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Sneijder, Petra; te Molder, Hedwig

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Research Report

Disputing taste: food pleasure as an achievement in interaction[☆]

Petra Sneijder^{*}, Hedwig F.M. te Molder

Department of Social Sciences, Wageningen University, Communication Science, P.O. Box 8130, 6700 EW, Wageningen, The Netherlands

Abstract

While identity has been a dominant topic in research on food choice, literature on identity in consumers' everyday life is scarce. In this article we draw on insights from discursive psychology to demonstrate how members of an online forum on food pleasure handle the hedonic appreciation of food in everyday interaction. We examined 40 discussions consisting of 1715 e-mails related to culinary topics. The analysis focuses on the way in which the participants of this forum work up and establish their identities as 'gourmets'. A dominant tool in performing this identity work is the discursive construction of independent access to knowledge of and experience with food items, so as to compete with or resist the epistemic superiority of a preceding evaluation. Data are presented with nine examples of the 73 manifestations of the construction of independent access. Contrary to sensory approaches to food choice, this study depicts the enjoyment of food as an interactional achievement rather than a pure physiological sensation. Wider implications of this study for the relation between food, identity and taste are discussed.

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Keywords: Discursive psychology; Discourse; Identity; Food choice; Taste; Hedonism

Introduction

In this article, we are drawing on insights from discursive psychology and conversation analysis to develop an analysis of natural online interactions of self-declared 'food-lovers'. Our aim is to shed light on the discursive procedures that are used by participants in an online forum on food pleasure to achieve ownership of taste. They do so by claiming the right to know what good food entails rather than constructing their enjoyment of food as a subjective experience. Within and through these interactional practices, participants construct their identities as 'gourmets'.

We focus on how participants negotiate their relative rights to evaluate food items or practices (cf. [Heritage & Raymond, 2005](#)). For this purpose, we examine interaction sequences in which an evaluative assessment of a particular food item is being offered to which other participants subsequently respond. We will demonstrate that participants in the so-called 'second assessment position' make an effort to construct their evaluations as independently arrived at, where they otherwise

could simply agree with previous speakers. Before presenting our analytic results, we will provide some background to the topic of food and identity and argue how discursive psychology may shed new light on this relationship.

Food and identity

The relationship between identity-formation and food consumption has become firmly established in the social sciences. At the same time, however, the concept of 'social identity' has lost much of its clarity. In the post-modern world in which our daily decisions regarding what to eat are determined by a wealth of options and by rapid economic and technological change, consumer identities seem fragmented and relatively unpredictable (cf. [Gabriel & Lang, 1995](#)). Furthermore, food products are not as recognisable in terms of taste, smell or texture as they used to be. Food technology makes it possible for producers to imitate natural or traditional foods and average consumers seem less aware of production methods and the origin of food items in the stores ([Fischler, 1988](#)). Decisions about what to eat and the corresponding identity work seem more rooted in product imagery than in actual food ingredients. With 'healthy products' being promoted by reference to their taste and 'convenience foods' being marketed as healthy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to speak of a one-to-one relationship between food consumption and identity.

Traditional approaches to food and identity no longer seem adequate to capture this kind of complexity. Food consumption

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^{*} Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: petra.sneijder@wur.nl (P. Sneijder), hedwig.temolder@wur.nl (H.F.M. te Molder).

has long been treated as a symbol of membership of specific social identity groups. A range of studies have emphasised its role as a marker of differences in gender, class and ethnicity (for example Charles & Kerr, 1988; Douglas, 1984). Mennell, Murcott, & Van Otterloo (1992, p. 54) define the categories social class, age and sex as ‘the pre-sociological baseline for explanations of social and cultural bases for the social distribution of ‘choice’, ‘habit’ or ‘taste’ (...). In the past decade, however, researchers from different social scientific disciplines have come to acknowledge the decreasing value of socio-demographic factors as predictors of present consumption patterns (cf. Caplan, 1997; Crouch & O’Neill, 2000; Fischler, 1988; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; Lindeman & Stark, 1999). Both the a priori relevance and the consistency of these identity factors have been overestimated.

