

13

# Linguistics and food studies

## Structural and historical connections

Anthony F. Buccini

*The chapter illustrates ways in which food studies intersect with linguistics, the study of language structured as a system, including variation and change over time and space. Work in the allied fields of anthropology, semiotics, and discourse analysis is briefly touched upon, followed by a survey of lexical semantic analyses of taste terms, verbs of ingestion, and cooking methods. Especially relevant for food history are etymologies and other historical linguistic research that can shed light on cultural history not documented in written texts. A critical methodological appraisal is included, to guide non-specialists in judging the validity of purported etymologies.*

### Introduction

Language is the fundamental tool and communal institution of human societies and so it is in countless ways tied to the production, preparation, and consumption of food; linguistics, as the study of how language is structured and functions as a system – synchronic or structural linguistics – and how language varies and changes across time and space – diachronic or historical linguistics – is therefore naturally concerned with virtually all social activities related to food, albeit generally in an indirect way. Some aspects of the relationship between food and language are typically regarded today as falling more within the purview of academic disciplines other than linguistics in the narrow sense, namely, anthropology, semiotics, discourse analysis. For example, analysis of cross-cultural variation in the offering of food may naturally involve a linguistic component but itself concerns primarily the anthropologist (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987: 45ff. Chen, 1990/91). Similarly, the broader meaning of foodstuffs with iconic value in society, such as “wine” or “steak” (e.g. Barthes, 1972), falls largely outside linguistics in the narrow sense and within the field of semiotics. Looking at the language of recipes or menus or restaurant critiques stands likewise outside the boundaries of the traditional concerns of linguists and within those of students of discourse analysis (e.g. Zwicky and Zwicky, 1980; Strauss, 2005; Bonazzi, 2009; Carroll, 2010).

In this chapter I focus on the structural and historical approaches to language study and thus on linguistics in the narrow sense as an auxiliary field to food studies. Though the two broad subfields of structural linguistics and historical linguistics are interrelated in myriad ways, it makes sense to draw a line between how the two can be related to food studies. In the first case, structural linguistics can shed light on how cuisine is constructed as a semiotic or symbolic

system and how such a system changes over time. In the second case, historical linguistics serves as a practical tool in the study of the history of specific foodstuffs, composed dishes, cooking utensils, etc., and thus of the social location and historical development of specific cuisines.

### Historical background of food scholarship in linguistics and major theoretical approaches in use

There is no established or well-defined field that brings together linguistics, in the narrow sense defined above, and food studies. Given that, research that brings the fields together in a sustained fashion has largely been wanting with but a few exceptions. Consequently, the bulk of work that addresses shared concerns has been carried out either from the perspective of the food scholar or from that of the linguist, and while much of this work has been invaluable in the development of our understanding of food and cookery, in many cases the one-sidedness of the two approaches has had a deleterious effect on the progress of the field.

Focusing on work done by linguists, we note that the primary point of intersection between food studies and synchronic linguistics is in the field of lexical semantics, the study of meaning at the level of the word. This work generally entails the analysis of terms within a more or less broad semantic domain – e.g. kinship terms, color terms, terms for cooking methods – and an investigation of the semantic relations between those terms, asking questions such as which concepts are given a name, what oppositions hold among such names, what connotations or metaphorical extensions are associated with their use, etc. A fundamental detailed study of a food-related lexical field in English is Lehrer's (1969) article, “Semantic Cuisine,” which explores the terminology of cooking within the theoretical framework of structuralist semantics. Also noteworthy is Lehrer's (1983) subsequent monograph on the language of “wine talk” in English, which analyzes the use of hundreds of words related to wine description and further includes the results of a series of experiments that demonstrate the semantic variability among speakers. A different sort of a work on food by a linguist who defies simple categorization is McCawley's (1984) *The Eater's Guide to Chinese Characters*. Its primary goal is to help non-readers of Chinese decipher the writing they encounter in restaurants but the book additionally contains numerous insights into the Chinese culinary lexicon. ← which

Lexical semantic analyses can serve as a springboard for further investigations in either of two directions. On the one hand, one can attempt to find reflections of the structures discovered in one semantic field elsewhere in the language and more generally in the cultural institutions of the society that uses the language in question, as has been done most famously by the anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss (1978: 495) using precisely the intersection of food and language as his focal point: “Thus we can hope to discover how, in any particular society, cooking is a language through which that society unconsciously reveals its structure ...” On the other hand, one can look at semantic domains from a comparative, cross-linguistic perspective with an eye toward elucidating the linguistic and cultural differences that exist between two speech communities. Comparative studies focusing on color terms (e.g. Berlin and Kay, 1969) can inform and, to a degree, have informed subsequent semantic studies relating to food, such as Backhouse (1994), which is first and foremost a detailed analysis of taste terms within Japanese but which then considers future paths of research along cross-linguistic/cross-cultural lines (164ff.). Kuipers (1984) in an important study of gustatory words in Weyéwa (Eastern Indonesia) also comments on the limitations of applicability of color term research to investigations of the semantics of taste.

