Food and Cooking – Related Words in Translation. Julian Barnes's *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (*Pedantul în bucătărie*)

Daniela HĂISAN
Ştefan cel Mare University of Suceava

Abstract: The present paper considers a few key passages from Julian Barnes' collection of articles *The Pedant in the Kitchen* and contrasts them with the Romanian translation. It addresses in particular the issue of how culture-specific culinary terms are adapted for the Romanian target reader while also assessing the restitution of the accompanying humour or irony they elicit in context (if any). As food vocabulary in any language is predominantly nominal, our analysis is mainly aimed at nouns and noun phrases which have to do with: cooking as an activity, cookings as a job, meals and dishes, ingredients (subcategory: partitive expressions), kitchen utensils and cookbooks. If the over-all strategy in translating names of dishes seems to be that of approximation, as far as the rest of the categories is concerned, sometimes each specific term calls for specific measures on the part of the translator.
Keywords: *Julian Barnes, food writing, culinary terminology, humour, translation.*

Introduction

That food and eating are heavily laden with connotations is a universally acknowledged truth. Roland Barthes, among others, repeatedly and famously insisted on food being, just like clothes, bona fide cultural signifiers:

> "For what is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior." [Barthes, 1997:21]

Much thought has also been put along time in scrutinising the ever-closer affinity between food and language. Whether viewed through a poetic lens or in a breezy, matter-of-fact style ("Language and food are closely linked, if for nothing else, for the fact that the mouth is instrumental in both", says Brigita Orel in a *Journal of Media and Culture* post [Orel, 2013]), this unavoidable ligature is a good example of successful symbiosis. And if gastronomy is in itself a spectacular field to deal with, culinary discourse is (as suggested by Mariana Neţ [Balaţchi, 2015:202]) even more so.

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

Over the past twenty years, writing about food has become extremely popular in a variety of shapes (cookbooks, food magazines, restaurant reviews, food blogs etc.). Moreover, its primary, straightforward, practical purpose, has in time become secondary: food writing is no longer about recipes (only), it is mostly a (meta)narrative, in short, it is either a (well-told) story or nothing at all.

Two main currents have traditionally been identified in food writing with, on the one hand, the popular culinary publications such as food magazines, columns and restaurant reviews, and on the other, with the culinary memoir, which is considered a literary subgenre. The most famous example of the latter goes back to nineteenth-century French lawyer and gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and his 1825 *Physiology of Taste: or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, an incredibly witty collection of historical and philosophical essays, recipes and anecdotes on the pleasures of the table. Another well-known example is that of the American M. F. K. Fisher, who provided an exquisite translation of Savarin's work into English and also produced an entire series of Fisherisms in her own memoirs.

Being essentially a hybrid, the culinary memoir displays an entire array of features it borrows from all the species involved. "Gastronomic literature is often informative as well as humorous and reflective. (...) Food is a recurring theme, but it does not control the memoir. It is used as a framework to express the writer's memory of a certain time or event.", says Anne Roetman [Roetman, 10], while Melina Markos sees it as "an extended meditation on the food experience, relying on personal experiences, memory, and metaphor to portray the multiple levels of significance of an event" [Cope Markos, 2006:10].

The corpus we will work on in the present paper, namely Julian Barnes' *The Pedant in the Kitchen*, does confirm each and every of the above mentioned features, but since ours is a comparative aim (examination of the culinary terms in the cited book as translated into Romanian), we need to consider two main traits above all: the transfer of food terminology from English into Romanian and the restitution of the humour or irony that comes with it (if any).

Food vocabulary in any language is predominantly nominal, with some decorative verbs and adjectives sprinkled here and there. English is no exception; nor is Romanian, for that matter. Now, unlike the English language, "that voracious sponge [...] which sucked into itself over the past millenium the riches of the world's gastronomic vocabulary" [Ayto, 2012:7] (from the few very basic terms traced back to our remotest Indo-European ancestors: *apple, dough, salt, mead, meat, milk, nut*, to Old English: *loaf, honey, ale, beer, garlic, leek*, Viking import: *cake, steak*, Indian import: *chutney, curry, punch* and ultimately to the 11th, then 18th and 19th French influx: *aspic, soufflé, vol-au-vent* etc.), the Romanian culinary vocabulary has been somewhat conservative by comparison but it does bear the traces of the French haute cuisine as well as of Italian and American cooking, alongside Latin-based, Turkish or Hungarian terms. In spite of apparently many common words in the food vocabulary of the two languages considered here, English and Romanian, translating food terms is not without some stress.

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

Mention must be made at this point that if food language has so far been the subject of numerous studies, considerably less has been written on this topic from a traductological point of view. The papers we consulted (Epstein, 2009; Köhler, 2011; Hoţu, 2011; Corduş, 2016) all seem to emphasize and classify the difficulties of translating food language, while also implicitly acknowledging the hardships of theorising and finding solutions for such difficulties. The fact that most gastronomic terms are culturally-imbued, the numerous false friends (see *minced meat*, for instance, which has nothing to do with meat), the occurrence of semantic splits (see *truffle*) are all challenges to any a translator, irrespective of how skillful s/he is.