As a response to such considerations, social theorists (for example Giddens, 1991) have introduced the concept of lifestyle, referring to the choices that people constantly make in their everyday lives. Consumers actively create their identity by choosing certain products over others, rather than conforming to food practices prescribed by particular social groups. Indicating a cultural rather than a structural pattern, the concept of lifestyle—or consumer lifestyle—partly resolves the rigidity of more traditional divisions. However, (see also Murcott, 2000) the lifestyle approach is not concerned with the way in which identities are formulated, reformulated and managed in everyday life for particular *interactional purposes*, by social members themselves.

In recent years, consumer researchers have begun to examine new consumer communities on the Internet, focusing on identities, values and motives, mainly using ethnographic research methods. ‘Nethnography’ (Kozinets, 2002) takes into account the interaction dynamics between members of consumption-orientated communities and focuses on the communicative acts performed by participants (for instance ‘sharing knowledge’). However, analytic observations are frequently based upon the content of what is said rather than the way in which talk is constructed and especially how it is used. In this article we analyse online interaction by drawing on a perspective that focuses on the fine-grained detail of interaction sequences (see also Lamerichs & te Molder, 2003). It examines discourse as being constructed and action oriented. This perspective allows us to study the discursive procedures by which members of an online community on food pleasure manage their relative rights and responsibilities to evaluate food.

Discursive psychology: discursive identities and evaluative practices

As mentioned, a specific concern of discursive psychology is the action-orientation of naturally occurring discourse (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; te Molder, 1999; te Molder & Potter, 2005). Rather than treating discourse as a result of underlying cognitive processes, it is analysed as social practice. Applied to the study of everyday discourse on eating practices, it has been shown how people hold each other accountable for taste preferences in mealtime

interaction (Wiggins, 2004) and how participants in online discussions on veganism resist the potentially health-threatening and complicated nature of the vegan lifestyle, for instance by presenting themselves as ordinary persons (Sneijder & te Molder, 2004).

From a discursive psychological perspective, identity is looked at as an achievement and a tool. Identities are part of everyday routine and as such used for a range of interactional purposes. They become visible as a demonstration of or an ascription to membership of a whole range of possible categories, such as ‘man’, ‘student’ or ‘ordinary person’, which are inference-rich and therefore associated with particular kinds of behaviour, the so-called category-bound activities (Sacks, 1992). However, the connection between identity and activity is not simply there but a part of participants’ interactional achievements. Success is not guaranteed: membership needs to be worked up and people can fail to be treated as being a member of a certain category (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Potter, 1996).

An important feature of identity work is the kind of ‘entitlement’ that identities may provide for. A witness to a car accident may have a specific entitlement to feel awful (Sacks, 1992), and a friend may be entitled to have intimate knowledge about the one he is friendly with. Again, these are negotiable rather than fixed or mechanical features of identities. In analytical terms, only those categories and category entitlements count which are made relevant and oriented to by participants themselves and which have a visible outcome in the interaction (Schegloff, 1991).

The role of evaluative practices in identity work

This paper deals with the ways in which participants manage their relative rights to evaluate taste in online discussions on food pleasure. Evaluative assessments implicate the speaker’s knowledge of or access to the referent he or she is assessing and thereby indicate the speaker’s right to perform an evaluation (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2005). However, being the first to evaluate a referent implies having independent rights to perform the evaluation, whereas evaluations of the same referent in second positions imply ‘secondary’ or relative rights (Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

Producers of second assessments may work at undermining the suggestion that their right to evaluate an event, object or person is secondary to the first speaker’s, especially when they are members of a category that is associated with knowledge of or access to the evaluated item (for example parents with their children). Speakers can use several discursive procedures to present their second assessments as ‘independently arrived at’. Heritage and Raymond (2005) identified four devices that are used to claim the socio-epistemic rights that are bound to specific identities. These devices construct second assessments as independent of first assessments:

1. producing a confirmation before an agreement, which constructs the action of agreeing as a matter of lower priority (e.g. ‘how beautiful’—‘that is beautiful, yes’)

2. oh-prefacing, which presents the second assessment as previously held and recollected ('how beautiful'—'oh, that is beautiful')
3. statement + tag, which invites agreement and positions the second assessment as a first one ('how beautiful'—'beautiful, isn't it?')
4. negative interrogative, which also serves to reclaim the first position and its epistemic rights ('how beautiful'—'isn't that beautiful?').

In this article, we examine three other devices for constructing superior or independent access, which emerged as dominant in our online data: (1) objective second evaluations, (2) bodily expressions and (3) the construction of explicit agreements.

