

# Analysis of the perception of foreign tourists about Turkish cuisine through the word association test: The case of Cappadocia region

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Turkish cuisine,  
Perception,  
Word association test,  
Cappadocia

Countries, which are rich in historical, natural, and cultural, are advantageous in terms of tourism compared to other countries. Cuisines, one of the cultural richness, attracted the attention of tourists in recent years. With its historical and cultural background, Turkish cuisine has always made itself known amongst the world's cuisines. Considering the increasing popularity of Turkish cuisine; of foreign tourists coming to Turkey, their thoughts about Turkish cuisine has become extremely important. The aim of this study is to determine opinions of foreign tourists coming to Cappadocia region of Nevşehir about Turkish cuisine. In order to determine their decision Word Association Test (WAT) was applied. As a result, Turkish cuisine offers delicious, spicy, various, healthy foods, but is not well-known.

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## 1. Introduction

People can participate in the tourism movement in order to see the authentic and cultural values they have not seen before and gain experience (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009). As a result, there is a motivation for people to experience the local foods and beverages of a country (Arslan, 2010; Ting et al., 2019). The desire of today's tourists to recognize different cultures causes the national cuisine cultures to be the center of attention. This may also affect the travel motivations of tourists. Tourists organize trips not only to see different places but also to experience food from different cultures. Experiencing foods belonging to different cultures can be interpreted not only as a physiological need but also as a sociological reading of culture over the cuisine (Bucak, Yiğit, and Okat, 2019). Tourists in increasing gastronomic tourism mobility often try local dishes in activities to get to know different cultures (Fields, 2002; Smith & Xiao, 2008; Seyitoğlu and Çalışkan, 2014; Yuan, 2015; Ahmad et al., 2020).

Although the action of eating is important for people to continue their lives, the content of the food, how it is prepared and served differs from each society (Albayrak, 2013). These differences create the features of the cuisines and cause them to differ from other cuisines (Sanchez-Canizares and Castillo-Canalejo, 2015; Tseng et al., 2015). Differences among cuisines create an element of attraction in tourism marketing (Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007). Tourism is one of the important means of economic, social, human, and political cooperation between countries. Tourism is also an industry that enables communities to get to know each other better with social and cultural values (Şanlıer, 2005). In tourism mobility; cuisines, one of the cultural values, come to the fore. Tourists experience through the national's cuisine and as a result of these experiences they start sympathizing with the country and the society (Çakıcı and Eser, 2016). In fact, national cuisines can also be used as a marketing tool in promoting the country (Gökdemir, 2009).

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Research Paper

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At this point, Turkish cuisine is considered as one of the well-known cuisines in the world (Belge, 2001). Turkish cuisine, with the diversity of Central Asian and Anatolian lands, the interaction of Turks with other nations in the historical process. New flavors that developed in the palaces of the empires such as the Seljuk and the Ottoman, played a role in gaining the new structure of the Turkish cuisine (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2020). The main general features of Turkish cuisine are (Önçel, 2015):

- Pastries have an important role in Turkish cuisine.
- Vegetables use in Turkish cuisine; it is common to cook it with meat, onions, tomatoes, and tomato paste.
- Olive oil is frequently used in Turkish cuisine. Olive oil is mostly used in Western Anatolian cuisine. The use of butter and animal oils is also common in Turkish cuisine.
- Spices are common in Turkish cuisine. Although it varies from region to region, spices such as chili peppers, mint, and thyme are used.

When the Turkish cuisine is examined in terms of its general characteristics; it is a cuisine based on agricultural and animal products in general, differing in geographical regions, special days and ceremonies and social structure in the historical development process and the effects of the religion of Islam are also seen (Güler, 2007). There are traditional foods that are important for the nutrition of countries with culinary and food culture and which are known to be national-specific (Sormaz et al., 2019). Traditional tastes that come to mind when it comes to Turkish cuisine; examples of foods and beverages such as pita, lahmacun, meatballs, buttermilk, baklava, sherbets, döner, and kebabs (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2020).

