

Food and Language: Foodways and Discourses across Cultures

Research Exercises

There are four types of suggested research exercises for each chapter: 1) a brainstorming exercise, 2) a foodways journal prompt, 3) a topic for library/internet research, and 4) a food-and-language fieldwork project. Each one can be used to generate further analysis and discussion. In addition, examples of student responses to some of these exercises can be found on the eResources page under “Student Research Examples.”

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Talking Food Across Cultures

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: List all the ways in which food and language co-occur in your life.
- 2) Foodways journal: Keep track for a day of what you ate, when, and where, and whether you discussed the food you ate with anyone (see the “Student Research Examples” folder for examples of “Foodways Journal” entries by several students).
- 3) Library/internet research: Do some internet research on one food item: its etymology, botanical properties, and nutrients; when, where, and how humans first started producing and eating it; where and how it’s produced and eaten now; if it has had any significant impact on the economy, politics, or religion of any society at any time.
- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Distribute a simple survey in the classroom asking questions such as the following, and then analyze the responses. Instructors may consider asking one question each week as an attendance question and then using the responses as a basis for classroom discussion:
 - a) What are your favorite foods/drinks and what are your food/drink taboos?
 - b) How do you communicate (if at all) about the food and drink that you grow, buy, cook, eat, or see in the media?
 - c) How do you interact when you are in the presence of food or drink, while growing, buying cooking, or eating it?
 - d) What kind of talk is poisonous or nourishing for you?

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Chapter 2 The Communicating Eater

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: List some of the ways in which your foodways (growing, marketing, preparing, consuming, and disposing of food and drink) would leave ecofacts and artifacts for future archaeologists to interpret.
- 2) Foodways journal: Describe the food-and-language habits of some animal(s) in your life, whether your dog at home or pigeons on your way to school: what do they eat, do they do any communicating with other animals of their own or other species (humans included) while they eat, do they in any way communicate about what they eat (such as telling you

it's time to feed them), and do they seem to take sustenance or offense from communication with other animals in any way, shape, or form?

- 3) Library/internet research: Choose a food that you ate today and trace where it originally came from and how it arrived on your plate, in other words, its food chain.
- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Treat your home as an archaeological field site and imagine what of your food-and-language practices would remain for an archaeologist to find if you were suddenly evacuated to Mars tomorrow. Take notes on the arrangement of space and furniture, and the tools and texts that would indicate how you were eating and interacting there (such as grocery lists and dishes in the sink).

Chapter 3 Procuring and Processing Food-and-Language Data

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: List all the everyday foodways-discourse sites in your life where you might be able to conduct food-and-language research.
- 2) Foodways journal: Reflect on when, where, what, and how you normally procure and eat your food on a normal day. Include photos of your foodscapes, such as your pantry/refrigerator, garden, grocery store, dining hall, street vendor, etc.
- 3) Library/internet research: Explore the American Anthropological Association's website for information about anthropological ethics (<http://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1656>) and the CITI course on doing research with human subjects (<https://about.citiprogram.org/en/series/human-subjects-research-hsr/>).
- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Conduct participant observation during some foodways-discourse event and collect data using the ethnography of SPEAKING and FEEDING guidelines provided in the Appendix of the book (also see examples of "Ethnography of SPEAKING-and-FEEDING" data collected by two students under "Student Research Examples").

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Chapter 4 Language Through Food

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: List the rituals that you and your family/friends celebrate and the starring role of at least one food during each (for example, Thanksgiving turkey or birthday cake).
- 2) Foodways journal: Describe in multisensual detail a dish of personal and cultural significance for you and consider how the ingredients are produced and procured and how the dish is prepared and eaten (see a student example of this form of "Food Exploration" under "Student Research Examples").
- 3) Library/internet research: Research a deeply meaningful food ritual (such as Passover dinner), food code (such as halal for Muslims) or taboo (such as entomophagy for

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Europeans and anthropophagy for most humans) to understand who engages in these practices, how they do so, what it means to them, and why others do the opposite.

- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Conduct interviews about how your interviewees produce, consume, and exchange food and talk, taking notes not only on what they say but also how they say it. One possibility is to elicit a culinary chat with a family member or friend while cooking and eating food. Consider not only the themes that emerge, but also the language varieties used, the impact of the context, and your own role as both interviewer and participant in the discussion (see examples of “Foodways Interview” data collected by students under “Student Research Examples”).

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Chapter 5 Language About Food

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: Brainstorm the many ways in which humans communicate about food (photos, recipes, interacting over a snack, etc.).
- 2) Foodways journal: Keep track of all the times you see or hear people communicating about food for one day. Think about whether these communications involve words and sentences, pictures, music, and/or body language. Are they done in person in a physical setting or are they separated by time and space via various forms of technology such as newsprint or computer screens? Analyze some of the food signage in your landscape.
- 3) Library/internet research: Research the path traveled by the name for a dish that has been borrowed into English along with the dish’s incorporation into the American food scene (such as *sushi*, *taco*, *roti*, *kebab*, *cannoli*) and consider how this dish continues to be represented online, on TV, in cookbooks, etc.
- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Analyze a food text, such as a poem, cartoon, advertisement, label, comedy skit, song, or film that uses food as a major player: who was involved in producing it, for what audience, with what intention, and with what actual impact? (see the list of food films under “Film Resources” and an example of a student’s “Food Film Analysis” essay comparing two food films under “Student Research Examples” on the eResources page).

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Chapter 6 Language Around Food

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: List the terms for food-related discourse genres in English or other languages (such as *coffee talk* in English or *kaffeeklatsch* in German).
- 2) Foodways journal: Keep track of any interactions you engage in around food over the course of a week (such as with your family members or roommates, a cashier at the supermarket, a farmer at the market, your coffee barista). Note both what you communicate about and how you communicate with others while procuring, preparing, and consuming your food.

- 3) Library/internet research: Research one food-related ritual that you have always been curious about, whether or not your family or friends celebrate it: what foods are eaten, when, where, how, and why, and what sorts of communication happens around and through the food during the ritual? Research how one of the relevant dishes is prepared and why it is meaningful for those preparing and partaking in it.
- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Record and transcribe interactions during a food event and analyze how and why people communicate as they do around food. Focus, for example, on rules for different mealtimes/snacks and how those rules are socialized through language and actions: who can talk when and about what, who can eat with their hands or utensils, etc.

Chapter 7 Language As Food

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: Design a “my plate” (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>) for language instead of food. What would be the categories? How many servings would you need? Why is this a problematic metaphor?
- 2) Foodways journal: Note over the course of the day ways in which you felt nourished or poisoned by interacting with others, whether face-to-face (such as through taking part in a gossip session or having a “deep” discussion) or mediated (such as through reading a powerful book or experiencing cyberbullying).
- 3) Library/internet research: Research the meanings and etymologies of some food expressions, idioms, metaphors, or aphorisms from English or another language you speak. These could be idioms involving food (*cool as a cucumber*), idioms that compare language to food (*a fruitful discussion*), or social labels based on food (*old prune* or *sweetie pie*).
- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Choose a food-related website that is trying to sell you something (such as a new snack or a famine-related charity), and analyze what line they are trying to feed you. How effective are they and why?

Chapter 8 Applying the Food-and-Language Model

- 1) Brainstorming exercise: List buzzwords from the realm of food politics and activism (for example, gluten, cage-free, and foodie).
- 2) Foodways journal: Describe a food-in-the-news event that made an impression on you and/or explore why and how specific political food discourses impact you.
- 3) Library/internet research: Analyze a food activist website (such as <https://www.slowfood.com/> or <http://www.justfood.org/>) or a food politics film (see the list of food politics films under “Film Resources”) for their effective use of text, graphics, sound, paths and logos (see an example of a student’s “Food Politics Film Review” presentation under “Student Research Examples”).

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- 4) Food-and-language fieldwork: Participate and observe (perhaps by volunteering) at a food justice site (a food pantry, soup kitchen, farmers market, etc.) and take notes on the role of written and oral communications in the organization's effort to deliver safe and healthy food in culturally respectful ways.