

Pragmatics and the Aesthetics of Food Discourse.
Jamie's Italy

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to investigate the pragmatic and aesthetic dimensions of *Jamie's Italy* (2005), a 'hybrid' cookery book, authored by British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, which actually collects and blends various genres by incorporating Italian recipes, professional photographs and personal commentaries. In particular, I will consider how such dimensions envisage the concepts of authenticity and identity, and their stylistic renditions operating in English-language food discourse. In constructing and reinforcing the prototypical (British) schema of authentic Italian foodscape by means of various semiotic resources and paratextual features (Eggs 2004, Stockwell 2002), the author's language choices also reflect and negotiate the representations of identity in the contemporary world (Perianova 2010). In pragmatic terms, authenticity is a keyword in food discourse as it projects a sense of realism and accuracy by referring to specific traditions and contexts. By analysing a selection of passages, my paper will specifically discuss the following issues: 1) the pragmatic present-day notion of authenticity, and its complexities and possible transformations in food discourse; 2) the strategies used in *Jamie's Italy* for the aesthetic, linguistic and textual depiction of traditional Italian food; 3) the construction of an ideological and stereotypical (e.g. romanticised) perspective of Italian cuisine, and by extension of the entire country.

Keywords: *authenticity in food discourse, language of food, Jamie Oliver, language and identity*

1. Introduction

Far from merely being a type of specialised language, or a restricted code, food discourse constitutes one of the most rooted and pervasive themes in human cultures, whose manifestations span a wide range of contexts, texts and forms, from fiction and cinema to contemporary television competitive cooking shows, websites and mobile applications. A complex social domain that according to Lévi-Strauss' paradigm of 'the raw and the cooked'¹ (1964) bisects civilisations, food imagery is linguistically, culturally and symbolically constructed through texts and discourses, across places and times, in order to convey ideologies and perspectives. Literary texts are often replete with food references,² but food is even more prominent in language, for instance, since it constitutes an abundant source for the creation of metaphors, idioms and set phrases, especially in English, as demonstrated by Pinnavaia.³ As such, it also contributes to the indexicality and representation of identity and authenticity by connecting traditions, habits and practices, in a mediation between a local and a global dimension. Siding with Pennycook's⁴ contention that language viewed as a social practice emerges from the activities it performs, I will here use the interlinked notions of identity, authenticity and circulation as guiding paradigms for my analysis, since they work as fundamental recurring elements in the complex cultural scenario of our epoch.

In this paper I set out a preliminary investigation of some pragmatic and aesthetic articulations of food discourse, in particular by considering how identity and authenticity are represented in and shaped

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le Cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964).

² See for example the papers collected in Francesca Orestano, ed., *Non solo porridge. Letterati inglesi a tavola* (Milan: Mimesis, 2015).

³ Laura Pinnavaia, *Sugar and Spice...: Exploring Food and Drink Idioms in English* (Monza: Polimetrica, 2010).

⁴ Alastair Pennycook, *Language as a Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 2010).

by texts. I will draw qualitative data from *Jamie's Italy*,⁵ a 'hybrid' cookery book, authored by British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and published in 2005, which actually collects and blends various genres by incorporating Italian recipes, professional photographs and personal commentaries. In recent times, food discourse has attracted scholarly attention from a variety of approaches and perspectives, for example with studies devoted to the narrative characterisation and synthetic personalisation in TV cookery programmes,⁶ or exploring how celebrity chefs carefully build up their fashionable personas against the backdrop of race, gender and class.⁷ The language and performative style of Jamie Oliver too has been the object of various research projects, for instance by investigating his role as a cultural intermediary⁸ or by looking at the cultural translation of his Italian food discourse for an English audience.⁹

However, Jamie Oliver's texts have often been overlooked, perhaps being deemed as banal examples of 'lowbrow' culture. In reality, they reveal an array of linguistic devices and strategies as they modulate and give contour to meanings. In constructing and reinforcing the schema of 'authentic Italian foodscape' by means of various semiotic resources and paratextual features, the chef's language choices also reflect and negotiate the representations of identity in the contemporary world.¹⁰ By investigating a selection of passages from *Jamie's Italy*, this article will specifically investigate the author's textual rendition and discuss the following issues:

1. The pragmatic present-day notion of authenticity, and its complexities and possible transformations in food discourse;
2. the strategies used in the book for the aesthetic, linguistic and textual depiction of traditional Italian food;
3. the construction of an ideological and stereotypical (e.g. romanticised) perspective of Italian cuisine, and by extension of the entire country.

