

SEM33. Edible narratives: Multidisciplinary representations of novel and traditional foods

33A 11 September h. 11:00-13:00, S3 Moro

33B 11 September h. 16:00-18:30, S3 Moro

Convenors

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Abstract

An interesting notion in the context of food studies has been developed by Montanari (2006): any food can be associated with the values of 'natural' and 'edible' as long as these notions are associated by the specific community that consumes that food. For instance, in the context of digital communication, food blogs in English are a case in point: in these virtual communities, the construction of food-centred discourse and the cultural values that the members of the community come to associate with the food that is presented in the food blog are determined and mediated by the food blogger who acts as the leader of the community itself (Cesiri, 2020).

Therefore, the difference in terms of traditional and novel foods is essentially cultural and has very little to do with their nutritional content. However, it has received early attention from the European Union, which has proceeded with the definition and regulation of novel foods for human consumption in Regulation No. 258/97, which dates back to 1997. Since then, novel foods have been used in the media in association with different kinds of food, from GMFs to cultivated meat, to insects as food (Patinho et al., 2021), whose communicative potential in the general public's psyche is regularly exploited by political propaganda (Domaneschi, 2024).

Drawing on (critical) discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2014), multimodal analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008) and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the seminar explores how traditional and novel foods challenge the notions of 'human' and 'humane'. Furthermore, it examines the linguistic and narrative representations of traditional and novel foods in English and how these food practices are discursively constructed across institutional, medical, marketing, corporate, and tourism domains. By analyzing these contexts, the seminar highlights how traditional and novel food narratives stimulate human responses to ecological crises, cultural change, and ethical dilemmas. Finally, it will critically examine these discourses to explore how food is used as a means to reflect and reshape contemporary cultural and environmental paradigms.

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SEM33. Papers

33A 11 September h. 11:00-13:00, S3 Moro

- *Reframing the edible: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of corporate narratives on insect-based products* (Alessia Battista, Università degli Studi di Salerno)
- *Conventional Disruptions: Marketing the humane, the traditional, and the innovative in contemporary food discourse* (Marco Cimini, Università degli Studi di Napoli Parthenope)
- *Novel foods narratives: A critical-discursive insight into the representation of cultivated meat, lab-grown fish and plant-based seafood* (Umberto Faraone, Università degli Studi di Salerno)
- *Food Narratives: Building brand identity through heritage and tradition* (Luisa Marino, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II)

33B 11 September h. 16:00-18:30, S3 Moro

- *Cultured meat is (not) veg*n meat: Exploring veg*n attitudes in YouTube comments* (Francesco Nacchia, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)
- *From farm-to-table: Measuring host communities' efforts to preserve a respectful and authentic relationship with the plant world in Instagram tourism reels* (Elena Mattei, Università degli Studi di Bergamo)
- *"Guilt-Free Indulgence": A corpus-assisted discourse analysis of ethical luxury in the marketing of plant-based products and novel meats* (Gianmarco Vignozzi, Università di Pisa)

SEM33. Abstracts

Reframing the edible: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of corporate narratives on insect-based products

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Growing ecological crises have intensified debates about sustainability, including the need to tackle climate change and food insecurity, prompting the exploration of alternative nutritional sources, such as insect-based foods for humans. In spite of their nutritional and environmental benefits and of the endorsement by international institutions such as FAO and the EU, consumer acceptance of insect-based foods in the Western world remains low (Baiano, 2020). Therefore, scholars and marketers have suggested that the promotion of this type of product be changed, for instance by highlighting their benefits, concealing realistic representations of insects on the packaging, and relying on new conceptual frames and sensory manipulations (Ali, 2016; Tang & Chung, 2023).

Starting from these considerations, the present study explores the narrative representation and positioning of insect-based foodstuffs by three US-based companies, namely *All Things Bugs*, *Eat Chirps*, and *Don Bugito*, which have been selected for their distinctive narratives grounded in science, 'coolness', and traditional/indigenous cuisine, respectively. Recognising that food production and consumption go beyond mere sustenance, as they embody social and cultural rituals (Battista, 2025; Rozin, 1996), this contribution focuses on the "About Us" pages and a selection of articles by the three aforementioned companies, and combines critical discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2023), multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020), and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The aim is to analyse the discursive, linguistic, and multimodal negotiation and representation of insect-based products as sustainable and attractive, but also as simultaneously 'human' and 'humane', innovative and traditional and/or familiar.

Overall, this contribution addresses the challenges posed to the traditional Western concepts of acceptable human foodstuffs, which may eventually be reshaped by novel socio-cultural and gastronomic paradigms. Additionally, examining multimodal corporate and marketing discourses about novel foods makes it possible to understand how narratives on novel foods stimulate responses to ecological crises, cultural change, and ethical dilemmas. Ultimately, this study contributes to a growing body of research on the discursive and linguistic representation of novel foods in marketing and corporate communication.

