

*Grzegorz A. KLEPARSKI*

**THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF METAPHORICAL  
CONSUMPTION: *MOZARELLAS, PROSTISCIUTTOS,  
MUTTONS AND YUM-YUM GIRLS* – FOODSEMY WITH  
A ROMANCE ACCENT**

**Introductory word**

The main purpose ascribed to this paper is to formulate partial evidence in favour of what seems to be the widespread operation of a well-documented – yet much hush-hushed – mechanism of semantic transference of words that will be henceforth referred to as **foodsemy**.<sup>1</sup> The blend employed here has been coined by the author of this paper on the basis of the by now well-evidenced and much-studied form of metaphoric semantic change known as **zoosemy** (animal metaphor), which almost universally entails the rise of evaluatively loaded senses of words related to the macrocategory **HUMAN BEING**. Notice that one is equally justified to speak of the process of **plantosemy**; that is the process of transference of plant names to refer to various qualities of human beings and/or with reference to humans. In Kleparski (1997), I discussed the example of Romance *tendril*, which appeared in English in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the sense ‘young shoot or sprout of a plant’ and – already by the following century – had developed the secondary sense ‘young girl’; but it is obvious that cases of plantosemy are present in various languages. For example, in Slovak *kvietok* primarily meaning ‘little flower’ is used either with reference to ‘person, whose

---

<sup>1</sup> While preparing this paper I had the occasion to turn to several people for help. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to **Donald Trinder, B.A.** for helping me cope with formal inadequacies of this text. Secondly, I would like to show my appreciation to **Prof. Zdzisław Wawrzyniak, Józef Koziol, M.A., Sofia Rus** and **Ms Krystyna Knutel** who – with their usual energy and enthusiasm – proved to be most reliable in helping me find relevant Germanic, Romance and Polish data. This paper is a very much modified and extended version of my introductory remarks on foodsemy formulated in Kleparski (2008).

behaviour goes beyond the norms and conventions' or 'cunning person'. Polish *stokrotka* 'daisy' and *różyczka*, the diminutive form of *róża* 'rose', are used endearingly with respect to a (beloved) female.

A broad spectrum of recently published works, such as that of Kleparski (1990), Kiełtyka (2006), Kiełtyka and Kleparski (2005a, 2005b), Fontecha and Catalan (2003) and Hsieh (2003), show how, in natural languages, animal names are widely employed to designate human characteristics and, conversely, why animals in different languages are attributed basic human character traits. Note that in the process of zoosemic transfer the comprehension of human attributes and behaviour through animal attributes and behaviour results from the application of the highly general conceptual metaphor, that is <**HUMAN BEINGS ARE ANIMALS**>. This paper aims to contribute to the figurative mechanism of foodsemy that is a highly general metaphor which may be summarised as <**HUMAN BEINGS ARE FOODSTUFFS**>.

### The ubiquity of foodsemy

The presence of bundles of words primarily linked to the conceptual category **FOODSTUFFS** in various natural languages and in various spheres of particular lexicons is obvious.<sup>2</sup> Examples of foodsemy, that is the cases of figurative extensions of food-related words onto various conceptual categories – most frequently **HUMAN BEING** – may be found as early as Latin with *mel/melis* 'honey' used figuratively as an endearing term as in Plautus', *Bacchides*, 18, *cor meum, spes mea, mel neum, suavituado* 'my heart, my hope, my sweetness, my delight'. Note at this point that also the English use of *honey* as a term of endearment goes a long way back; in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* the carpenter refers to his wife as his *honey dear*.

As the discussion below will show, in world languages large portions of food terminology are not merely related to the activity of eating and foodstuffs, but they exhibit a character very much polysemous in nature through being linked to many apparently diverse conceptual spheres as quality labels, sexual activity, transportation or finances. Take, for example, the metaphorical sense of Polish *kaszana*, the augmentative of *kaszanka* 'black pudding' that is figuratively used

---

<sup>2</sup> Note that the free morphemes linked primarily to the conceptual macrocategory **FOODSTUFFS** constitute parts of such seemingly peripheral sectors of language as, for example, place names such as English *Breadstone*, *Fishlake* or *Plumstead*, family names such as Polish *Czosnek* ('garlic'), *Śliwka* ('plum') *Salata* ('salad') of which – interestingly enough – *Ogórek* ('cucumber') and *Gruszka* ('pear') are the most frequent ones (see Martenka 2007). Yet, the most spectacular sphere of language where food terminology is visible is the area of metaphoric transfer.

in colloquial Polish as a peg to hang anything that may be qualified as <USELESS>, <DISAGREEABLE> or <UNACCEPTABLE>. The metaphorical sense of the English words *peach* ‘sexually attractive female’ and *cheesecake* ‘female charm on provocative display’ seem to testify to the link to the conceptual dimension (SEX). While such foodsemic metaphors as the use of *cooking* in the sense ‘driving’ and *lettuce* in the sense ‘money’ documented in the language of American CB radio users testify to the last two conceptual spheres enumerated above.<sup>3</sup>