For B. J. Epstein (2009), a translator, translation critic and editor of many cookbooks, the main issues that may prove problematic when translating a text which contains food terms concern the availability of ingredients, the different cuts of meat, measurements, and the kitchen equipment (implements, pots and pans). On the question of measurements, she suggests two possible solutions in translation: keeping the original measurements and providing a conversion table at the end of the book or changing the measurements into the system used in the target language either by *complete replacement* or by *replacement and retention* (*i.e.* indicating the shifted measurements in the recipe, but also keeping the original in parenthesis). In addition to these four issues, Köhler (2011) adds another, namely *Culture Specific Names*.

In our analysis, we will be dealing with ingredients, measurements and kitchen utensils. In accounting for the translation strategies, we have in mind (though not extensively, given the corpus) classifications such as Christiane Nord's [1] for the culinary terms we analyse.

The Corpus

Before delving into the analysis as such, a few more words about the corpus are in order. Our source text will be the 2013 edition of Barnes' *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (Atlantic Books, London) and the target text – the only Romanian version so far published, *Pedantul în bucătărie* (Nemira, Bucureşti, 2006, translation by Marina Radu). Italics are reserved for examples singled out from the source text and inverted commas for both larger samples of the original text and examples from the target text. Retroversion (Romanian to English), and occasionally, in tables, our observations are placed between square brackets. Sometimes, but not always, back-translation is provided between brackets, too.

The source text is actually a collection of columns on the trials of home cooking which originally appeared in the *Guardian Review* in the 1990s, which means

[1] In her book *Text Analysis in Translation* (2005) as well as a series of articles, Christiane Nord identifies four different categories: *pragmatic* (arising from differences in the communicative situations of the source and target text); *culture specific* (*e.g.* French names of products or dishes), *language pair specific* (proverbs, expressions, idioms) and *text specific translation problems* (terminology). According to Nord, the choices you make in the first category, the pragmatic translation problems, will give direction to the way you handle problems in the other three categories. As far as our corpus is concerned, we found examples illustrating mostly the last three categories.

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

this clearly falls outside Barnes' mainstream literature. But then he started out as a journalist in the first place and his reputation for being a "chameleon" (literally "chameleon of British letters") [Moseley, 1997:1] has constantly been endorsed and heightened by (leaving his Dan Kavanagh thrillers aside) a considerable amount of periodical short fiction and miscellaneous nonfiction. And if the quality of Julian Barnes' fiction that attracts the most comment is its technique, his personal essays, often autobiographical, have an interest of their own, as Barnes is "both revealing and fairly modest, and generally writes with originality and verve." [Moseley, 1997:165] Half way between journalism and memoir, *The Pedant in the Kitchen* retains most of Barnes' idiosyncrasies as a novelist (self-conscious linguistic style, wittiness, playfulness, irony etc.), only on a more casual note.[2] He functions more as a reporter, less as a memoirist, some critics say, though the personal tone remains. [Moseley, 1997:167] Others find that in collecting these articles into a book, *The Pedant in the Kitchen* column lost some of its flavour. [Fort, 2003] Despite all these, the volume, first published in 2003, has never been out of print and the fourth cover advertises the product exclusively in superlative terms: "the funniest piece of food writing" (Giles Coren, *The Times*); "as crisp and tart [...] a piece of writing about food as one will find anywhere" (Lisa Markwell, *Independent on Sunday*); "a witty and practical account of the search for gastronomic precision"; "a curiously palatable little book" (*Evening Standard*); "this delicious collection of bite-sized articles", "a little hob-side classic" (*Scotland on Sunday*); "a tiny masterpiece of observational wit" (*The Herald*); "a brilliant and self-mocking modern classic" (*Daily Mail*) – most of which strive to turn into account the very same food imagery. And the paratextual side does not end here: the 2013 edition under analysis also contains an Introduction signed by English chef and restaurateur Mark Hix (pp. ix-xiv) which is equally encomiastic and more conatively focused: "I implore you to read this book and enjoy it as much as I have." (p. xiv).

What Julian Barnes does in *The Pedant in the Kitchen* is share his experience(s) / experiments / frustrations as an amateur cook while also fully exposing the inaccuracies of recipes (which he sees as utterly unclear and badly edited most of the time). The main challenges for the translator lie in transferring some of the ingredients and measurements and capturing the feeling tone of the original text.

Our first observation concerns the titles (the title of the column / collection of articles, as well as the titles of the 17 pieces included in the volume). The Romanian version provides a literal rendition of *The Pedant in the Kitchen* [Pedantul în bucătărie], with all the self-conscious undertones Barnes infuses in it (though, truth be told, Barnes' character, while a stern critic of himself and of others, is still too modest to deserve such a label). By contrast, neither of the French versions of *The Pedant*, namely *Un homme dans sa cuisine* [literally, a man in his kitchen] and *Un anglais aux fourneaux* [lit. an Englishman cooking / by the stove], preserve the word *pedant*.

[2] See the fourth cover quote: "Barnes puts almost as much elegance and thought into this series of short essays as into his fiction." (*The Herald*)

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

The inventory of the title of the 17 articles, shown in the table below, is not, however, entirely consistent with the literality of the overall title.

