

Full Length Research Paper

Interacting through food - food discourse as politeness

Irina Perianova

University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria. E-mail: inogina@yahoo.com. Tel: 00359 2 9627644.

Accepted 6 June, 2011

The paper is an attempt to study the links between eating and politeness and to show that politeness spans other social practices or instances of non-verbal behaviour, such as food and eating. The paper aims to view how food structures relationships and mediates social interactions and explores different ways in which food and eating fit the concepts of the politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Politeness is regarded in the broadest sense possible as civility, propriety, relevance; and above all, it is based on the notion of face. Food is a signifier of collective identity, a sign of affiliation and bonding (vertical or horizontal), a cultural icon and a personal statement. Shared food and commensality are markers of politeness and acceptance of relationship. Logically, failure to share often seems rude and a denial of social qualities. Giving or choosing 'wrong' or improper food for certain occasion (that is, for breakfast, lunch, or wedding), or for a certain group of people, depending on their age, ethnicity, or religion, may seem very impolite and a sign of a social faux pas.

Key words: Food, meals, politeness, social interaction, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

"How pleased will the reader be to find that we have in the following word, adhered closely to one of the highest principles of the best cook which the present age, or perhaps that of Heliogabalus hath produced. This great man, as is well known to all lovers of *polite eating* begins at first by setting plain things before his hungry guests, rising afterwards by degrees as their stomachs may be supposed to decrease, to the very quintessence of sauce and spices. In like manner, we shall represent Human Nature at first to the keen appetite of our reader in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country, and shall hereafter hash and ragout it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of affectation and vice which court and cities afford" (Fielding, 1992: 8). In this extract from the 1st chapter of *Tom Jones* by H. Fielding first published in 1749, "polite eating" refers to eating as social interaction and the 'more imaginative' high cuisine – French and Italian is by implication viewed as more polite as opposed to plain country (that is, English) fare. The quotation may also be viewed as food orientation with regard to the entire novel which illustrates the literal and the metaphorical importance of food. Food may be viewed as a metaphor of life as a whole, while meals and eating (or not eating) together, or at all should be regarded as one of the most important social interactions. The research into the subject of politeness has spawned a host of studies (Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson,

1987; Fraser, 1990; Sifianou, 1992; Georgieva, 1995; Watts, 2003) covering a broad range of topics, such as, but not limited to, its ontological roots and the design of politeness models, their application in different cultural contexts and enactment in speech activities. The studies produced some very different ideas of the nature and manifestations of politeness, however, scholars seem to agree that politeness is associated with social appropriateness, and that it is an integral part of social interaction and a means to achieve social harmony and avoid conflict.

The latest developments of the politeness theory is the emergence of the discursive and interactional model of politeness (Locher and Watts, 2007; Haugh, 2007) which conceptualizes politeness as a constituent of a broader construct inherent in all human interaction to account for interpersonal relations. This approach seems logical because face strategies cannot be defined out of context, be it cultural, group, or individual attitude. With Spencer-Oatey (2005: 97), the authors define politeness as a "subjective judgement that people make about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour". Im/politeness is thus regarded here as a collaborative endeavour, an umbrella term, and a continuum of evaluative meanings and judgements (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). This is why in this paper, politeness is viewed broadly, as civility, propriety, relevance, and above all,

appropriateness based on the notion of face (Goffman, 1955, 1967). Furthermore, under politeness, the author is inclined to include other behavioural descriptions, such as propriety and civility, which sometimes is differentiated from politeness (Lakoff, 2001). In his view, the term also covers avoidance, taboo, and even the buzz concept of the 20th century, that is, political correctness. The latter phrase is now often used to describe food, and even Prince Charles calls for 'politically correct snacks', such as leeks and broccoli and proscribes such un-pc foods as chips and hamburgers in school vending machines (Perianova, 2009). The following quote also gives an idea of the spread of the concept:

"Toulos restaurant, adjacent to Capitol Hill, boasts a *politically incorrect menu of baby veal and horse carpaccio*, making it an ironic hotspot for the quintessential Washingtonian power breakfast" (Brown, 2004: 17).