The all-pervading operation and ubiquitously well-documented presence of the phenomenon of foodsemy in English – though without developing the subject in any depth – was pointed to in Kleparski (1990). Note that, not infrequently, cases of foodsemic development – that must ultimately be set against the background of a broadly understood sexist consumption – imply the rise of female-specific senses such as the secondary, female-specific, sex-based sense threads of *mutton*, *prostisciutto* or *yum-yum girl* that appear in the title of this paper. Taking these in turn, *mutton*, which has been present in English since the Mid.E. period, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century started to be used in the novel sense ‘prostitute’, especially in the collocation *laced mutton*; *prostisciutto* – clearly a blend formation based on the English *prostitute* and Italian *prosciutto* – was coined in the 1930s to convey a somewhat complex yet reality-mirrored notion of ‘a female prostitute regarded as an item on the menu’; while *yum-yum girl*, with the initial impression of the compound expressing a pleasurable or delicious sensation that accompanies palate-based type of consumption, became – in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – a euphemism for ‘prostitute’ – with a certain shift of the sphere responsible for the sensing of the figuratively developed consumption of the consumption-available object.

Obviously, the operation of the mechanism of foodsemy is by no means restricted to the category of nouns; its metaphoric effects are observable in the case of other grammatical categories. Take, for example, the English adjective *dishy* that may be employed with reference to a man who is personable and attractive in looks and appearance, the Polish adjective *serowaty* ‘cheesy’ that is now a slightly dated qualifier for practically any object that the speaker finds disagreeable, of poor quality or altogether unacceptable (for example, *serowaty sweter* ‘poor quality, bad-looking sweater’, *serowaty film* ‘boring, ill-produced’, *serowata impreza* ‘boring, ill-organised party’).

Likewise, traces of foodsemy are easily discernible in the sphere of idiomatic expressions, phraseological units and proverbs, for example, the English phrasal verb *to pork out* is used in the sense ‘to eat too much’, *broth of a lad*, an Irish English expression meaning ‘a big and sturdy lad’, *make love to a sack of potatoes*

---

<sup>3</sup> Coincidentally, in the Polish language (especially youth slang) of the 1970s and 1980s *salata* ‘(green) salad’ was used in the sense ‘money’.

where *sack of potatoes* means ‘a woman who is inactive during sex act, *toad in the hole* which is literally ‘a dish of sausage or meat baked in butter’, but is metaphorically employed to describe an unfortunate situation when a very small penis is inserted into a vagina thereby giving neither party stimulation of any sort. Take also Polish *Ale/nieźle ciacho!*, literally ‘What a/not a bad cake!’, where *ciacho*, augmentative form of *ciastko* ‘cake’, is used in the sense ‘(What a) handsome man!’. Similarly, in Polish *chleb* ‘bread’ seems to acquire contextually the figurative sense of ‘success, well-being’ in the proverb *Małymi rzeczami gardzić nie trzeba temu, kto się chce dorobić chleba*, literally ‘One should not ignore tiny things if one wants to obtain bread’, that is ‘Many a mickle makes a muckle’. Additionally, we might add the English use of the word *bread* which is commonly used as a synonym of ‘money’, as in English *He’s the bread-winner of the family*, meaning literally that ‘He earns the main source of income for our family’. This transfer can be put down either to the extralinguistic, cultural importance of bread in Europe as a staple food, or possibly to the Cockney rhyming slang *bread and honey* used in the sense ‘money’. Note at this point that all varieties of natural languages, both regional dialects and professional argots seem to be affected by the working of the mechanism of foodsemy operating at various stages of the development of the language.

### Foodsemy in Italian

In what follows we shall be dealing with selected, yet representative cases of foodsemy in Italian. On the basis of the tabled data featuring foodsemy developments in Italian an attempt will be made to determine whether the cases of food metaphor in this Romance language can be matched with other parallel developments in other Romance, Germanic, Slavonic and various Indo-European languages. This will be coupled with the aim of finding certain conceptual paths, if not tendencies, present in the operation of food metaphor. The sample of Italian foodsemy is presented by means of the following table:

LEXICAL ITEM	PRIMARY SENSE	SECONDARY SENSE	CONTEXT OF USE	TRANSLATION
<i>zuchero</i>	‘sugar’	‘kind, pleasant or handsome person’	Essere tutto <i>zucchero</i> e miele! <sup>4</sup>	‘To be all sugar and honey’, i.e., ‘To be pleasant and forthcoming’

<sup>4</sup> Notice that in Italian the use of *miele* ‘honey’ as in *Una donna tutta miele*, lit. ‘a woman full of honey’ implies the attributive values of either sweetness or kindness.