A Late-Onset Cook	*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*
Warning: Pedant at Work	*Atenție: pedant la lucru!*
Take Two Medium Onions	*Luați două cepe mijlocii*
By the Book	*După carte*
The Ten-Minute Maestro	*Maestrul celor zece minute*
No, I Won't Do That	*Nu, nu fac așa ceva!...*
The Cactus and the Slipper	*Cactusul și papucul*
The Tooth Fairy	*Cocoșul roșu*
Good Things	*Lucruri bune*
Service with a Scowl	*Proastă servire*
Once is Enough	*O dată e suficient*
Now They Tell Me!	*Bine că-mi spui acum!*
Keep It Simple	*Cât mai simplu*
In the Purple	*Las-o purpurie!*
Not a Dinner Party	*Nu e dineu*
Bottom Drawer	*Sertarul de jos*
The Moral of It All	*Morala generală*

We can spot at least an adaptation[3]: *The Tooth Fairy*, for instance, is replaced by *Cocoșul roșu*, but in context, „cocoșul roșu" [the red rooster], which in the Romanian culture symbolizes a never-ending story rather than a fantasy figure of early childhood like the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, is a rather unfortunate choice.

"It doesn't look like the picture," the Pedant remarked the other day as he laid down the dinner [...]. "That's like believing in the tooth fairy," replied She For Whom the Pedant Cooks. (*The Tooth Fairy*, p. 56)	– Nu arată ca în poză, a rostit Pedantul acum câteva zile, în timp ce aducea la masă cina [...] – E ca și cum ai crede în povestea cu cocoșul roșu, i-a răspuns Cea Pentru Care Gătește Pedantul. (*Cocoșul roșu*, p. 79)

[3] We employ here Vinay-Darbelnet's 1958 well-known classification of translation procedures.

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

As for the food terminology in *The Pedant the Kitchen*, we organised it into seven categories, as follows:

1) cooking as an activity (subcategory: cookery-related aphorisms)
2) cooks / chefs / other related jobs / gourmets
3) meals and dishes
4) ingredients (subcategory: partitive expressions)
5) kitchen utensils
6) cookbooks
7) adjectives and verbs

Cooking as an Activity

Cooking as an activity is described in various ways: as a craft, as a moral agent, as not exactly sissy.

No one went so far as to say **cooking was sissy**, it was just something that domestic males weren't suited to. (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 9)	Şi asta nu pentru că am fi considerat **gătitul prea efeminant**. Era pur şi simplu o activitate nepotrivită pentru bărbaţi. (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, p. 9)
The Pedant in the Kitchen is not concerned with **whether cooking is a science or an art**; he will settle for it being **a craft**, like woodwork or home welding. (*Take Two Medium Onions*, p. 18)	Pe Pedantul din Bucătărie nu-l interesează **dacă gătitul e ştiinţă sau artă**: el îl consideră **un meşteşug**, la fel ca sudura la domiciliu sau cioplitul în lemn. (*Luaţi două cepe mijlocii*, p. 30)

The choice of „efeminant" [effeminating] to render *sissy* is a deliberate euphemism; a blunt expression like „pentru fătălăi" was probably considered dissonant with Barnes' overall elegant style. The philosophical issue of likening cooking to a science, art or craft is carefully handled by the translator, with only a change of word order. Along the book, Barnes also uses a number of aphorisms about cooking: sometimes he just borrows them (*e.g.* from Joseph Conrad: "Good **cooking** is a moral agent.", *The Moral of It All*, p. 132 / „Buna **preparare a hranei** este un agent moral.", *Morala generală*, p. 178); at other times, he paraphrases them (*e.g.* G. B. Shaw's "He who can, does. He who cannot teaches." becomes "Those who can, cook; those who can't, wash up. *Warning: Pedant at Work*, p. 14 / „Cine poate, găteşte; cine nu poate spală vasele.", *Atenţie: pedant la lucru!*, p. 24 – the missing comma after „poate" is, possibly, an example of bad editing) or uses inversion as a rhetorical device:

The modern mantra goes, "If food is not simple, it is not good." Olney prefers its inversion: "If food is not good, it is not simple." (*Keep It Simple*, p. 100)	Mantrei moderne: „Dacă mâncarea nu e simplă, nu e bună", Olney îi preferă propria sa variantă cu inversarea termenilor: „Dacă mâncarea nu e bună, nu e simplă." (*Cât mai simplu*, pp. 136-137)

