

A Structural and Semantic Analysis of English Loanwords in Mandarin on Weibo

Cicik Arista

cicikarista@unesa.ac.id

Harisa Ismi Dina

Harissa.21006@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Surabaya

ABSTRACT

This study presents a structural and semantic analysis of English loanwords in Mandarin on Weibo. Although previous research has extensively investigated phonological adaptation and etymological origins, the structural patterns and semantic meanings of English loanwords in Mandarin in digital communication remain underexplored. This study aims to describe the structural formation based on Xing's classification and denotative/connotative meanings based on Barthes' semiotic framework. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed. Data were collected from Weibo posts in the fourth quarter of 2025 through non-participatory observation and web scraping, resulting in 150 English loanwords in Mandarin for analysis. The findings reveal three structural patterns. Full phonetic translation dominates, followed by phonetic translation with a Mandarin morpheme, while mixed sound-meaning translation occurs least often. This distribution indicates that phonological adaptation is the primary strategy for loanword formation on social media. Regarding meaning, connotative meaning was identified through contextual analysis of metaphorical, slang, or culturally charged expressions within each post, such as 披萨 (pīsa/pizza) used to express romantic feelings in fan community posts. Denotative meaning was assigned when the loanword referred literally to its dictionary definition. Denotative use is more prevalent than connotative use, suggesting that Weibo users primarily employ loanwords for referential purposes. Connotative meanings, though fewer, are significant as they demonstrate creative repurposing for emotional and cultural expression. The study contributes to Mandarin language teaching by showing how English loanwords can serve as accessible vocabulary and how understanding connotation helps learners grasp cultural nuances in digital communication.

Keywords: English loanwords in Mandarin; Weibo; Structural Analysis; Semantic Analysis; Denotation; Connotation

INTRODUCTION

Language is dynamic and continues to evolve along with the needs of its speakers (Thomason, 2015). This development is inseparable from language contact, which occurs when people from different language backgrounds interact. In an open

society, language contact gives birth to the process of absorbing foreign language elements into the recipient language, known as loanwords. Loanwords are defined as words from other languages that are absorbed and adjusted to the rules of the receiving language, both in terms of spelling, pronunciation, and meaning (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009). As stated by Xin (2022), loanwords represent cross-cultural communication in a language, showing that language is not purely from one source but undergoes element transfer due to intercultural contact.

Mandarin, as one of the languages with the largest number of speakers worldwide, is not immune to the influence of foreign languages, especially English. Globalization and the intensity of cultural exchanges between English-speaking countries and China have accelerated this absorption process. In the last two decades, thousands of English loanwords have entered Chinese, not only at the lexical level but also affecting its morphosyntactic aspects (Treffers-Daller, 2019). Recent research shows that loanwords emerging in the digital age undergo semantic transformations during cross-cultural integration, reflecting changes in social values and technological innovations (Mambetalieva, Zhang, & Osmonova, 2025). The process of absorbing words from English into Chinese occurs through various adaptation methods, including sound, meaning, and writing form (Kang, 2018). In addition to adaptation methods, loanwords in Chinese have specific structural formation patterns that distinguish them from original Chinese vocabulary (Xing, 2003).

Unlike traditional sources such as dictionaries or textbooks, where loanwords appear after a time lag and undergo formal standardization, social media accelerates the emergence and spread of loanwords dramatically. On platforms like Weibo, millions of users create, adopt, and modify loanwords simultaneously, often without official approval (Mi et al., 2025). This digital environment allows loanwords to develop connotations and figurative uses that are rarely documented in traditional lexical sources. For instance, a loanword like 披萨 (pīsa/pizza) can be used metaphorically on Weibo to express romantic feelings in fan community posts, a usage absent from any dictionary. Thus, analyzing loanwords on social media reveals dynamic and creative aspects of language use that traditional sources cannot capture.

Social media has become a major arena for the development and spread of the word absorption, including in Chinese. Weibo, as one of the largest social media platforms in China, has a wide reach among the younger generation, especially millennials and Generation Z, which is the main motor of language innovation in the digital age (Weibo, 2026). Research on the sinicization pathway of English words on social media with a Weibo case study found that phonetic transcription was the most dominant adaptation strategy, while hybrid and semantic lending also reflected the unique characteristics of the Chinese script system (Dina & Hu, 2025).