<i>pane/pezzo di pane</i>	'bread/slice of bread'	'a kind and sincere person'	Quell' uomo è un ( <i>pezzo di</i> ) <i>pane</i> .	'This person is kind and honest.'
<i>mela marcia</i> <sup>5</sup>	'rotten apple'	'a negative element in a group'	Quel ragazzo è la <i>mela marcia</i> del gruppo.	'This boy is a rotten apple in the group.' i.e. 'This boy is a source of evil (or trouble) in this group.'
<i>salame</i>	'salami'	'awkward and clumsy person'	Stai lì impalato come un <i>salame</i> !	'You stand there like salami.' i.e., 'You stand there without helping me.'
<i>peperoncino</i>	'pepper'	'lively person'	Quella <i>bambina</i> è un peperoncino!	'This young girl is very lively.'
<i>zucca</i>  <i>zuccone</i> (accretive of <i>zucca</i> )	'pumpkin'  'a big pumpkin'	'a stubborn and blockish person'  'stupid and retarded person'	E' una <i>zucca</i> che non farà mai nulla di buono.  Essere uno <i>zuccone</i> significa essere una persona di scarsa intelligenza	'He is a pumpkin that will never do something good', i.e., He is very stubborn and blockish person.'  'To say that someone is a big pumpkin means that somebody is silly.'
<i>rapa</i>	'turnip'	'silly, worthless/good-for-nothing person'	Quel ragazzo è una <i>rapa</i> (o ha la testa di <i>rapa</i> )	'That boy is a turnip (or he's got a head of turnip.), i.e., 'That boy is silly/stupid.'

<sup>5</sup> Notice that Italian *mela* itself seems to be positively loaded when it forms a constitutive element of comparative phrases such as, for example, *Una ragazza fresca e bella come una mela* 'A girl that is as fresh and beautiful as an apple' or *Viso tondo come una mela* 'A round and healthy face'.

<i>pera cotta</i>	‘cooked pear’	‘highly gullible, silly person’	Ci è cascato come una <i>pera cotta</i> .	‘He has fallen like a cooked pear’, i.e. ‘He has fallen into a trick/deception like a stupid person.’
<i>fico</i> <sup>6</sup>	‘fig’	‘beautiful, handsome person’	Quel ragazzo è un <i>fico</i> .	‘This boy is a fig.’, i.e., ‘This boy is handsome.’ <sup>7</sup>
<i>patata</i>	‘potato’	‘silly awkward person’	Francesca è una <i>patata</i> (o un sacco di <i>patate</i> ).	‘Francesca is a potato (a sack of potatoes.), i.e., ‘Francesca is a silly, awkward person.’
<i>broccolo</i>	‘broccoli’	‘stupid awkward person’	Non voglio parlare con questo <i>broccolo</i> .	‘I do not wish to talk to this broccoli.’, i.e., ‘I do not wish to talk to this stupid, awkward person.’
<i>mozzarella</i>	‘mozzarella, type of cheese’	‘weak and flaccid person’	Non voglio essere una <i>mozzarella</i> , e per questo ragione voglio finire questo lavoro subito.	‘I don’t want to be a sissy and that is why I wish to finish this work immediately.’

<sup>6</sup> Note that Italian *fico* has a derived feminine form *fica* which is employed figuratively in the sense ‘female sexual organs’.

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that while the metaphorical sense in Italian *fico* may certainly be said to be positively loaded as the word may in practice be used with reference to anything or anybody that is either beautiful, handsome or fashionable, the semantics of *fico secco* ‘dried fig’ is entirely different as it may be used in the sense ‘silly, worthless’ in the contexts like *Quel ragazzo non vale un fico secco* ‘That boy is not worth a dried fig’. Along somewhat similar lines, Romanian *stafidă* which is used in the primary sense ‘dried grape, raisin’ is often employed in the somewhat negatively loaded sense ‘elderly person with old-fashioned beliefs’ as in, for example, *Stafida asta și părerile ei depășite mă scot din sărite deja* ‘This raisin and her old-fashioned beliefs are driving me crazy’.

From the very start, when we analyse the quantum of metaphoric extensions tabled here, it seems that one may distinguish several distinctive paths in the mechanism of foodsemy in Italian. One of the obvious observations that may be formulated is that a substantial number of metaphorical transfers are based on sensory distinctions linked to the dimension of (TASTE) that enable us to identify such attributive values as (TASTE: <SOUR>, <HOT>), while other cases of figurative transference seem to be based on such sensation as sight that enables us to distinguish various attributive values related to vision, such as (SIZE: <BIG>, <SMALL>), (SHAPE: <ROUND>, <OBLONG> or (LENGTH: <SHORT>, <LONG>). However, one must admit that with a substantial number of cases of foodsemy the underlying relations that may have conditioned the metaphorical transfer are either dubious, indeterminable or lie in utter obscurity.