Another very basic semantic domain related to food and cookery that has garnered sustained interest among linguists from a cross-linguistic perspective is that of the terms (and underlying

conceptualizations) of the ingestion of food and drink. Indeed, an entire volume, *The Linguistics of Eating and Drinking* (Newman, 2009), has recently been dedicated to this topic and while the orientation of the various authors' contributions is very much linguistic in nature, they present a wealth of data and observations drawn from a wide variety of languages that are of interest to food scholars. Related to the work of the scholars whose pieces appear in the Newman volume is Ye (2010), which supplements cross-linguistic analysis focusing on Mandarin and Shanghaiese with further brief consideration of the diachronic aspect of the terms of ingestion in Sinitic.

A further area of cross-linguistic lexical semantics relating to food studies involves the comparative analysis of cooking terminology, addressing in the first place questions of how the terms in one language correspond to those in another (e.g., the differing semantic ranges of German *braten* vs. English *to fry* vs. Dutch *bakken*, or how – if at all – the distinctions between Italian *friggere/soffriggere/saltare* can be rendered in other languages), but then conceivably progressing to address further questions: With a more linguistic orientation, regarding lexical organization, or with a more anthropological orientation, regarding other loci or levels of cultural structure, or finally, with a more purely culinary orientation, regarding, for example, a focus on the deeper conceptual and structural differences between specific cuisines. Again, Lehrer (1972) is to be cited here for the range of the cross-linguistic analysis of cooking terminology (with data from nine languages from around the world) in her paper critiquing Lévi-Strauss's (1965, 1978: 490ff.) culinary triangle; from a partially different perspective, see also Harrison (1983) in this regard.

In addition to cross-linguistic comparisons of the sort just described, one can of course also make comparisons between different stages within the history of one and the same language and with that one enters into the field of diachronic lexical semantics. The degree to which this line of inquiry with a specific focus on the culinary has been followed by linguists is limited but an exemplary piece, albeit with a very narrow focus, is Sihler (1973), which features a detailed analysis of the relationship between the terms *to bake* and *to roast* in modern English but also a consideration of how that relationship has changed over time.

The sort of semantic study presented in Sihler (1973) represents the lynchpin, as it were, that connects the three traditional language-related fields that have had the most sustained impact on food studies, namely, philology, lexicography and etymology: the semantic analysis, both synchronic and diachronic in nature, informs the broader understanding of historical texts, contributes directly to the compilation of lexicographical material, and in turn fleshes out the history of the individual word. Though these fields of study are regarded today by some linguists of a narrow theoretical perspective as at best marginal to their view of language study, the three represent core activities in the rise of linguistics as a scientific field in the course of the nineteenth century, and the kinds of investigations they entail continue to have relevance to less narrow approaches to linguistic theory, as well as to virtually all academic disciplines of a historical nature in both the humanities and the social sciences.

Of the three fields just mentioned – philology, lexicography, and etymology – the last named is in a very real sense the most basic. Indeed, the beginnings of the modern field of linguistics as a scientific discipline revolved to a considerable degree around etymological research, and specifically coincided with a relatively sharp break from a long-standing tradition of what the purpose of etymology was and how it had previously been done in the Western world. Traditionally, etymology was viewed as a scholarly tool to serve the more fundamental intellectual endeavors of philosophy and rhetoric, whereby the "original" or "true" meaning of a word could be ascertained and, for many philosophers and rhetoricians, a word's relationship to the natural world could thus be discovered (see, e.g., Liberman, 2009: 8ff., 239ff.; Geeraerts, 2010: 2ff.). The stock in trade of etymology was drawing connections between words not closely or

not obviously related to one another, be they words in the same language, from different stages of a language, from different dialects or languages, or some combination thereof. In drawing such connections, some measure of phonetic or orthographic similarity between the words was required, but there existed no accepted guidelines for what entailed a legitimate kind or degree of phonetic/orthographic resemblance to justify the proposed etymological relation and so no objective means whatsoever to judge their relative worth. The fact of the matter is that any such phonetic or orthographic resemblances were very much secondary to the semantic relationship seen by the etymologist between allegedly related words, rendering etymology in general very much a semantic word game, albeit one with a learned and especially philosophical and/or poetic orientation that was essentially unfettered by any actual issues of linguistic history; as Liberman (2009: 240) puts it:

For a long time, the main method of etymology was dissecting a word and adding, subtracting, and transporting letters. Socrates already used it. (We [linguists] do the same, but according to rules guided by the facts of history!) Those methods are easy to mock, for they are indeed silly.

The most notable bit of mockery in this regard is the oft-cited (but possibly apocryphal) comment attributed to Voltaire by Max Müller (1864: 238): "L'étymologie est une science où les voyelles ne font rien, et les consonnes fort peu de choses" – etymology is a science where vowels count for nothing and consonants for little.

The transition from this sort of semantically driven "speculative etymology" of the philosopher and rhetorician to the modern "scientific etymology" of the linguist involved a number of steps, of which the fundamental one was the development of the concept of the regular sound correspondence (see, e.g., Campbell, 2004: Ch. 5; Hock and Joseph, 2009: Ch. 4). With the establishment of this principle, there came in place a means by which the phonetic relationship between allegedly related words could begin to be judged in an essentially objective way and in turn there also came an inversion of the primacy of semantics over form (phonetic or orthographic) that characterized the spirit of speculative etymology; semantic connections henceforth became subordinate to and restrained or channelled by the requirements of what was known from the study of linguistic data about phonological form and how it changes. And once some rules were introduced, the possibility arose for dialogue and adjustment between what was learned generally both about semantic change and about formal – to wit, phonological and morphological – change; in other words, the sophistication of the semantic analyses themselves grew within the context of the broader concern with linguistic reality.