Furthermore, Mi et al. (2025) developed a method of identifying absorbed words in social media texts and found that new absorbed words appearing on platforms

such as Weibo and Weixin often do not follow traditional lexical borrowing rules. Jia (2024) research on the pragmatic borrowing of the English politeness marker *please* into Chinese on social media also proves that the word absorption not only undergoes a change in form but also a change in pragmatic function, which has an impact on the meaning of its use in daily communication. In the context of the study of meaning in digital content, Maulida (2024) shows that uploads on social media platforms not only have a literal denotation meaning but also an implied connotation meaning in the form of sarcasm, criticism, and emotional expression.

Previous research on English absorption words in Chinese has focused more on phonological, etymological, or adaptation methods. Fu and Shen (2022) examined the transmutation of absorbed words based on the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th Edition) and found that English was the largest contributor to absorption words (67.07%), with the absorption word structure divided into four categories: semi-free transliteration translated words, Chinese morpheme word plus transliteration, free transliteration words, and letter words. This research makes an important contribution to understanding the diversity of etymologies of words absorbed, but the data sources are limited to dictionaries so they do not reflect the use of vibrant and dynamic language in social media. Astrida Yanti Bestari et al. (2018) examined the lexicon of English absorption into Chinese from a phonological and semantic review, focusing on sound changes and changes in the form of meaning (expanding, narrowing, and total). This study found that English absorption occurs by imitating speech sounds, but has not touched the structural aspects of the formation of absorption words comprehensively. Meanwhile, Karsono (2014) highlights the relationship between the development of vocabulary absorption and cultural change, but using data sources from books so that it has not reached actual data from social media use.

From the presentation, several research gaps were identified. First, previous studies have tended to use data sources in the form of dictionaries, textbooks, or corpus, while the use of social media as a source of data that reflects the actual and natural language of native speakers is still very limited. Second, in terms of study focus, most of the research emphasizes more on phonological, etymological, or adaptation method aspects (Miao, 2005), while the structural aspects of the absorption word formation according to the classification of Xing's (2003) which distinguishes between (1) the full phonetic translation structure, (2) the partial structure of sound and meaning translation, and (3) the phonetic translation structure with the addition of Chinese morphemes has not been extensively studied in depth on data from Social Media. Third, the aspect of the meaning of the word absorption, especially the distinction between the meaning of denotation and connotation in the framework of (Barthes, 1968) semiotics, has not received adequate attention in the study of Chinese absorption words on social media. In fact, understanding meaning is very crucial in the context of language learning, considering that the use of absorbed words on social media is often not literal and loaded with cultural nuances.

Based on these gaps, this study offers the following novelties. First, this study uses data sources from Weibo user uploads in the 4th quarter of 2025, a period with high user activity. Second, in contrast to previous research that tended to focus on one aspect (phonology, etymology, or adaptation methods), this study simultaneously examines two aspects that are still rarely studied, namely the structure of formation and the meaning of the word absorption. Third, this study integrates the structure theory of words absorbed from (Xing, 2003) and the theory of denotation-connotation meaning from (Barthes, 1968), an approach that has not been widely used in the study of Chinese words absorption on social media. Thus, this study aims to (1) describe the structure of the formation of English absorption words in Chinese on Weibo posts based on the classification of (Xing, 2003), and (2) describe the meaning of the use of the absorption word by distinguishing between the meaning of denotation and connotation based on the semiotic framework of Barthes (1968).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Studies

The phenomenon of English loanwords in Mandarin has been extensively studied, yet research using social media data remains limited. Fu and Shen (2022) analyzed 504 loanwords in the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th Edition) and found that English contributed the largest proportion (67.07%), with loanword structures divided into four categories: semi-free transliteration, transliteration with Mandarin morpheme, free transliteration, and letter words. However, dictionary-based data cannot capture how loanwords are actually used in daily communication, nor can it reveal the creative, figurative functions that emerge on social media.