To start with, it seems obvious that the metaphoric transfer of such Italian lexical items related primarily to the domain of **FOODSTUFFS** as *zuccherò* ('sugar' > 'kind, pleasant or handsome person'), in such contexts as *Antonio è un zucchero*, literally 'Antonio is a sugar', that is figuratively 'Antonio is a handsome man' or *Maria è diventata tutto zucchero*, literally 'Maria has become a lump of sugar', that is figuratively 'Maria has become very kind and sweet', *mela* ('apple' > 'general term of approval and/or endearment'), especially used in the comparative phrase *il viso tondo come una mela*, literally 'the face as round as an apple' which has acquired the metaphorical sense 'nice, healthy looking face', *fico* ('fig' > 'beautiful, handsome person'), may be said to have been based primarily on the perception of the attributive quality (TASTE: <SWEET>) in the general axiological folk-accepted<sup>8</sup> schema where <SWEETNESS IS PERCEIVED AS POSITIVE>.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly enough, it is possible to note that there are languages of the world in which the very word for sweetness is used metaphorically with reference to people. Thus, for instance, Romanian *dulceață* used in its primary abstract sense 'sweetness' may be employed in the figurative foodsemic sense 'pleasant person', as in *E o plăcere să-ți petreci timpul cu ea. E o dulceață* 'It's a pleasure to spend your time with her, as she is such a honey'). Here, there are grounds to attest that sensory sweetness metaphorically translates – onto the

---

<sup>8</sup> Certainly, in the specialised world of medicine the currently accepted schema is just the opposite, that is <SWEETNESS IS PERCEIVED AS NEGATIVE>.

<sup>9</sup> Many of the metaphorical uses of *apple* in English are intrinsically positively loaded. And so, for example, *the apple of someone's eye* was originally the pupil, so called because it was thought to be spherical, but the figurative application in the sense 'someone or something much loved' goes back to Old English. English *apple pie* is used in the sense 'dear, beloved person'. In Australian English the phrase *she's apples* means 'everything is fine' which – in turn – goes back to Cockney rhyming slang *apples and rice* meaning 'nice'. Note also that the use of *honey* as a term of endearment in English can be traced back a long way; in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* the carpenter refers to his wife as his *honey dear*.

plane of human qualities of character and appearance – with such positively loaded attributive values as <PLEASANT>, <DEAR>, <HANDSOME> or <BEAUTIFUL>. Note that similarly, Spanish *bombón* ‘candy’ is frequently used metaphorically in the sense ‘attractive person’. Likewise, Romanian *bomboană* in the contexts like *Ea e o bomboană* may be used in the sense ‘She is a candy’. In the Balto-Slavic group of languages, the Slovak *cukrík* ‘candy’ – with the foregrounded attributive value of sweetness may be used in the transferred sense ‘young, attractive, pretty girl’. Also, the attributive value <SWEET> undoubtedly linked to the primary sense of Polish *ciacho*, augmentative form of *ciastko* ‘cake’, may be said to be at least partially responsible for the fact that in Polish slang usage the word is employed in the sense ‘man/boy perceived as sexually attractive’. Note that English *stud muffin* may be seen as an example of this extrapolation where the whole refers to ‘a young sexually attractive male’, with the use of *muffin* specifically indicating that the man is good enough to be devoured such as – so to speak – a muffin straight from the oven’.

When we pursue the attributive element <SWEET> in other sectors of English **FOODSTUFFS** vocabulary, we see that in present day English *peach* is frequently used in the sense ‘beautiful, attractive female’, while English *plum* – although nowadays perhaps not in most people’s top ten of delicious fruits (and not that sweet) – in days when choice was more limited in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was used in the sense ‘something excellent or superior’.<sup>10</sup> One more sweet fruit that has developed a completely new figurative sense is *melon*, which is commonly used in reference to ‘a large pair of breasts’, which is most probably a case of transfer conditioned in a twofold manner by the conceptual dimensions of (SHAPE) and (TASTE). The English term *sugar*, one of the prime carriers of the conceptual quality <SWEET> – especially in American English – has found its way into many 20<sup>th</sup> century terms of endearment such as, for example, *sugar baby* or *sugar pie*. Likewise, in the 1960s such forms as *candy*, *shoulder candy* and *arm candy* developed that now all serve as synonyms to name a ‘young sexy young lady’. While discussing *candy* we might also make reference to the phrase *eye candy*, literally meaning ‘something that is noteworthy for its visual appeal’, as in the context *She only appeared on the game show as eye candy*, literally ‘She only appeared in the show because of her physical (sexual) attractiveness’.