Following H. Spencer Oatey, the author considers that this broader construct implies rapport management in general. Rapport is managed in the course of interaction through different strategies of adaptation, accommodation or compensation. Undoubtedly, the aforementioned description of im/politeness covers eating patterns which are always some kind of social interaction. At the same time, the norms of any interaction may be said to comprise diverse regularities, role specifications and attitudes of social identity accepted as a code of membership. These norms may be culture-specific. However, they are not static (as in Grice's model) but rather, subject to accommodation and development by the interaction (discourse) participants in different situations.

The main objective of the paper is to view certain ways in which food structures relationships and mediates social interactions to achieve or damage social equilibrium. Offering wrong, improper, or inappropriate food, may seem very impolite and a sign of a social faux pas while appropriate foods may help build solidarity and bonding in social interaction.

The examples in the paper are mostly based on fiction because the author follow Appadurai (1996) in considering blurred borders and edges indicative for our age. This is why literature is currently used in anthropological examples and literature studies often debate the subjects which used to be regarded as quite alien for this area, in fact as alien as quantum physics, yet now they have turned into the centerpiece of debates (Appadurai, 1996: 80-85).

COMMENSALITY AND BONDING

Eating alone and eating in company, especially for special occasions mostly cater for different needs.

"the Eucharistic celebration is a dinner, at which table manners are entirely necessary; for nothing like it, no ritual celebration whatever, not even the most ordinary lunch at a fast-food restaurant can begin to be imagined unless the people participating in it commit themselves, both now and in future, to behaving" (Visser, 1991: 37)

Significantly, from the structural perspective, like some other social events, food-related practices have also been regarded as language, as signs in a system of communication (Claude. Levi Strauss, Roland. Barthes, Mary. Douglas). The eating process has been examined synchronically and diachronically, as a memory of a number of previous meals, a conditioning by previous eating events.

It would see, that politeness relates to one of the tiers of A. Maslow's (1970) pyramid. In Maslow's hypothesis of a hierarchy of common needs the higher level needs, such as acceptance, belonging and self-actualization, become salient only when the lower level needs, such as food and safety, have been met. However, it is easy to prove that food and meals satisfy both higher- and lower level needs. Food is one of the greatest motivating factors for humans as desire, source of power, socializing, creating and maintaining links, a symbol of social position. Furthermore, it may be assumed that in many cases, food takes on compensatory functions and stands for other needs. In other words, in addition to meeting the physiological need of sustenance, food and meals are a means to affirm cultural and social identity and serve as a vehicle of bonding (horizontal and vertical), as a statement of friendship, or belonging and as a collective memory of the past meals, acceptance and self-expression).

Sharing food (which may be interpreted as positive politeness) is a must in all cultures, and in fact, fellowship as evidenced by commensality, seems to be one of the key concepts associated with food. "Giving to others is the basis of power, for recipients are beholden to donors" (Counihan, 1999: 74). Conversely, food refusal is "a meaningful statement in all structures and signifies denial of relationship"(Counihan, 1999: 95). Thus food may be treated as discourse analysable in terms of politeness/impoliteness. Commensality which often signifies or implies bonding is an extremely important social interaction, with the power to make or break. It is guided by certain rules which vary depending on the occasion, as well as on the participants and their roles. The more intimate the relationships between the participants, the more the guests may be permitted to comment on some procedural matters and the greater the likelihood of breaking the routine rules. A refusal to take part in a meal, or to sample a dish, is often regarded as impolite or downright rude, and causes a loss of face for the hosts. Even in on-line forums, the virtual offers of food serve as markers of positive politeness, especially in dialogues with newbies (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 274).

