



# **Prototypicality and Categorization of Filipino and Non-Filipino Dishes: A Cognitive Analysis of Mental Representations among Adolescents**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines how Filipino adolescents perceive and categorize Filipino and non-Filipino dishes, a process that plays a crucial role in understanding their cultural identity. As globalization introduces foreign dishes into Filipino households, the boundaries between what is considered traditional Filipino food and other cuisines have become increasingly blurred. This study explores how adolescents navigate these blurred lines and how food categorization reflects the intersection of culture and globalization. The study used a survey methodology where 30 Filipino adolescents ranked 30 Filipino and non-Filipino dishes based on their perceptions of prototypicality and fuzziness. The dishes were assessed using prototype theory, which suggests that categories are based on central, prototypical examples, with fuzzy boundaries. The results showed that Pork Adobo, Dinuguan, and Lechon were perceived as the most prototypical Filipino dishes. In contrast, dishes such as Carbonara, Pizza, and Hamburger were considered “fuzzy” or ambiguous due to their foreign influences. Pork Adobo received the highest ranking, indicating its central role in Filipino food culture, while dishes with foreign origins ranked lower, reflecting their peripheral status in Filipino culinary identity. These findings underscore the growing hybridity in Filipino food culture, shaped by globalization, and have significant implications for education. By recognizing both traditional Filipino dishes and the increasing influence of global foods, educators can create more culturally relevant teaching frameworks that reflect the fluidity of identity and cultural pride in a globalized world. This research contributes to understanding how food categorization can shape adolescent identity and cultural education in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Food Categorization, Filipino Cuisine, Prototype Theory, Cultural Identity, Cognitive Analysis

## **1. Introduction**

Food categorization played a central role in shaping human cognition; however, how individuals categorized food—especially within cultural contexts—is a phenomenon that has often gone unnoticed. Food, at its core, is not only a biological necessity but also a powerful cultural symbol, representing identity, tradition, and social practices. As globalization continued to influence culinary practices worldwide, the boundaries between what was considered Filipino food and what was considered foreign food became increasingly blurred. With international dishes such as ramen, spaghetti, and pizza becoming staples in Filipino households, the question arose: how did Filipino adolescents navigate the categorization of food, and what factors influenced their perceptions of these dishes?

Cognitive linguistics provided valuable insights into this process, particularly through the lens of prototype theory. Prototype theory, first proposed by Rosch (1975), suggested that categories are structured around central, prototypical examples, which serve as the most representative instances of a given category. According to this theory, the boundaries of categories are often flexible and not rigidly defined, allowing for items to fall on a spectrum from central prototypes to more peripheral, fuzzy examples. While prototype theory has been widely used to examine categories in areas such as animals, objects, and abstract concepts (Lakoff, 1987), its application to food categorization—particularly about Filipino adolescents—remained relatively underexplored.

In the Filipino context, food held great cultural significance, serving as a symbol of national identity and community. Dishes such as adobo, sinigang, and lumpia were often regarded as quintessential representations of Filipino cuisine. However, the increasing exposure to foreign cuisines complicated the traditional boundaries of food categorization. As Filipino adolescents experienced both local food traditions and the influx of global culinary influences, their categorization of food may not have adhered strictly to national or cultural lines. Instead, their perceptions may have reflected hybridized cultural identities shaped by both local and foreign influences. This presented an opportunity to investigate how Filipino adolescents categorized food and how these categorizations reflected their evolving cultural identities.

While prototype theory has been instrumental in understanding how we categorize various domains, such as animals, objects, and abstract concepts (Rosch, 1975; Lakoff, 1987), the categorization of food, particularly Filipino food, remained relatively unexplored, especially among adolescents. Research in this area was sparse, and much of the existing literature focused on adult categorization or bilingual contexts (Chen & Zhang, 2020). Adolescents, however, were at a critical developmental stage, where their cognitive abilities and cultural identities were still evolving. This developmental

stage was crucial because adolescents were in the process of defining their sense of self and understanding their relationship with their culture. Given this, it was imperative to understand how they categorized food, as it provided insights into how they perceived and internalized their cultural identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

This study aimed to fill this gap by examining how Filipino adolescents categorized Filipino and non-Filipino dishes in terms of the concepts of prototypicality and fuzziness. The central research questions of this study were as follows: What were the top five Filipino dishes that adolescents perceived as prototypical representations of Filipino cuisine? Which dishes did adolescents find to be "fuzzy" or "vague" in terms of categorization as either Filipino or non-Filipino? Additionally, how did these categorizations of food influence teaching, learning, and cultural identity?

