



# Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

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Review of:

## **Culinary Linguistics: The Chef's Special**

Edited by Cornelia Gerhardt, Maximiliane Frobenius, and Susanne Ley. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013. Pp. xvi + 347, bibliography, index.

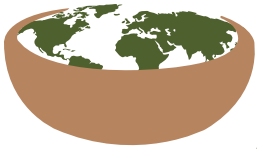
By: Jeffrey Kallen, Trinity College Dublin

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The study of foodways and language makes for a natural partnership. The mouth is the focus of activity in both eating and speech; traditions of food preparation and consumption are passed on (at least in part) by word of mouth; and there is no end of conversation over or about food. Many basic metaphors in English for cognitive processes rely on food - we chew over ideas, rejecting those we find hard to swallow and taking time to digest difficult ones, while hoping not to have exams in which students regurgitate lecture material - and our images of mother tongue language-learning are often coupled with images of childhood socialization, from mother's milk and beyond. Despite these obvious connections, it is relatively rare to find research in which language is foregrounded in the study of foodways. This volume - a collection of papers presented in honor of Neal R. Norrick of Saarland University by his colleagues, friends, and students - is one important attempt to fill this gap.

The book starts with a 47-page review of foodways research by Cornelia Gerhardt. Though the review does not cover anthropology and folklore in great detail, it is noteworthy in bringing together references on such topics as etymology and change in food-related vocabulary, food and metaphor, dinner table conversation, writing about food (from cookbooks to menus and labels), and food-related discourse in online forums. Much of this research may be unfamiliar to people who work outside this area.

Six papers then cover a variety of types of discourse pertaining to food. Television chefs (Delia Chiaro comparing the linguistic and presentational strategies of Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson, and Kerstin Fischer on personal involvement with the reader in Julia Child's classic *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*), historical linguistic perspectives on recipes and cookery writing (such as a comparison by Jenny Arendholz, Wolfram Bublitz, Monika Kirner, and Iris Zimmerman between a Middle English recipe for "Beef



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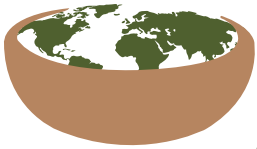
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y-Stywyd” and Jamie Oliver’s online recipe for “Beef and ale stew”), and food blogs (analysed by Stefan Diemer and Maximiliane Frobenius) are all considered. This section helps the reader to build a broad perspective on the recipe as a genre of text, whether spoken, written, or in an electronic hybrid. Recipe-based texts demonstrate a great variety of linguistic traditions and formulas. They also show patterned variation in the stances that they take towards their audiences, whether they are professionals, home cooks, or simply observers. It is thus a logical progression that the section concludes with an experimentally-based paper by Claudia Bubel and Alice Spitz on the use of recipes as a textual genre in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

The second main section of the book turns to topics that are more broadly cultural. Janet Holmes, Meredith Marra, and Brian W. King analyse segments in workplace conversation in New Zealand, noting that discussions of food appear consistently to bracket talk away from work and towards informality, while Helga Kotthoff compares aspects of elaborate drinking toasts in the Georgian language with more limited practices in Swedish and German. Astrid M. Fellner takes a critical look at food references in several works of North American ethnic literature. Fellner emphasizes ways in which this literature does not assume a simple relationship between ethnic foodways in the new country and old-country values, but, rather, points to the ambivalence through which literary narratives “display protagonists whose memories affectively position themselves as ethnic subjects critical of longing for home” (257). A more semiotic approach is taken in the examination by Stefan Karl Serwe, Kenneth Keng Wee Ong, and Jean François Ghesquière of the use of French-language names and signage for restaurants in Singapore. Serwe et al. demonstrate that French in the Singaporean linguistic landscape can point to complex matters. Not only can it index French restaurants serving French food (thus appealing to authenticity), but it can be found in hybrids as exemplified by the <Bonheur Patisserie>. This shop name uses French vocabulary with English syntax, and crucially follows Chinese tradition in using words like “happiness” and “good fortune” in the shop name. It is an Asian, not a French, bakery, but the authors conclude that this combination of overt and covert linguistic signs “aligns the shop symbolically with contemporary culture without losing sight of its traditional roots” (295).

This book has modest ambitions, since it does not set out to establish a comprehensive field of foodways and linguistics. Some papers do not follow their own premises as fully as they might have. I am intrigued by Fischer’s argument, for example, that part of Julia Child’s success lies in engaging the reader with a decision-making process during various cooking stages. Yet much of the paper lays preliminaries for this analysis, and there



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is not much scope for a discussion of either Julia Child or of comparable engagement features in other very popular books such as Irma S. Rombauer's *Joy of Cooking*. Readers who are not familiar with corpus linguistics or linguistic discourse analysis may not warm to all the approaches explored here, but it is in the nature of a project like this one that all readers are likely to encounter a mix of both the familiar and the unfamiliar. Despite any such quibbles - and some occasional frustration caused by typographical or editing mistakes - most of the papers in this volume succeed very well in providing thought-provoking discussions which can encourage much-needed further research.



# Digest

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## References Cited

Child, Julia, Louisette Bertholle, and Simone Beck. 1961. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Rombauer, Irma, Marion Rombauer Becker, and Ethan Becker [1931] 2006. *Joy of Cooking*. 8th edn. New York: Scribner.