



Traditional food in the perspective of culinary linguistics

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Abstract

Food and language are universal human traits. Both of them can transmit meaning which varies from culture to culture. They play a big role in exploration of culture through food. Food and language as part of a social activity that people construct their life worlds by displaying stances, identities, values, norms and beliefs. Therefore, food functions not merely as a means of human biological survival and language as a tool to transmit information. They can be explored using the pedagogy of Culinary Linguistics which is the study of food in the perspective of language. This paper describes the role of culinary linguistics as the interdisciplinary science to discover the local wisdom from cultural traditional food of community.

Keywords: food, language, culinary linguistics, local wisdom

1. Introduction

What is food? Why does everyone eat? The answer is that food is a very central part of human life and it is more than a nutrient or nourishment. Why does a human need language to communicate? Language is not only a tool to transmit information. Therefore, what could be more central to people lives than food and language? Both are universal human traits. Every healthy human being eats and talks and every society or group eats and talks (Gerhardt 2013:3) ^[6]. Each culture has its own distinct foodstuffs and language which can be used to describe the cultural behaviors and identity of its people. French gastronome Brillat-Savarin's famous aphorism (1926) in Sztatowski (2014:5) ^[22] "*Dis-moicquetumanges, je teditraicquetues.*" 'Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are'. It shows the connection between food and identity.

Furthermore, food consumption and language use often characterize settings, speech events, space, social activity, identity and belief. These aspects are perceived differently by different cultures and are projected onto their languages in which culinary linguistics can take part. This is a relatively new field of study as a branch of linguistics which has been indirectly tackled by few researchers such as anthropologists since early 20th century. Linguists have taken an academic interest in this branch of linguistics for the past few years.

2. The perspective of Culinary Linguistics

Culinary Linguistics is defined as a qualitative study of language in food traditions or eating habits through the linguistic paradigm (Jabonillo, 2016: 18) ^[9]. However, Gerhardt (2013) ^[6] defines culinary linguistics implicitly as a study of food and food-related studies from a linguistic perspective. Food is generally to be consumed, but it is through language that we will know how it is made, what

ingredients are used in a recipe, the meaning of the name of the food, as well as the culture of each community in relation to food such as eating together. Claude Lévi-Strauss was the first person to conduct a linguistic study of cuisine. He illustrates an analogy between language and culture (for example: 1964 in *The Raw and the Cooked* and 1968 in *The Origin of Table Manners. A Short Treatise on Culinary Anthropology* in his mythologies).

Previously, a number of research related to food and language have been conducted on various food and languages in the world, such as cooking vocabularies (Lehrer, 1972) ^[13], eating and drinking verbs (Newman, 1997) ^[17], eating and drinking in Mandarin (Ye, 2010) ^[24], taste and flavor in Southeast Asia (Enfield, 2011) ^[4], the connection between language and sense (Majid & Levinson, 2011) ^[6], Persian culinary metaphors (Khajeh & Ho-Abdullah, 2012) ^[10], naming of food (Kusmaningtyas, *et al.*, 2013) ^[11], role of food in workplace discourse (Holmes, *et al.*, 2013) ^[8], food metaphor (López-Rodríguez, 2014) ^[14], Boholano culinary linguistics which is about Philippine's food and language (Jabonillo, 2016) ^[9].

2.1 What is culinary?

The term culinary comes from the Greek word *culinarius*-something which is related to cook and *culina*-kitchen (Ervi, 2007) ^[5]. Culinary is a synonym for cuisine (Soegiarto, 2008:570) ^[19] and it can be defined as a processed product that is a cuisine, such as side-dishes, food (snack) and drinks (Maengkom, 2015) ^[15]. According to Soenardi (2013:6) ^[20] culinary is the art of cuisine and cultural tradition of preparing cuisine (Annuk, 2013:139) ^[2]. Based on such definition culinary is matters relating to cooking, food, and drinks as a basic need for human beings as well as energy sources for daily activities.

It can be concluded that culinary means an exploration of

culture through food. It describes what we consume, how we acquire it, who prepares it, who is at the table, and who eats first. It is a form of communication which is rich with meaning (Stajcic, 2013) ^[21]. Besides, the activity of eating can strengthen the bonds between individual, family, and communities, such as dinner talk or commensality tradition of some cultures. There are rules and traditions when that eating activity is held in some cultural events.

2.2 The field of Culinary Linguistics

Since food is much more than a nutrient, it is one central element of human lives. As for language, it is a primary means for human to transmit meaning. Therefore, the focus on language and its use can explore more aspects of food. Gerhardt (2013) ^[6] represents a first attempt at delimiting the field of culinary linguistics that are (1) comparative linguistics (2) morphology and word formation (3) syntax and grammar (4) word and meaning (5) spoken discourse (6) food writing. These fields of culinary linguistics can be described as follows.

First, every language in this world has their food terminology since eating is a biological necessity. For example, cultures depends on the food items for some reasons such as the endemic plants or historical language contact. Borrowing of words denoting food items can identify the language contact. Prehistoric studies, for example on comparison of cognates for food items can be studied in historical comparative linguistics (Anttila, 1972 in Gerhardt, 2013; Lavric & Konzett, 2009) ^[6] ^[2] and the studies of local food names (Brown, 2006; Perrier et.al., 2011; Kusmaningtyas, *et al*, 2013) ^[11].

Second, the study of morphology and word formation processes deals with the denomination of food items such as compounding, borrowing and eponyms or anthroponym. The words wander around the world together with the food items such as the local food name '*rendang padang*' which becomes popular as Indonesian culinary identity. Indonesia has many other local food names from different ethnic cultures that can be interesting to explore in order to revitalize the lexicon of local extinct food.