One of the primary objectives of this study was to identify the dishes that Filipino adolescents perceived as prototypical and those they considered more ambiguous or difficult to categorize. By doing so, this research investigated how cognitive development and cultural exposure influenced food categorization among adolescents. According to studies by Pauwels and Evans (2017), food categorization is not only a cognitive process but also deeply rooted in cultural cognition, which is shaped by the experiences and social contexts in which an individual grows up. Adolescents, who were simultaneously exposed to local food traditions and global influences, experienced a unique intersection of cultures, which was essential to understanding their perceptions and mental representations of food.

Prototype theory suggested that categories are flexible, defined not by rigid boundaries but by core features that are considered central to the category (Rosch, 1975). In this study, Filipino dishes such as adobo and sinigang were regarded as prototypical. In contrast, dishes like ramen or spaghetti—which had been integrated into Filipino culture—may have fallen into fuzzy categories. Food categorization, therefore, was not a strictly cognitive process but was deeply influenced by cultural identity. The mental representations of food, as discussed by Villanueva (2016), were shaped by cultural experiences, which further complicated food categorization in the age of globalization.

In addition to prototype theory, this study was grounded in cultural linguistics (Villanueva, 2016), which examined the deep interconnection of language, cognition, and cultural practices. The categorization of food, therefore, was not merely a matter of cognitive processing but was influenced by the cultural significance of food and its role in defining national identity. For example, adobo and sinigang were deeply ingrained in Filipino culture and were often considered prototypical Filipino dishes. In contrast, dishes like ramen and spaghetti, which had foreign origins, may have been categorized as more ambiguous, reflecting the hybridization of Filipino culinary culture.

Despite the widespread use of prototype theory in categorizing objects and concepts (Rosch, 1975), the categorization of food had been underexplored, particularly in terms of how adolescents perceived food. Previous studies focused primarily on adult categorization (Carvalho, 2015), bilingual food categorization (de la Fuente, 2018), or the impact of cross-cultural exchanges (Peltier & Allen, 2019). However, few studies have examined how adolescents, especially in the context of Filipino food, perceive food and categorize it as either Filipino or non-Filipino. This study extended prototype theory into the realm of cultural hybridity, addressing how globalization affected food perceptions and how their cultural experiences shaped adolescent food categorization.

Filling this gap was essential for understanding how food, cognition, and culture intersect in the context of adolescent identity formation. This study not only contributed to the field of cognitive linguistics but also offered practical implications for educators. Understanding how adolescents categorize food could inform the development of teaching strategies that foster cultural pride and identity development. By examining how adolescents mentally categorized food, a deeper understanding of the intersection between globalization and local traditions was gained, providing valuable insights into the multicultural identities of Filipino adolescents. Furthermore, the findings of this study contributed to a broader understanding of cultural hybridity and the implications of food categorization in an increasingly globalized world.

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## 2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, which was ideal for examining how Filipino adolescents categorized Filipino and non-Filipino dishes. The research aimed to provide a clear description of how participants perceived food in terms of prototypicality and fuzziness. Descriptive research was appropriate because it allowed for the collection of data regarding adolescents' perceptions of food without manipulating any variables. The survey questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection, enabling the study to measure and quantify how adolescents categorized different dishes. The design was well-suited to answering the research questions about the relative prototypicality and fuzziness of Filipino and non-Filipino dishes.

The respondents of the study consisted of 30 Senior High School learners aged 16 to 18 years. This age group was chosen because adolescents are at a stage of cognitive development and identity formation, making them ideal for examining how they categorize food within their cultural context. Random sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring the sample was representative of the population. The sample size of 30 respondents was suitable for identifying trends and conducting an in-depth analysis of the data, while remaining manageable for this type of research.

The primary data collection tool was a survey questionnaire that included thirty (30) Filipino and non-Filipino dishes. The questionnaire asked respondents to rank the dishes from 1 to 30, with 1 representing the most prototypical Filipino dish and 30 representing the least prototypical or most "fuzzy" dish. The dishes selected were a combination of traditional Filipino foods, such as adobo, sinigang, and lumpia, as well as popular non-Filipino dishes like ramen, spaghetti, and pizza. This allowed the study to assess how adolescents perceive the distinction between Filipino and non-Filipino food categories. A pilot test of the instrument was conducted prior to data collection to ensure that the questions were clear and the ranking system was intuitive for the respondents.