Similarly, Astrida Yanti Bestari, Rejeki Urip, and Komala Sari (2018) examined English loanwords in Mandarin from phonological and semantic perspectives, identifying 164 loanwords with 149 undergoing sound changes. A critical weakness of this study is its reliance on textbooks rather than authentic language use, leaving structural formation and meaning in natural contexts unexplored. In the context of digital media, Hermawan (2023), (Indriyani et al. (2024), and Lestari, Imaniar, and Oktaviani (2025) have examined borrowing, code mixing, and vocabulary learning in Indonesian and English contexts. Across all these studies, a consistent pattern emerges: research on loanwords relies heavily on traditional data sources such as dictionaries and textbooks, while social media remains underexplored. This gap is significant because social media accelerates loanword emergence and enables figurative uses that never appear in dictionaries for instance, the loanword 酷 (kù), borrowed from English "cool", has shifted from its literal meaning "cold" to a slang meaning "stylish" on Weibo.

Despite these contributions, three gaps remain. First, previous studies predominantly used dictionaries or textbooks as data sources, not social media. Second, most research focused on phonological or etymological aspects rather than

structural formation and meaning. Third, studies applying (Barthes' (1968) semiotic framework to loanword analysis are scarce. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing English loanwords in Mandarin on Weibo, focusing on structural formation and denotative-connotative meanings.

Loanword Structural Formation

(Xing (2003) classifies Mandarin loanword structures into three patterns. The first is full phonetic translation, where Mandarin characters are selected solely based on their phonetic similarity to the source word without regard to meaning, such as 咖啡 (kāfēi) from coffee. The second is mixed sound-meaning translation, which combines phonetic transcription on some characters and semantic translation on others, such as 摩托车 (mótuōchē) from motorcycle. The third is phonetic translation with a Mandarin morpheme, where a semantic classifier is added after phonetic transcription, such as 沙发椅 (shāfāyǐ) from sofa with the added morpheme 椅 (yǐ) meaning 'chair'. This study adopts Xing's classification to analyze the structural patterns of English loanwords found on Weibo.

Denotative and Connotative Meaning

Barthes (1968) distinguishes two levels of meaning in his semiotic framework. Denotation is the first order of signification, representing the literal, explicit, and dictionary definition of a word (Fatimah, 2020). Connotation is the second order of signification, where the expression plane is formed by the denotative sign system, producing associative, subjective, and culturally bound meanings. To avoid subjective interpretation, a loanword is classified as connotative when it meets at least one of the following criteria: (1) used metaphorically, (2) functions as slang with evaluative meaning, (3) carries emotional or culturally specific meaning beyond its literal definition, or (4) appears in fan community posts where playful language is conventional. Denotative meaning is assigned when the loanword refers literally to its dictionary definition without any figurative extension. In the context of social media, loanwords often carry connotative meanings beyond their literal definitions, particularly in fan community posts and metaphorical expressions. This study applies Barthes' framework with the stated criteria to distinguish between denotative and connotative uses of English loanwords on Weibo.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. A qualitative approach was chosen to understand and describe in depth the phenomenon of the use of English loanwords in Mandarin on social media Weibo Moleong, 2019; Sugiyono, 2008. The sample consists of 150 loanwords extracted from 129 sentences. This number is considered sufficient for a qualitative study because the

goal is not statistical generalization but theoretical saturation, where additional data no longer reveals new structural or semantic patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The source of data for this study is the uploads of Weibo users in the 4th quarter of 2025 (October to December). The sampling criteria were: (1) the post must contain a word identified as an English loanword in Mandarin based on online dictionaries (Pleco and MDBG), (2) the post must be written in Mandarin Chinese, (3) the post must be publicly accessible, and (4) the post must be from Q4 2025 to ensure data currency. Posts that were retweets or replies were excluded to avoid duplicate content. The data was in the form of sentences containing English loanwords in Mandarin, with a total of 150 loanwords extracted from 129 sentences.