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Conventional disruptions: Marketing the humane, the traditional, and the innovative in contemporary food discourse

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Food plays a key role in shaping cultural and individual identities, driving social change, and reinforcing or challenging dominant power structures. Research has widely explored how discursive and representational practices involving food across different media function as ideological signifiers in the advancement of particular worldviews and values. In marketing discourse, for instance, consumers are encouraged to embrace ideals of ‘authenticity’ and ‘equality’ and increasingly, ‘humane’ consumption, by purchasing products associated with particular territories (e.g., Italy), communities (e.g., small-scale farms), or moral principles (e.g., fair trade). Such narratives often rely on a conservative imagery, and frame local and artisanal products in terms of ‘traditional’ and ‘natural’ heritage. In contrast, the category of ‘novel food’ – broadly understood as items unfamiliar to European consumers (e.g., insects) or produced through in-vitro processes (e.g., cultured meat) – evokes progressive and artificial associations that disrupt ‘conventional’ food imaginaries. Promoting these products requires distinct strategies to reframe negative representations (e.g., *Frankenstein Food*), overcome consumer resistance, redefine taste boundaries, and legitimize unfamiliar practices. These efforts are further hindered by regulatory constraints (e.g., the EU *Novel Food Regulation*), cultural norms and religious frameworks which determine both how the product is perceived and how it is discursively constructed for different market segments.

This paper adopts a qualitative, discourse-oriented approach to examine how contemporary marketing constructs the opposition between traditional and novel food in the particular case of meat. It focuses on four US-based companies – two cultivated meat pioneers (*GOOD Meat* and *UPSIDE Foods*) and two emblematic representatives of traditional meat production (*Certified Hereford Beef* and *Lobel’s of New York*). Through a comparative multimodal analysis of corporate websites, advertising, and selected social media content, the study explores how notions like ‘natural’, ‘authentic’, ‘humane’, and ‘ethical’ are articulated through metaphor, visual rhetoric, and other semiotic strategies. Results are expected to challenge the assumed dichotomy between ‘traditional’ and ‘novel’ in food discourse, revealing an interplay of competing ideologies determined by shifting ecological, technological, and ethical concerns.

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Novel foods narratives: A critical-discursive insight into the representation of cultivated meat, lab-grown fish and plant-based seafood

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Discourses around food and foodways have become increasingly prominent nowadays across diverse intellectual and media landscapes (Matwick & Matwick, 2019), resulting in a food-webbed world. And as societies continue to evolve, so do too our foodscapes, constantly welcoming innovative and alternative food forms which may stimulate the circulation of new food narratives and even call for reinvented communicative paradigms.

In particular, the recent emergence of plant-based seafoods, lab-grown fish and cultivated meat has seemingly determined a shift in the way food is discursively represented, acknowledged and perceived. While traditional foodstuffs are often framed through the lens of ‘authenticity’, insisting on ‘organic’, ‘protected’, or ‘local’ designations, among others, serving as indicators of quality, tradition, and integrity of craftsmanship in consumer culture (Beer, 2008), the arrival of novel foods stemming from cellular agriculture (e.g. cultured meat and fish) or from plant-based replication of animal-based

foodstuffs has prompted the emergence of new stories around food as well as new conceptualisations and narratives that foreground a newfangled array of sociocultural and ethical values.

This pilot study seeks to delve into the food discourses revolving around novel lab-grown, cultivated and plant-based edibles, by analysing a selection of English-language websites that market such foodstuffs, with the aim of unveiling the discursive strategies implemented in verbally representing and framing these novel edibles for the intended audiences. By employing qualitative modes of enquiry and incorporating corpus linguistics tools (Baker, 2023), discourse analysis (Goddard & Carey, 2017; Gee, 2014) and critical discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2023; Fairclough, 2010), the study centres on the analysis of referential strategies, semantic prosodies, and framings leveraged to discursively portray the novel foods in question and the stories constructed around them for the intended English-speaking audiences.

Overall, results suggest that the scrutinised websites of the companies that produce and/or sell cultivated/lab-grown edibles and plant-based analogues present their products by underscoring environmental impact, economic benefits, sustainability, transparency, and quality, while ignoring matters relating to tradition and cultural identity.

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Food narratives: Building brand identity through heritage and tradition

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Even though codfish is not endemic in the Portuguese sea, its consumption is widespread all over the country and it is considered a symbol of national (culinary) identity.

This paper investigates the discursive construction of corporate identity from the ten leading Portuguese companies which operate in the field of canned and curated fish. After having retrieved a list from Bureau van Dijk-Orbis, I aim at utilizing Multimodal Discourse Analysis to analyse a corpus comprising the 'About Us' sections of the companies' websites. The companies involved in cod processing, which are under scrutiny here, tend to use narrative strategies which focus on the history of the company and on their tradition in handling such a 'symbolic' product. In this perspective, far from being just food, or a product, codfish seems to play a fundamental role in the transmission of the Portuguese cultural image(s) and archive(s).