Example is the following comment in an online forum during the Beijing Olympics:

“The fact that American athletes will bring their own food catering and snub the Chinese host’s food is just another example of American rudeness and arrogance. If American athletes are fearful of the food, water, and air in China, then they should stay home. Otherwise they should be grateful guests at the Olympics.” (George, Sacramento, CA).

Eating without offering food to a person close to you (spatially) is viewed as impolite in many cultures. In Canada, when 58 people of different background were questioned: “When are you supposed to refuse food?,” the answer was “Never”, or a qualified negative: ‘When it is an intentional insult, or when the style of serving is insulting’; also, ‘when it is against my religion or taboos (and the giver knows it), or very unhealthy (‘but then I’ll pretend I am eating’). Similar answers were gotten in Bulgaria and Russia.

The concept of face is very important for all social interactions, while politeness may be viewed as psychosocial motivation involving affiliation, bonding, that is, it caters for building solidarity and acceptance. Of course, the manifestations of politeness are culture-specific. In Britain or Canada, where negative face, and hence a focus on independence is more important than positive face and involvement, there are few repeated requests to join in a common meal. Insistence is impolite, and is regarded as a face threatening act. On the other hand, positive face and involvement are more important for other cultures, such as Russia or Bulgaria. Even though offering food is almost invariably a sign of politeness, the responses to these offers differ depending on the norms of politeness which are culture-specific. This difference may cause a cultural clash between participants. In Russia, for example, it is impolite to agree to a food offer immediately, and according to some sources, food may be offered up to 7 times (Larina, 2003). Numerous practical repercussions of those cultural differences and culture-specific norms of politeness may be noted. For instance, the author was told in Vancouver by an executive of the Chernobyl fund that when Chernobyl children are put up in foster families in Canada, at first during an induction lecture he explains to the hosts that if they do not want the children to starve, they need to repeat their offers of food, respectively invitations to have breakfast, lunch or dinner, several times because in the Russian and in the Ukrainian cultures, it is rude to agree immediately (Yourie Pankratz – personal communication). As opposed to the English style, the Russian style of communication may be called status-oriented rather than person-oriented, using Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey’s (1990) terms. The former, that is, status-oriented style, is typical of collectivist cultures and features a marked difference in the

treatment of the appropriate roles - guests and hosts.

To abide by the fixed rules of politeness so as not to cause other people to lose face involves one or more of the following:

1. Appropriate food at an appropriate place
2. Appropriate food for an appropriate occasion
3. Appropriate number of dishes or ingredients
4. Appropriate eating utensils -cutlery or plates; appropriate table manners
5. Appropriate seating arrangements - spatial distribution of guests and hosts
6. Appropriate timing and sequencing of food
7. Appropriate food for appropriate people (depending on age, gender, religion, class, national culture, etc.)
8. Appropriate attitude to what you are eating.

Appropriate food at an appropriate place

Offering certain foods or drinks, such as coffee or tea, in modern societies of Europe or North America, or for example, some symbolic foods offers, such as bread and salt to welcome important guests in Russia, is always a gesture of politeness. In fact, on a social level, people have always communicated through food to point out their likes and dislikes. In *Joshua Then and Now* by M. Richler, Joshua’s former classmate Sheldon asked Joshua and his classy wife Pauline to a posh restaurant: “...oppressively elegant, where the waiters came dressed like eighteenth-century voyageurs, snowshoes and muskets and stretched beaver skins were mounted on the wall” (Richler, 1981: 23). Pauline loathed Sheldon and his wife Bertha on sight. “Matters were not helped any when the waiter, bewigged, of course, his manner officious, asked Pauline for her order. “I’ll have a hamburger,” she sang out, “with French fries and a Coke. And don’t forget the ketchup, please.” (Richler, 1981: 24) An order of a hamburger, French fries and ketchup at a posh restaurant is an explicit show of the lack of solidarity. In Grice’s terms, it may be described as flouting the maxim of relation and violating the cooperative principle altogether. The order was a face-threatening act, an intentional insult of the people Pauline detested, an intentional failure to have a reciprocated food dialogue and it undoubtedly caused a loss of face to the co-commensals and a damaged rapport.