'Objective evaluations' suggest describing a feature of the referent ('That sandwich is very tasty'), whereas subjective evaluations index a privileged preference or dislike towards the referent ('I like that sandwich') (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). In attitudinal models the distinction between internal and external divides taste as an individual experience from measurable features of the food referring to its texture, colour or shape (cf. Wiggins, 2004). In discursive terms, the distinction is understood rhetorically, allowing speakers to construct or suggest the source of a taste evaluation themselves (Wiggins, 2004).

Wiggins and Potter (2003) showed different functions of subjective and objective evaluations in everyday mealtime interaction. For instance, subjective evaluations were shown to limit the need for other speakers to agree with or respond to the assessment, or they were used as resources to make food refusals accountable. On the other hand, objective evaluations make good compliments, because they present the judgment as based on facts rather than personal experience. Furthermore, objective evaluations are used persuasively, especially when countering subjective evaluations. In our data, the objective evaluations are used in response to subjective evaluations and suggest access to 'knowledge of good food'. The analysis will show how they are used to claim ownership of taste.

The second device we distinguish in the analysis is the use of 'bodily expressions'. These are broadly defined as assessments of taste that are not embedded in syntactical structures ('mmm' or 'delicious') and suggest a direct on-the-spot taste experience. Bodily expressions are constructed as immediate and spontaneous, that is, as directly triggered by a bodily experience with the food-referent (cf. Wiggins, 2002).

Finally, we focus on the construction of explicit agreements. In producing an agreement people show that their assessment stands in agreement with the prior speaker's assessment (Pomerantz, 1984). Pomerantz (1984) showed that agreements are generally produced with a minimization of gap between the end of the turn containing the first assessment and the start of the agreement turn. Agreements usually are constructed as spontaneous and immediate and shaped as 'upgrades' of the prior assessments, as 'same evaluations' (I like it too) or as 'downgrades'. However, the practice of designing an agreement as agreement (I agree with you) is less common.

We examine the role of explicit agreements in constructing opinions as 'previously held' (cf. Heritage and Raymond, 2005).

Method

Material

The material consists of online discussions, or threads, downloaded from an Internet site on food pleasure. There are three forums on this site that are specifically related to various food themes (a culinary forum, a wine forum and a slimming forum). For our research, we examined threads of the forum on culinary topics. The threads we selected are archived and stored on the website. With respect to copyrights, the site mentions that all contents may be used for non-commercial purposes. Names have been altered and date or time indications have been deleted to minimise the possibility of identification. Results of this research will be shared with the forum participants. The data corpus consists of 40 threads containing 1751 emails in total. The criteria for thread selection were:

- the relevance of 'taste' as a topic
- the presence of first-second assessment sequences

Transcription and translation

The selected online discussions have been copied to Word files. We removed all text that was not part of the actual discourse and then we saved the files as text files. In the results section, extracts from the raw data are reproduced to provide the reader with the opportunity to validate the analytic observations. The extracts were first analysed in Dutch and subsequently translated to English with the help of a professional translator who is also a native speaker (see the Appendix A for the original Dutch extracts). Translation is not a neutral but an analytically informed process. In this sense, the translations must be considered as 'free' translations.

Analytic procedure

A discursive psychological approach is participant-centred, i.e. in the first instance it is not the researcher who makes inferences about what is going on in a conversation. Rather, the interactional meaning of utterances is determined by the 'next-turn-proof procedure' (Edwards, 1997; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). The aim is that the analysis of any turn can be checked against how participants themselves respond to it in subsequent turns. Another analytical procedure is to examine utterances for their rhetorical quality. By selecting a specific description, other possible descriptions are ruled out or undermined. The principle is that language is a 'system of differences', such that words have meanings because there are alternatives. Imagining plausible alternatives helps the analyst to see what alternative descriptions may actually be in play, and for what purposes the present selections are being used. More in general, large

representative and pivotal sections of the ‘raw’ materials are reproduced in publications so readers can provide their own check on the conclusions drawn from it.

The analysis shows how participants in online discussions on food pleasure manage their relative ‘rights’ to assess taste. For this purpose, we consider sequences in which participants evaluate food items. In the process of examining the data a recurrent phenomenon emerged. When providing ‘second evaluations’ (evaluations following previous evaluations of the same referent), participants constructed these evaluations as their own, independent of or superior to what others had said before. In everyday conversation, the preferential action following a first assessment is agreeing with the previous speaker (Pomerantz, 1984). In our data however, participants often constructed their second evaluations in a way that suggested a superior or unmediated access to the referent (usually a food item), or the existence of an opinion about the referent prior to the first assessment.