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

Cooking as a Job

Amateur cooks are, to Julian Barnes, always pedantic, always anxious ("In the kitchen I am **an anxious pedant**. [...] I am also **a reluctant taster**, with excuses always at the ready. [...]...**the self-taught, anxious, page-scowling domestic cook** is about as pedantic as you can get.", *A Late-Onset Cook*, pp. 4; 6; 7). The Romanian version of these tribulations offers steady occurrences of „anxios" and „pedant", but chooses a verbal transposition [nici nu-mi place să gust / I dislike tasting too] for the nominal phrase *reluctant taster* („În bucătărie sunt **un pedant anxios**. [...] **Nici nu-mi place să gust** şi găsesc întotdeauna scuze pentru asta. [...]...**bucătarul amator, autodidact şi anxios**, trebuie să fie foarte pedant.", *Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, pp. 13, 14, 15). A hypernymic expression like *food insiders* (*The Cactus and the Slipper*, p. 54) is translated by the cordial „specialiştii în arta culinară" [culinary arts specialists] (*Cactusul şi papucul*, p. 73). In any case, any perversity possibly implied by *food-fluffers* (*The Tooth Fairy*, p. 56) is definit(iv)ely lost in the Turkish term „ageamiu" [novice, amateur] („ageamiii în ale bucătăriei", *Cocoşul roşu*, p. 79). *The TV chef* (*Warning: Pedant at Work*, p. 13) is rendered by means of a gender-conscious „bucătarul / bucătăreasa TV" (*Atenţie! Pedant la lucru*, p. 23)

Kitchen-maid (*The Moral of It All*, p. 135), normally ranked below a cook and above a scullery maid in the hierarchy of a great house, is made more explicit in Romanian by means of an intratextual gloss „fata angajată pentru spălatul vaselor" [lit. the girl hired to wash the dishes] (*Morala generală*, p. 181). Interestingly enough, whenever *chef* appears in the original text, it is rendered by „bucătar" [cook], but when Barnes says about Flaubert that he was "more of a **trencherman** than a **gourmet**..." (*Now They Tell Me!*, p. 87), the Romanian text introduces italics to heighlight the transferred *gourmet* and softens the rough edges of *trencherman* by rendering it as „mâncăcios" [foodie], leaving aside more colourful alternatives like „mâncău" or „haplea" („Care era mai degrabă **mâncăcios** decât ***gourmet***...", *Bine că-mi spui acum!*, p. 119).

Meals and Dishes

Meals are only rarely mentioned in *The Pedant in the Kitchen* and even more rarely in *Pedantul în bucătărie*. Breakfast is mentioned in the very beginning (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 1), mainly for its autobiographical significance (a very early memory of the writer is that of the breakfast his father used to prepare occasionally for his brother and himself). *Dinner* and *supper* are used interchangeably in the original text and avoided altogether in the target text ("The **dinner – supper** – went well and the chef was unstressed.", *Not a Dinner Party*, p. 118 / „**Totul** [everything] a mers bine, iar bucătarul a fost foarte relaxat.", *Nu e dineu*, p. 158). *Idle feast* (*The Moral of It All*, p. 136) is translated by „festin fără sens" [meaningless feast] (*Morala generală*, p. 183), whereas *dinner party*, which also appears in one of the titles, has „dineu" as an appropriate equivalent.

The term *dishes* itself is more often than not translated by „mâncăruri" and only rarely by „feluri de mâncare":

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

This is one of the earliest lessons to be learned: there are certain **dishes** always best eaten in restaurants, however tempting the cookbook version appears. (*No, I Won't Do That*, p. 44)	Iată una dintre primele lecţii care trebuie învăţate: anumite **mâncăruri** sunt întotdeauna mai bune la restaurant, oricât de tentante ar părea variantele din cărţile de bucate. (*Nu, nu fac aşa ceva!...*, p. 61)

Fast food is considered a borrowing so it is transferred as such, whereas *slow food* is paraphrased ("the virtues of **slow food** and **fast food"**, *The Ten-Minute Maestro*, p. 34 / „virtuţile **mâncării clasice, gătite pe îndelete**, şi ***fast food***.", *Maestrul celor zece minute*, p. 51).

Most of the examples of dishes are treated literally, others lightly, with little concern for terminological exactitude:

breakfast – re-heated porridge with golden syrup, bacon, toast (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 1)	micul dejun – adică *porridge* reîncălzit cu melasă, şuncă şi pâine prăjită (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, pp. 9-10) [*porridge* is transferred and italicised]
bacon chop, peas, and potatoes (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 2)	Cotlet cu mazăre şi cartofi. (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, p. 10) [„cotlet" does not seem to cover *bacon chop*]
My repertoire broadened. Meat and vegetables were the main things to be, if not mastered, at least somewhat tamed. Then came puddings and **the odd soup**; later – much later – **gratins, pasta, risotto, soufflés**. (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 3)	Repertoriul mi s-a lărgit. Carnea şi legumele rămăseseră de bază şi chiar dacă nu ajunsesem încă maestru reuşisem să le domesticesc. Pe locul doi se situau budincile şi **o supă bizară**. Iar mai târziu, mult mai târziu, **legume gratinate, paste, rizoto, sufleuri**. (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, p. 12) [the definite article in *the odd soup* suggests a dislike of soups in general, whereas the indefinite article in „o supă bizară" suggests the cook's first attempts at soup were not successful] [„legume gratinate" could be considered a hyponym of what *gratins* can cover] [both the French *soufflés* and the Italian *risotto* are rendered by autochtonised terms: „sufleuri", „rizoto"]

Not all French words are domesticated. *Vichy* in *Vichy carrots* (*Warning: Pedant at Work*, p. 9), as well as *confiture d'oignons* (*The Ten-Minute Maestro*, p. 36 / *Maestrul celor zece minute*, p. 53) and *consommé* in *Jellied Beetroot Consommé with Sour Cream and Chives* (*In the Purple*, p. 110 / *Consommé* de sfeclă roşie în aspic cu

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

smântână şi arpagic, *Las-o purpurie!*, p. 148) are unaltered. The French names of products or dishes in the original text are not merely part of the *couleur locale*; they give the English text a French touch and character which is not accidental, given that Barnes' parents were French teachers.