Instrument and Procedure

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself who acts as a data collector, analyst, and data interpreter (Moleong, 2019). Supporting instruments include documentation sheets to record absorption word data and category codes, as well as online dictionaries (Pleco and MDBG Chinese Dictionary) to verify the status of loanword. Data collection is carried out through two techniques. First, non-participant observation was carried out by observing Weibo users' uploads without direct interaction (Nasution, 2014). Second, the web scraping technique is carried out using the Selenium Python library to collect data automatically based on predetermined keywords (Josi et al., 2014; Dwicahyo & Indah Ratnasari, 2023). To ensure data reliability and avoid irrelevant data, the web scraping process followed these steps: (a) keywords were derived from previous loanword studies to target relevant posts, (b) only original posts (not retweets or replies) were scraped, (c) the scraping script filtered posts by date (October-December 2025), and (d) all scraped data were manually verified by the researcher using the Pleco and MDBG dictionaries to confirm loanword status and eliminate false positives (e.g., homophones or non-loanword uses). The data collection procedure was carried out in four steps: (1) identifying relevant keywords from previous research, (2) running the Selenium script to retrieve uploads for the period October to December 2025, (3) storing the collected data in Excel format containing usernames, dates, sentences, loanwords, and URLs, and (4) manually verifying each potential loanword using the Pleco and MDBG dictionaries to confirm its status as a loanword.

Data Analysis

The validity of the data is tested through source triangulation and theoretical triangulation (Moleong, 2019). Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from Weibo with data from academic journals and online dictionaries. Theoretical triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of the analysis based on two theoretical frameworks: the theory of the structure that forms the absorption of words from Xing (2003) and the theory of the meaning of the

denotations of Barthes (1968). To ensure consistency in coding decisions when a loanword could potentially belong to more than one structural or meaning category, the following procedures were applied. For structural formation, each loanword was first identified based on its original English source. Then, the Mandarin characters were examined: if all characters were chosen purely for sound, it was coded as full phonetic translation; if a semantic classifier was added (e.g., 鱼 'fish', 舞 'dance'), it was coded as phonetic + morpheme; if some characters carried meaning while others carried sound, it was coded as mixed sound-meaning. Cases that did not fit these three categories (e.g., graphic loans like UFO) were noted separately. For meaning classification, the criteria established in the Literature Review were applied: a loanword was coded as denotative if it referred literally to its dictionary definition within the sentence context; it was coded as connotative if it met at least one of four criteria: (1) used metaphorically, (2) functions as slang with evaluative meaning, (3) carries emotional or culturally specific meaning beyond its literal definition, or (4) appears in fan community posts where playful language is conventional. When ambiguity occurred, the researcher consulted two independent linguists to reach consensus, and any disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Data analysis follows the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by filtering 8,000 raw sentences from web scraping into 129 sentences containing loanwords, so that 150 loanwords were obtained for analysis. Data presentation is carried out in the form of a classification table based on structural formation and meaning type, which is presented in the Results and Discussion section. Conclusions are drawn by verifying the findings during the analysis process. To reduce subjectivity in interpreting connotation, this study followed the explicit criteria stated above. In addition, each connotative classification was cross-checked against the full context of the original post (including accompanying emojis, hashtags, and user comments) to confirm that the figurative or slang meaning was indeed intended by the user. When interpretation remained ambiguous, the word was classified as denotative to avoid over-interpretation (conservative coding principle).

The final stage involves the interpretation of the pre-classified data to answer two research questions: (1) how the structure of English loanwords in Mandarin on Weibo is based on Xing's (2003) classification, and (2) what meanings (denotation or connotation) are contained in the loanword based on Barthes' (1968) semiotic framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed 150 English loanwords in Mandarin taken from Weibo users' uploads in the fourth quarter of 2025. Data were collected through web scraping using Python Selenium during October to December 2025. Based on the theoretical framework of Xing's (2003) on the structure of loanword formation and Barthes'

(1968) on denotative and connotative meanings, it was found that loanwords on Weibo show a diversity of structural patterns and variations in meaning depending on the context of its use.

In general, full phonetic translation structures were found to be the most dominant, while denotative meanings were used more often than connotative meanings. Another interesting finding is that the same loanword can have different types of meanings when used in different contexts, especially on uploads in fan communities and metaphorical phrases. Table 1 presents representative examples of the findings of this study.