The paper aims at evaluating how the texts in the corpus contribute to build the companies' brand identity, identifying the verbal and non-verbal rhetoric devices used to present them as rooted in tradition and willing to preserve their connection with the past. Furthermore, the paper aims at finding communication patterns which could, eventually, influence and shape stakeholders' perceptions.

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From farm-to-table: Measuring host communities' efforts to preserve a respectful and authentic relationship with the plant world in Instagram tourism reels

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Instagram has become a dominant platform for tourism marketing, yet few discourse studies examine its multimodal content, particularly at the corpus level (Mattei, 2024). This paper introduces a multi-level annotation scheme to analyze tourism reels. The aim is to explore how local food is portrayed across different forms of tourism promotion. Within a sociosemiotic, post-humanist framework, we investigate food's representation as a raw, natural element or 'authentic' dish to be consumed (Stibbe 2014).

Using ELAN software, a pilot corpus analysis allowed for the quantification of formal elements like objects, shots, gazes, words and sound in two sub-corpora of reels promoting traditional and regenerative tourism. Content-based categories such as participant roles, types of (re)actions and emotions were also measured (Bateman et al., 2017).

Findings show that traditional tourism often simplifies food preparation, presenting the latter as product, both fostering passive mental, emotive consumption and reinforcing power imbalance between hosts, tourists and the environment. In contrast, regenerative tourism highlights shared moments of food co-preparation and respect for local biodiversity, fostering cultural learning and equality. This study offers avenues for corpus research on ways to promote collective, social-ecological development through travel (Tham and Sharma 2023).

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Cultured meat is (not) veg*n meat: Exploring veg*n attitudes in YouTube comments

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The production of cultured meat is being increasingly allowed in countries worldwide, with the global market being estimated to reach the size of \$214 million by 2025 and \$593 million by 2032 (MarketsandMarkets, 2019). However, studies demonstrate that its recognition as an effective technology in tackling issues concerning human health, the environment and animal welfare has been received with mixed feelings across different countries (Pakseresht et al., 2022). Naming and framing also play a significant role in public acceptance, as shown by Bryant and Barnett (2018), who found that consumer perceptions can shift dramatically depending on how cultured meat is labelled.

The issue is particularly relevant to the veg*n (the term is meant to include both vegetarians and vegans) community, which has embraced different perspectives on it. Despite PETA's explicit endorsement of *slaughterless* meat, an opposing narrative emerges from a share of veg*ns who criticise cultured meat for symbolically violating animal dignity (Chauvet, 2018). This division echoes broader tensions within the veg*n movement regarding authenticity, compromise, and moral consistency (Wrenn, 2016).

Based on these premises, the proposed paper aims to explore the attitudes between veg*ns disapproving of and veg*ns approving of cultured meat by analysing a corpus of 1,050 YouTube comments posted in response to the popular amateur video "VEGAN Tries Lab Grown Meat for the First Time". The analysis draws upon the framework of Socio-

cognitive Discourse Studies (van Dijk, 2017) and considers online discourse as a space of affiliation, negotiation and boundary construction (Zappavigna, 2012). In so doing, the study aims to shed light on the diverging perspectives that shape the ongoing dialogue around cultured meat and that might lead to setting new in-group and out-group boundaries within the veg*n community in online settings.

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“Guilt-Free Indulgence”: A Corpus-assisted discourse analysis of ethical luxury in the marketing of plant-based products and novel meats

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With the multiplication of discourses and the consequent normalization of sensitivity toward issues such as the environmental footprint of human alimentation and the well-being of animals, the marketing of plant-based and cultivated meats is shifting from discourses of sacrifice and sustainability to those of pleasure, luxury, and personal empowerment (Caruana et al., 2020; Athwal et al., 2019).

This paper investigates how such products are discursively framed as both ethical and indulgent, offering consumers the promise of “guilt-free” pleasure (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Drawing on corpus-assisted discourse analysis, the study explores how ethical consumption is aestheticized in English-language marketing discourse, focusing on prominent international plant-based and cell-based meat brands such as *Beyond Meat*, and *Oatly*. The study is based on the Ethical Indulgence Corpus (EIC), a purpose-built corpus of approximately 100,000 words, comprising texts retrieved from webpages of international brands producing plant-based and cultivated meat products (e.g., product descriptions, mission statements, press releases). Keyword analysis, collocation patterns, and semantic prosody are used to uncover how key values such as sustainability, animal welfare, and innovation are aligned with sensory and emotional appeals with words like “crave” and “indulgence”. Special attention is paid to relevant collocations (e.g., “clean protein”) and evaluative language that constructs these foods as both morally virtuous and gastronomically satisfying (Chen & Eriksson, 2019). While the primary focus is on verbal language, occasional multimodal analysis of selected promotional visuals complements the linguistic data, shedding light on how ethical luxury is visually signified.

Preliminary findings reveal how novel meat brands strategically blur boundaries between health, pleasure-seeking, and ethics, rebranding alternative products as desirable lifestyle choices.

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