The over-all "strategy" in translating names of dishes seems to be that of approximation. The Romanian version constantly wavers between hyponymy (see above „legume gratinate") and hypernymy (see „fructe de mare" [seafood] as the proposed translation for *scallops*, in *The Cactus and the Slipper* / *Cactusul şi papucul*).

There are very few allographic (translator's notes) clarifying this or that aspect of a given dish; one of them, however, details one of the ingredients (*i.e.* the species of fish involved):

Marcella Hazan, in her **omnium gatherum** *The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*, has a recipe for Baked **Bluefish Fillets** with Potatoes, Garlic and Olive Oil, Genoese Style. (*Service with a Scowl*, p. 73)	Marcella Hazan, în **cartea ei cu de toate**, *The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*, dă o reţetă de **File de peşte albastru*** la cuptor, cu cartofi, usturoi şi ulei de măsline, varianta genoveză. **Pomatomus salatrix*, peşte marin răpitor din zonele tropicale (n. tr.). (*Proastă servire*, p. 99) [in spite of a clash of register between *omnium gatherum* and „cartea cu de toate", the Romanian translation is funny if taken as evocative of a TV shawarma advertisement]

Approximation is also visible in the following two examples, in which *effortlessly* is rendered by „plăcut" [pleasant] and *leafy* by „de legume" [vegetable]:

That perfect apple tart with parchment-thin but **effortlessly** crispy base and the shimmering glaze on top? (*No, I Won't Do That*, p. 44)	Tarta aceea perfectă cu mere, cu baza subţţire ca foiţa, dar **plăcut** crocantă şi acoperită cu glazură strălucitoare? (*Nu, nu fac aşa ceva!...*, p. 61)
Clear **Leafy** Soup (*The Cactus and the Slipper*, p. 55)	supă clară **de legume** (*Cactusul şi papucul*, p. 75)

Ingredients

If B. J. Epstein talks about the availability of ingredients as one of the main challenges for a translator of culinary texts, here it is more a case of how common or commonly used these ingredients are in a given recipe. A first observation concerns the term *chicory*, for instance, which is consistently translated by „andive" [endives] (in *The Tooth Fairy* / *Cocoşul roşu* and *Good Things* / *Lucruri bune*). The translator carefully avoids the trap set by the semantic split (*chicory* – both "cicoare" and „andivă" in Romanian). On the other hand, „Să asezonez ghimbirul?" [Shall I

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

season the ginger?] (*Bine că-mi spui acum!*, p. 127) is an unaccountable solution for *Season the salt?* (*Now They Tell Me!*, p. 95). Equally unaccountable is the series of adjectives used in Romanian to render *We've got white fish, pink fish,* ***yellow*** *fish...* (*Service with a Scowl*, p. 73): „Avem peşte alb, roz, **verde**..." [white, pink, green fish] (*Proastă servire*, p. 99).

For *pecorino* in *basil, garlic, and pecorino* (*No, I Won't Do That*, p. 46), the translator introduces another intratextual gloss („şi busuioc, usturoi şi ***pecorino* – brânză de oaie**" [sheep milk cheese], *Nu, nu fac aşa ceva!...*, p. 63).

In *Now They Tell Me!*, the narrator mentions currants, then raisins, in exactly this order (p. 93). As in Romanian they can be both translated by "stafide", the translator distinguishes between them by providing „stafide" for *currants* and „stafide mici" [small „stafide"] (p. 124) for *raisins* when in fact, dried currants are much smaller than raisins. However, given the fact that currants are mentioned first, and then raisins come as an amendment, the translator chose to preserve both terms by inverting them, rather than saying first „stafide mici", and then, possibly, „stafide mari" [big „stafide"].

The next excerpt, though it omits *epically filthy*, does convey the humour of the situation:

The only liberty I take with the recipe is to increase the quantity of an ingredient of which I particularly approve. That this is not an infallible precept was confirmed by **an epically filthy dish** I once made involving **mackerel, Martini and bread crumbs**: the guests were more drunk than sated. (*A Late-Onset Cook*, pp. 4-6)	Singura libertate pe care mi-o permit faţă de reţetă este să măresc cantitatea unui ingredient care îmi place mai mult. Că acest precept nu e infailibil mi-a dovedit-o chiar **o mâncare** gătită odată, care conţinea, printre altele, **macrou, Martini şi pesmet**. Musafirii mei au plecat mai mult beţi decât sătui. (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, pp. 13-14)

A subcategory of ingredients in our classification is represented by the partitive expressions which indicate quantity. These are not exact measurements, on the contrary, they are approximate, therefore frustratingly unclear for the (pedant) cook. *A knob of butter*, for instance (*The Tooth Fairy*, p. 60), has the bland Romanian equivalent o „bucăţică de unt" [a small amount of / a piece of] (*Cocoşul roşu*, pp. 82-83).

