How to Read a Foreign Menu

Margret Wallace
Iowa State College

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There's something fascinating about trying new things. Perhaps that is why you and thousands of other people crowd into foreign restaurants every year to stare blankly at strange menus.

However, there is just as much thrill and far less embarrassment, to say nothing of fewer stomach aches, if you can read enough of the menu to know what you are getting.

Not all foreign words are on foreign menus. Two phrases, originally French, have become a part of American menus. Table d'hote designates a complete dinner ordered at once. If you don't know what the words on the menus mean, an easy way out is to pick by price or better yet, choose a meat dish or table d'hote which you recognize. You can be fairly sure that the rest of the meal will be appropriate.

A La Carte

This type of menu is not nearly as interesting as ordering a la carte, which means, dish by dish. Realizing this, most restaurants specializing in foreign foods will suggest ordering a la carte so that you can try a greater variety.

It would be impossible to learn the names of all the foods which might be offered. It's even more difficult when the foods could be offered in four or five different languages. The most practical plan would be to learn general rules, or the most common words and add to them a great deal of imagination.

Scandinavian and German words are easiest. Many of our own words are derived from the same sources as those languages are. Although they might not look the same, the sound might be a clue, so say the words out loud.

For instance, the Danish word for bread is brod which is pronounced even more like bread than it is spelled. If you can learn the word for potato, which in Danish is "kartoffel" but in Norwegian is "poteter", it will help you. There are many potato dishes. There is brøndede, for browned potatoes and bogt, for boiled, in Danish. The words in Norwegian and Swedish are similar and can be recognized instantly.

Common foods in Scandinavian restaurants would include ost (cheese) and fish variations. A famous Norwegian dish is called fiskesuppe med fiskeboller.

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For April Showers

Foreign Menus (Continued from Page 3)

You've probably guessed that it is fish soup with fish balls.

Lefse is another unique Norwegian dish. It has no translation because it is so traditionally Norwegian. It is a dessert waffle which they eat with their coffee.

Almost certain to be seen on a Swedish menu is lutefisk. This is easily recognized as some sort of fish and connoisseurs consider it a delicious dried fish.

Dutch restaurants are uncommon, but not because their food is poor. Parallels between their words and ours are harder to find. You would be sure to find gekookte aardappelen on any menu, for they always have boiled potatoes.

Dutch cheese, kaas, is a familiar delicacy. A kale and sausage dish which they call boerenkool met rookworst is another one of the Dutch favorites. Another source of one of our words can be found in their taart, which is a cake.

Italian dishes are more familiar to us in our daily living. You don't have to go to an Italian restaurant in a big city to find macaroni ala' Italiana.

Many times we see ravioli, filled dough squares. Antipasto is another familiar word which indicates assorted appetizers.

There are many famous Italian desserts, too. Among them are zabaglioni, a foamy wine dessert, and castagne, a combination of chestnuts with whipped cream.

The same sort of familiarity is to be found with Oriental food. China's chow mein is one of America's favorites. Less well known perhaps, but even more intriguing are such delicacies as pei tan, preserved eggs; a lobster omelet called lung fa yung; an almond soup known as hang yang wu; and fan, which is their word for rice.

Mexican food is always a treat in the United States. Mexican restaurants get a huge business from the sale of frijoles, a Mexican bean dish, and tortillas, which are crisp pancakes served with any or all meals.

French food, as everyone knows, is the ultimate in foreign foods. Here again there are parallels in words so that certain foods can be recognized. Hors d'oeuvres are assorted appetizers which are usually followed by soup such as soupe vert, made of greens. A salad of mixed green vegetables is called salade franaise because it has become so typical. Their word for potatoes is pommes de terra. Crepes suzette are a dessert favorite. They are like pancakes with sweet sauce on them. French pastries can always be counted on to be not only good eating but fun.

As a rule, however, French menus are so varied that a good idea would be to swallow your pride and ask the waiter for help before ordering.

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