Constructing a ‘third space’ through culinary talk in transnational contact.

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While culinary talk may be perceived as trivial small talk, in this paper I present how in transnational contact it can be used as a deliberate "statement of continuity or change" (Janowski, 2012: 175). Applying theories of stance (Du Bois, 2007; Ochs, 1996), I examine how members in Polish-British households use food talk as a stancetaking tool. The paper explores whether and how such projected subject positions can potentially reconstruct speakers’ identities.

Food vis-à-vis migration has inspired a lot of research depicting migrants’ longing for native cuisines (e.g. Abbots 2011; Raman, 2011; Ray, 2004). In such studies migrants are usually portrayed as nostalgically clinging to their old culinary practices and rarely engaging with the novel foodscape of their new localities. Reproducing their ‘collective memory’ of the homeland, they often perform what Appadurai (1996) refers to as "armchair nostalgia" – longing for what has never been lost.

Like Janowski (2012) and Coakley (2012) I want to challenge overemphasising nostalgia for home foods among diaspora. Therefore, in this talk I demonstrate how transnationals increasingly open up to the foreign cuisines of receiving countries, desiring to consume the ‘exotic’ Other. Their discourses reveal how in transnational relationships the ongoing negotiation of culinary practices contributes to the creation of a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994: 55) – a liminal zone offering unique forms of cultural meaning, with "no primordial unity or fixity”.

Following the theories of reflexivity (Lash and Urry’s reflexive subjects, 1994; and Urban’s self-reflexivity within his theory of metaculture, 2001), I conclude how in postmodernity even food practices become reflexive spaces. Inherently contained in culinary performances (in artefacts, action and talk), such reflexivity is further generated by them and directly voiced in social actors’ reflections on the very performances. This meta-talk reveals speakers’ agency in negotiating socio-cultural meanings and discursively reconstructing their identities.

Keywords: third space, transnational contact, food talk.