How big is a "lump", how voluminous is a "slug" or a "gout", when does a "drizzle" become rain? Is a "cup" a rough-and-ready generic term or a precise American measure? Why tell us to add a "wineglass" of something, when wineglasses come in so many sizes? (*Take Two Medium Onions*, p. 19)	Dar cât de mare e o „bucată"? Ce înseamnă, ca volum, „o gură de" sau „câteva picături"? Care este diferenţa dintre „se stropeşte" şi „se pune pe ploaie"? E „o cană" un termen generic aproximativ sau o măsură exactă? De ce ne spune că trebuie pus „un pahar de vin" de ceva, când paharele de vin sunt atât de diferite? (*Luaţi*

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

	două cepe mijlocii, p. 32) [the Romanian solutions for these approximate units of measurement are largely speaking equally approximate; the pun upon *drizzle* and *rain* is downright pedestrian, especially since in the Romanian culinary jargon, introducing given ingredients „în ploaie" is fairly common]

Kitchen Utensils

With the exception of a *large shallow pan* (*The Tooth Fairy*, p. 59), rendered by „o tigaie mare cu capac" (*Cocoșul roșu*, p. 81 – nothing about shallowness in it), almost all kitchen utensils are cramped in the *Bottom Drawer / Sertarul de jos* story. Here, the nostalgic description of the old-fashioned mincing machine is followed by an entire of series of more or less exotic tools and implements which are enthusiastically rendered into Romanian, sometimes by paraphrase (*i.e. the brawn tin* – „recipientul din tablă în care se conserva carnea de porc"), sometimes by overtranslation (*i.e. a pair of salad servers* – „o pereche lingură-furculiță pentru servit salata").

Do you remember the old-fashioned **mincing machine**? The wing-nutted clamp that screwed on to the underside of the kitchen table, the curly spindle; the choice of tarnished metal nozzles; and the way the meat came out, leading the infant mind to dwell on murderers and victim-disposal? (p. 120)	Mai ţineţi minte vechea maşină de tocat care se înşuruba bine de masa de bucătărie; cu axul spiralat; cu sitele din metal mat; şi cum ieşea carnea, trimiţând mintea voastră de copil la poveştile cu criminali şi cu metode de a face să dispară victimele? (p. 163)
the brawn tin; the paste jagger; the bread gater (p. 121)	recipientul din tablă în care se conserva carnea de porc; forma zimţată de tăiat fursecuri; răzătoarea pentru pesmet (p. 164)
jelly bag, turkey-baster; a pair of salad servers with giraffe handles; adze-hewn wooden spoons, truffle-grater (p. 122)	punga-strecurătoare pentru jeleul de fructe; ustensila de stropit friptura de curcan; o pereche lingură-furculiţă pentru servit salata, cu mânere în formă de girafă; diverse linguri de lemn cam rudimentare; o răzătoare pentru trufe (pp. 165-166)

Cookbooks

Many passages in *The Pedant in the Kitchen* show the aspiring culinarian at war with cookbooks and recipe writers for their lack of precision and lack of empathy with the underconfident cook. Cookery books and recipe transmission are classified (oral, written, TV tie-in) and described in bitter-sweet self-ironical terms; there is also a cookbook buying decalogue placed at the reader's disposal as words of advice, "all of it paid for in money" (*e.g.* "Never buy a cookbook for its pictures. Never buy

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

books with tricksy layouts. Never buy the chef's recipe book on pointed display as you leave the restaurant. Never buy a juice book if you haven't a juicer. Never buy a collection of recipes put together for charity. etc.", *By the Book*, pp. 28-30).

The *avuncular book* the Pedant confesses being in desperate need of (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 4) is translated by „o carte de bucate foarte accesibilă" [very accessible cookbook] (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, p. 13) which recovers the friendliness and helpfulness (while lacking the figurativeness) implied by *avuncular*. The Pedant also needs the book to be comprehensive (*e.g.* "a porker of a book, four inches thick and and 1997 pages", *The Cactus and the Slipper*, p. 50, with the binominal phrase *a porker of a book* being translated as „o carte... obeză" [an obese book], *Cactusul şi papucul*, p. 70) Besides avuncular and ponderous, a cookbook needs to be as precise as a manual of surgery or even as a novel ("Why should a word a word in a recipe be less important than a word in a novel?", *A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 7) in order to be useful to a Pedant in the kitchen. All this wrath transpires in the Romanian version, as long as it sticks to the letter of the original (and it often does, with the exception of the following fragment, where adaptation and omission – see *Roschach*, for instance – seem to be the strategy):