Table 1. Structural Formation and Meaning of English Loanwords in Mandarin on Weibo

Code	Category	Loanword	Source	Structural Formation	Meaning Type
U1/MK/25.12.31	Food	披萨 (pīsa)	<i>pizza</i>	Full phonetic translation	Denotation
U2/MK/25.12.31	Food	披萨 (pīsa)	<i>pizza</i>	Full phonetic translation	Connotation
U1/MN/25.12.30	Beverage	奶昔 (nǎixī)	<i>milkshake</i>	Mixed sound-meaning	Denotation
U10/TEC/25.12.20	Technology	谷歌 (gǔgē)	<i>Google</i>	Full phonetic translation	Denotation
U6/TEC/25.12.20	Technology	UFO	<i>UFO</i>	Graphic loan	Connotation
U3/ENT/25.12.20	Entertainment	脱口秀 (tuōkǒuxiù)	<i>talk show</i>	Mixed sound-meaning	Denotation
U2/AM/25.12.20	Arts & Music	芭蕾舞 (bālěiwǔ)	<i>ballet</i>	Phonetic + Mandarin morpheme	Denotation

Code	Category	Loanword	Source	Structural Formation	Meaning Type
U2/TRN/25.12.20	Transportation	摩托车 (mótuōchē)	<i>motor cycle</i>	Mixed sound-meaning	Denotation
U2/MED/25.12.19	Medical	阿司匹林 (āsīpīlín)	<i>aspirin</i>	Full phonetic translation	Denotation
U1/SPO/25.12.16	Sports	保龄球 (bǎolíngqiú)	<i>bowling</i>	Phonetic + Mandarin morpheme	Denotation
U2/SPO/25.12.16	Sports	悠悠球 (yōuyōuqiú)	<i>yoyo</i>	Phonetic + Mandarin morpheme	Connotation
U1/OBJ/25.12.18	Object	沙发 (shāfā)	<i>sofa</i>	Full phonetic translation	Denotation
U3/ETC/25.12.20	Social	幽默 (yōumò)	<i>humor</i>	Mixed sound-meaning	Connotation
U1/ETC/25.10.23	Social	酷 (kù)	<i>cool</i>	Phonetic-semantic	Denotation

(Source: Weibo posts, October-December 2025; analyzed by researchers, 2026)

Structural Formation of English Loanwords in Mandarin

Based on Xing's (2003) classification, loanwords in Mandarin can be formed through three main patterns. The findings of this study show that the three patterns were found in Weibo posts, with the following characteristics of each one.

Full Phonetic Translation Structure

The first pattern is the full phonetic translation structure, which is a loanword formed by choosing a Mandarin character solely based on the *phonetic*

approximation to the source word, without considering the lexical meaning of the chosen character Xing's (2003) . This pattern is found in loanwords such as 披萨 (pīsà) from *pizza*, 谷歌 (gǔgē) from *Google*, 阿司匹林 (āsīpīlín) from *aspirin*, and 沙发 (shāfā) from *sofa*. In all of these examples, the selected character has no semantic relationship to the referent.

The dominance of this pattern in research is in line with the findings of Fu and Shen (2022) , who report that transliteration-based loanwords are the most common type in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. This shows that the most basic and easiest adaptation strategy in the absorption of foreign words is to adjust the sound, not the meaning (Miao, 2005). In the context of social media that demands speed of communication, this pattern is the main choice because the formation of words is relatively simple and direct (Lu, 2022).

Several deeper factors explain why full phonetic translation dominates on Weibo specifically. First, social media prioritizes speed and efficiency; users need to produce and understand loanwords quickly without pausing to interpret character meanings. Full phonetic translation allows immediate recognition of the source word for English-proficient users. Second, many loanwords on Weibo are brand names (谷歌 for Google, 必胜客 for Pizza Hut) or technological terms (U盘 for USB flash drive), where preserving sound identity is commercially or functionally more important than conveying meaning through characters. Third, the rise of English proficiency among younger Chinese users means that phonetic approximations are easily recognized without needing semantic cues. This contrasts with older borrowing periods (19th-20th centuries), where semantic transparency was prioritized (e.g., 电话 'electric speech' for telephone). The dominance of full phonetic translation thus reflects both the technological affordances of social media and shifting language attitudes among younger, globally connected users.