We distinguished three dominant constructions of ‘independent access’:

- objective evaluations (‘it is delicious’ rather than the subjective ‘I love it’) (see also Wiggins & Potter, 2003)
- bodily expressions (‘hmmm, delicious!’) (see also Wiggins, 2002)
- explicit agreements (‘I agree with you’)

We began the analysis by searching and counting first assessment–second assessment sequences so as to establish the frequency of constructions of independent access in comparison to ‘unmarked’ agreements.

Results

As mentioned earlier, Heritage and Raymond (2005) identified four devices that are used to index independent access in a corpus of tape-recorded conversations (the production of a confirmation prior to an agreement, oh-prefacing, tag questions and negative interrogatives). In our corpus, we only found three examples of oh-prefacing and two tag questions in second evaluations. Below we reproduce two examples:

Extract 1: from ‘simplicity’ thread (oh-prefacing)

Jim to Aaron:

- 1 (1 line omitted) I totally agree with what you said
- 2 about there being more art to preparing simple things
- 3 well and ensuring that they taste good.

Joan:

- 4 Oh yes, the art of good preparation seems more
- 5 important to me than complicated recipes. (1 line
- 6 omitted)

The oh-prefacing in line 4 suggests a change of state (Heritage, 1984; Heritage and Raymond, 2005). By producing it prior to providing her second assessment, Joan suggests that she already held the opinion that the art

Table 1
Second assessments

Types of second assessments	Frequency	Percentage
‘Simple’ agreements (‘I like it too’)	77	51
Bodily expressions (‘hmmm’, ‘delicious’)	28	19
Objective evaluations (‘it is delicious’)	25	17
Explicit agreements (‘I agree with you’)	15	10
Other	5	3
Total	150	100

of good preparation is more important than complexity, and that she has reviewed or recollected it on the basis of the previous assessment. Thereby she undermines the potential inference that her assessment is merely elicited by the first one.

Extract 2: from ‘favourite menu’ thread (tag question)

Carry:

- 1 I would make a salad with fresh snow peas and baked
- 2 uncooked ham as a starter (1 line omitted)

John:

- 3 good aren’t they, those salads with fresh snow peas?
- 4 And princess beans too of course! (1 line omitted)

In extract 2, the tag format in line 3 invites agreement. Hereby John positions his evaluation as a first assessment and claims primary rights to assess (Heritage and Raymond, 2005).

There were no examples of repeat/confirmation + agreement or negative interrogatives in our corpus. However, we identified three other devices that are more frequently used by participants of the online forum to index different types of independent access to the taste of culinary foods: objective second evaluations, bodily expressions and explicit agreements.

In 1715 emails we found 209 emails in which a ‘second assessment’ was provided. These 209 emails consisted of 150 positive second evaluations and 59 disagreements. The 150 positive second evaluations consisted of 77 simple agreements and 73 constructions of independent access (objective evaluations, bodily expressions, direct agreements and oh-prefaces/tags). Table 1 provides an overview of the different types of positive second evaluations. We will reproduce examples in which the different constructions of independent access occur and describe our analytic observations in more detail.

Constructing superior access to taste by using objective evaluations

In our corpus, we found 25 sequences in which a second evaluation was formulated as an objective evaluation. Here they are not used to counter subjective evaluations (cf. Wiggins & Potter, 2003), but to display superior access to the referent. Participants using an objective second evaluation suggest

basing their evaluation on facts and display access to the specific qualities of the food. Participants using this resource suggest epistemic authority in the matter of evaluating the food referent and show their entitlement to having specific and factual knowledge about the taste of enjoyable foods. Fifteen of the 25 objective second evaluations are comparable to the ones in extract 3 and 4. In these extracts a subjective assessment is followed by an objective assessment.

Extract 3: from 'favourite menu' thread

Ray:

- 1 scallops wrapped in wonton pastry with a sauce of
- 2 two kinds of sherry (two lines omitted)

Mick:

- 3 (quotation omitted) they seem tasty!