Methodologically, I will follow an interdisciplinary approach that benefits from contributions and tools from various disciplines, including critical stylistics, discourse analysis and cultural studies. The aim thus is to examine how in the postmodern and globalised age the shapes of food discourse, for Oliver, do not simply reside in eye-catching lexical borrowings or concern rigidly defined text-types, but rather they embed and evoke the manipulation, innovation and hybridisation of cultural and (trans)national identity-related issues.

2. Identity and Authenticity in Food Discourses and Texts

Before tackling the concept of authenticity, I will start with the general notion of identity, which in linguistics has been studied from a variety of perspectives and very often has been considered as the sum of various aspects of our personality (or self), starting from fundamental elements such as gender and ethnicity.¹¹ However, a more recent trend of analysis has broadened its scope in order to illuminate

⁵ Jamie Oliver, *Jamie's Italy* (London: Penguin, 2005). All in-text citations from this edition are inserted with page reference in brackets.

⁶ See for example Keri Matwick and Kelsi Matwick, "Storytelling and Synthetic Personalization in Television Cooking Shows", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 71 (2014), 151-159.

⁷ See for example Josée Johnston, Alexandra Rodney and Philippa Chong, "Making Change in the Kitchen? A Study of Celebrity Cookbooks, Culinary Personas, and Inequality", *Poetics*, 47 (2014), 1-22.

⁸ Nick Piper, "Jamie Oliver and Cultural Intermediation", *Food, Culture and Society*, 18.2 (2015), 245-264.

⁹ Linda Rossato, "Le Grand Culinary Tour: Adaptation and Retranslation of a Gastronomic Journey across Languages and Food Cultures", *The Translator*, 21.3 (2015), 271-295.

¹⁰ Irina Perianova, "Identity and Food in the Globalizing World", in Maria Georgieva and Allan James, eds., *Globalization in English Studies* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 23-45.

¹¹ See for example Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004).

other features, such as the way we behave, the way we dress and also the way (and what) we eat or how we prepare food. This approach may be positioned within a broad area of study, including the idea of ‘Discourses’ (with capital letter) put forward by Gee, namely “ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes”.¹²

Similarly it is akin to the ‘major/minor’ identity categorisation elaborated by Lakoff by which the former refers to features such as ethnic belonging and sexual preference, whilst the latter relates to mundane aspects such as attires, music and “taste in the consumption and preparation of food”.¹³ Food discourse is representative of such ‘Discourses’ and, rather than being driven by the mere fulfilment of a physiological need, it often constitutes a central social domain in human culture and turns out to be an important indicator of our identity that operates through language use too. Our approach to food in fact is mirrored in the linguistic manifestations, since the words, structures and styles we use to talk about food point to the creation of sets of values, meanings, and ideologies. For Beccaria, for example, “parlare è come inghiottire ciò che si vede, o ciò che si legge. Parlare o scrivere del gusto è un riassaporare, è memoria di un sapore, ricordo di un profumo”.¹⁴ The Italian linguist’s synesthetic metaphor brings to the fore the paramount position of food and eating for human civilisations and juxtaposes it with other activities and abilities, including cognitive and perceptual ones such as speaking, writing, thinking and recalling. In this light, food is instinctively tied to nourishment and existence of course, but it is also much more than that and emerges as a noteworthy constituent of cultural discourse as well as a metaphor for negotiations and ways of being.