In Anthony Burgess’ *A Malay Trilogy*, first published in 1956, on the other hand, the British food often features as irrelevant in Malaya, as marking the end of the colonial era. Also for example: “Certainly, in the gravy soups, turbo, hare, roast saddles, cabinet puddings, boiled eggs at tea-time and bread and butter and meat paste with the morning tray, one tasted one’s own decadence: A tradition had been preserved in order to humiliate.

Perhaps, it really was time the British limped out alof

Maya" (Burgess, 1981: 272), where the dishes listed represent a clear political statement of a division expressed through food, and a sign of failure to bond with the locals.

Appropriate food for an appropriate occasion

Different occasions, such as breakfast, lunch, wake ceremonies, etc., call for different foods. Visser writes that "it is still 'not done' at formal dinners to provide butter, or side plates for spreading it on bread: A banquet is supposed to be rich enough not to need more butter; bread is broken and laid on the table cloth in the French manner. The custom has for Anglo-Saxon an obstinately archaic air – which is often just what familiarity demands; it is like ... modern women wearing veils at the weddings" (Visser, 1991: 214).

A case in point: Public foods are always fixed as choice – in opera in most countries you are not supposed to be eating at all - in any case, nothing that rustles and makes noise; popcorn is an appropriate cinema food; hot dogs in suitable packaging are traditional street foods.

By and large, the relevance of, say, dinner and breakfast is far from identical, as evidenced by countless examples, both in real life and in fiction. In Julian Barnes' story *The Things You Know*, two elderly ladies are eating breakfast together:

"I like the look of the poached egg,' said Merril. 'Poached egg sounds nice.' But Janice's agreement didn't mean she'd be ordering it. She thought poached egg was lunch not breakfast. There were a lot of things on this menu that weren't breakfast either in her book: waffles, home-style pancakes, Arctic halibut. Fish for breakfast? That had never made sense to her. Bill used to like kippers, but she would only let him have them, when they were staying at a hotel "(Barnes, 2004: 52)

The two ladies with different ideas of breakfast (and life) accept breakfast compromises and settle for negative politeness. There is no imposition in their choice of food and their dialogues as they have long agreed to disagree. Negative politeness is what makes them tick as companions.

A different tendency is highlighted in Vine's, *The Dark-Adapted Eye*. On the day when the narrator's aunt was hanged for murder, the food ritual of the family changed: "We had no eggs that morning. ... No cornflakes either. My mother would have considered cornflakes frivolous, in their white and orange packet. She had disliked Vera ... but she had a strong sense of occasion, of what was fitting. Without a word, she brought us a toast that, while hot, had been thinly spread with margarine, a jar of marrow and ginger jam, a pot of tea". (Vine, 1996: 9) 'A strong sense of occasion', and "frivolous" cornflakes underline the importance of food as ritual and remembrance. In *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth the

two families joined by marriage (ethnic Jews and Irish Catholics) are brought together" on the dereligionized ground of Thanksgiving", when everybody gets to eat the same thing, just one colossal turkey as a symbol of American identity. Jack Goody wrote: "The continuity of borsch may provide some thread of living to those passing through the years following the October Revolution, just as a hamburger clearly states to many an American that he is home and dry" (Goody, 1982: 152) Yet unlike turkey, hamburger would be inappropriate as the main dish for Thanksgiving.

Appropriate number of dishes or ingredients

In Bulgaria, for Christmas Eve, only vegetarian foods may be served, e. g. beans, walnuts, stuffed peppers and vine leaves, pumpkin, special bread. An appropriate number of these strictly vegan dishes should be odd, never even, at least 7, better still - 11 or 13. Four (4) is an unlucky number in China and Japan, where it is chi. It would not be an appropriate number of components in a dish, say, sushi. In fact, even and odd numbers are considered symbolic in many cultures: In Ossetia, for example, the number of the traditional pies is quite significant, an even number of pies is only suitable in case of death in the family. Three pies symbolize the past, the present, the future (sacrifice to God); also earth, water, heaven. The focus of the BBC correspondent's Steve Rosenberg's coverage of the tragic events in Beslan on September 1, 2004 was just two pies on the table in every place he visited. These two pies stood for death and loss.