---

<sup>10</sup> Note that the metaphorical sense of Romanian *poamă* ‘plum’ is far from being positively loaded, as the word may be used in the sense ‘flippant or frivolous person’ in such contexts as *După ce au văzut cât de urât s-a comportat, și-au dat seama ce poamă e*. ‘Having seen how she misbehaved, they realised what a plum she was’. Note that the metaphorical development of the German *Pflaume* (‘plum’ > ‘female sexual organs’) seems to have been based on the distinctions of (SHAPE) rather than any peculiarities related to the attributive path linked to the dimension of (TASTE).



At an entirely different point of the sensory dimension of (TASTE) there is the conceptual value <HOT>, linked to the primary sense of Italian *peperoncino* and this attributive element seems to translate somehow with the attributive value of <LIVELINESS> clearly discernible in the metaphorical sense ‘lively person’. Note that – to a certain extent – also Romanian *piper* ‘pepper’ seems to echo the attributive value <VIGOUR> in a phrase like *El e numai sare și piper* ‘He is all of salt and pepper’ which serves to describe a very active person that gets things done really well and in time’. Again, Romanian *acritură/murătură* that are used in the primary sense ‘pickle’ may – apart from their literal sense – be applied metaphorically in the sense ‘crabbed, mean person’ as in *Acritura asta ar fi în stare să stea cu tine o zi întreagă fără să-ți spună o vorbă*, meaning that may be translated as ‘This pickle would stay with you an entire day without saying a word’. In turn, German *Pfeffer* has acquired somewhat opprobrious connotations in the phrase *Pfeffer im Arsch haben* literally meaning ‘to have pepper in one’s ass’ which is used in the metaphorical sense ‘to have ants in one’s pants’.

When we move along the (TASTE) sensory dimension we see that the quality of being <SOUR> has produced different foodsemic developments in different regional varieties of English. For example, the attributive element <SOUR> generically linked to the semantics of *lemon* has produced such secondary sense-threads as in the British English slang sense ‘foolish, incompetent person’, and the American English sense thread ‘something defective or disappointing’, whereas in Australian and New Zealand English *to go lemony at someone* means to ‘get angry with someone’. In German the quality of being <SOUR> is associated with metaphorical unpleasantness visible in, among others, such contexts as *in den sauren Apfel beißen* which means ‘to be forced to do something unpleasant’, while Polish *skwaszony* ‘soured, of sour quality’ is currently used with reference to people’s faces, especially in such collocations as *skwaszona twarz, skwaszony wyraz twarzy* meaning ‘dissatisfied, unhappy face’.

Likewise, it seems that the broadly understood conceptual value of being physically <IMPERMANENT> seems to be focal in the mechanism of foodsemy. For example, the rot-inducing and thus destructive physical quality of Italian rotten apple, that is *mela marcia* within any apple community may be said to translate somehow into the attributive elements <SOURCE OF TROUBLE/DESTRUCTION> within human community as an instance of **<PHYSICAL DECAY/DECOMPOSITION IS PERCEIVED AS ABSTRACT TROUBLE/DESTRUCTION>**.<sup>11</sup> One may conjecture that the underlying attributive value that may have conditioned the transfer of *pera cotta*

---

<sup>11</sup> Note that also in English rotten apple is perceived as a source of trouble which is evidenced in the saying *There is a bad apple in every bunch/barrel* ‘In every body of animals/people there is a black sheep’. The directly destructive nature of rotten apple clearly emerges from the German expression *ein fauler Apfel steckt hundert an*, ‘one rotten apple may infect one hundred healthy ones’.

‘cooked pear’ that developed the sense ‘highly gullible person’ is that the attributive element <IMPERMANENT> of a cooked pear translates onto the human specific attributive values of <WEAKNESS>, <FEEBLENESS> of the mind that somewhat automatically entails <GULLIBILITY>.

On the other hand, there must be something intrinsically negative in the semantics of *pear* itself. Note that in many other European languages *pear* equivalents have acquired negatively loaded elements of meaning in their historical metaphorical senses. Take, for example, the French *poire* ‘pear’ that developed the sense ‘naive, silly person’. In colloquial German *Birne* ‘pear’ is used in the sense ‘head’, and the word appears in the extended metaphorical use in the phrase *eine weiche Birne haben* literally ‘to have a soft head’, where – in fact – it means ‘to be feeble-minded, to be silly’. Note also that in Polish, *grucha*, the augmentative form of *gruszka*, ‘pear’, is used as either a derogatory name for a ‘fat, awkward female’, the case of transference certainly based on the dimension of (SIZE), but also it is used as a low colloquialism for male sexual organs, especially in such expressions as *bić w gruchę/śmigać w gruchę* ‘to masturbate’, the transfer also very likely based either on the dimension of (SIZE) or (SHAPE), or both (see Grochowski’s *Słownik*).