Identity is thus the very first element to consider in approaching the complexity of current foodscapes, but I argue that we need to reflect on other key words as well, in particular the interconnected notions of authenticity, which has become a type of buzzword in this arena, and circulation, to refer to the transmission of shared patterns of the language of food. For various reasons, there seems to be a kind of obsession with the idea of authentic food, as shown by overused fixed expressions such as “real food”, “home-made”, “traditional” or “natural”, probably as a reaction towards homologation and sameness in taste. In reality, as Jurafsky¹⁵ convincingly demonstrates, the idea of authenticity should be balanced with the concept of circulation: similarly to languages, recipes and foodways do circulate, spread, and settle across the world, generating, affecting or transforming behaviours and habits. Different types of cuisines actually share, at least partially, some components like ingredients, ways of cooking, procedures, rites and other. Moreover, authenticity might even be read in the relationship that the subject who approaches and consumes food establishes in a broader ontological sense and in relation to ethical principles, as proposed by Kara Schultz for instance and her Heidegger-inspired interpretation of the expanding present-day culture of food.¹⁶

From this perspective, food discourse is not merely concerned with the dimensions of identity, but it also illuminates areas of contacts and hybridity that stem from historical roots and are further amplified by globalisation processes. Evidence can be found in the philological transformations of the names of food staples, which are culture-bound words but also offer insights into the development of societies and communities, and their behaviour, simultaneously divided and united by practices, customs and styles.

¹² James Paul Gee, *Social Linguistics and Literacies* (Oxon: Routledge Falmer, 1996), 127.

¹³ Robin Tolmach Lakoff, “Identity a la Carte: You Are What You Eat”, in Anna De Fina, Deborah Schrifin and Michael Bamberg, eds., *Discourse and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006), 143.

¹⁴ Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Misticanze* (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), 32, “to speak is like to swallow what you see, or read. Speaking or writing about taste is a kind of re-tasting, a memory of a taste, or a smell” (my translation).

¹⁵ Dan Jurafsky, *The Language of Food* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014).

¹⁶ Kara Shultz, “On Establishing a More Authentic Relationship with Food: From Heidegger to Oprah on Slowing down Fast Food”, in Joshua Frye and Michael Bruner, eds., *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 222-237.

In other words, traditional cuisines can often be viewed as the final outcome of various evolutionary cultural (and implicitly linguistic) processes, which in some cases have extensively drawn from other contexts. Social anthropologist Kate Fox for example highlights the variegated composition of British cuisine, and affirms that “Greek, Italian, Indian and Chinese food have been part of the English diet for decades”.¹⁷ With this premise, it is worth investigating the ways in which food traditions have been linguistically constructed and manipulated in the British context, although the attitude toward food-related issues has not always been positively connoted in the UK. For instance, Fox holds that “an intense interest in food is regarded by the majority as at best rather odd, and at worst somehow morally suspect”,¹⁸ but today’s context is probably slightly different, in particular thanks to the established popularity of celebrity chefs like Gordon Ramsay, Delia Smith, Jamie Oliver in the UK, or Marcella Hazan in the USA, as well as various worldwide famous cooking shows and programmes.

To carry out my analysis, I will concentrate on a specific text type, i.e. the recipe, which superficially belongs to the procedural typology as it presents instructions about how to cook a specific dish. In reality, however, as a peculiar genre, it is linguistically and stylistically complex in its discursive construction and meaning-making process.¹⁹ In particular, from a systemic functional perspective, Eggins²⁰ identifies a series of standard structural patterns in recipes, including the following components:

- title (a nominal group or a noun phrase);
- enticement (a full sentence with a ‘be’ clause followed by positive attitudinal or evaluative words like ‘traditional, succulent or tempting’);
- ingredients (a sequence of nominal groups, whose head is premodified by measuring words, sometimes with abbreviations, e.g.: 90g (3 1 oz.) fresh white breadcrumbs);
- method (clauses in the imperative mood + meanings of location, time and manner, with action-oriented verbs);
- serving quantity (typically an elliptical declarative, i.e. a part of a clause, for example ‘serves 4’ rather than the full clause ‘this dish serves 4’. The structure is declarative in the sense that it provides information but does not require us to do certain operations).