Knowing the opinions of foreign tourists coming from different cultures about Turkish cuisine can provide clues about the expectations, wishes, and needs of the tourists. With the word association test used in this study, the general judgments of the participants about Turkish cuisine can be determined. One of the main purposes of the word association test is to reveal instant thoughts about a topic. With this study, it is planned to fill the gap in the literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study is; to determine the opinions of foreign tourists visiting the Cappadocia region of Nevşehir

about Turkish cuisine with the word association test (WAT).

## 2. Literature Review

When the literature on the subject is examined, many studies have been carried out in which Turkish cuisine is evaluated from the perspective of foreign tourists. These studies and their results are listed below.

Akman and Hasipek (1999) examined the attitudes and behaviors of foreign tourists about Turkish cuisine in their study. Tourists who participated in the study, among the reasons for coming to Turkey, the Turkish cuisine has taken seventh place. It was determined that 94% of the tourists had consumed any food or beverage belonging to Turkish cuisine before. Özdemir and Kınay (2004) conducted a study in order to determine the views of foreign tourists on Turkish cuisine. Tourists participating in the study gave a positive opinion about Turkish cuisine in general. Tourists described Turkish cuisine as delicious, diverse, interesting, hygienic, and nutritious. Some of the tourists, on the other hand, stated negative opinions that Turkish cuisine is fatty, too much tomato paste, and spicy. Şanlıer (2005) conducted a study to examine the views of local and foreign tourists on Turkish cuisine. As a result, it has been determined that foreign tourists find Turkish cuisine delicious, interesting, fatty, and spicy. Albayrak (2013) tried to determine the views of tourists from different nationalities on Turkish cuisine. According to the data obtained, tourists; Although they find Turkish food delicious, fragrant, appetizing, satisfying, good-looking, different, healthy, and safe, they also found it too tomato paste, spicy, fatty and calorie. Birdir and Akgöl (2015) have carried out their study they evaluated the gastronomic experience of foreign tourists visiting Turkey. In the results of the study; The food tasting request specific cause of Turkish cuisine to foreign tourists prefer Turkey have determined that it is in third place. It was emphasized that the first choice of foreign tourists participating in the study was restaurants serving local foods. Çakıcı and Eser (2016) evaluated Turkish cuisine from the perspectives of foreign kitchen chefs in their studies. In this context, foreign cuisine chefs have liked Turkish cuisine in terms of portion, spice variety, nutritional value, quality, and taste. On the other hand, the chefs have negative opinions about Turkish cuisine; hygiene, digestive difficulties, and excessive use of sugar.

### 3. Methodology

The word association test (WAT) was applied in order to determine the opinions of foreign tourists about Turkish cuisine. Participants who have tasted Turkish cuisine were included in the study. As part of the study, the word association test was applied to 59 foreign tourists. Data collected between 10 January to 1 March in 2019, through face-to-face interviews with tourists. The data analyzed in a qualitative data analysis program. The word association test is defined as the “measurement and evaluation method that tries to determine the meaning and adequacy levels of the information and relationships that arise in the consciousness of the participants towards certain events and facts” (Işıklı, Taşdere & Göz, 2011). Özatlı and Bahar (2010), defined the word association test as “one of the measurement and evaluation techniques that enables the observation of the cognitive structure and the network related to the information formed in the mind and determines whether the relationships between the concepts in memory are sufficient and meaningful”. In recent years, studies have been carried out in the field of tourism through the word association test (Keskin & Örgün, 2015; Keskin, Örgün & Akbulut, 2017; Akyurt, 2019; Onat and Keskin, 2019, Karakuş, Onat & Güneren-Özdemir, 2020). In the word association test used as a data collection tool; Turkish cuisine is listed 10 times in a row on a page. Foreign tourists participating in the study

**Table 1:** Demographic Features of the Participants

Variables	n:59	%
Gender		
Female	22	37.3
Male	37	62.7
Country	14	23.7
United States of America	8	13.6
South Korea	8	13.6
Germany	6	10.1
United Kingdom	6	10.1
Russia	5	8.5
China	4	6.8
Italy	4	6.8
France	1	1.7
Ukraine	1	1.7
Spain	1	1.7
Lebanon	1	1.7
Egypt	14	23.7

Source: Authors

were informed about the word association test and during the application of the test, participants were asked to write the relevant concepts come to mind within 30 seconds. The 30 second time period was determined as the most suitable time period in the pretests performed in previous studies (Kempa

and Nicolas, 1983; Yalvaç, 2008; Polat, 2013; Keskin and Örgün, 2015).