Mixed Sound-Meaning Translation Structure

The second pattern is the partial structure of sound translation and meaning, which is a loanword that combines the transliteration of sounds in some characters and the translation of meaning in others (Xing, 2003). This pattern is found in loanwords such as 奶昔 (nǎi xī) from *milkshake*, where the character 奶 (nǎi) translates the meaning of 'milk' semantically, while the character 昔 (xī) imitates the sound of 'shake' phonetically. Another example is 脱口秀 (tuōkǒu xiù) from *talk show*, where 脱口 (tuōkǒu) imitates the sound of 'talk' and 秀 (xiù) translates the meaning of 'show'.

This pattern is less common than full phonetic patterns, indicating that the formation of loanwords by combining sounds and meanings requires a higher linguistic awareness. The speaker needs to choose characters that not only come close to the sound of the source word but also have a meaning that is relevant to the referent. These findings support the observation of Mi et al. (2025) that new

loanwords in social media often do not follow traditional lexical borrowing rules, and hybrid patterns like this reflect the creativity of speakers in adapting foreign words.

Phonetic Translation with Mandarin Morpheme Structure

The third pattern is the phonetic translation structure with the addition of Mandarin morphemes, which are loanwords formed through the transliteration of sounds from the source word, then the Mandarin morpheme is added as an explanation of semantic categories Xing's (2003). This pattern is found in loanwords such as 芭蕾舞 (bālěiwǔ) from *ballet*, with the addition of the morpheme 舞 (wǔ) meaning 'dance'; 保齡球 (bǎolíngqiú) from *bowling*, with the addition of the morpheme 球 (qiú) meaning 'ball'; and 艾滋病 (àizībìng) from AIDS, with the addition of the morpheme 病 (bìng) meaning 'disease'.

The addition of this explanatory morpheme shows that Mandarin has a tendency to maintain semantic transparency in the absorption of foreign words (Xing (2003)). Unlike English, which can instantly adopt foreign words without changes, the Mandarin logographic writing system often requires additional cues to help readers identify the semantic domain of loanwords. This is in line with the findings of (Mambetalieva, Zhang, and Osmonova (2025) that loanwords in Mandarin tend to undergo morphological modifications to improve comprehension. In addition to the three patterns above, this study also found loanwords in the form of graphic loans such as UFO that retained their original Latin letterforms, as well as semantic borrowings such as 霸凌 'bullying' and 黑 'hack' that simply took the meaning of the source word without imitating its sound. These two types do not fall into the three categories of Xing's (2003) , but they show the variation in adaptation strategies used by Mandarin speakers on social media.

Meaning of English Loanwords in Mandarin

Based on the semiotic framework of Barthes (1968) , the meaning of words can be divided into two types: denotation (literal, explicit, referential meaning) and connotation (figurative, implicit, associative, and culturally charged meanings). In Barthes's marking level system, denotation is the first marking system that represents the direct relationship between the sign and its referent, while connotation is the second marking system where the meaning produced is subjective and depends on the cultural context (Barthes, 1968; Fatimah, 2020).

Denotative Meaning

Denotative meanings were found in most of the loanwords in this study. Loanwords used denotatively refer directly to an object, concept, or activity according to its literal definition. For example, 披薩 (pīshà) is used to refer to pizza food, 谷歌 (gǔgē) to refer to the technology company Google, 瑜伽 (yújiā) to refer to the physical exercise of yoga, and 阿司匹林 (āsīpīlín) to refer to the drug aspirin. The

use of denotative meaning reflects the primary function of loanwords in any language, which is to fill a lexical gap when a foreign concept does not have a proper equivalent in the receiving language. In the context of globalization and technological developments, many new concepts have entered China through popular culture and digital advancements, so loanwords are an efficient solution to refer to these concepts (Xin 2022).

Connotative Meaning

Connotative meanings are found in loanwords used metaphorically, as slang words, or in expressions loaded with emotional and cultural content. Interestingly, the same loanword can have different types of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. The most obvious example is the word 披萨 (pīsa 'pizza'). In a typical post about food, this word is denotative. However, in fan community posts addressed to an idol, the same word is used connotatively: “我的心是块披萨, 而你, 就是那个让我加倍芝士的理由” (My heart is pizza, and you are the reason for the 'extra cheese'). This phrase does not mean to state that the heart is really made of pizza dough, but rather uses a metaphor to express romantic feelings. The phrase 'extra cheese' (double cheese) is also a play on words that refers to the habit of taking pictures while saying 'cheese' in English.