Ray:

- 4 they are tasty!!! You really should prepare them!
- 5 I make them for everybody; I even have a girlfriend
- 6 who insists on them!

In this extract, Mick produces a cautious, subjective assessment referring to the taste of scallops in a spring roll (etcetera) in line 3. By downgrading his assessment with the verb 'seem', Mick resists the potential inference that he wishes to claim primary rights to assess the scallops and makes available the inference that he did not taste the recipe. Ray replies with an objective assessment in line 4, suggesting tastiness as a feature of the scallops rather than based on individual preference. The reformulation ('they are tasty' rather than Mick's 'they seem tasty') almost indexes a disagreement: Ray implies that he does not agree with the cautious nature of Mick's formulation.

By constructing the tastiness of the scallops as a fact rather than a privileged experience, Ray implies unmediated and superior access to the recipe and indexes his primary rights to evaluate it. Also note the construction of this objective evaluation: it is constructed as an immediate response (leaving out a capital letter or a greeting) and it is upgraded by three exclamation marks. This, along with the accounts in lines 4–6 reinforces the epistemic strength of the evaluation. In lines 4–6 Ray displays an awareness of his overt claim of superior access by downgrading it. He makes the recipe for everybody (and is not specifically trying to convince Mick) and refers to a girlfriend that insists on having the scallops (she 'pushing' him to make it rather than he her).

The next extract shows a similar pattern. This time however, the first assessment is upgraded rather than downgraded.

Extract 4: from 'canned food' thread

Lynn:

- 1 (1 line omitted) I don't like it but I see it in the
- 2 stores and it sells well. What I really hate is
- 3 mixed vegetables, which is even served in many
- 4 restaurants.

Frank:

- 5 (3 lines omitted) Like Mark I've eaten various
- 6 canned foods in the past, but now I think I could

- 7 only eat them if I had a bad cold.

8

- 9 And those mixed vegetables are indeed one of the
- 10 worst.

In lines 2–4 Lynn constructs her evaluation of canned mixed vegetables as subjective. She upgrades this assessment using the extreme case formulation 'really' (Pomerantz, 1986). Before producing his second evaluative assessment of canned, mixed vegetables in line 9, Frank conveys his experience with canned food more in general. He thereby treats the assessment as a matter of lower priority, which contributes to its construction as independent of Lynn's evaluation.

The second assessment is an objective evaluation that constructs the bad status of canned mixed vegetables as a quality of the food rather than a matter of individual taste. Hereby Frank indexes superior access to the referent. Furthermore, note the succinctness of his assessment and the addition of 'indeed'. All these features work to suggest that Frank has superior access to the product and held this opinion before Lynn displayed hers.

In 10 of the 25 constructions of objectivity, producers used constructions like 'Exactly!' or 'That's right' rather than full objective evaluations. By suggesting that the previous speaker is 'right', speakers index their knowledge of the referent and suggest being in the position to judge whether other participants' assessments are in line with reality or not. In other words, participants construct superior expertise. In extract 5 is an example of this phenomenon.

Extract 5: from 'pasta' thread

Catherine:

- 1 I feel that it doesn't go together. It gives me the
- 2 idea that health freaks go too far, like with light
- 3 chips. Chips are supposed to be greasy (and salty) and
- 4 pasta is supposed to be white.

Jeffrey:

- 5 exactly!

In line 5, Jeffrey's 'exactly' orients to the truth-value of what Catherine has said in lines 3–4. Thereby he suggests having superior knowledge of the properties of chips. The immediacy of his response and the absence of any account for his contribution suggest Jeffrey held this opinion even before Catherine had written down hers. Interestingly, the objective formulations construct taste as 'knowable', thereby underlining the idea that taste is not to be disputed.

Suggesting personal and physical experience with food to index independent access

In 28 evaluations, participants used 'bodily expressions'. These expressions suggest direct and independent access to the referent and undermine the subordinate state of the second assessment in a robust way. As bodily expressions are constructed as if they are unmediated spontaneous reactions

In extract 9, a similar sequence is reproduced.

Extract 9: From ‘speciality of the house’ thread

Theodore:

- 1 well, for me a bit of fat is allowed. Yagonaise
- 2 and light mayonnaise, you won’t find those things
- 3 in my house. Then I’d rather use less. If I do eat
- 4 something like that (which doesn’t happen that
- 5 often, egg salad), then I want to taste what’s in it
- 6 and even if the recipe contains only a minimal amount
- 7 of yoghurt or another taste, I don’t want that.