Of course the sequence and the type of information above may vary, but as a whole this is the prototypical structure governing the genre of recipes. Other types of approaches are possible, and Coller for example highlights the narrative status of recipes in Labovian terms by identifying the recurrent categories of title, list, orientation components, action, evaluation and coda.²¹ Moreover, as Norrick notes, the narrative dimension of recipes is particularly remarkable when they are told in a television cookery programme, where they even acquire a conversational tendency mixed with an instructional modality in order to project identity and reinforce a community.²²

Acknowledging the contention that food and meals “serve as a vehicle of bonding, affiliation, belonging, acceptance, and therefore esteem, as well as a means of self-actualization”,²³ the recipe textual typology can function as a tool to represent aspects of identity in a dialogic, or collaborative, relationship between authors and readers and at the same time serve to construct a sense of authenticity by upholding and reviving traditions via specific models and patterns. Indeed, according to Lakoff,²⁴

¹⁷ Kate Fox, *Watching the English* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004), 300-301.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁹ See Lakoff, “Identity la Carte”, and Jurafsky, *The Language of Food*.

²⁰ Suzanne Eggins, *Systemic Functional Analysis* (London: Continuum, 2004), 66-69.

²¹ Colleen Cotter, “Claiming a Piece of the Pie: How the Language of Recipes Defines Community”, in Anne Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading: Community, Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 59-60.

²² Neal R. Norrick, “Conversational Recipe Telling”, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43 (2011), 2740-2761.

²³ Perianova, “Identity and Food”, 23.

²⁴ Lakoff, “Identity la Carte”, 157.

“recipe-writing is an art form that has changed over time, and as with menus, the changes are related to the writer’s assumptions about the relationship shared with the reader”. For example, the formal and didactic nature of recipes is currently being redesigned to a certain extent, so that specific quantities and methodological instructions may be accompanied by personal addresses, colloquial language and imprecise information.

3. The Linguistic Construction of Authenticity and Identity in Jamie Oliver’s Italian Recipes

I will now look at the idea of authenticity in food discourse in relation to Italian gastronomy, as perceived from an English point of view, and will specifically focus on *Jamie's Italy* (2005). Italian food has always been enormously appreciated in Britain, and the world in general, and its impact emerges in a wide range of domains, from literature to advertising and more generally language. In the English literary context, the Victorian author William Morris praises the healthy qualities of Italian breadsticks in his utopian work *News from Nowhere* (1890) whereas the contemporary writer Ian McEwan adds some Italian food echoes in his novel *Enduring Love* (1997), but many other examples could be cited. Linguistically, the Italian influence is relevant not only in specific names for foods and products, e.g. Garibaldi biscuits, but also and especially thanks to the large quantity of Italian food-related borrowings in the present-day English lexicon. Even a cursory research in the *Oxford English Dictionary*²⁵ will reveal that the semantic fields of food and drinks extensively include Italian loanwords, spanning a variety of entries such as antipasto, minestrone, polenta, provolone, tagliatelle and zuppa.²⁶ In locating the domain of food and drinks within the broader area of the language of tourism, Dann puts forward the suggestive label “gastrolingo” and among its features he notices “a tendency to over-use foreign words, particularly French and Italian expressions, without further explanation”,²⁷ a stylistic choice that not only adds overtones of sophistication, but also discloses the intention to project a desired identity and personality.

In recent times, a main figure in the construction of food discourse in the UK, featuring ties to Italian gastronomy too, is represented by James (‘Jamie’) Oliver, the popular chef and restaurateur, who started working at Antonio Carluccio’s Italian restaurant in Covent Garden and was even awarded an MBE in 2003. Over the last 15 years, he has appeared in various cooking shows and has authored a number of cookbooks, dealing with several types of cuisine, not only trying to promote local products of the English tradition but also introducing healthier ways for the preparation of food staples, with a special focus on food education. In particular, he has collaborated with various charities and elaborated campaigns against the idea of ‘junk food’, especially addressed to school kids, with the aim to raise awareness on the importance of a healthy and balanced diet.

It is first necessary to provide some background information about the book under investigation, which actually juxtaposes ‘traditional’ Italian recipes with professional photographs and commentaries (“My thoughts on” + name of the dish) as well as some brief autobiographical details, intertextually evoking ideologies and mental images, or schemas of a ‘romanticised’ Italy, a country apparently made up of food enthusiasts: “Since I was a teenager I’ve been totally besotted by the love, passion and verve for food, family and life itself that about all Italian people have, no matter where they’re from or how rich or poor they might be” (viii). The book includes 132 recipes divided into these double-labelled categories: antipasti / starters, street food and pizza, primi / first courses (soups, pasta, risotto), insalate

²⁵ See www.oed.com (2018).