The discovery of the principle of regular sound correspondences, the subsequent elaboration of the comparative method and language reconstruction, and the gradual development of closely related subfields of linguistic investigation such as dialectology, language contact studies and sociolinguistics all have indirect but very important implications for the study of food history. In the first place, an accurate account of a given language's history builds on but also contributes to a more general understanding of the social and cultural dynamics at work within the community in which the language was spoken. Since the theoretical and methodological tools of historical linguistics allow us, moreover, to go to a certain degree beyond what extant historical records directly show us, we can thereby gain insights into cultural and culinary matters that are in nature pre-historical or what one might call "para-historical" or "sub-historical," by which I mean matters occurring in historical periods but outside the contemporary historical record.

A particularly interesting example of the use of the comparative method extending beyond purely linguistic ends is Watkins's (1995) study of Indo-European poetics (on the methodology,

see especially 3ff.) and though that work has only indirect connections to food studies (e.g., through agriculture in chapter 17), there is a strong tradition of using the comparative method and linguistic reconstruction with an eye toward identifying cultural items, institutions, and notions reflected in the proto-language. With direct bearing on food studies is some of the research involving long-range linguistic reconstruction and especially studies attempting to identify likely homelands of peoples in the period when a given reconstructed proto-language is believed to have been spoken; in such discussions, flora and fauna and thus also food sources are particularly important pieces of evidence, as are any terms relating to agricultural practices that can be reconstructed. Probably the first language family to be studied in this manner was Indo-European and the field has produced an extensive literature; for recent works of interest here, see for example Gamkrelidze and Ivanov (1995: especially part II), Mallory and Adams (2006: especially Chapters 9, 10, 15, 16). Linguistic/cultural reconstructions related to questions of homelands of proto-populations for many other language families of interest to food scholars now exist; for example, in North America there is the comparative research done on the Algonquian (Siebert, 1967) and Iroquoian (Mithun, 1984) languages. As a further example, one notes the recent research on the Bantu language family of Africa, which, building on earlier discussions of Proto-Bantu foodways (Polomé, 1982), goes much further in attempting to reconstruct as detailed a picture as possible of the earliest culinary culture of the Bantuphone community (see Schoenbrun, 1993; Ricquier and Bostoen, 2010).

Another line of research involving long-range reconstruction with a bearing on food studies addresses the question of the degree to which the spread of agriculture was related to the spread of languages. The view that the link was very strong – the farming/language dispersal hypothesis – is associated particularly with the work of the archaeologists Renfrew and Bellwood, but brings together not only the various disciplines concerned with the domestication of plants and animals and the development of farming methods, but also the work of students of human genetics and, of course, historical linguists; for a broad overview of this research and criticism thereof, see the contributions in Bellwood and Renfrew (2002).

On account of the nature of the evidence available in the study of prehistory and historically remote periods, it is generally possible to reconstruct to a reasonable degree what basic foodstuffs a given language community consumed. On occasion, the lexical evidence allows us to ascertain further information, such as basic cooking methods, basic utensils related to food preparation or consumption, and on occasion also secondary alimentary products, such as “butter” or “dough” or “mead,” and with that one begins to get glimpses into the nature of an ancient cuisine. As we proceed into historical periods in which there is direct and indirect textual evidence of culinary culture, it would seem perhaps that linguistic reconstruction would be otiose but such is not the case. Given the general relationship in many societies between literary sources and the social groups that produce them, the picture of the culinary culture of a given society we get from those sources may be very skewed and incomplete, with the foodways of the less affluent sectors of the population being largely or wholly ignored – such is the case in Europe from classical times on through the Middle Ages and well beyond, and a similar situation long obtained in the Islamic world as well. The limited or absent direct textual evidence for the culinary culture of whole sections of a society can be supplemented to a degree with indirect historical evidence, but the same tools required for the study of prehistoric foodways must also be brought to bear, namely archaeological and linguistic evidence, and in this way historical linguistics in the broadest sense can here play a role similar to its role in the field of ethnohistory (cf. Trigger, 1975: 53). With a certain degree of historical contextualization, the linguistic contribution to uncovering past cultural complexes, including the culinary, can transcend reconstruction or explication of individual lexical items and extend to broader

analyses of sociolinguistic dynamics and the dynamics of language (and dialect) contact, which in turn can provide new perspectives on and fuller contextualization of social and cultural developments generally. A study along these lines is Buccini's (2006) account of the development and distribution of summer vegetable stews (*ratatouille*, *cianfotta*, *samfaina*, etc.) around the Western Mediterranean, in which an analysis of the various names for this type of stew, with extensive reference to dialectal material, is used in conjunction with known historical contacts and population movements within the region during the early modern period. This not only sheds light on the history of this family of dishes but beyond that offers evidence for earlier adoption of the New World vegetables (peppers, tomatoes, etc.) than scholars have generally believed, on account of the direct evidence we have for resistance to their use in botanical and culinary texts from the period – the dialectal evidence is a crucial element in getting past the limitations of those texts and getting a view of the foodways of the poor, which differed markedly from those of the more affluent and literate.