Another example is the word 悠悠球 (yōuyōuqiú 'yoyo'), which literally means children's toys. In posts about romantic relationships, this word is used connotatively: “你可以丢我像颗悠悠球绝对又不放手” (You can throw me like a yoyo but never let go). The connotative meaning that emerges is a picture of an unstable relationship, where a person feels thrown up and down but still bound. The connotative meanings observed in this study are not random or merely subjective; they are deeply rooted in specific social and cultural practices of Weibo user communities.

First, in fan communities (posts addressed to idols or celebrities), loanwords like 披萨 (pizza) acquire romantic connotations. The playful phrase "extra cheese" exploits the dual meaning of 'cheese' (as food and as the word said when taking photos). This reflects a distinctive fan community practice where humor, intimacy, and shared cultural knowledge are expressed through creative wordplay. Fan communities value exclusivity and in-group identity; using loanwords in non-literal ways becomes a marker of belonging and distinguishes true fans from outsiders.

Second, in sports communities, “UFO” is used as a nickname for basketball player Vince Carter. This connotation linking extraordinary athletic ability (jumping and dunking) to an unidentified flying object emerges from shared knowledge within basketball fandom. A non-fan would not understand the reference. This usage reinforces group boundaries and allows fans to express admiration through insider language. Third, in romantic relationship posts, 悠悠球 (yoyo) metaphorically describes unstable relationships. This connotation draws on the physical behavior of a yoyo (going up and down, being thrown but returning) to represent emotional

uncertainty and attachment. The metaphor is culturally accessible but creatively repurposed by social media users.

These examples show that connotative meanings on Weibo are socially motivated, culturally grounded, and community-specific. They serve identity-building functions, strengthen in-group cohesion, and enable emotional expression that literal language alone cannot achieve. These findings are in line with the results of Maulida (2024), who analyzed denotative and connotative meanings on social media content, as well as Jia (2024), who found that loanwords in social media often undergo a pragmatic shift beyond their original meaning. This shows that Weibo users are not only passively borrowing words, but actively reusing loanwords for creative expression, humor, and emotional communication.

The findings of this study have several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of loanwords by showing that the analysis of meaning (denotation vs connotation) is an important dimension that has received less attention than phonological and etymological aspects. Most previous research, such as Astrida Yanti Bestari et al. (2018), has focused more on sound changes and changes in the form of meaning (expanding, narrowing, total), but have not explicitly distinguished between denotative and connotative loanwords in real communication.

Practically, these findings can be used in learning Mandarin as a foreign language. Educators can use loanwords as an entry point to teach new vocabulary because of their familiar form to English speakers. In addition, understanding the connotative meaning of loanwords can help advanced learners grasp humor, metaphors, and cultural references in authentic communication on Chinese social media (Dina & Hu, 2025). The limitation of this study lies in the limited scope of data on one platform (Weibo) and one period of time (fourth quarter of 2025). Future research could expand coverage to other social media platforms such as Douyin or WeChat, as well as conduct longitudinal analyses to track the evolution of loanwords over time.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to describe the structural formation and meaning of English loanwords in Mandarin on Weibo posts in the fourth quarter of 2025. Based on the analysis of 150 loanwords using Xing's (2003) framework for structural formation and Barthes' (1968) semiotic framework for meaning, the findings show three dominant structural patterns: full phonetic translation (e.g., 披萨 from pizza), phonetic translation with Mandarin morpheme (e.g., 芭蕾舞 from ballet), and mixed sound-meaning translation (e.g., 奶昔 from milkshake). Full phonetic translation was found to be the most dominant pattern, reflecting the preference for speed and ease of adaptation in social media communication. Regarding meaning, denotative use is more prevalent, although connotative meanings emerge in metaphorical and emotional expressions, such as 披萨 used as a romantic metaphor

in fan community posts or 悠悠球 (yoyo) used to describe unstable romantic relationships. These findings indicate that Weibo users not only borrow words passively to fill lexical gaps but also creatively repurpose loanwords for cultural and emotional expression.