²⁶ A typical problem with lexicology and lexicography concerns the fact that vocabulary is a dynamic component in a language and constantly undergoes transformations, expansions and reductions through time, and thus it is difficult to study it in quantitative terms without a diachronic reference. However a valuable reference in this respect is Laura Pinnavaia, *The Italian Borrowings in the Oxford English Dictionary* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001).

²⁷ Graham M.S. Dann, *The Language of Tourism* (Walliford, Oxon: Cab International, 1996), 237.

/ salads, secondi / main courses (fish, meat), contorni / side dishes, dolci / desserts. The structural components theorised by Eggs above are present and attentively developed. In particular, the enticement section is worth noticing since it is expanded into a fully-formed text enriched by details about the ingredients, the history of the recipe itself or other anecdotal references, thus enhancing the pragmatic (i.e. instructional) nature of the text as well as its aesthetic, narrative and even poetic dimension, thanks to attention-getting devices and tactics. Furthermore, in matching the Gricean maxims of quantity and quality that prescribe providing the necessary type and amount of information for the communicative act to take place,²⁸ in this case concerning quantities, times and methods, the recipes collectively shape their communicative force by supporting the imagined reader and user of the recipes themselves as a non-professional or amateur cook via different linguistic strategies.

From a stylistic point of view, in a text the presence of a particular element or construction is significant as it signals certain meanings, but at the same time the absence of specific words that one would expect in that communicative context is relevant too. In a book that from the very title, and cover, strives to suggest a faithful and genuine idea of a country and its culinary tradition, the fact that the words ‘authentic’ and ‘authenticity’ do not actually appear may shed light on the author’s general view: in fact Oliver seems to prefer the word ‘real’, which is abundantly used, as exemplified by the following forms: “I wanted to find the food of the ‘real’ Italy” (xi), “My best advice is to get out of the touristy places and into the real Italy” (xv), “What on earth can I say about pasta? Well, if you want the real truth, the moment I stopped cooking sloppy, sticky, uninteresting, predictable pasta and started making pasta that was delicious, using the same commodities and ingredients that the Italians use at home, was the moment that my cooking changed for ever” (84). The monosyllabic, more direct term ‘real’ thus seems to produce a closer sense of involvement in the reader, with a marked impact and persuasive force, sometimes even with tautological, hyperbolic and paradoxical echoes as in the last example (‘real truth’).

As a whole, the register adopted by Oliver is quite informal, captivating and sometimes even colloquial. Although it naturally draws from the specialised lexis of gastronomy, it also exhibits everyday words, structures and forms of address, as in the following examples: “some real ballsy flavour” (129, for the risotto recipe), “absolutely moreish” (266, for the aubergine parmigiana), the vocative “ok, tigers” (121) or the onomatopoeic vague indication “a good splash of olive oil” (106, for the Tuscan picci with tomato and meat sauce). Oliver’s style thus combines a mixture of specialised language, colloquial items and creative devices, as illustrated by the innovative metonymic form “Treviso is the Aston Martin of the radicchio family” (254), or the unusual consonance-based expression “the real bloody treat to eat” (284), with regard to the recipe of torta di riso (Florentine rice tart). The two examples here appear to indicate the permutation and combination of items from core (with generic intensifying colloquial adjectives like “bloody”) and non-core (with the specific term “Treviso” to indicate a long, thin kind of radicchio) vocabulary in coining new linguistic forms, namely a “continuum of expressive possibilities for making utterances more intimate, as well as for intensifying and evaluating utterances”.²⁹

Of course, the entire book is grounded on a wealth of Italian loanwords specially appertaining to local products (e.g. cavolo nero, 70), names of dishes (e.g. antipasti, 260), sometimes in a compound hybrid form (e.g. chicken cacciatore, 222), cooking methods (e.g. al dente, 90), but also with reference to people and family relations/memberships, for example when the author explains that “the poor old mammas have got used to bulking out soups easily by adding pasta, bread and beans” (63). The frequent appellation *mamma* (or sometimes *nonna*) immediately evokes time-honoured stereotypes of the Italian population and such address forms are also instantiations of personal deixis, which occasionally take the

²⁸ George Yule, *Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1996), 37-38.