Such investigations, which are firmly within the field of food studies but carried out by a linguist who draws heavily upon linguistic evidence in the course of the argument, are not numerous but in this regard the work of Perry stands out in particular. His discussions of families of dishes found across a wide array of culinary cultures are notable for the combination of extensive philological work with culinary insights and linguistic analyses of lexical material from multiple languages, especially Arabic, Persian, and Turkish; see e.g., Perry (2001) on *birān* or Perry (2010) on *korma*, etc. (other examples of Perry's work appear in the same volume as Perry, 2001).

Historical linguists, in the ordinary course of conducting their research, have in passing contributed much to the field of food studies by producing etymologies that serve a key role in the writing of food and culinary history and the fruits of this labour are most easily encountered in the many etymological dictionaries that have been compiled in a linguistically rigorous fashion. In many cases, however, etymologies relating to culinary matters proposed by linguists with little or no especial interest in or knowledge of that particular cultural domain are inadequate, either through missed connections of one form to another or through unconvincing semantic analyses of the material. Application of sophisticated linguistic analyses to culinary questions in a sustained fashion is something that only in recent times has come to the fore, as in some of the works just mentioned above, and with this further possibilities for significant advances in our knowledge and understanding of food history are possible, as a genuine dialogue between food historians and linguists develops. What I have in mind here is the sort of work in which an old and seemingly intractable linguistic problem, such as the etymology of the words “olive” and “oil,” is approached with as much of a concern for the relevant historical data as for the linguistic data, as in Buccini (2010), where I argue that the Greek word from which “olive” and “oil” derive is itself a borrowing from Anatolian, a possibility that, if correct, forces us to revise received notions about the early history of oleiculture and in turn contributes more broadly to our understanding of the history of arboriculture.

Building on both the semantic studies and the historical research discussed above, linguists can also make significant contributions to the field of food studies in the areas of food-related lexicography and philology and in recent decades this has been increasingly the case. A considerable body of food-related research by linguists with a particular focus on lexicography is brought together in the three-volume proceedings of a conference held in Naples (Silvestri *et al.*, 2002). The conference and proceedings grew out of an ongoing major international scholarly project, namely, the *Atlante Generale dell'Alimentazione Mediterranea*, which promises to be an indispensable resource for the study of culinary culture in the Mediterranean region; for samples of the detailed lexical entries – with etymological information, related idioms, etc. – to

appear there, see in particular the articles in the first volume. The second and third volumes are devoted to related research on specific topics in lexical semantics of culinary terms from various regions of Italy and other Mediterranean countries, a portion of it in the venerable tradition of the *cose e parole/Sachen und Wörter* approach (a notable early illustration of which is Schuchardt, 1912). Other recent work in food-related lexical semantics with ties to the *Sachen und Wörter* approach are Buccini (2009) on Greek and Italian names for *muscaria comosum*, and Buccini (2007) on *spaghetti alla carbonara* and related dishes; the latter emphasizes the need to distinguish between the invention of a dish and the invention of a particular name for a dish. In the field of lexicography, another recent contribution to culinary studies from Italy is Pinnavaia's (2010) study of food and drink idioms in English. Relating more to food history is Dalby's (2003) reference work on food in the ancient world, which features semantic and etymological discussions for many of the entries.

Dalby, a linguist with an especially strong background in classical philology, has edited and translated important historical source works for food studies, such as Cato's *On Farming* (1998) and more recently the *Geoponika* (2011). The aforementioned scholar of Near Eastern languages, C. Perry, has also edited and translated historical works of significance, such as Arabic cookbooks *The Description of Familiar Foods* (2001) and *The Book of Dishes* (2005), bringing to bear both linguistic and philological expertise.

## Research methodologies

In the previous section, I focused on work by linguists with bearing on the field of food studies and their work naturally follows the theoretical and methodological frameworks of their subfields in linguistics. In this section, I consider some aspects of the use of linguistic argumentation in the work of food historians and call attention to some methodological pitfalls that commonly arise there.

As mentioned above, the area where linguistic research most often is of direct concern to food scholars is etymology. Many food scholars are extremely careful in their use of linguistic and especially etymological evidence in their discussions of culinary matters, relying whenever possible on contributions established by linguists. In instances where no such appeal can be made, the prudent path to take is to suggest with caution and not base further arguments too much on an uncertain or unsound etymological base. The simple fact of the matter is that while it is obviously quite possible for a non-linguist to propose a (non-trivial) etymology that is convincing and correct, it is in practice something that does not occur especially often. First off, the basic etymologies regarding the core culinary vocabulary in the major and also many minor languages with which food scholars are generally concerned in their research have by and large already been done in the course of general historical or lexicographical work on those languages by linguists. Of course, there are undoubtedly many partially or wholly wrong etymologies that have been published by linguists as well, but where these errors occur it is typically the case that the error has been in a sense caused by the difficulty of the problem at hand; such is likewise the case with the many words for which historical linguists have felt it necessary to declare that their origins remain "uncertain", "unknown", or "obscure".