In China it's taken as a compliment if the tablecloth immediately surrounding your place is, by the end of a meal, a site of major spillage: ill-aimed rice, gouts of soy sauce, twigs from your bird's nest soup or whatever. [...] The same principle applies – without any shadow of ambiguity – to cookbooks. The more decorated their pages are with stove-splash, peel-drip, edible Rorschach stains, oil starbursts, the more you have honoured them. (*Good Things*, p. 65)	Pentru chinezi e un compliment dacă, la sfârşitul mesei, faţa de masă din dreptul tău arată ca după un dezastru major: plină de orez rătăcit, pătată cu sos de soia sau cu amintiri de la supa 'cuib de pasăre'. [...] Acelaşi principiu se aplică – fără umbră de ambiguitate – şi cărţilor de bucate. Cu cât le sunt mai 'decorate' paginile cu stropi de la prăjit, cu picături de la curăţatul legumelor, cu pete de fructe, cu amprente roşii de la sfeclă sau cu alte urme generale şi incoerente, cu atât mai evidente sunt onorurile acordate. (*Lucruri bune*, pp. 89-90)

Adjectives and Verbs

As previously stated, even though food vocabulary in any language is predominantly nominal, adjectives and verbs are also instrumental in fine-tuning a given message. The original text scrutinizes adjectives *small*, *medium* and *large* with a view to pinpoint the painful imprecision of measurements in recipes. The Romanian translation preserves the humorous touch at the expense of two cultural references, namely the *shallot* (replaced by „castană" [chestnut]) and the *curling stone*.

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

Let's take the problem of the onion. [...] (1) For recipe writers, onions only come in three sizes, "small", "medium", and "large", whereas onions in your shopping bag vary from the size of a **shallot** to that of a **curling stone**. So an instruction like "Take two medium onions" sets off a lot of pedantic scrabbling in the onion basket for bulbs that fit the description (obviously, since medium is a comparative term, you have to compare across the whole spectrum of onions you possess). (*Take Two Medium Onions*, p. 21)	Hai să discutăm şi problema cepei. [...] (1) Pentru cei care scriu reţete, cepele sunt doar de trei feluri: „mici", „mijlocii" şi „mari", iar cele din plasa noastră variază, ca dimensiune, între o **castană** şi un **bolovan**. Aşa că indicaţia „luaţi două cepe mijlocii" stârneşte o răscolire pedantă în coşul cu ceapă pentru a le găsi pe cele ce corespund descrierii (evident, mijlociu fiind un termen comparativ, trebuie să compari întregul spectru al cepelor pe care le ai). (*Luaţi două cepe mijlocii*, pp. 32-33)

The syn-pleronyms[4] *Undercooked* and *overcooked* are most ingeniously overlooked:

This [bacon chop, frozen peas, and tinned potatoes] gave much latitude to the chef: it wasn't **undercooked** unless positively cold, or **overcooked** unless coal-black and alight. (*A Late-Onset Cook*, pp. 2-3)	Astfel că timpul de frigere rămânea la latitudinea bucătarului: câtă vreme nu erau complet reci sau negre-tăciune şi în flăcări, **puteau fi gata în orice moment**. (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, p. 11)

Preternaturally toothsome ("the stylists and food-fluffers, who make things look preternaturally toothsome for the lens", *The Tooth Fairy*, p. 56) is rendered in Romanian as „din cale-afară de gustoase" [exceedingly tasty] (*Cocoşul roşu*, p. 80). Another adjective, *criminal*, that falls outside food terminology but contributes, in context, to a rather pleasing humorous effect, is quite skillfully handled by means of prosody (*i.e.* the translator inserts suspension points before „criminală".)

I was in my mid-twenties and reading for the **bar**; some of the food I concocted at that time was **criminal**. (*A Late-Onset Cook*, p. 2)	Aveam douăzeci şi ceva de ani şi studiam **dreptul**; mâncarea pe care mi-o pregăteam era uneori... **criminală**. (*Începuturile unui bucătar întârziat*, p. 10)

As for the cooking-related verbs used in *The Pedant in the Kitchen*, we remark the interesting compound *par-fry* (from the series *par-cook, par-boil, par-fry* etc.) (in the

[4] *Synpleronyms* or *Complenyms* are paired members of a non-hierarchical field which negate each other absolutely, *e.g. rare* and *done*, *single* and *married*, *brother* and *sister*, *mare* and *stallion*. In contrast to antonyms, syn-pleronymsare not comparable or gradable. [Reinhard Rudolf Karl Hartmann, *Constrastive Lexicology*, in *Interlingual Lexicography*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007, p. 65]

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

target text: „a prăji parţial", *Cât mai simplu*, p. 133) and Barnes' structural semantics analysis, done in good faith and in full pedantry, of the verbs applicable to onions:

The applicable verbs are generally "slice" and "chop", which I logically assume always to indicate different actions: "slice" meaning cut across a halved onion, resulting in a clutter of semi-circles; "chop" involving preliminary lengthwise incisions from tip to root in the halved bulb, resulting in a mound of smaller bits. "Slice" may be qualified by "finely"; "chop" by both "finely" and "roughly". So that comes to five methods to decide among and delay the knife. (*Take Two Medium Onions*, pp. 21-22)	Verbele folosite sunt în general „a felia"şi „a toca", ceea ce presupun, logic, că ar trebui să indice două acţiuni: „a felia" înseamnă a tăia de-a curmezişul o jumătate de ceapă, pentru a rezulta o grămăjoară de jumătăţi de cerc; iar „a toca" implică incizii preliminare pe lungime, dinspre vârf spre rădăcină, într-o jumătate de ceapă, rezultatul fiind o moviliţă de bucăţi mici. „Feliatul" poate fi determinat prin „fin", iar „tocatul" prin „fin" şi „mare". Avem de ales, aşadar, între cinci variante, şi asta ia timp. (*Luaţi două cepe mijlocii*, p. 33)