In English the word *pear* is used pejoratively to indicate either a person of endomorphic proportions ‘with narrow shoulders and enlarged hips’, which would seem to reinforce the activation of the dimension (SHAPE), or may be used as in the phrase *It’s all gone pear-shaped* meaning that a plan has failed. The etymology of this phrase remains unclear, but would appear to herald from the British Royal Air Force, and was originally used to describe an imperfect acrobatic loop, which if incorrectly performed would take on the shape of a pear.

Notice that the substantial number of Italian foodsemantic developments involve the rise of attributive value <STUPIDITY> in the structure of the metaphorical sense, yet it is extremely difficult to find a single common ground for the transfers involved. And so, it is hard to find the conceptual link that has provided the conceptual bridge for the Italian *salame* ‘salami’ to have developed the sense ‘awkward and clumsy person’ (from the contexts provided by native informants one may suppose that the quality of (SIZE: <LARGE>) may have been at work here). However, when we analyse our data from other languages we see that all types of meat products come to be metaphorically associated with human beings.

And so, Spanish *chorizo*, the primary sense of which is ‘a type of Spanish sausage’ may be used metaphorically in the senses ‘shoplifter’ or ‘pick-pocket’, while *fiambre*, the primary meaning of which is ‘smoked ham’, is used in the sense ‘dead body’. French *andouille* ‘(kind of) sausage’ may be employed in the metaphorical sense ‘imbecile’, while Polish *parówa* – the augmentative form of *parówka* ‘kind of frankfurter sausage’ – is used in prison slang in the sense ‘an inmate who is forced to pay sexual services to other

inmates'. Also, Polish *mięsko*, the diminutive form of *mięso* 'meat', *cielęcinka*, the diminutive form of *cielęcina* 'veal', and *wołowinka*, the diminutive form of *wołowina* 'beef' are currently frequently heard sexist expressions used in the sense 'sexually attractive and available woman' which – metaphorically speaking – seem to put sexually viewed human being straight on the meat hook at the local butchers.

English back-up cases are not far to seek. In the history of English, during the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century *mutton* developed the sense 'sexually promiscuous woman', and the unflattering connotations connected with *mutton* have culminated in the semantics of *mutton dressed as lamb*, the crushing judgement on an older woman trying to look younger than her age. Hendrickson (2001) informs us that in British English *sausage* has become a term of familiar address employed in such contexts as, for example, *You silly old sausage!* while *meat* has, in colloquial usage, acquired the sense 'sexual partner, which is evident in such compounds as *meat market* or *meat rack* used with reference to singles' bar where the primary objective seems to be to find someone to spend the night with. Equally, the people who frequent such bars are often referred to as *pieces of meat* where *a piece of meat* is a 'target for sexual advances'. Continuing the train of events, when we happen to get our *piece of meat* back to our apartment there comes the *sausage time*, where the term is used taking the obvious physical attribute linked to the dimension of (SHAPE) to indicate that it is time for the male sexual organ to be put to use. And – circumstances permitting – the female will be a *sausage jockey*, in that she is a highly promiscuous female. The origin of the derogative *faggot* 'homosexual' may well be traced back to the traditional product of the pig whereby 'the animal's liver, lungs, heart and spleen are minced up, mixed with belly of pork, onion, then moulded into billiard-ball shapes and braised in stock'.<sup>12</sup> English, *gammon* is frequently employed in the sense 'nonsense', while *ham* developed the sense 'actor who goes over the top'.

The physical qualities of (SIZE: <LARGE>) and (SHAPE: <ROUND>) which in a number of languages are conceptually associated with the qualities of the mind (MENTAL: <BLOCKISHNESS>, <STUPIDITY>) tied to one's mental qualities located in the central organ, that is the head, may have been responsible for the metaphoric transfer of *zucca* 'pumpkin' that – mediated by the sense 'head' (present in such contexts as *avere la zucca vuota* 'to be empty headed') – developed the negatively loaded sense 'a stubborn and blockish person'. Secondly, the accretive form *zuccone* – meaning primarily 'a big pumpkin' – developed – via the colloquial application of the word with reference to big head – an even more pejoratively loaded sense 'stupid, retarded or stubborn person' (*essere uno zuccone*). Much the same happened in

---

<sup>12</sup> For an alternative etymology see, for example, the *OED*.

English with *pumpkin*, present in the language since the 17<sup>th</sup> century that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the evaluatively loaded extension ‘stupid, self-important person’.