### 4. Results

The opinions of foreign tourists about Turkish cuisine were carried out with 59 participants with the word association test. The analysis results are given below.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of foreign tourists participating in the word association test. 62.7% (n: 37) of the participants are male and 37.3% (n: 22) are female. The majority of the participants; 23.7% (n: 14) came from countries such as the United States of America, 13.6% (n: 8) South Korean, and Germany, 10.1% (n: 6) from the United Kingdom, and Russia.

**Table 2:** Word Association Test Results of Turkish Cuisine

Words	Total Participant	Number of Participants Answering	Number of Participants Who Left Empty
Word 1	59	59	0
Word 2	59	59	0
Word 3	59	59	0
Word 3	59	59	0
Word 4	59	59	0
Word 5	59	52	7
Word 6	59	50	9
Word 7	59	44	15
Word 8	59	37	22
Word 9	59	28	31
Word 10	59	19	40
Total Number of Words	466		

Source: Authors.

In Table 2; It is seen that 59 foreign tourists participating in the study associate Turkish cuisine with 466 words. Participants were able to fully participate in the first, second, third, and fourth words while establishing a word relation with Turkish cuisine. It is seen that the participants started to have difficulty in finding words related to Turkish cuisine starting from the fifth word. This reveals that foreign tourists can say at least four words associated with Turkish cuisine.

In Table 3, 56 words, which foreign tourists think are related to Turkish cuisine, have been obtained. 52 words not related to Turkish cuisine were not included in the analysis. The first five words considering the Turkish cuisine are; delicious (n:42), spicy (n:30), not well known (n:27), diverse (n:24), and healthy (n:17). Tourist perception of Turkish cuisine, it as cuisine that offers delicious, spicy, varied, healthy food, but is not well known.



word was the fact that the participants had "delicious" foods, one of the greatest features of Turkish cuisine. The second word that repeats the most is the word "spicy". Although Turkish cuisine varies from region to region, it is thought that this word is among the most repetitive words due to the high usage of spices. The word "not well known" is among the words obtained within the scope of the study. It was also revealed in this study that there are deficiencies in the promotion and marketing of Turkish cuisine, which has been discussed for many years. The word "need promotion" also supports this situation, although it is not among the most repeated words. Besides the historical and cultural richness of Turkish cuisine, another outstanding feature is the richness of food and drink. This situation was supported by the fourth most repeating word "diverse" in the study. The fifth most repeating word was the word "healthy". The experience of Turkey's four seasons and each season's unique food that is thought to make healthy food advantageous for the Turkish cuisine.

When the negative words among the words expressed about Turkish cuisine are examined; words related to the promotion of Turkish cuisine and sense of taste come to the fore. Such negative word groups are also seen as thoughts that need to be examined carefully.

Positive words were spoken about Turkish cuisine; written and visual tools should be included in the promotions of Turkish cuisine abroad. In this way, the interest of other people in Turkish cuisine can be increased. Comparisons can be made by performing such studies in different destinations in Turkey. In addition, after experiencing and experiencing the food of Turkish cuisine, participants can take a word relationship test to see the changes in between.

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**Keywords:** Turkish cuisine, Perception, Word association test, Cappadocia

**Authors**

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
<i>Serkan Yiğit:</i>	<i>Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft,</i>	<i>60%</i>
<i>Nilüfer Şahin Perçin:</i>	<i>Writing - Review &amp; Editing, Supervision,</i>	<i>40%</i>

**Author statement:** Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Ethics Committee Satatement: This paper does not required ethics committee report.**

**Justification:** This research was conducted before January 1, 2020. For this reason, it is exempt from ""ULAKBIM TRDizin"" criterion.