The data collection process began with a thorough orientation session, designed to ensure that respondents fully understood the purpose and procedures of the study. This session was crucial for ensuring that the participants were comfortable and well-informed before engaging with the survey. During the orientation, the researcher provided a clear explanation of the study's objectives, which focused on understanding how Filipino adolescents perceive and categorize Filipino and non-Filipino dishes. The researcher emphasized the significance of the study in exploring the relationship between food categorization and cultural identity, as well as how these perceptions reflect the broader influence of globalization on Filipino culture.

A key aspect of the orientation involved introducing the ranking procedure that would be used in the survey. The respondents were instructed on how to rank each dish from 1 to 30, with 1 representing the most prototypical Filipino dish and 30 representing the least prototypical or most fuzzy dish. To ensure that participants understood the ranking system, the researcher explained the concept of prototypicality—how certain dishes are considered central to Filipino cuisine due to their cultural significance—and fuzziness, where some dishes straddle the line between Filipino and non-Filipino categories, resulting from globalization and cultural hybridization.

The researcher provided practical examples to illustrate how to assign ranks to dishes. For example, adobo was described as a classic, central Filipino dish, which respondents might rank higher on the scale. In contrast, dishes like ramen or pizza, despite being popular in the Philippines, could be viewed as more peripheral or "fuzzy" due to their foreign origins. The researcher also emphasized that the ranking process was based on their personal perceptions and cultural experiences, giving them the flexibility to rank the dishes in a way that best reflected their understanding.

To ensure clarity and consistency in responses, the researcher took time to clarify any doubts the participants had during the orientation. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to answer questions, offer further explanations, and address any confusion regarding the ranking system or the specific terms being used in the survey. By doing this, the researcher helped minimize misunderstandings that could potentially skew the data. The participants were encouraged to ask questions and were reassured that the ranking was subjective, based on their views of Filipino cuisine and food classification.

Following the orientation, the survey was administered face-to-face to the 30 respondents. This format was chosen to ensure that the researcher could immediately assist with any misunderstandings or difficulties that participants may encounter while completing the survey. Face-to-face administration allowed the researcher to observe the respondents' reactions and ensure that they were completing the rankings accurately. Additionally, the researcher could provide real-time clarification, ensuring that respondents fully understood how to rank the dishes correctly. This personal interaction also helped establish a comfortable environment for the respondents, fostering openness and engagement.

Once all 30 respondents completed the survey, the researcher collected the surveys for analysis. The researcher ensured that all responses were recorded accurately and stored confidentially. The completed surveys were then coded for data entry and analysis, ensuring that the confidentiality of the respondents was maintained throughout the process. The data were organized and prepared for statistical analysis, specifically focusing on the rankings provided by the respondents, which would later be used to identify patterns and categorize dishes according to their perceived prototypicality and fuzziness.

The analysis of the data primarily used median and rank as statistical tools. The median was calculated to determine the central tendency of rankings for each dish, identifying which dishes were perceived as the most prototypical and which were seen as the most ambiguous or "fuzzy." The rankings were also used to categorize dishes according to their prototypicality, allowing for a clear comparison between Filipino and non-Filipino dishes. This approach provided a straightforward means of identifying the dishes that were most commonly regarded as central to Filipino cuisine, as well as those that were considered more difficult to categorize due to their foreign influences.

In conducting the study, several ethical considerations were followed to ensure the rights and confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent before participation. The respondents were informed of the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Adolescents under the age of 18 provided consent, which was obtained with the approval of their parents or guardians. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher ensured that all personal information was kept confidential, and no identifying details were recorded on the survey forms. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the respondents were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Data were stored securely, and the results were presented in aggregate form to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

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### 3. Results

This section presents the findings from the survey conducted to explore how Filipino adolescents perceive Filipino and non-Filipino dishes in terms of prototypicality and fuzziness. The first part addresses the prototypical Filipino dishes, focusing on which dishes adolescents view as central representations of Filipino cuisine. The second part delves into the dishes that adolescents find "fuzzy" or "vague", particularly in terms of categorizing them as either Filipino or non-Filipino. These findings provide insights into how cultural identity, globalization, and food categorization intersect in the minds of Filipino youth. The results are presented with supporting data from the survey rankings, which were analyzed using median values to capture the centrality of dishes within Filipino food culture.

#### *The Top Five Filipino Dishes Adolescents Perceive as Prototypical Representations of Filipino Cuisine*

The first research question sought to identify the top five Filipino dishes that adolescents perceive as prototypical representations of Filipino cuisine. Based on the survey responses, the dishes most frequently identified as prototypical were Pork Adobo, Dinuguan, and Lechon. These dishes were ranked by their median values, with Pork Adobo emerging as the most prototypical Filipino dish in the minds of the adolescents.