Appropriate eating utensils; appropriate table manners

Numerous books on etiquette spanning centuries address the subject of appropriate table manners. However, what is regarded as appropriate is undoubtedly culture-specific. Few examples: At a dinner in Japan or South Korea, you should fill your neighbour's glass but not your own.

When eating dinner in Norway, the United States, Russia or Bulgaria, it is polite not to leave anything on your plate to show that you have enjoyed the food. In China and other South Asian countries, as well as in the Middle East, it is polite to leave some of the food on your plate.

In Western countries, you must never ever eat with your mouth open; in China it is permitted. Eating with your left hand in Africa and India is to be avoided. In areas where they routinely eat with their hands, you must use the right one. The left is the "unclean" hand, reserved for a related function a few hours later.

Do not leave your chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice in China or Japan. Of all chopstick, no-number, this is the

worst, as it mimics a Japanese funeral rite, when chopsticks and rice are left by the bedside of the newly deceased.

The eating etiquette is a function of the formality of an occasion. During a formal banquet, in some countries tables positively bristle with cutlery. Of course, in countries where formality is generally avoided, the use of cutlery is sparing. An often quoted story features a Canadian waitress who once advised visiting British royalty: "Keep your fork, Duke, there's a pie" (Visser, 1991: 215). Moreover, eating the right thing in the correct manner served to define masculinity and femininity. In modern Western cultures, prior to the late twentieth century, that had meant dainty or polite eating for women and hearty eating for men.

Appropriate timing and sequencing

The sequencing and the format of a meal is culture-specific, and may also fall under the expected polite behavior, for example grappa and rakia are two nearly identical drinks in Italy and Bulgaria respectively, served at the end of the meal in Italy and at its beginning in Bulgaria. The order in which different foods are eaten is not self-evident, as noted by many travelers. A case in point: A US businessman visiting Sweden accompanied his manager to the staff dining room where there was self-service. On Thursday, a traditional fare was on the menu and he decided to try it. Being a polite man, the manager let his guest go before him in the queue, but unfortunately there was no indication on the food counter of the order in which the food was to be eaten. So naturally enough, the American guest poured the pea soup over his pancake. His Swedish manager followed suit not wanting to embarrass his guest, or to make him lose face (Olofsson, 2004: 90). During afternoon tea in England you are expected to eat your scone after your sandwich but before your cake (Olofsson, 2004: 52). Perhaps, one of the best known examples of correct 'sequencing' when serving a drink is "milk first" during the traditional tea ritual in England.

The very concepts of lunch" and dinner" have different chronological significance in different cultures. They may be fixed and regulated or subject to individual proclivities (Giddens, 1994). This fact has practical and economic implications because the difference in attitude to these meals may have a negative impact or even cause the failure of corporate mergers when companies have different eating traditions (Schmidt, 2002), that is, a sandwich on the run and a leisurely warm lunch reflect different value systems for Americans and Germans respectively, as they echo in everyday routines.

The time of the socially important meals such as dinner may also be quite significant. In many towns in the UK, between 14.00 and 18.00, pubs and restaurants do not serve any food and only fast food outlets are open, if any.

The same applies to Italy, where at 19.00 nearly all restaurants and osterias in small towns, say in Toscana, are still closed and your wish to have dinner before 8 p.m. would cause a surprised query -"What, now?"

Mennell (1996) traces the gradual change of the dinner hours in England in the beginning of the 16th century dinner was normally served at 11 a.m. while in late 18th century, the usual accepted time was 7 to 8 p.m. The aristocracy was the first to embrace the change. In her uncompleted novel, *The Watsons*, Jane Austin describes the acute embarrassment suffered by the heroines due to the difference between the early hours of dinner for their modest country relatives and the late dinner time of the local nobility (Mennell, 1996).