²⁹ Ronald Carter, *Language and Creativity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 117.

form of onomastic terms in the name of dishes like Nonna Fangitta's tuna (204), Nada's cake (294), nonna Giusy's fish with couscous (207), or pasta Norma style (88), for which the author actually confesses "I haven't got a clue who Norma is, but I'm sure she's a good old girl!" (88), further reinforcing positive values and echoes of family relations and bonds. Therefore the authenticity of the dish is progressively constructed with the support of clichés and stereotypes, along with distant, almost exotic echoes of an imagined and crystallised tradition.

Deictic personal items also play an important role in the negotiation between authenticity and identity, in particular via pronoun usage in a tripartite referential framework: with "we" (the British) versus "they" (meaning the Italians) thanks to a facilitating agent ("I", i.e. Jamie Oliver, who repeatedly stresses his personal and even emotional closeness to Italian culture and food, and thus grants himself the role of mediator). The author thus constructs his social positioning by strategically negotiating a sense of belonging, for example with an exclusive 'they' to designate the Italians via a slightly distancing pronoun: "I love the fact that they [the Italians] think their own regional way of cooking is the best, and how they are so proud of their local produce" (IX). Conversely the author employs an inclusive reference, as in the case "[flavours] very accessible to us back in Britain" (116), to refer to the British and illustrate an ideal collective English readership as the book's implied addressee. In other passages, however, Oliver also seems to boast an acquired 'semi-Italian' identity: for example when he talks about the various options for making white risotto, he works out an egocentric perspective and patronisingly affirms that "if a local Italian turns his nose up, well, I don't care, because in this chapter I consider myself a know-it-all" (129). According to Wales,³⁰ personal pronouns "display a richness of rhetorical and social connotation beyond the strictly denotational" and indeed they allude to the sensitive relations between various subjects in a blend of attraction, difference and belonging.

In other words, the use of personal referents is driven by the power of implying and assuming³¹ by which 'authentic' identities are constructed and projected for ideological purposes: Oliver's colourful presentation and linguistic manipulation of recipes intentionally calibrate the extra meaning of what is actually said and play with the sense of implicature, namely the "additional conveyed meaning".³²

In documenting the archive of culinary traditions in Italy, the volume also employs other strategies, such as hyperbolic constructions like "Everyone loves them [beans] there!" (248), rhetorical questions ("What on earth can I say about pasta?", 84), and figurative or evaluative language ("a smooth, silky egg sauce", 90, "the best tuna meatballs", 203, and "the best prawn and parsley frittata" 44). Once again the use of such devices affects the boundaries of the recipe genre by flouting maxims of quantity and quality, but in reality they function as eye-catching elements that also display an emotional involvement, rather than slowing or impeding the communicative flow. Let us consider hyperbole, for instance: this rhetorical figure is based on the idea of exaggeration and amplifies in metaphorical terms the content of an assertion. However, according to Wales,³³ "hyperbole is not the same as telling lies: there is normally no intention to deceive one's listeners, who will no doubt infer the true state of affairs". For Oliver, hyperboles are a way to attract the reader's attention and establish a further connection by reducing distances between cultures and speakers, so that the English readers may feel close to the domain of Italian food.

4. Representing Food for Thoughts, Words and Images

In the attempt to build up the imagery of authenticity, the overall production of meaning in the book benefits from a broad range of stylistic, semiotic and paratextual resources. To approach the way in

³⁰ Katie Wales, *Personal Pronouns in Present-Day English* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), 50.

³¹ Leslie Jeffries, *Critical Stylistics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 93-105.

³² Yule, *Pragmatics*, 37.