Carly:

- 8 I totally agree.
- 9 I don’t use that garbage either. When I want to eat
- 10 fewer calories, I mix the mayonnaise with water or
- 11 yoghurt myself, rather than those ready-made
- 12 catastrophes that don’t even taste good. And if you
- 13 want to eat fewer calories, eat less fat, and don’t
- 14 think you are better-off with those so-called light
- 15 products. (3 lines omitted)

Theodore:

- 16 exactly! (3 lines omitted)

In line 8, Carly ‘totally agrees’ with Theodore, thereby suggesting that her opinion was not merely elicited by Theodore’s assessment of light mayonnaise, but existed prior to his message. The upgrading of the negative evaluation of light mayonnaise to ‘garbage’ (line 9) and ‘ready-made catastrophes’ (lines 11–12), further constructs the prior existence of her opinion. Furthermore, she provides her own accounts of these products in lines 12–15 (don’t even taste good, you are not better off with light products), thereby indexing her independent experience with and knowledge of the products.

In line 16, Theodore produces an objective evaluation of the type discussed under extract 5. Rather than allowing Carly primary rights to provide an assessment of light products (lines 12–15) by simply agreeing with them, Theodore indexes his epistemic authority in this matter.

In summary, we have demonstrated how participants in naturally occurring discourse on food pleasure handle their identities themselves so as to perform particular kinds of interactional business. A dominant way in which the participants of this forum establish their rights to know what good food is rather than merely liking particular kinds of food, is through the discursive construction of independent and/or superior access to knowledge of and experience with the taste of culinary food products or dishes.

First, participants accomplish superior access by presenting objective evaluations of taste. Rather than simply agreeing with evaluations of others, participants suggest factual, non-subjective knowledge about the taste of a product (extracts 3–5).

Second, participants construct independent access by constructing their bodily sensations with food as immediate and spontaneous (extract 6 and 7).

Finally, they construct their opinions as previously held by constructing agreements as explicit agreements (‘I totally

agree’), which marks the action of agreeing as a conscious deed rather than a spontaneous one that depends on interactional contingencies (extracts 8 and 9).

By suggesting knowledge of and experience with foods in these ways, participants construct themselves as having rights to assess matters of taste that are commonsensically thought of as highly subjective and negotiable. They construct enjoying food, and being a gourmet, as having *independent knowledge* about tasty foods rather than having and displaying particular subjective preferences.

Discussion

Since the appearance of *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture* (Mennell et al., 1992), the nature of research into food choice and eating practices has changed. With respect to the study of identity and food, researchers have come to acknowledge the decreasing explanatory value of sociological variables like class, gender and age and are searching for new ways to determine the relation. In the search for satisfying accounts of food choices and practices, there is a movement towards multidisciplinary approaches (Wiggins, 2004). The current study is an example of an innovative approach to the study of food choice, eating practices and identity, focusing on the socio-interactional features of food talk. Drawing on conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992), ethnomethodology and social constructionism (see Potter, 1996) and by reformulating insights from social psychology, discursive psychology provides an exciting new and broadly informed account of identities and their management in everyday interaction.

In this article identity is reformulated from a cognitive concept into a participants’ resource that is managed in interaction (cf. Edwards, 1991). Rather than treating identity as a predictor of behaviour, like in attitudinal studies on food choice (e.g. Povey, Wellens, & Conner, 2001; Sparks & Sheperd, 1992), discursive psychology emphasises the constructed and performative nature of identities in talk. The analysis demonstrates how participants in the forum actively negotiate their relative socio-epistemic rights to assess taste and thereby construct their identities as gourmets.

Although sensory approaches to food evaluations implicate that there is a direct relation between the evaluation and the taste as it is physically experienced (for an overview see Conner & Armitage, 2002: 13–15), this study indicates that evaluative practices in everyday life are not so straightforward. Descriptions of taste carry all kinds of different rhetorical and interactional implications that are typically ignored in the laboratory but also in cultural studies of food preference and food liking (Fischler, 1988; Rozin, 1990). We have shown how the expression of food preferences in everyday life can be analysed as social practice.