Table 1 shows that Pork Adobo received the lowest median ranking of 1.5, indicating its position as the most prototypical Filipino dish. This result reflects the strong consensus among the respondents that Pork Adobo is central to Filipino cuisine. Dinuguan and Lechon were tied with a median ranking of 5, indicating that these dishes are also strongly identified with Filipino food, though slightly less central than Adobo. Lumpiang Shanghai and Balut were ranked fourth, with a median of 7.5, reflecting their importance in Filipino food culture but suggesting they are not as universally recognized as the top three.

Table 1

*Top Five Prototypical Filipino Dishes Selected by the Respondents*

Dish	Median	Rank
Pork Adobo	1.5	1
Dinuguan	5	2
Lechon	5	2
Lumpiang Shanghai	7.5	4
Balut	7.5	4

#### ***The Top Five Dishes Adolescents Find "Fuzzy" or "Vague" in Terms of Categorization as Either Filipino or Non-Filipino***

The second research question explored which dishes adolescents find "fuzzy" or "vague" in terms of categorizing them as Filipino or non-Filipino. These dishes were perceived as ambiguous or hybridized due to their foreign influences, making them harder to classify as distinctly Filipino.

Table 2 shows that Carbonara was ranked 26th with a median of 24.5, marking it as one of the most fuzzy dishes in terms of categorization. Pizza and Hamburger followed, each with a median of 25, reflecting that these dishes, while popular in Filipino households, are generally viewed as foreign. Ham and Lasagna were ranked even lower, with Lasagna ranked 30th, suggesting that these dishes are regarded as more foreign and peripheral to Filipino food culture.

Table 2

*Top Five Prototypical Filipino Dishes Selected by the Respondents*

Dish	Median	Rank
Carbonara	24.5	26
Hamburger	25	27
Pizza	25	27
Ham	27	29
Lasagna	30	30

## **4. Discussion**

This section interprets the study's findings in light of the research questions, exploring the implications of adolescents' perceptions of prototypical Filipino dishes and their views on ambiguous or vague food items. The first part of the discussion examines how Filipino adolescents categorize prototypical dishes, such as Pork Adobo, Dinuguan, and Lechon, and explores the relationship between these dishes and cultural identity. The second part delves into the categorization of foreign dishes, such as Carbonara, Pizza, and Hamburger, which adolescents view as ambiguous and hybridized. Ultimately, the discussion examines how these categorizations impact teaching, learning, and the formation of cultural identity, highlighting the role of food in shaping self-perception and understanding of national identity within a globalized context.

#### ***Understanding Filipino Adolescents' Perceptions of Prototypical Filipino Dishes***

The results of the first research question revealed that Pork Adobo, Dinuguan, and Lechon were regarded as the top prototypical Filipino dishes. Pork Adobo, with the lowest median rank, was consistently identified as the most central representation of Filipino cuisine, aligning with its cultural prominence in Filipino food culture. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing the role of iconic dishes in reinforcing cultural identity (Villanueva, 2016).

The consistency in responses about Adobo suggests that, among adolescents, food plays a vital role in reinforcing national identity. Moreover, the presence of Dinuguan and Lechon among the top five dishes highlights the regional diversity in Filipino food culture. While Adobo might be seen as a unifying Filipino dish, Dinuguan and Lechon point to the varied, multi-regional aspects of Filipino cuisine.

The findings reflect the cultural complexity of food categorization, where dishes can possess varying levels of prototypicality depending on their geographic location, personal experience, and cultural significance. The recognition of Balut and Lumpiang Shanghai as prototypical dishes further supports the notion that Filipino cuisine is characterized by both tradition (e.g., Balut) and adaptation (e.g., Lumpiang Shanghai), with the latter reflecting more contemporary influences on the cuisine.

### ***Perceptions of "Fuzzy" or "Vague" Dishes***

The second research question examined which dishes adolescents found unclear or ambiguous in terms of categorization. The results revealed that dishes like Carbonara, Hamburger, Pizza, Ham, and Lasagna were viewed as the most ambiguous. These dishes, while widely consumed in Filipino households, were consistently categorized as foreign due to their global origins and lack of indigenous Filipino roots.

The ambiguity surrounding Carbonara, Pizza, and Hamburger indicates the influence of globalization on food categorization. As these dishes have become staples in Filipino households, particularly with the increasing presence of foreign restaurants and fast food chains, they have introduced complexities in food classification. This finding aligns with Peltier and Allen's (2019) argument that globalization challenges traditional notions of cultural boundaries and identity, including how people define national cuisine. The ranking of Lasagna and Ham at the bottom of the list reflects the perception of these dishes as more distinctly foreign and less connected to Filipino food traditions.