The difficulties in discovering a non-trivial etymology are often both numerous and complex, for ideally a good etymology accomplishes all of the following: (a) it accounts completely for the relationship of the sounds in the word in question and its proposed etymon(s) and does so in accord with known sound laws, patterns of phonological adaptation in borrowing, etc., which pertain to the language(s) involved; (b) it similarly accounts for the morphology of the word in question where required; (c) it provides a convincing account of any and all semantic

changes that the word has undergone. All of these accounts of form and meaning need also to be matched appropriately with what is known concerning the historical use of the word, e.g. the details regarding attestation. In the case of a proposed etymology that invokes borrowing from one language to another, the complexities can increase considerably, insofar as one must then deal with the analysis of data from two (or conceivably more) languages and additionally give a reasonable account of the proposed socio-historical setting in which the borrowing was made. Questions of relative and absolute chronology must always be taken into consideration. Furthermore, care must be taken to avoid the common pitfall of anachronistically projecting the central status of the modern standard variety of a given language back in time – wherever possible one must identify the specific dialect(s) of relevance to the matter at hand. For example, in considering colonial-era European loanwords in Native American languages, one looks not to the modern standard varieties as the possible sources but rather to the dialects of French, Dutch, Spanish, etc. as spoken in the actual time of contact (i.e. the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries). But this then entails knowledge of the demographics of the colonial situation, as well as a solid grounding in historical dialectology. In short, what starts as a seemingly small problem concerning an individual word can in fact require a surprisingly large and time-consuming research project.

Enthusiasm and conviction are not substitutes for a deep understanding of the principles of language variation and change, as one can see from the work on cultural influences from Egypt and the Near East in early Greece by M. Bernal; in his three volumes of *Black Athena* historical linguistics and etymological arguments feature most prominently, but the lack of rigour in Bernal's approach to these and his inclination to generate in forced fashion linguistic evidence in support of his overarching claims have with justification been sharply criticized by linguists (e.g. Jasanoff and Nussbaum, 1996) and others. One finds partially analogous uses of linguistic argumentation in the literature on cookery and food history, albeit on a smaller scale. For example, in the extensive writings of C. Wright on Mediterranean food, there is an unmistakable tendency on his part to attribute culinary items and practices first and foremost to Arab influence (e.g., Wright, 1992, 1999). Of course, the Arab influence in matters culinary around the Mediterranean has indeed been extremely important, and a research agenda of trying to discover hitherto unseen instances of that influence is a very reasonable one. What is less reasonable is the tendency to include in historical arguments only etymologies that serve the overarching agenda even when those etymologies are flawed or highly speculative and are presented in lieu of more reasonable ones that do not fit the agenda. If the goal is to present an accurate appreciation of the role of Arab influence throughout Mediterranean cookery, flimsily argued etymologies do not serve the purpose, especially in those instances when etymological evidence is potentially of central importance to shedding light on a difficult problem, as with the early history of pasta (see, e.g., the suggested etymology of *macheroni* in Wright, 1996–97; cf. Wright, 1999: 618ff.).

Even in instances where a given etymology is not crucial for understanding the broader issue at hand, some food historians feel compelled to supply one but do so more to the detriment of their own main point than to its benefit. Such is the case with Hess's (1992: 89–100) proposed etymology of the name of the dish "Hoppin John," which she offers in her generally sound, culinary oriented elaboration of Littlefield's (1981) work on the importance of African slaves in the development of rice cultivation in colonial South Carolina. This particular etymology (deriving "Hoppin John" from a posited phrase of very mixed linguistic parentage, *bahattā kachāṅg*, the first element being from Hindi via Persian and Arabic, the second Malay "perhaps by way of Malayasy") is noteworthy for the degree of mismatch between the manner of presentation, which suggests that the etymology had been carefully researched using sound

linguistic and historical reasoning, and the actual argumentation offered, which harkens directly back to the sort of speculative etymologizing that Voltaire disparaged where seemingly anything goes: "Keeping in mind the historical consonant shift and the predilection for metathesis and elision ..." (100). For example, Hess asserts that in the first word of the phrase, *b* becomes *p* and switches places with the *h*; *affa* is deleted and *in* is inserted, but this without any reference to established sound laws in any actual language.

Such etymological flights of fancy are unfortunately still not rare in the literature on food history and while it is understandable that they occur frequently in popular writing about food, they need to be eliminated from work that otherwise looks to provide us with a real understanding of the culinary past. Good etymologies can be very entertaining and they can of course be crucial bits of evidence in a historical argument, but as Liberman (2009: 166) says: "A bad etymology is not better (in fact, it is much worse) than no etymology at all ..."

For a recent and detailed discussion of the methodologies used currently by etymologists, one can consult Durkin (2009), which can be supplemented with basic works on historical linguistics (e.g., Campbell, 2004; Hock and Joseph, 2009). Another recent contribution specifically concerned with etymology is Liberman (2009), which is an entertaining work but also one that contains many valuable insights and much information; of particular interest here is his chapter on methodology (158ff.), which includes a list summarizing important principles. Given the importance of cultural contacts and exchanges in food history, an understanding of the current state of the study of language contact, both with regard to the social dynamics that affect linguistic transfer and to the structural aspects of language contact, would be worth having. In this regard, the topic of loan phonology should be of especial interest to food scholars. Recent important general works on language contact are Van Coetsem (1988), Thomason and Kaufman (1988) and Van Coetsem (2000).

