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CHAPTER

10 The Language of Food

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Abstract

Food is a great conversation opener, whether at parties or in an academic forum, and a great topic for gathering data. The language of food is a topic on which most people have a view, whether subjective or objective, implicit or explicit, from the inside or outside. The field of food study exists down the street or in some distant community. An interested fieldworker can gather information from friends, neighbours, in schools, supermarkets, and restaurants, or just about anywhere, asking ‘What is your favourite food?’ and so on. This chapter explores the ‘languages of food’ as they communicate variations of messages about the meanings of food. The local or internal messages, exemplified in this article in Marshallese are contrasted with three external messages: ‘civilized eating’ as the concern of early outsiders such as missionary wives; economists’ approaches largely concerned with production of food; and nutrition education messages about ‘good’ food. These alternative approaches reflect Douglas’s idea that ‘every spoken sentence rests on unspoken knowledge for some of its meaning’. In order to focus on significant differences in approaches to food and eating that anthropologists have brought to the fore, the concept of gastronomy is elaborated upon stating that gastronomic protocols that govern the use of chopsticks or serving food on a palm leaf, or serving food in the correct hierarchical sequence, are all notable features that send messages about the wider society.

Keywords: [food](#), [nutrition education messages](#), [gastronomy](#), [language of food](#), [civilized eating](#)

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