³³ Katie Wales, *Dictionary of Stylistics* (Longman: London, 1995), 222.

which readers process and visualise the contents of the recipes and the other textual and non-textual elements that make up Oliver's book, it is useful to bring in modality, an interdisciplinary notion that "explicitly introduces the viewpoint of the text's producer".³⁴ Realised by a range of language items such as auxiliary and lexical modal verbs, adverbs and more complex structures, modality is traditionally seen in relation to obligation (deontic modality), desirability (boulomaic modality) and knowledge (epistemic modality). To illuminate such concept, let me quote a longer extract which Oliver uses as an introductory part for the section dedicated to salads:

In Italy, salads are eaten as a matter of course, very often after the secondo. If you've never been to Italy, some of the recipes in this chapter will reinvent what you perceive as a salad. And if you're not the salad type, you don't know what you're missing. In comparison to Italy, it's horrific to see what the British consider a salad. No wonder lots of people here think they don't like them. If you are one of these people, I hope this chapter helps you to change your view.

(*Jamie's Italy*, 152)

A possible critical interpretation of this excerpt should consider its modalised quality, i.e. the presence of modal structures and the effects they produce in readers. As Gavins points out, "in all types of discourse, human beings frequently generate unrealised and remote text-worlds through language".³⁵ Very often specific devices and strategies, for example the use of hypothesis, function as triggers through which speakers conceptually construct and speculate on possible alternative worlds. The quotation above once again presents and contrasts two perspectives, the Italian and the British ones, and suggests a number of possible, desirable but so far unrealised worlds. For this purpose, the author employs conditional sentences (three times), perceiving and feeling verbs ("perceive", "hope"), negation ("never", "don't", "no wonder") and collectively these elements envisage an alternative scenario, in which English people are led to change their mind and start appreciating salads.

The book under investigation here is also characterised by the professional photographs taken by David Loftus and Chris Lerry, which with their saturated colours collectively strive to visually index a romanticised, almost 'poetic' image of the country. As scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen have demonstrated,³⁶ photos and images do not simply have an aesthetic relevance, but they are also endowed with an inner representational power that contributes to the meaning-making process in discourse, and the text under examination here proves to be no exception. In *Jamie's Italy*, recipes, in fact, are combined with a series of beautiful pictures of sunny landscapes, rural populations (including photos with religious references like those of priests, saints and churches, again typically imagined as part of a certain vision of traditional, authentic and somehow backward southern Italy) and colourful ingredients. The pictorial rendition of Oliver's project triggers a further note of mythologizing inasmuch as it somehow tends to favour picturesque and spectacular elements, almost turned into stereotypes and clichés of a faraway and imaginary Italy. Sometimes there are also striking images of bloody wild game that serve to add a touch of dramatic intensity, although Oliver tries to mitigate their disturbing force by elucidating his editorial choices. Commenting on a photo of a shepherd seeing to a lamb hanging and ready to be slaughtered, he affirms: "I'm highly aware that the picture opposite is both graphic and gruesome, and so I'm going to explain why I decided to use it in the book and also why this whole chapter is quite visually gritty" (210). This quotation and the passage from which it comes operate as a form of hedging, i.e. a technique of "qualification and toning-down"³⁷ that contextualises the image thanks to a cultural

³⁴ Jeffries, *Critical Stylistics*, 115.

³⁵ Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 2007), 118.

³⁶ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1997). Unfortunately, due to copyright restrictions, it is not possible to reproduce photos from the book, and as a consequence rather than carrying out a multimodal analysis I will have to limit myself to a purely descriptive approach.

³⁷ Wales, *Dictionary of Stylistics*, 215.

clarification about the rites of traditional rural cultures and their handling of butchery practices, whose strong impact is acceptable for Oliver because it is situated within a specific and self-balancing cultural milieu.

In these sections it is possible to unveil an ‘ecological’ significance as well because the author explicitly tackles the sensitive theme of hunting and the consumption of meat, namely practices that were quite customary in old-fashioned societies but that tend to be totally different today due to social and economic world dynamics. Not only does Oliver evoke this sense of a mythicized past, but he also considers the present, in particular criticising the overuse of poor quality and unhealthy meat in Britain: “because the majority of people don’t want to see the dead animal that their cut of meat is coming from, big corporation have jumped in to solve the problem – out of sight, out of mind” (120). Since the author has included many meat-based recipes in his book, he feels it is his duty to discuss the question of animal produce and consumption. Against the endless spread of food industries that typically offer low quality, and sometimes even unhealthy products, Oliver suggests a new ‘ethical’ vision that traces its roots to the original peasant communities, which were regulated by a set of precise norms aimed at maintaining an equilibrium within a territory. To some extent, thus, the ideological stance shown by Oliver in these parts of his volume seems to be positioned near those food books that aim to raise awareness regarding the production, sustainability and consumption of food, and all its moral and critical implications, and that for Shultz³⁸ express a form of authenticity. However, one may question whether, in spite of Oliver’s positive and environmental intentions, the language at work here is, at least to some extent, tinted by an ideological evaluation of key notions such as tradition and authenticity that once again mythologize the past in (un)real reminiscent and nostalgic terms.