The time of socially important meals may also be crucial as a universal. A case in point is the following example:

"Oh, don't hurry off!" my mother cried. "Stay for dinner! We are having shrimp salad. There's lots."
 "Thanks, but I already ate," I said. "... already ate? Ate dinner?", she asked. She checked her watch. -"It's barely seven-thirty." -"Right"
 "Goodness, Barnaby. You're so uncivilized!" I looked at her. I said, -"How do you figure that?" "We always eat at eight," she said. -"Dine," I told her. -"Pardon?" -"We always dine at eight. Isn't that what you are supposed to say?" "She drew up taller in her seat. She said, -"I don't see."- "Gram and Pop-Pop dine at five-thirty, however", I said, "and what's good enough for them is good enough for me" (Tyler, 1999: 198).

In the extract aforementioned, the linguistic discourse relating to the time of dinner highlights the class demarcation line between a well-to-do WASP family of the father, and the mother's parents' working class immigrant background. Significantly, the extract also illustrates the grandson's rebellious nature.

Appropriate use of space

The seating arrangements (e.g. guests: hosts, men: women) vary, depending on the occasion and the culture, on the desire to make things more inclusive or less inclusive, and a focus on some kind of spatial arrangement seems to be a universal. Those of lower status, e.g. servants, as a rule, eat separately. In her study on communicating with food in the Andes, Bourque (2001) notes a spatial boundary between household and non-household members during a meal. Significantly, in Victorian culture, with its patriarchal nature, men were sitting at the head of the table and women together, but separately. Canadian Hutterites abide by even more extreme rules to this day, men and women do not eat at the same table which is reminiscent of a taboo on men and women eating together noted by Malinowski in Trobriand culture.. However, in Hutterite communities, as

elsewhere, important female visitors may be treated as 'honorable men' and join the men's table (personal communication in Manitoba)

Life in a Medieval Castle by Joseph and Francis (1974) outlines a similar tendency: "At the table, seating followed status: The most important guests were at the high table, with the loftiest place reserved for an ecclesiastical dignitary, the second for the ranking layman. After grace, the procession of servants bearing food began. First came the pantler with the bread and butter, followed by the butler and his assistants with the wine and beer."

Appropriate food for different groups of people

Food and drink consumed by a group of people may also be examined in terms of their value as signs of a certain status and as markers of a particular taste (Bourdieu, 1984). In that case, some foods may be considered an affectation, as trivial or inappropriate. This principle cuts across the entire board of divisions, *religion, class, gender, nationality, age, even occupation*. Eating 'wrong' foods may result in a damaged rapport. In many cultures, the quality, or the quantity of the food differs depending on the status of the guests. Bourque (2001: 92-93) refers to "the construction of bowls of soup" as a socially significant event for the Indian communities in the Andes. Honored guests are given the largest pieces of chicken and a greater quantity of potatoes than other people. Also, guests may eat some things but not all; the latter would be breaking another taboo

In societies where inequality underlies the social structure food, is often a function of a certain class. In Europe of the middle Ages, only the nobles' tables had spices, they were off-limits for the servants (Mennell, 1996:58). Similar to clothes, food marks class; it is the way to determine who is equal and who is not. Theophano (2002: 203) maintains that in the 18th century, Europe and North America sweets were considered inappropriate for servants. Servants were not encouraged to spend their money on sugar or other sweet treats which their master called childish and silly. The fact that even working class families took their tea with sugar caused great concern and indignation. Conversely, late 1800s saw a very different approach: In his book *Sweetness and Power*, Sidney Mintz (1985: 130) argues, "...wives and children were systematically undernourished because of a culturally conventionalized stress upon adequate food for the 'breadwinner'". Men's privileged access to meat actually spurred the consumption of sugar: "...while the laboring husband got the meat, the wife and children got the sucrose..." (Mintz, 1985: 145). Sugar provided a relatively cheap source of calories for women and children's diets to make up for the fact that they got less of other foods. Of course men also ate sugar, but historical evidence indicates that their diets were made up of more protein and less sugar