While it may well be (and should be) daunting for non-linguists to tackle difficult etymological problems, it is important that all food historians have a reasonable sense of what makes an etymology good or bad, more likely or less likely correct, in order to be able to judge better the relative merits of those proposed by others. And in many cases, there are etymologies that have been proposed by linguists with little interest in or understanding of culinary matters that can only be properly revised or rejected by those who have a deep knowledge of those culinary matters.

## Avenues for future research

Interdisciplinary research which genuinely brings together linguistics and food studies has hitherto been relatively quite limited. Consequently there remain many topics on which such collaboration is a real desideratum. Hand in hand with ongoing research in culinary history should go a concerted effort to reject or revise etymologies that are wanting with respect either to their linguistic underpinnings or their connection to culinary culture.

Given the advances in recent decades by linguists in understanding how language contact works and the degree to which food studies are concerned with instances of cultural/culinary contact, it seems natural that interdisciplinary work focus on contact. From a practical standpoint, there is once again much to be gained for food studies through more sophisticated analyses of food-related word borrowings but linguistics has another, more general way of contributing to food studies here: by observing patterns of transfer, one gains insight into the inner structure of language and an understanding of what linguistic domains are more or less stable, more or less open, more or less susceptible to change in different situations. Looking at cuisine – which, like language, is itself a semiotic system – from this linguistically informed

perspective, one begins to see more clearly what can reasonably be called "culinary grammar" (Buccini, 2008: 67; Buccini, 2011: 74; n.b. this conception of culinary grammar is rather different from that of Montanari, 2006: 99–103).

Many lines of inquiry bringing together lexical semantic research and food studies are yet to have been explored, particularly with regard to cross-linguistic topics.

For a list of suggestions by a culinary historian of what culinary historians can learn from linguists, see Laudan (2010).

## Practical considerations for getting started

There are as yet no academic programs specializing in linguistics and food history. Students interested in applying linguistic methodology to food studies should seek a linguistics program that includes training in historical linguistics and/or lexical semantics; those interested in pursuing historical linguistics would benefit greatly from exposure to the related subfields of dialectology, socio-linguistics and language contact. For investigating food-related semantic fields in languages other than one's own native language, a course in field methods is highly recommended. Students at institutions without a program in linguistics may be interested in the courses offered through the Linguistic Society of America's Summer Institutes in odd-numbered years; see lsadc.org for more information.

Etymological dictionaries are increasingly available in online versions; note, however, that in many cases an affiliation with a university library may be needed in order to access the database.

With regard to grants and fellowships, there is no funding source specifically devoted to the intersection of linguistics and food studies. A possibility worth considering might be support from the American Council of Learned Societies, which funds humanistic research in a number of fields, including linguistics and history, and which accepts applications from independent scholars as well as from those with an academic affiliation.

## Key reading

### General linguistics

Bloomfield, Leonard (1984 [1933]) *Language*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.  
(Classic work, still an excellent introductory text for the non-linguist, despite its age.)

### Lexical semantics

Geeraerts, Dirk (2010) *Theories of Lexical Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
Lehrer, Adrienne (1969) "Semantic Cuisine." *Journal of Linguistics* 5: 39–55.

### Historical linguistics

Campbell, Lyle (2004) *Historical Linguistics. An Introduction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.  
Hock, Hans Heinrich and Brian D. Joseph. (2009) *Language History, Language Change, and Language Relationship. An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics*. New York: Mouton De Gruyter.

### Language contact

Thomason, Sarah Grey and Terrence Kaufman (1988) *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Van Coetsem, Frans (1988) *Loan Phonology and the Two Transfer Types in Language Contact*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- (2000) *A General and Unified Theory of the Transmission Process in Language Contact*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

## Etymology

- Durkin, Philip (2009) *The Oxford Guide to Etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liberman, Anatoly (2009) *Word Origins ... and How We Know Them. Etymology for Everyone*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Food studies and language

- Hosking, Richard, ed. (2010) *Food and Language. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*. Totnes: Prospect.