Third, the study of grammatical framework such as construction grammar, cognitive linguistics, pattern grammar or research in corpus linguistics stress the inseparable nature of syntax and lexis (Gerhardt, 2013:20) ^[6]. For example, verbs denote food preparation or ways of eating and nouns represent food items such as dishes or ingredients and kitchen utensils.

Fourth, words and meaning belonging to the realm of food can be classified into the sub-field of linguistics called semantics. Also, the classification of plants and animals in different languages and on its nature and customs of different cultures has to be explored in verbal or nonverbal meaning and experiences.

Fifth, the spoken discourse can study about how offering food to guests includes referring to the food on the table using summonses, demonstratives, gestures and body practices in Indonesian local culture. Also, speech act concerning with offering food or drinks to guests is strongly dependent on cultural norms. Gesture and speech act (verbal or nonverbal meaning) that are used when offering food or drinks in Indonesian local culture will show the politeness, hospitality and respect of the hosts to their guest (Wierzbicka, 1985 e.g.

Polish culture; Sahragard, 2000 e.g. Persian culture) ^[23, 18].

Finally, food writing can be studied from recipes, cookery books, restaurant menus, or labels of food products. Food writing of culturally complex food items and the modes of preparation for one dish may vary from cook to cook. The genre recipe has a number of characteristics on different linguistic levels which consist of specialized written use of language. It is interesting to study the Indonesian local food writing or the code-mixing of local and modern recipes adapted from Japanese, European and Korean cuisine.

However, the delimited field of culinary linguistics can vary depending on many fields of linguistics that are not explored yet. Further, it is hoped that many aspects intersecting language and food can be explored by researchers from other disciplines or other branches of linguistics in order to gain more insights into the connection between food and language.

3. Food and language

Food uses natural or chemical substances to make dishes. Language on the other hand uses sounds and written expressions to create ideas and culture. These two fundamental human social acts i.e eating and using language can be connected. Food enters the body through the mouth while language leaves the body through the same cavity in its primary that is spoken form. Gerhardt (2013) ^[6] describes the connection between food and language in which they are fabricated by building larger units out of smaller entities: ingredients make dishes make meals; sounds make words make utterances make texts.

Through language, food can be communicated to know how it is made, what ingredients are used in the cuisine, how a name of a cuisine is formed, how food can be a symbol to make social bonding in commensality, etc. Such field of linguistics can be used to explore the connection between food and language.

4. Food, language and culture

Only humans can flavor and create their food. Therefore, the activity of cooking food or the process of preparing a cuisine shows the human ability to transform nature that is from natural ingredients to food (Goode, 1992) ^[7]. The process of moving from nature to culture can be described as food items are produced and acquired, transformed through cuisine rules, and combined with other dishes in expected arrangements and sequences to comprise eating event. Each community has special eating events such as productivity (harvests, and successful hunts), in the life cycle (births, wedding, deaths), or religious commemorations (Gerhardt, 2013) ^[6]. It means that cooking can represent human ability to transform nature into cuisine rules that are applied in social events. It has some symbols or signs which have verbal and nonverbal meanings in the eating ritual or performances of culture in different communities.

Furthermore, human abilities exist because they have a culture or in other words, food obtained by humans has been through cultural processes before being eaten or cultures manage humans in food needs. This is in line with what Fischler has said, "Food is a bridge between nature and culture" (Fischler 1988 in Gerhardt, 2013) ^[6]. That means the human ability in creative thinking is a form of culture. Some authors define

culture as “the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish people from another. People within a culture usually interpret meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or similar ways” (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1989; Stajcic, 2013) ^{[2], [3]}. Therefore, a community of people can be identified by referring to the language, ritual, habits, set of values, lifestyles, attitudes, folklores and their customs.

Then, food also communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyles affiliation, and other social positions (Anderson, 2014) ^[1]. It shows other communities many things about the eater as a social communication system through language. For example, in Acehese formal hospitality, honor and respect are showed by the host inviting outside people to eat together and serving them while eating. There are literally many thousands of other gestures in each community that function as a social communication.

There are different kinds of food in this world. Different cultures in the world result in different food flavors, ingredients, digestion and performance. Foodways of community also can be different due to differences in ecology, geography, social life and religion. All of these aspects show the identity of each culture. Therefore, foodways can only be understood holistically, with every aspect of human life (Anderson, 2014) ^[1].

5. Conclusion

A typical cuisine is the identity of an area or community that distinguishes it from other regions. Such differences can be seen from the types of food, confectionary, processing, presentation, and taste. The interaction of food, language and culture creates the social communication and identity of community. Therefore, the exploration of culture through food, especially local food can be interestingly carried out through culinary linguistics which can describe the culture, identity, social relationship and ideology that the communities have. It also can identify the values and norms of the cultural tradition and custom and finally, it describes the local wisdom that communities have in their lives.

In addition, the richness of Indonesian cuisine as well as the richness of the local languages was united through the Youth Pledge in 1928 using the language of Indonesian. However, the culinary diversity of the areas cannot be united because the diversity is the strength of the culinary treasures of Indonesia as cultural inheritance that must be preserved, protected, and passed on to the next generation. Culinary linguistics has a role to play in revitalizing these Indonesian treasures.

Gerhardt (2013) ^[6] has presented the first attempt at delimiting field of culinary linguistics, but there is a plethora of studies at the intersection of food and language that is interesting to be explored from other disciplines or other branches of linguistics.

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