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PERSONIFICATION OF EMOTIONAL STATES THROUGH FOOD IMAGES IN MEDIA TEXTS

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Abstract The rapid integration of cognitive linguistics and media discourse analysis is fundamentally transforming our understanding of how abstract emotional states are personified through food imagery. This paper presents a critical scientific literature review of recent peer-reviewed advancements in gastronomic metaphors, evaluating their communicative efficacy in triggering specific affective responses. The review synthesizes findings on conceptual mapping, demonstrating how positive emotional states-such as nostalgia, psychological comfort, and affection-are frequently personified through "sweet" and "warm" food imagery, whereas negative states, including anxiety, resentment, and moral disgust, are mapped onto "bitter," "sour," or "decaying" food concepts. Furthermore, the convergence of textual and visual modalities in digital journalism is examined through the lens of emerging psycholinguistic vulnerabilities, specifically how these sensory manipulations affect audience empathy and cross-cultural interpretation. Despite significant theoretical maturation in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a critical research gap persists regarding the empirical, corpus-driven validation of how distinct emotional spectrums are computationally processed in algorithmic media environments. The study concludes that while food imagery dramatically enhances emotional resonance by simulating visceral psychological reactions, its integration into persuasive mass media relies heavily on the future development of robust, culture-specific affective models.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Personification, Food Imagery, Affective Responses, Media Discourse, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Emotional States, Nostalgia, Disgust.

Introduction Historically, the linguistic representation of emotional states in mass communication has relied on abstract semantic principles and direct lexical categorization. However, the modernization of media discourse and the demand for instantaneous audience engagement have necessitated a shift toward more visceral, embodied communicative strategies. Today, the modern media text operates as an interconnected semiotic system, wherein complex human emotions are continuously mapped onto and personified by tangible concepts-predominantly food imagery-to trigger immediate psychological reactions.



The primary objective of implementing gastronomic personification in media texts is to minimize cognitive distance and force the audience to "feel" rather than merely read about an emotion. Specifically, media texts frequently personify feelings of familial warmth, romantic affection, and nostalgic security through the imagery of fresh, sweet, or culturally traditional foods. Conversely, emotional states of psychological fatigue, guilt, or societal corruption are viscerally conveyed through metaphors of stale, bitter, or rotting food. Recent linguistic advancements in conceptual blending have unlocked unprecedented capabilities for analyzing this real-time emotional manipulation. Nevertheless, the proliferation of digital media introduces a paradox: as texts become more visually and linguistically augmented, the cognitive complexity of interpreting these specific emotional triggers across different cultures scales exponentially. This manuscript critically evaluates the contemporary scientific literature concerning the application of food-based personifications to specific emotional states.

Literature Review and Critical Analysis

Personifying the Emotional Spectrum: Comfort vs. Anxiety Cognitive linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) establish that food imagery effectively transitions emotional expression from abstract taxonomy to condition-based, physical experiences. By analyzing contemporary media texts, cognitive models reveal strict patterns in how distinct emotions are categorized. Research demonstrates that the personification of joy, love, and nostalgia is systematically achieved through metaphors of "sweetness" and "warmth" (e.g., "a sugar-coated memory" or "comfort food for the soul"). These linguistic structures biochemically simulate feelings of safety and empathic warmth in the reader's brain. Conversely, negative emotional states—such as deep resentment, anxiety, or cynicism—are personified through "bitter," "sour," or "stale" food imagery (e.g., "swallowing a bitter truth," "a recipe for disaster," or "a sour mood"). By mapping abstract feelings onto human taste receptors, authors bypass logical resistance and induce immediate affective empathy or aversion.

Multimodal Media and the Psychology of Disgust and Greed To safely validate these communicative models and optimize audience engagement, linguists have increasingly turned to multimodal discourse analysis. In digital journalism and advertising, gastronomic personification is not merely textual; it is highly visual. The literature emphasizes that imagery of abundant, rich foods is frequently used to personify greed, extreme indulgence, or economic prosperity, triggering psychological desire. In contrast, investigative journalism often uses the imagery of rotting or contaminated food to personify moral decay, political corruption, and societal neglect, directly targeting the psychological emotion of disgust. Research indicates that this sensory language—when integrated into a broader multimodal framework—accurately triggers profound visceral responses, preventing message



disengagement and forcing the audience to react emotionally before analyzing the text logically.

Cultural Embeddedness and Interpretive Vulnerabilities While the biological reactions to sweet and bitter tastes are universal, the deployment of globalized digital media architectures reveals that the emotional associations of specific foods are highly culturally dependent. Modern psycholinguists emphasize that diverse audiences are susceptible to interpretive dissonance when engaging with food personifications. For instance, a spicy food metaphor might personify "excitement and passion" in one culture, but "aggression and danger" in another. In an interconnected digital environment, an unrecognized or culturally misaligned gastronomic metaphor causes a breakdown in emotional resonance. The literature consensus affirms that successfully triggering specific affective states is inextricably linked to cultural competence and socio-cognitive alignment.

Research Gaps and Discussion A critical comparison of the reviewed literature reveals a pronounced dichotomy: established findings demonstrate that the theoretical capacity to map specific emotional states (like nostalgia or disgust) onto food imagery has rapidly matured, yet this conceptual innovation substantially outpaces empirical, data-driven frameworks.

The principal research gap identified is the lack of standardized, large-scale corpus methodologies tailored to evaluating which specific emotions dominate high-velocity social media texts across different demographics. While traditional CMT exhibits high empirical success in qualitative analyses of static print media, its subjective architecture restricts formal, statistical verification of how varying degrees of anxiety or joy are quantified in dynamic media. Future research must prioritize developing domain-specific computational linguistics frameworks that can mathematically translate complex sensory metaphors into deterministic affective data. Until the cognitive processing of these specific emotional states can be formally verified against strict cross-cultural algorithms, their role remains confined to qualitative interpretation rather than predictive communicative modeling.

Conclusion Food imagery and sensory metaphors have irrevocably redefined the paradigms of emotional expression in media discourse. The personification of abstract affective states-ranging from the warmth of nostalgia to the visceral reaction of moral disgust-through gastronomic concepts provides media producers with the unprecedented ability to trigger embodied psychological responses proactively. This sensory mapping significantly reduces the reliance on literal emotional descriptions and minimizes the margins for audience disengagement. However, transforming media texts into sensory-rich systems introduces severe cross-cultural vulnerabilities that require continuous, context-aware mitigation. For



cognitive linguistics to assume a predictive role in analyzing specific emotional resonance in future global media, subsequent academic research must bridge the gap between abstract metaphorical theory and deterministic, corpus-based validation through the advancement of computational affective discourse analysis.

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