## Bibliography

- Backhouse, A. E. (1994) *The Lexical Field of Taste. A Semantic Study of Japanese Taste Terms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barthes, Roland (1972) *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Bellwood, Peter and Colin Renfrew, eds. (2002) *Examining the Farming/Language Dispersal Hypothesis*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- Berlin, Brent and Paul Kay. (1969) *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bernal, Martin (1987–2006) *Black Athena*. (3 Volumes). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bonazzi, Andrea (2009) "Per uno studio della lingua dei menu." In *Linguisti in contatto. Ricerche di linguistica italiana in Svizzera*. Atti del Convegno, Bellinzona, B. Moretti, E. Pandolfi, M. Casoni, pp. 16–17 November 2007. Bellinzona, pp. 59–70. (Postprint available at: [www.zora.uzh.ch](http://www.zora.uzh.ch), accessed on March 29, 2012.)
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson (1987) *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buccini, Anthony F. (2006) "Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews and the Integration of Culinary Exotica." In *Authenticity in the Kitchen. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2005*, Richard Hosking ed., pp. 132–45. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2007) "On Spaghetti alla Carbonara and Related Dishes of Central and Southern Italy." In *Eggs in Cookery. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2006*, Richard Hosking, ed., pp. 36–47. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2008) "From Necessity to Virtue: The Secondary Uses of Bread in Italian Cookery." In *Food and Morality. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2007*, Susan Friedland, ed., pp. 57–69. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2009) "The Bitter – and Flatulent – Aphrodisiac: Synchrony and Diachrony of the Culinary Use of *Muscari Comosum* in Greece and Italy." In *Vegetables. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2008*, Susan R. Friedland, ed., pp. 46–55. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2010) "The Anatolian Origins of the Words 'Olive' and 'Oil' and the Early History of Oleiculture." In *Food and Language. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*, Richard Hosking, ed., pp. 52–61. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2011) "Continuity in Culinary Aesthetics in the Western Mediterranean: Roman *Garum* and *Liquamen* in the Light of the Local Survival of Fermented Fish Seasonings in Japan and the Western Mediterranean." In *Cured, Fermented and Smoked Foods. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2010*, Helen Saberi, ed., pp. 66–75. Totnes: Prospect.
- Campbell, Lyle (2004) *Historical Linguistics. An Introduction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Carroll, Ruth (2010) "The Visual Language of the Recipe: A Brief Historical Survey." In *Food and Language. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*, Richard Hosking, ed., pp. 62–72. Totnes: Prospect.

- Chen, Victoria (1990/91) "Mien Tze at the Chinese Dinner Table: A Study of the Interactional Accomplishment of Face." *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 24: 109–40.
- Dalby, Andrew (ed. and trans.) (1998) *Cato. On Farming (De Agricultura). A modern translation with commentary*. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2003) *Food in the Ancient World A to Z*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (ed. and trans.) (2011) *Geoponika (Farm Work). A Modern Translation of the Roman and Byzantine Farming Handbook*. Totnes: Prospect.
- Durkin, Philip (2009) *The Oxford Guide to Etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gamkrelidze, Thomas V. and Vjačeslav V. Ivanov (1995) *Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans* (two vols). Berlin and New York: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Geeraerts, Dirk (2010) *Theories of Lexical Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harrison, Alan F. (1983) "Making Sense of Cuisine: From Culinary Triangle to Pyramid Using Lehrer's Tetrahedron as a Stepping Stone." *Anthropological Linguistics* 25: 189–210.
- Hess, Karen (1992) *The Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Hock, Hans Heinrich and Brian D. Joseph (2009) *Language History, Language Change, and Language Relationship. An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics*. New York: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Jasanoff, Jay H. and Alan Nussbaum (1996) "Word Games: The Linguistic Evidence in *Black Athena*." In *Black Athena Revisited*, Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, eds., pp. 177–205. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Kuipers, Joel C. (1984) "Matters of Taste in Weyéwa." *Anthropological Linguistics* 26: 84–101.
- Laudan, Rachel (2010) "What can the Culinary Historian Learn from the Linguist? Ten Suggestions." In *Food and Language. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*, Richard Hosking, ed., pp. 209–16. Totnes: Prospect.
- Lehrer, Adrienne (1969) "Semantic Cuisine." *Journal of Linguistics* 5: 39–55.
- (1972) "Cooking Vocabularies and the Culinary Triangle of Lévi-Strauss." *Anthropological Linguistics* 14: 155–71.
- (1983) *Wine and Conversation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1965) "Le triangle culinaire." *L'Arc* 26: 19–29.
- (1978) *The Origin of Table Manners. Introduction to a Science of Mythology: 3*. (John & Doreen Weightman trans.) New York: Harper & Row.
- Liberman, Anatoly (2009) *Word Origins ... and How We Know Them. Etymology for Everyone*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Littlefield, Daniel C. (1981) *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Mallory, J.P. and D.Q. Adams (2006) *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCawley, James D. (1984) *The Eater's Guide to Chinese Characters*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Mithun, Marianne (1984) "The Proto-Iroquoians: Cultural Reconstruction from Lexical Materials." In *Extending the Rafters. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian Studies*, Michael K. Foster, Jack Campisi, Marianne Mithun, eds., pp. 259–81. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Montanari, Massimo (2006) *Food is Culture*. (Trans. Albert Sonenfeld.) New York: Columbia University Press.
- Müller, Max (1864) *Lectures on the Science of Language* (Second Series). London: Longman, Gren, Longman, Roberts, & Green.
- Newman, John, ed. (2009) *The Linguistics of Eating and Drinking*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Perry, Charles (2001) "Būran: Eleven Hundred Years in the History of a Dish." In *Medieval Arab Cookery*, Maxime Rodinson, A. J. Arberry, & Charles Perry, pp. 239–50. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2001) "The Description of Familiar Foods." In *Medieval Arab Cookery*, Maxime Rodinson, A. J. Arberry, and Charles Perry, pp. 272–465. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2005) *A Baghdad Cookery Book. Petits Propos Culinaires* 79. Totnes: Prospect.
- (2010) "Korma, Kavurma, Ghormeh: A Family or Not So Much?" In *Food and Language. Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*, Richard Hosking, ed., pp. 254–57. Totnes: Prospect.
- Pinnavaia, Laura (2010) *Sugar and Spice ... Exploring Food and Drink Idioms in English*. Monza: Polimetrica.

