pâte brisée garnie de lardons et recouverte d'un mélange d'œufs battus et de crème. (Spécialité lorraine.)

- *Sabatini-Coletti:*

quiches.f. fr. (pl. quiches); in it. s.f. inv. (o pl. orig.)

Crostata salata farcita con salumi o formaggi o verdure varie

quiche

- *DUE*-María Moliner

quiche¹ [quish] (fr., del al. *Kuchen*)

f. Tarta salada cubierta con una mezcla de huevos batidos, beicon, queso, etc., **que se come caliente**.

- *American Heritage*:

A **rich** unsweetened custard pie, often containing ingredients such as vegetables, cheese, or seafood.

- *Merriam-Webster*:

an unsweetened custard pie usually having a savory filling (as spinach, mushrooms, or ham)

fondue

- *Larousse*:

Plat d'origine suisse, composé de lamelles de fromage que l'on fait fondre à la chaleur dans un caquelon avec du vin blanc, jusqu'à consistance de crème, que l'on aromatise de kirsch et que l'on déguste en y trempant des cubes de pain rassis au bout d'une fourchette. (On dit aussi fondue savoyarde.

fondue

- *DUE*-María Moliner:

1 f. Plato que consiste en queso fundido en un recipiente calentado con un hornillo especial, en el que se van mojando trozos de pan. También se prepara con otros ingredientes, particularmente con trozos de carne que los comensales van friendo en el momento en aceite caliente.

fondue

- *American Heritage*:

1. **a.** A hot dish made of melted cheese and wine and eaten with bread.

b. A similar dish, especially one consisting of a melted sauce in which pieces of food, such as bread, meat, or fruit, are dipped or cooked: chocolate fondue.

- *Sabatini-Coletti*:

s.f. fr. (pl. *fondues*); in it. s.f. inv. (o pl. orig.)

gastr. Pietanza tipica svizzera a base di formaggio fuso ||

f. bourguignonne, a base di pezzetti di carne

What explanations can be offered for these differences:

- Nature of the food is different in its “new” context
- Background cultural knowledge is different
- Different lexicographical practice owing to a long tradition

"a la romana" "alla romana" alcachofas vs. carciofi



“a la romana” defined in Spanish

- *DUE*- María Moliner

a la romana Al uso de Roma; particularmente, se aplica a la manera de preparar ciertos alimentos, como la merluza o los calamares, que se fríen después de haberlos rebozado en huevo y harina.

Conclusion

- The expression of cultural information in general-purpose language dictionaries is not a trivial issue.
- The amount of encyclopedic information that should be included in general-purpose language dictionaries is an open issue. Some dictionaries are inconsistent with respect to the amount of encyclopedic information given about food vocabulary.