The ‘second position assessments’ in the data are used to index independent or even superior knowledge of food, thereby suggesting that enjoying food implies knowing what good food

is. The point here is that the enjoyment of food is not something that is automatically done or that can be taken-for-granted, but something that has to be achieved within talk. Even the bodily constructions that index an immediate physiological reaction to food serve interactional purposes (cf. Wiggins, 2002) and are not necessarily connected to actual sensations. Although these expressions seem to represent what is going on inside the body, they are selected out of many alternative descriptions (Edwards, 1991), and therefore ‘designed’ (consciously or not) for particular purposes.

In order to enjoy food *as* a gourmet, participants entitle themselves to knowing what good food is all about rather than merely displaying subjective taste preferences. As we have shown, indexing epistemic independence (and superiority) is a crucial procedure for countering the secondary status of taste evaluation. In the highly subjective environment of food talk, this procedure may be the only appropriate way of claiming expertise and thereby claiming membership of the ‘gourmet’ category. What is at stake, namely, is the construction of expertise by presenting assessments as more than an opinion without overtly ‘doing being superior’.

A number of interesting issues deserve attention in subsequent research. In a previous study about an online forum on veganism, we argued how participants built knowledgeability and credibility by also showing the *limits* of their knowledge with respect to preventing and solving health problems (Sneijder & te Molder, 2004, 2005; Potter, 1996). This may specifically be the case in ideological domains-like discussions on veganism—where defending the ideology without coming across as precisely doing that, is at stake. In this kind of environment it may be particularly important for people to avoid accusations of ‘unlimited normativity’, i.e. saying things because they are in line with the ideal rather than saying them because they are based on facts. In contrast, what is at stake in subjective domains like the food pleasure forum, is the status of one’s claims to being a food expert. One can only be treated as a real expert when assessments stem from knowledge rather than *mere* personal opinion. Claiming *unlimited* (i.e. objective or direct) access to the domain of good food is apparently an adequate interactional solution for solving this problem. On the other hand, there is no disputing about tastes. Tastes differ, and every man to his taste. Independent or superior access is therefore claimed in an inconspicuous, descriptive manner, by claiming access to the objective world of taste (sensations), or by designing it as a mere agreement. Handling knowledge and expertise is an important issue in food talk and seems to be done differently in ideological vs. subjective domains. It would be fruitful to further examine the role of knowledge in food discourse within various contexts.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine how people ‘do enjoying’ in contexts in which enjoying food is potentially problematic, like obesity management groups. In this environment, enjoying food may be an accountable action as food is the likely cause of the weight problem. Are there different criteria for being entitled to enjoy food in this kind of

environment? How do participants in this context accountably talk about enjoying good food?

Another avenue for further research would be to examine whether the constructions of independent and superior access through second objective evaluations, bodily expressions and explicit agreements are specific to discussions on food. These constructions have turned out to be interactionally appropriate devices for suggesting independent and superior access to the referent in highly subjective domains like food talk. It may be expected that similar devices are drawn upon in other domains like interaction related to art or music. Furthermore, it could be examined whether these devices are specific to online data or emerge in face-to-face interaction on food as well. On the whole, we hope to have shown that identity in food interaction is not so much a reflection of what participants ‘really are like’ but a phenomenon that is constructed and worked up so as to perform major interactional business with.

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Appendix A. Dutch original data

Extract 1: from thread ‘Eenvoud’

Jim:

- 1 volledig eens met je uitspraak dat er meer kunst zit in
- 2 het goed klaarmaken en correct doen smaken van de
- 3 simpele dingen.

Joan:

- 4 Oh ja, de kunst van het goed bereiden lijkt me veel
- 5 belangrijker dan ingewikkelde receptuur.

Extract 2: from thread ‘Lieveingsmenu’

Carry:

- 1 Ik zou als vooraf Salade van verse peultjes en gebakken
- 2 rauwe ham maken (1 line omitted)

John:

- 3 lekker he die salades van verse peultjes en ook van
- 4 prinsessebonen trouwens ! (1 line omitted).

Extract 3: from thread ‘Lieveingsmenu’

Ray:

- 1 scallops in een pakketje van loempiavel met een saus
- 2 van twee soorten sherry (2 lines omitted)

Mick:

3 die lijken me lekker !

Ray:

4 die zijn lekker!!! Moet je echt maar een keer maken! Ik
5 schotel ze iedereen voor; heb zelfs een vriendin die ze eist!