compared to women and children. Sugar provided an energy boost and a source of calories for women and children, but at the cost of providing little nutritional value. Mintz (1985: 150) also describes how cultural beliefs emerged to justify this consumption pattern so that one (male) observer after another displayed the curious expectation that women would like sweet things more than men; that they would employ sweet foods to achieve otherwise unattainable objectives; and that sweet things are, in both literal and figurative senses, more the domain of women than of men. And of course, the belief that women like sweet things more than men, and use them to achieve their objectives (say, eat chocolate to soothe a broken heart after a breakup) is still with us today.

Foods may also be gender specific: In some cultures now, in others - in the past (e.g. in the UK in the 19th and 20th cent.) eating meat is considered a masculine thing, while salads and fruit are regarded as food for women and children.

The following is an apt illustration of an argument: an Englishman is offered a drink by his French girlfriend's relatives:

- "What are you drinking?" Michel asked.

Henri and Ginette gave an expectant 'Eh oui?' The foreigner's drinking habits were suddenly the most exciting thing happening in this side of the English Channel.

It was a difficult choice because I didn't recognise half the bottles. What were Suze and Banyuls, for example? I thought I'd risk it and go native.

'I'll try a Suze.' This got a bigger laugh than most of the jokes I'd told that year. Even little Simon joined in the hilarity. - 'It is mostly a drink for the women,' Florence told me in English." (Clarke, 2006: 36)

Different food trends change markedly with age. In a story written by New Zealand, writer Fiona Farrell, food marks the main character's relationship with her mother and the bond she feels to her. For the older woman, the changing fashion trends are mind-boggling and inappropriate to the utmost degree. They make her feel insecure and unsafe:

"She had prodded doubtfully at her Maryland Chicken. 'They've put fruit on it,' she said 'Whatever next?'

'And will you look at that?' she said. 'Fancy beetroot. That must be how they do it Overseas.' 'Just eat it,' said Elizabeth. 'It's crinkle-cut. But it tastes just the same as the flat kind' (Farrell, 1994: 49-50)

For old people, experimenting with food is very suspicious and not quite proper. In the story referred to previously, the old woman scrapes pineapple off her chicken.

In her book *Watching the English* (2001), Kate Fox lists numerous examples outlining the class function of food in

present-day England, e.g. shrimp cocktail with mayo is viewed as low class. Many body parts (offal), which used to be regarded as delicious tidbits in subsistence economy, are now considered a no-no in developed countries, where people are dissociated from their sources of food. "Who eats tongue any more?" aptly asks a character in *Stanley Park* written by the young Canadian author Timothy Taylor (2001). Food in/appropriacy may also be conditioned by culture, traditions and history. Example is the following illustration of a specific cultural attitude to that emblematic drink, tea:

"From the Governor's wife, Simon accepts a cup of tea. He doesn't much like tea, but considers it a social duty to drink it in this country; and to greet all jokes about the Boston Tea Party, of which there have been too many, with an aloof but indulgent smile" (Attwood, 1997: 347). Simon is an American in Toronto who notes that the British custom of tea-drinking rubbed off on Canadians and turned into a social duty, a sign of politeness and respect. Tea, of course, is intertwined with the national history of many countries and hence with their politics. In fact, it has often been noted that tea and coffee are very culture-sensitive drinks. A case in point: In July 2007, Starbucks closed its outlet in Beijing's Forbidden City after seven years of controversy. The coffee shop had become a symbol for the intrusion of foreign culture in China's heritage, an abomination in the land of tea. The discontent culminated in protests and government intervention and the subsequent closure. In England, tea means comfort, and in crisis, a cup of tea is the first recourse. In contrast, in Bulgaria, until quite recently, the offer of a cup of tea may have elicited the reply –"I am not ill", because tea was mostly herbal and was associated with illness. This is no longer the case and tea is now a drink of choice for many Bulgarians of younger generations. Hence, food attitudes and food statements are subject to change, as it has happened in Bulgaria.