# Food and theology

David Grumett

- Polomé, Edgar (1982) "The Reconstruction of Proto-Bantu Culture from the Lexicon." In *Language, Society, and Paleoculture*, Anwar S. Dil, ed., pp. 316–28. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ricquier, Birgit and Koen Bostoen (2010) "Retrieving Food History through Linguistics: Culinary Traditions in Early Bantuphone Communities." In *Food and Language: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2009*, Richard Hosking, ed., pp. 258–69. Totnes: Prospect.
- Schoenbrun, David (1993) "We Are What We Eat: Ancient Agriculture between the Great Lakes." *The Journal of African History* 34: 1–31.
- Schuchardt, Hugo (1912) "Sachen und Wörter." *Anthropos* 7: 827–39.
- Siebert, Frank T. (1967) "The original home of the Proto-Algonquian people." In *Contributions to Anthropology: Linguistics I (Algonquian)*, A. D. DeBlois, ed., pp. 13–47. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada.
- Sihler, Andrew (1973) "Baking and Roasting." *American Anthropologist* 75: 1721–25.
- Silvestri, Domenico, Antonietta Marra, and Immacolata Pinto, eds. (2002) *Saperi e sapori mediterranei. La cultura dell'alimentazione e i suoi riflessi linguistici* (3 vols). Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale."
- Strauss, Susan (2005) "The linguistic aestheticization of food: a cross-cultural look at food commercials in Japan, Korea, and the United States." *Journal of Pragmatics* 37: 1427–55.
- Thomason, Sarah Grey and Terrence Kaufman (1988) *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Trigger, Bruce (1975) "Brecht and Ethnohistory." *Ethnohistory* 22: 51–56.
- Van Coetsem, Frans (1988) *Loan Phonology and the Two Transfer Types in Language Contact*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- (2000) *A General and Unified Theory of the Transmission Process in Language Contact*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Watkins, Calvert (1995) *How to Kill a Dragon. Aspects of Indo-European Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wright, Clifford A. (1992) *Cucina Paradiso. The Heavenly Food of Sicily*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- (1996–97) "Cucina Arabo-Sicula and Maccharuni." *Al-Masāq* 9: 151–77.
- (1999) *A Mediterranean Feast*. New York: William Morrow.
- Ye, Zhengdao (2010) "Eating and Drinking in Mandarin and Shanghainese: A Lexical-Conceptual Analysis." In *ASCS09: Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the Australasian Society for Cognitive Science*, W. Christensen, E. Schier, and J. Sutton, eds., pp. 375–83. Sydney: Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science. [www.macqs.mq.edu.au/news/conferences/2009/ASCS2009/html/ye.html](http://www.macqs.mq.edu.au/news/conferences/2009/ASCS2009/html/ye.html) (accessed on April 12, 2012).
- Zwicky, Ann D. and Arnold M. Zwicky (1980) "America's National Dish: the Style of Restaurant Menus." *American Speech* 55: 83–92.

Current work on food and theology is indebted to prior developments in religious studies, social anthropology, and sociology. Patristics and church history have provided foundations, notably critiques by feminist scholars in these disciplines of medieval fasting. Biblical studies has also produced valuable findings, as have theological engagements with culture, ritual, and liturgy. Scholars of food and theology now need to appraise further their inherited tradition, engage non-theological interest in food, shape church practice and witness, and consider the wider implications of practice-focused theology. As well as extending theological understanding of food, this will renew the discipline of theology.

The current expanding multidisciplinary interest in food, and the emergence of the discipline of food studies, provide theologians with both a challenge and opportunities. The challenge lies in connecting often abstract theological concepts to the material reality of people's daily lives. The opportunities offered are to recover rich traditions of theological reasoning that have in fact been shaped by material life, and to understand how theory and practice might be reconnected in the present day.

Food might be assumed to be of greater interest to religious studies scholars than to theologians, and with good reason. Religious studies is centrally concerned with the customs, rituals, narratives, and myths that structure the daily lives of people of faith and their communities, and food is likely to be part of each of these. Theologians certainly have much to learn from the close engagement with empirical life that religious studies at its best achieves. But religious studies does not usually interrogate the texts, theories, and doctrines that motivate and sustain empirical practices. That is the task of the theologian, and how he or she might pursue this task with regard to food is the subject of this chapter.

The task is complicated because the way in which theology functions varies between religions. Understood as a coherent body of rational reflection about God and divine revelation, theology has been central to Christianity since early in its history. Judaism and Islam, the other great monotheistic faiths with discrete historic identities, possess similar traditions of reasoning about God, although the place of food in daily life is better understood in these than in Christianity. This is due to food's clearer ritual significance in them. In some other religions, in contrast, it is debatable whether theology is even possible. Many scholars of Buddhism, for example, have viewed it as non-theistic and not amenable to rational investigation. Hinduism is