5. Conclusions

The manifestations of food discourse that I have briefly examined in this paper pivot around the coterminous aspects of identity, authenticity and circulation that emerge in the constructions of texts and I specifically focused on the genre of recipes. As Jurafsky³⁹ holds, “a cuisine is a richly structured cultural object, with its component flavor elements and its set of combinatory grammatical principles, learned early and deeply” and the language of food testifies to the changes and transformations of individual and society. Alongside the cardinal issue of identity, I have dealt with the intertwined notions of authenticity and circulation. If ‘authentic’ is a recurrent word in recipes, and other food-related text-types such as menus and advertising, in reality it can be argued that it refers to a broad, all-encompassing concept that often tends to ignore contacts and transformations, e.g. the meaning of an authentic recipe depends not only on the fact it is passed on through generations but it is also affected by the power of circulation of foods and cultures because new ingredients and trends may introduce changes that eventually generate new traditions, even in linguistic terms. Likewise to what happens with languages, food discourse is thus governed by a variety of dynamics like adoption and transformation of ‘new’ elements, as well as exchanges and borrowings, which eventually become the norm and not the exception. Jamie Oliver too follows these paradigms, for example when he justifies his intention to include his personal and revised recipe of *insalata caprese* (salad from Capri): “I like to make mine ... So I wanted to do my take on this brilliant combination” (170). Innovation, elaboration and adaptation are therefore part and parcel of food discourse and they testify to the transformation of gastronomy and its social and cultural role across time and space.

It is almost a truism to affirm that worldwide Italian food is frequently reinvented practically, but also linguistically, with fanciful eye-catching words, for example in the names of the elaborated dishes

³⁸ Shultz, “On Establishing a More Authentic Relationship with Food”, 234.

³⁹ Jurafsky, *The Language of Food*, 184.

offered by Italianate cafes and restaurants, but there are cultural, social and commercial reasons behind such acts and in the British context Kate Fox⁴⁰ holds that “when it comes to food, we behave like teenage fashion victims”. Jamie Oliver’s position in such domain is more complex as he tries to mediate between the stereotyped image of Italy and Italian foodscapes, in a certain measure still coloured by a kind of romantic allure, and the reality of the country and its culinary traditions that he personally experienced and appreciated. His recipes thus represent texts, or narratives to borrow Cotter’s reading,⁴¹ that evoke, construct and challenge identity and the sense of community since they are meant not only to provide instructions about how to cook certain dishes, but also to illustrate a kind of cultural journey within and across a country and ultimately build up text worlds and representations of the world.

In conclusion, I claim that the materials I have here considered go beyond a mere informative or procedural nature, providing details about the ingredients required for a dish, as they also try to persuade readers and turn them into customers by ideologically constructing cultural and imaginary worlds, and thus implicitly bargaining/negotiating new identities, as in the case of the linguistic and photographic representation of Italy as a traditional southern destination for food enthusiasts. In thus doing, they partake of a broader social practice that establishes a sense of identity through linguistic forms that break clear-cut categories of belonging and otherness by substituting authenticity with imagined geographies and hybrid identities. Perianova,⁴² with Anderson in mind, stresses that “social identity is significantly a question of imagined communities, of imagining oneself to share a common history of destiny or fate with thousands or millions of others one can never know”. The same argument is shared by Lakoff⁴³ in her analysis of the language of food that aims to show “human identity as a continual work in progress, constructed and altered by the totality of life experience”.

⁴⁰ Fox, *Watching the English*, 300.

⁴¹ Cotter, “Claiming a Piece of the Pie”.

⁴² Perianova, “Identity and Food”, 27.

⁴³ Lakoff, “Identity a la Carte”, 142.