In the good old componential analysis manner (though this analysis is more revealing of human psychology than of food), the near-synonymous verbs are distinguished on the basis of their sememes, making the archilexeme *cut* look positively bland. Chopping onion involves, for the pedant, a well-wrought strategy involving a clear protocol and surgical precision (see the "preliminary lengthwise incisions"), and the climactic realisation that the lack of exactness in instructions (or pedantry?) is time-consuming is rendered differently, but in an equally efficient way in the target text as compared to the original (the synecdochic use of *knife* in "delay the knife" is replaced by „şi asta ia timp" [and this takes time], after a comma-induced pause). This is but one example of opacification [Corduş, 2016:219] applied by the translator.

Conclusion

If the over-all strategy in translating names of dishes seems to be that of approximation, as far as the rest of the categories is concerned, our conclusion is that sometimes each specific term calls for specific measures on the part of the translator. This is not a "bad" translation, it is undoubtedly readable and, all things considered, not much is lost in translation; however, the reprehensible laxness it displays in approaching food terms makes it less appealing, especially since the book deals, after all, with pedantry.

Along time, numerous food metaphors have been used to account for the role the translator plays in this incredibly complex act of transferring ideas and messages from a language into another. Leaving the Brazilian anthropophagy metaphor (translator = cannibal) aside, analogies have also been made between translators and cooks, with creativity being a tie-break in both activities (translating and cooking). If this be true, the (otherwise reliable) translation under analysis here is, precision-wise and creativity-wise, somewhat deficient.

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ayto, John, 2012. *The Diner's Dictionary: Word Origins of Food and Drink*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

Balaţchi, Raluca-Nicoleta, 2015. *Problèmes spécifiques à la traduction. Les sciences humaines*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă

Barthes, Roland, 1997. *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*, in Carole Counihan and Penny van Esterik (eds.) *Food and Culture*, New York, Routledge, pp. 20-27

Brillat-Savarin, Jean-Anthelme, 1949. *The Physiology of Taste: or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, trans. M.F.K. Fisher, New York, The Heritage Press

Chakhachiro, Raymond, 2007. *Translating Irony in Political Commentary Texts from English into Arabic*, in *Babel* 53:3, pp. 216-240

Corduş, Iulia, 2016. *La traduction de la terminologie gastronomique dans le contexte du discours littéraire*, Suceava, Editura Universităţii "Ştefan cel Mare" din Suceava

Epstein, Brett Jocelyn, 2009. *What's Cooking: Translating Food*, in *Translation Journal*, vol. 13, no. 3, retrieved from http://translationjournal.net/journal/49cooking.htm (March 2017).

Fort, Matthew, 2003. *Too Much of a Good Thing*, in *The Guardian*, 2 nov., retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/nov/02/houseandgarden.foodanddrink (March 2017).

Hartmann, Reinhard Rudolf Karl (ed.), 2007. *Constrastive Lexicology*, in *Interlingual Lexicography*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, pp. 53-66

Hoţu, Alina, 2011. *Anthroponyms in Gastronomic Terminology*, retrieved from http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/revista_scol/site_ro/2011/young%20researchers%20contributions/alina%20hotu.pdf (March 2017)

Köhler, Ida, 2011. *Translating Food: How to Translate Culture Specific Features in Recipes*, retrieved from https://oversattarbloggen.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/essay-2-translating-food.pdf (March 2017)

Markos, Melina Cope, 2006. *The Tastes of a Nation: M.F.K. Fisher and the Genre of Culinary Literature*, in *Undergraduate Research Symposium*. Paper 29, retrieved from http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=ugrs (March 2017)

Moseley, Merritt, 1997. *Understanding Julian Barnes*, South Carolina, University of South Carolina Press

Neţ, Mariana, 2015. *Variante sincronice şi diacronice în vocabularul gastronomic românesc: Grupuri verbale formate cu substantivele* ploaie *şi* zăpadă, in Florescu, Cristina (ed.), *Terminologia românească meteorologică (ştiinţific vs popular) a fenomenelor atmosferice*, Editura Universităţii A. I. Cuza Iaşi

Nord, Christiane, 2005. *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis*, Amsterdam / New York, Rodopi, (2nd edition), translated from German by Christiane Nord and Penelope Sparrow

Orel, Brigita, 2013. *The Language of Food*, in M/C Journal. A Journal of Media and Culture, vol. 16, no. 3, retrieved from http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/636 (March 2017)

Roetman, Anne, *Translating the Grande Dame of Gastronomy. Theory and Practice of Translating M.F.K. Fisher's* The Gastronomical Me, MA Thesis, University of Utrecht, retrieved from https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/250523 (March 2017)

Vinay, Jean-Paul; Darbelnet, Jean, 1995 [1958]. *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, trans. J. Sager and M-J. Hamel, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 20-27

BDD-A27720 © 2017 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 20:53:18 UTC)