

Consuming Translations: Eating the Food of the Other

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Simona Stano's *Eating the Other* is an important contribution in the field of semiotics of food. It analyzes the translation processes undergone by *washoku*, 'the traditional dietary cultures of Japanese' (Stano 2015: 52), when presented in Western Japanese restaurants. More precisely, the object of this study is the Japanese meal in its Western translations as ethnic meal 'as it is consumed in public *restaurants*, particularly focusing on the *dinner*' (Stano 2015: 50), i.e. the meal which, in Western cultures, is conceived of 'as a moment of *enjoyment* and *relaxation*', mainly observed from the point of view of the consumer (Stano 2015: 51, 57). This socio-cultural practice is a manifestation of the broader phenomenon of ethnic food, which, in our contemporary and globalized world, is becoming increasingly common. Simona Stano analyses six among the most known and renowned Japanese restaurants abroad, located in contexts of different food cultures (Italy, Switzerland and Canada).

The aim is, on the one hand, to observe and understand the processes of translation between culinary systems, considering the effects arising at the level of signification (Stano 2015: 48). On the other hand, this work provides methodological and epistemological contributions to the field of semiotics of food.

Indeed, the most impressive aspect of Simona Stano's work is the complex articulation of the theoretical and methodological framework, developed by the author in the first part of the book, by drawing relevant conceptual tools from several different approaches and streams of research within the semiotic field and beyond (anthropology, sociology, ethnology, ethnography). This reveals a fundamental epistemological position: what counts is the understanding of signification and the discovery of meaning of the object of study by making use of all useful means. At the same time, by adopting models, concepts and tools from other relevant disciplines, the researcher acts like Lévy-Strauss's bricoleur, i.e. as someone 'who invents new contingent solutions by reusing and readjusting the various tools at his or her disposal' (Stano 2015: 216). The inher-

ent interdisciplinarity of semiotics (widely discussed and stressed by different scholars, starting from Charles Morris; cf. Withalm 2016, Boris Uspenskij in Mazzali-Lurati 2014) is richly deployed here. As Stano declares repeatedly, methodological and theoretical *transversality* is essential in order to analyze signs, discourses and practices related to food (Stano 2015: 215).

Food is 'such a complex phenomenon', presenting 'variety and variability' and requiring 'such a composite set of methodological approaches' that one can easily get lost (Stano 2015: 27). Chapter 1 provides a critical review of contributions to the study of food, food symbolism and food systems from the point of view of 'traditional approaches, such as structuralism and text semiotics' (Stano 2015: 26), highlighting their lacunae and limitations.

In Chapter 2, these preliminary analytical tools are complemented with 'new branches' of semiotic investigation. Lotman's work on culture is presented as 'an inescapable reference frame', that leads to take into consideration not only texts, but also 'how texts are produced, re-produced, interpreted, and translated among different cultures' (Stano 2015: 25, 30). Following 'the so-called turning point of semiotics', a wide conception of textuality as social acts and practices is adopted, 'exceed[ing] the limits of the structuralist notion of text' (Stano 2015: 212). This calls for analytical models and tools proposed within the field of sociosemiotics. The importance of the approach of ethnosemiotics is then underlined, where observation, i.e. fieldwork, (instead of deduction of theoretical models) is essential.

The analysis is presented in the second part of the book. Based on 'the research, synthesis, and comparison of information on the Japanese culinary culture, specifically focusing on some of its most significant elements *par excellence*', Chapters 3 and 4 attempt to decipher the grammar of the traditional Japanese meal (Stano 2015: 210). Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to the fieldwork in the six chosen restaurants and its analysis. In Chapter 5, the restaurants are introduced and their logos and menus are analyzed. In Chapter 6, the spatial dimension is analyzed at three different levels of observation '[f]rom the macro-level of the eating place and the practices related to it' (Stano 2015: 117), to the intermediate level of the table and proxemics, reaching the micro-level of plates and food.

The analysis highlights important features of the Japanese meal and important changes undergone by *washoku* in the processes of its Western translation. In particular, changes involving the re-shaping and re-semantization affect the action of two principles generally shaping the Japanese semiosphere: the 'wrapping principle' and 'ma'. The 'wrapping principle' (the idea of *tsutsumi*) 'is primarily connected to concepts such as *containing* and *protecting*, in addition to the idea of *concealing*' (Stano 2015: 67). It shapes different elements and aspects of *washoku*, from the conception and organization of the eating place to the structure of dishes and of sushi. Being the Japanese word meaning gap, pause, the space between two structural parts, 'Ma' refers to a conception of space that focuses not on 'compositional elements, but rather [on] the intervals between them, which are considered the basis of spatial progressive experience and designation' (Stano 2015: 168).

General conclusive remarks are drawn in Chapter 7 and 8. Two main tendencies in Western processes of translation of *washoku* are identified: cases in which the processes of translation are 'explicitly displayed to "reassure" the customer', thus 'enhancing activities of desemantisation and resemantisation of the ethnic eating experience' (Stano 2015: 203) and cases in which these processes as well as the local sphere are concealed 'in order to create a total and completely absorbing experience' and 'to keep as faithful as possible to the source foodsphere' (Stano 2015: 203). However, even in these cases, translation emerges and presents itself as unavoidable: in order to 'eat the Other' (Stano 2015: 203), the source foodsphere has to be preserved, but the local foodsphere cannot be neglected.

REFERENCES

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