Appropriate attitude to what one is eating

The utmost in rudeness, that is, criticising foreign food, is very offensive to the "food hosts". Disparaging remarks about local delicacies (be it sheep's eyeball, or tripe soup) are commonly regarded as impolite, no matter how "gross" these delicacies might seem to outsiders. Yet Samuel Johnson wrote that "An Englishman is not easily persuaded to dine on snails with an Italian, frogs with a Frenchman or horseflesh with a Tartar, monkey and lizard with West Indians (1828: 177). According to a book published as early as 1847 "that which is regarded as a luxury in one country is by its neighbour abhorred as loathsome" (Vasey, 1847: 65). The treatise called *Illustrations of Eating; Displaying the Omnivorous Character of Man and Exhibiting the Natives of Various Countries at Feeding Time* lists the following (alleged) offers as a sign of politeness in Greenland: Whales tails

partly decomposed (putrid) and thus soft, bears flesh, bulls heads, dogs, seagulls (Vasey, 1847: 27). Since the book was written long before the age of political correctness, it is unashamedly Anglo-centric; the English food is the point of departure and it is described as fastidious and civilized eating. In contrast, the Chinese are described as rather peculiar; they eat with the wretched substitutes for forks, everything swims in gravy, and generally speaking, 'natives' have revolting eating customs (Vasey, 1847: 35 - 40). Clearly, the quotes in bold illustrate the disgust and abhorrence with which the author regards the food of the other.

At the age of political correctness insulting comments about the food of the other may only be confined to somebody who has mental health problems, such as the protagonist of a story by Julian Barnes, whose wife communicates with him exclusively through recipes: "Pork Tenderloin with Mushrooms and Olives. Pork Chops Baked in Sour Cream. Braised Pork Chops Creole. Braised Devilled Pork Chops With Fruit.' 'With fruit,' he'll repeat, making his face into a funny snarl, pushing out his lower lip. 'Foreign muck!' He doesn't mean it, of course. Or he didn't mean it. Or he wouldn't have meant it. Whichever one's correct." (Barnes, 2004:162).

An interesting study of the transformation of Bulgarian identity through food-related behaviour is the portrayal of Bai Ganyo Aleko Konstantinov's hero, known to every Bulgarian, is arguably the epitome of all the worst things in the Balkan, or more specifically, the Bulgarian psyche. His eating manners are far from polite by European standards; he finds fault with his hosts' cooking and introduces his (allegedly savage Balkan) style of food preparation invading his Czech hosts' space and thus breaking taboos guiding the relationship between guests and hosts. Not surprisingly, Konstantinov's pro-European stance predetermines his attitude to his hero, who symbolizes everything that Konstantinov believes wrong with the Turkish-style approach ingrained in the Bulgarian mentality. However, in his own way, Bai Ganyo is on the way to Europe, when he says to his Czech hosts that he likes *soup* more than *chorba*, because *chorba* is a Turkish dish. He also claims that Bulgarians in general prefer soup to *chorba*. (Konstantinov, 2006: 48). However, as every Bulgarian will tell you, soup and *chorba* is the same thing, a matter of appropriate terminology, and cultural attitude. The change in terminology shows a matching change in attitude - using the Turkish word *chorba* instead of the French-related *supa* is a denial of the European identity that Bulgarians aspired to at the end of the 19th century, when *Bai Ganyo* was written.

CONCLUSION

Meals and eating viewed in discursive terms always involve face and politeness. The abundance by or the

flouting of the existing culture-specific rules, no matter whether intentional or non-intentional, should be viewed within the context of this general category. Thus it may be reiterated that im/politeness as a category transcends language.

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