This fuzziness can be interpreted as part of a larger phenomenon where food hybridity—the merging of local and global culinary influences—complicates traditional categories of Filipino cuisine. Adolescents today are growing up in an environment where global food items are as familiar as traditional Filipino dishes, leading to a redefinition of what constitutes Filipino food. This insight is crucial for understanding how food categorization intersects with broader processes of cultural change and identity formation.

### ***Implications for Teaching, Learning, and Cultural Identity***

The final research question focused on the implications of food categorizations for teaching, learning, and cultural identity. The results suggest that food categorization is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, particularly for adolescents who are still developing their understanding of national identity. The findings demonstrate the potential of food to act as a vehicle for cultural learning and identity development.

In educational settings, the recognition of Pork Adobo, Lechon, and Dinuguan as prototypical Filipino dishes presents an opportunity to integrate these foods into curricular content. Educators can use these dishes as entry points for teaching not only culinary traditions but also cultural values and historical narratives. By making lessons more culturally relevant, educators can foster a deeper connection between students and their cultural heritage, increasing engagement and pride in their identity.

Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of recognizing the global influences on Filipino food culture. As globalization increasingly shapes cultural identities, recognizing the hybridity in food practices is essential for developing a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of Filipino identity. The fuzziness of dishes like Pizza and hamburgers signals a need for education that embraces both local and global cultures, allowing students to understand the intersections between Filipino identity and global influences.

This approach can also be applied to promote multicultural education. The increasing popularity of foreign foods among Filipino adolescents calls for educational frameworks that recognize the fluidity of cultural boundaries, rather than attempting to define what is “Filipino” or “foreign strictly.” Such frameworks would not only teach about traditional Filipino culture but also provide students with the tools to navigate and appreciate the diverse and globalized world in which they live.

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## **5. Conclusions**

The findings of this study reveal that Filipino adolescents predominantly perceive Pork Adobo, Dinuguan, and Lechon as the most prototypical representations of Filipino cuisine, underscoring the central role of these dishes in shaping Filipino cultural identity. The high ranking of these dishes, particularly Pork Adobo, reflects their deep-rooted significance in Filipino culture, resonating with both traditional and regional food practices. In contrast, the identification of dishes like Carbonara, Pizza, and Hamburger as the most “fuzzy” or “vague” highlights the increasing influence of globalization on Filipino food categorization. These findings emphasize the growing hybridity in Filipino food culture, where foreign dishes, despite their widespread popularity, struggle to be fully integrated into the traditional concept of Filipino cuisine.

These results have significant implications for both education and the formation of cultural identity. By incorporating prototypical Filipino dishes, such as Pork Adobo, into teaching materials, educators can create more contextualized and relevant lessons that foster a deeper connection between students and their cultural heritage. Additionally, recognizing the fuzziness surrounding certain global dishes suggests the need for educational frameworks that embrace cultural hybridity, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of Filipino identity in a globalized world. This approach could not only promote multicultural awareness but also equip students with the tools to navigate and appreciate the intersection of local and global cultures. Ultimately,

understanding how Filipino adolescents categorize food can contribute to a more nuanced approach to teaching cultural identity in an increasingly interconnected world..

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## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that educators incorporate traditional Filipino dishes, such as Pork Adobo, Lechon, and Dinuguan, into their curricula to enhance students' understanding of Filipino culture and identity. These dishes, being central to Filipino cuisine, can serve as cultural touchstones in lessons related to history, culture, and culinary arts. In addition, multicultural education programs should be introduced to help students recognize the impact of globalization on food culture, encouraging them to understand the fluidity between local and global influences. Schools should also embrace cultural hybridity, integrating foreign foods such as Pizza and hamburgers into lessons, as these dishes are increasingly consumed in Filipino households and reflect the modern evolution of Filipino food culture.

Moreover, future research should explore how food categorization varies across socio-economic backgrounds, regions, and ethnicities within the Philippines. Such studies would offer a deeper understanding of the intersection between food, identity, and globalization. Policymakers and cultural institutions can also play a key role in promoting a more inclusive view of Filipino cuisine by recognizing and celebrating hybrid dishes that represent the fusion of local and global influences. This approach would ensure that Filipino food culture remains dynamic, relevant, and inclusive in the face of globalization, helping to preserve and promote cultural identity while acknowledging the diverse food practices emerging in the modern world..

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