Extract 4: from thread 'Conserven'

Lynn:

1 (1 line omitted) Ik ben geen liefhebber ervan, maar
2 zie ze toch gewoon in de rekken staan en vlot verkopen.
3 Waar ik echt een hekel aan heb is bv groentemacedoine,
4 die ze in vele eetgelegenheden ook nog op je bord doen.

Frank:

5 (3 lines omitted) Net als Matthieu heb ik vroeger wel
6 allerlei dingen gegeten uit blik, maar ik denk dat ik
7 dat nu alleen nog maar zou kunnen als ik heel erg
8 verkouden ben.
9
10 En die macedoine is inderdaad 1 van d ergste.

Extract 5: from thread 'Pasta'

Catherine:

1 Voor mijn gevoel gaat dat niet samen. Dan heb ik
2 het idee dat de gezondheidsfanaten een beetje
3 doorslaan, net zoals light-chips. Chips horen gewoon
4 vet (en zout) te zijn en de pasta wit.

Jeffrey:

5 Precies!

Extract 6: from thread 'Wie kookt er nu echt grang?'

Josie:

1 Wanneer ik bij mijn vrienden in nuernberg of muenchen
2 ben staan er meestal ook hele gewone dingen op het
3 menu maar waarvan ze wel weten dat ik ze heerlijk vind:
4 zurige linsen met spek en zelfgemaakte spaetzle (sort
5 pasta (3 lines omitted)

Mary:

6 MMMMMMMMMMMMM Lekker zelf gemaakte
7 spätzle. En dan overgoten met roomsaus?
8 Naturel of met paddestoelen, of spekjes.
9 (Kan je ook in Oostenrijk eten Josie.)

Extract 7: From thread 'Azijn en olijfolie'

Daisy:

1 Koop ik nooit in de winkel. Altijd met 50 liter
2 tegelijk uit Kreta deels van eigen olijfgaard en deels

3 van een neef die ook veel olijfbomen heeft en ook voor
4 de oogst van onze olijven zorgt. Je levert de gepluktel
5 olijven in en je krijgt zoveel flessen olie per zoveel
6 kilo olijven. Allen koude persing. De olijfolie bewaren
7 we in urnen en glazen flessen. (2 lines omitted)

Bruce:

8 heerlijk !
9 op Kreta en Cyprus koch ik ook al eens olijfolie
10 bij een klooster

Daisy:

11 Ja (Monasterie) Mom Toplou (internet site)
12 ben ik vaak geweest, man nooit oijfolie
13 gekocht (2 lines omitted)

Extract 8: from thread 'Olijfolie proeven'

William:

1 Ik gebruik enkel olijf olie in salades en pasta, ik
2 braad en bak enkel in ardense boter en soms in franse
3 boter. De smaak van boter is altijd beter bij
4 gebakken vlees en gebakken vis en ook op de
5 boterhammen altijd goede boter.

Tina:

6 Helemaal mee eens William.
7 Voor ons hier ok een goede roomboter voor bak en
8 braadwerk, en voor op het brood.
9 Om te bakken en braden klaar ik de boter voordat ik
10 het gebruik.

Extract 9: From thread 'Specialiteit van het huis'

Theodore:

1 nou er mag voor mij wel wat vet in hoor. ygonaise en
2 halvaise, halfvolle etc. die spullen kom je bij mij
3 thuis niet tegen. Dan gebruik ik liever gewoon meteen
4 iets minder. wanneer ik al een keer (komt niet zo
5 vaak voor die eiersalade) zoiets eet, dan wil ik ook
6 kunnen proeven wat er in zit en ook al is het maar het
7 minimale van yoghurt-of-andere-smaak in zo'n
8 bereiding, dat wil ik dus if niet.

Carly:

9 Helemaal mee eens.
10 Ik gebruik die 'troep' ook niet. Als ik minder
11 calorierijk wil eten, dan doe ik wel zelf mayonnaise
12 gemengd met water of yoghurt, ipv van die kant en
13 klare mistoestanden die zelfs slecht smaken.
14 En ik heb ook zoiets van als je dan toch minder vet
15 wilt eten, eet dan minder vet, en geef jezelf de
16 illusie niet dat je met die zogenaamde light
17 produkten beter en gezonder af bent. (3 lines omitted)

Theodore:

18 precies! (3 lines omitted)

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