One has grounds to say that many other foodsemic developments in natural languages are based on the dimension of (SIZE). Another Italian example tabled above is that of *rapa* – ‘turnip’ – that through its jocular use in contexts like *avere la testa come una rapa*, literally ‘to have a head like a turnip’, that is ‘to be bold’, and *valere una rapa* ‘to be worth very little’ developed the sense ‘blockhead, good-for-nothing person’. Take also the Spanish *fideo* ‘macaroni’ that has, due to the much specific length-oriented shape quality, developed the metaphorical sense ‘skinny person’. Likewise, Polish equivalent *makaron*, is used in the idiom of comparison *cienki jak nitka makaronu* ‘as skinny as a piece of macaroni (singular)’. On another pasta-related product of world cuisine, Romanian *gălușcă* ‘dumpling’ is employed in the sense ‘good-looking and stoutish baby’. Likewise, one may conjecture that, due to certain attributive values related to the dimension of (SIZE), Polish *banan* ‘banana’ and *marchewka* ‘carrot’ may have come to be applied euphemistically to male sexual organs.

As the table above shows, Italian *patata* ‘potato’ and *broccolo* ‘broccoli’ are used in the evaluatively pregnant senses ‘silly, awkward person’. Similarly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the English *potato* came to be applied contemptuously or humorously to people, especially its synonymous slang form *spud*, which refers to an ‘eccentric or abnormal person’, although this can be used in a more pejorative sense to mean ‘a complete idiot’. Much on the same tune, the English, *praty* which is a dated Anglo-Irish term for potato, is used as a general word of disparagement for an Irish person. Note also that such English compounds as *mouse potato* – an amusing coinage based on *couch potato* ‘someone who spends too much of his time sleeping, eating or watching TV’ – was recently coined to name a person who spends too much time on the computer.

Note that in many languages – Italian among others – cabbage, that is in many extralinguistic ways akin to broccoli, has become a proverbial symbol of stupidity seen in, for example, *Hai una testa di cavolo!*, literally ‘You have a head of cabbage’, that is ‘You are stupid’. Along similar lines, in present day Romanian *varză* ‘cabbage’ is a word of general disparagement denoting a state characterized by lack of knowledge, as in the context *Cum nu am reușit să învăț mare lucru, o să fiu varză la examenul ăsta* ‘As I haven’t managed to learn much, I’ll be cabbage at this exam’. Also in Polish *kapusta* ‘cabbage’ usually appears in negatively loaded contexts implying outright <STUPIDITY>, such as, for example, *Mieć kapuścianaą głowę* (‘to have a head made of cabbage’) *Ty kapuściany głąbie* (‘You cabbage stump’), as well as in the rhyming saying

*Kapusta głowa pusta* ('Cabbage means empty-headiness').<sup>13</sup> In German, although not directly human-specific *Kohl* 'cabbage' has become a synonym of stupidity as the word developed the metaphorical sense 'silly talk, bullshit' in such contexts as, for example, *Rede keinen Kohl* ('Stop talking bullshit') or *Das ist ja alles Kohl!* ('That's all bullshit').

Finally, let us turn our attention to dairy products. Generally, all types of milk products seem to be almost universally associated with negatively loaded evaluative elements as well as – very frequently – those who consume them. Take, for example, Romanian *papă-lapte* meaning 'milk-drinker' that has acquired a negatively loaded sense 'coward' in such contexts as *N-a îndrăzni să o invite în oraș. E un papă-lapte* 'He didn't dare to ask her out. What a milk-drinker!' When we stick to our Italian data we see that one of the most interesting observations emerging from the table above is that for thus far unknown reasons names of many otherwise much appreciated Italian dairy products have come to be associated with overtly conceptually negative or what are commonly held to be conceptually negative attributive values. And so, the highly appreciated dairy product named *mozzarella* has come to be used as a synonym of 'a weak and flaccid person', while *provolone* – another name for a type of typically Italian cheese – has come to be a synonym of a sex-mad man. However, we see that there are other European languages in which the conceptual build-up of dairy products may be said to contain certain attributive values that somehow translate onto the dark side of human beings.

And so, looking for parallels in other languages we find Spanish *yogurin* 'yoghurt' that may be used figuratively in the sense 'inexperienced person, greenhorn', while *cuajada* that is used either in the sense 'sour milk' or 'cottage cheese', has the adjectival form *cuajado* that is used figuratively in the sense 'paralysed, stunned'. In German the generic term *Käse* 'cheese' is used colloquially in the sense of 'silly talk' or 'trifle', the sense that is directly observable in the semantics of the expression *Mach doch nicht solchen Käse!* ('Stop talking bullshit'), and the negatively charged attributive values present here are further echoed in the semantics of the compound *Käseblatt* 'yellow press'. Likewise, German *Quark* 'curd cheese' is used metaphorically in the sense 'nonsense'.

As to English, let us observe that in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *cheese/cheesy* developed the sense 'second-rate', as used in the context *There is no chance in this cheesy town*. Likewise, in American English *cheese* appears in a number of compounds that are far from being positively loaded, such as *cheeseball* 'stupid or obnoxious person', *cheesebox* 'dilapidated vehicle', *cheesedick* 'a disgusting or contemptible person', *cheese-eater* 'despicable

---

<sup>13</sup> Apart from that, the augmentative form *kapucha* (< *kapusta* 'cabbage') is used as a vulgar name for female sexual organs or 'secret informer' (see Lewinson's *Slownik*).

person' or the phrasal verb *cheesed off* whose origin is unknown.<sup>14</sup> In the history of Polish, when considering the Polish of the 1980s and 1990s the adjective *serowaty* was used in the sense 'of poor quality, bad'.