The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it enriches loanword studies by demonstrating that meaning analysis is an essential yet underexplored dimension. Pedagogically, the findings can help Mandarin educators introduce new vocabulary through familiar loanword forms and assist advanced learners in understanding humor, metaphor, and cultural references on Chinese social media. Due to the limited scope of data (only Weibo, fourth quarter of 2025), future research is recommended to expand to other platforms such as Douyin or WeChat, conduct longitudinal analysis, and employ mixed methods to explore the reasons behind loanword choices.

REFERENCES

- Astrida Yanti Bestari, E., Rejeki Urip, S., & Komala Sari, T. (2018). Leksikon serapan bahasa Inggris ke dalam bahasa Mandarin tinjauan fonologi dan semantik. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 4(2), 145-160.
- Barthes, R. (1968). *Elements of semiology*. Hill and Wang.
- Dina, H. I., & Hu, Y. (2025). The sinicization path of English loanwords in social media: A case study of Weibo. *International Journal of Chinese Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(2), 58-66. <https://doi.org/10.26740/ijcis.v2i2.44051>
- Dwicahyo, K., & Indah Ratnasari, C. (2023). Perbandingan metode web scraping dalam pengambilan data: Kajian literatur. *Automata*, 4(2), 200-205.
- Fatimah. (2020). *Semiotika dalam kajian iklan layanan masyarakat (ILM)*. TallasMedia.
- Fu, Y., & Shen, J. (2022). Research on the transmutation of Chinese loanwords--Based on Modern Chinese dictionary (7th ed.). *Modern Chinese Dictionary*.
- Haspelmath, M., & Tadmor, U. (Eds.). (2009). *Loanwords in the world's languages: A comparative handbook*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Hermawan, A. (2023). Slang used by generation Z in Southwest Papua on social media. *INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 10(2), 145-158.
- Indriyani, R., et al. (2024). Code mixing used by Maudy Ayunda on YouTube channel. *INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 11(1), 89-102.
- Jia, Y. (2024). The English politeness marker please in Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 230, 154-165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2024.07.009>
- Josi, A., Abdillah, L. A., & Suryayusra. (2014). Penerapan teknik web scraping pada mesin pencari artikel ilmiah. *Jurnal Sisfo*, 5(2).
- Kang, Y. (2018). Phonological adaptation of English loanwords in Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 27(1), 1-29.

- Lestari, N. P., Imaniar, N., & Oktaviani, L. (2025). The use of word chain game to enrich students' vocabulary in English class. *INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 12(1), 45-58.
- Lu, Q. (2022). *A phonological study on English loanwords in Mandarin Chinese* (Master's thesis). Western Sydney University.
- Mambetalieva, S., Zhang, J., & Osmonova, C. (2025). Lexical borrowings and semantic shift in digital neologisms of Chinese-English origin. *Bulletin of Science and Practice*, 11(9). <https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/118/80>
- Maulida, H. (2024). *Makna denotasi dan konotasi meme pada akun Instagram mrci.id: Kajian semiotika Roland Barthes* (Skripsi). Universitas Mataram.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mi, C., Xie, S., Li, Y., & He, Z. (2025). Loanword identification in social media texts with extended code-switching datasets. *ACM Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3748317>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Moleong, L. J. (2019). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nasution, S. (2014). *Metode research: Penelitian ilmiah*. Bumi Aksara.
- Sugiyono. (2008). *Memahami penelitian kualitatif*. Alfabeta.
- Thomason, S. G. (2015). *Endangered languages: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Treffers-Daller, J. (2015). The role of transfer in language variation and change: Evidence from contact varieties of French. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 18(2), 93-175.
- Weibo Corporation. (2026). *Weibo announces fourth quarter and fiscal year 2025 unaudited financial results*. Retrieved from <http://ir.weibo.com>
- Xin, J. (2022). Cultural characteristic analysis of Chinese and English loanwords from the network catchwords. *Frontiers in Educational Research*, 5(7), 94-97.
- Xing, G. (2003). *Xiàndài hànyǔ jiàochéng* (现代汉语教程). Nánkāi Dàxué Chūbǎnshè.
- Zhou, W. (2022). *Elementary Chinese I*. Michigan State University Libraries.