## Conclusion

Obviously, the foodsemic developments discussed here do not exhaust the number of food-based metaphorical extensions that have taken place either in Italian or any other language quoted here. The aim pursued here was merely to signal the potential universality and the internal complexity of the mechanism of **foodsemy**, as well as to mark the possible conceptual transfer links that may have conditioned such metaphoric changes, many of them highly speculative, as they undoubtedly are. Very frequently terms basically linked to the macrocategory **FOODSTUFFS** develop the secondary sense used with reference to various types of human being, for example, *cabbage* meaning 'mentally disabled person', *fudge nudger* 'a homosexual man', yet it seems that more frequently there arise historical secondary senses related to various parts of the human body, for example, *beef curtains*, a slang term for 'vagina', *plums* that functions as a synonym of *testicles*, *mangoes* figuratively employed in the sense 'female breasts', *banana* that is used metaphorically in the sense 'penis', but also – not infrequently – by some kind of metonymically mediated process the words related basically to the macrocategory **FOODSTUFFS** develop two metaphorical senses, that is one related to the human being as a type, and another sense thread related to certain specific body part, such as, for example, *peach* that may be employed to stand either for an attractive female, young vagina, but also in the sense 'soft and smooth female bottom' or *apple pie* that in the history of English has developed two senses, that is either 'dear, beloved person' or 'vagina'.

By and large, the conceptual basis of the figurativeness of foodsemic metaphor lies in obscurity and much effort is needed before any of the basic questions are given any definite answers, however partial they may prove to be. Yet, one thing that seems to be certain is that such metaphorical transfers are most frequently based on various **attributive values of sensory experience** such as, for example, (TASTE: <...>, <...>), (SHAPE: <...>, <...>) or (SIZE: <...>, <...>). However, it is beyond any doubt that to verify such generalisation one will need to engage in fully-fledged, systematic comparative cross-linguistic analysis.

---

<sup>14</sup> See *The Diner's Dictionary* (1993). In fact, the only positively (at least aesthetically) loaded compound that has been found is *cheesecake* 'scantly clad female charm on provocative display'. Note that the answering *beefcake* in which dishy men take the place of dishy women, was coined in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Cheese* data has been taken from *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (1994).

## References

### Dictionaries

- Grochowski, M.** 2002. *Słownik polskich przeleństw i wulgaryzmów*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Lewinson, J.** 1999. *Słownik seksualizmów polskich*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.
- Lighter, J.E.** 1994. *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*. New York: Random House.

### Other works

- Fontecha, A.F and J.R.M. Catalan** 2003. 'Semantic derogation in animal metaphor: A contrastive-cognitive analysis of two male/female examples in English and Spanish' [in:] *Journal of Pragmatics* 35, pp. 771–797.
- Hendrickson, R.** 2001. *World English*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Hsieh, Sh. Ch.** 2003. 'The Corpus of Mandarin Chinese and German animal expressions' [in:] D. Archer, P. Rayson, A. Wilson and T. McEnery (eds) *Proceedings of the Corpus Linguistics 2003 Conference*. Lancaster: Lancaster University, pp. 332–341.
- Kieltyka, R.** 2006. *Towards a Historical Account of English Zoosemy: The Case of Middle English and Early Modern English DOMESTICATED ANIMALS*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Rzeszów.
- Kieltyka, R., G.A. Kleparski** 2005a. 'The scope of English zoosemy: The case of DOMESTICATED ANIMALS' [in:] G.A. Kleparski (ed.) *Studia Anglica Resoviensia* 3, pp. 76–87.
- Kieltyka, R., G.A. Kleparski** 2005b. 'The ups and downs of the Great Chain of Being: The case of canine zoosemy in the history of English' [in:] P. Štekauer (ed.) *Skase*, the e-journal of the Slovak Association for the Study of English, vol. 2, pp. 22–41.
- Kieltyka, R., G.A. Kleparski** 2007. 'On cognitively motivated semantic change: The case of Middle English and Early Modern English canine zoosemy' [in:] P. Stalmaszczyk, I. Witczak-Plisiecka (eds) *PASE Studies in Linguistics*, pp. 121–129.
- Kleparski, G.A.** 1990. *Semantic Change in English: A Study of Evaluative Developments in the Domain of HUMANS*. Lublin: The Catholic University of Lublin Printing House.
- Martenka, H.** 2007. *Skąd się wzięło moje nazwisko?* Bydgoszcz: Biblioteka Tygodnika Angora.