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How less means more in the comments section of vegan food blogs: Exgredients such as *gluten-free* and extreme case formulations

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This is the author accepted manuscript of an article published in: *Talking about Food: The social and the global in eating communities*, edited by Sofia Rüdiger & Susanne Mühleisen, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2020, pp. 15-34. [IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society ; 47]. The version of record is available online at <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.47.02ger>

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How less means more in the comments section of vegan food blogs: Exgredients such as *gluten-free* and extreme case formulations

Short title: Exgredients and extreme case formulations

Abstract

Recipes in (vegan) food blogs are often advertised as not having certain ingredients such as gluten or refined sugar. In the comments sections of posts topicalising such exgredients (linguistically, no-X constructions like *soy-free* or *no nuts*), extreme case formulations (e.g. *always* or *entirely*) are employed to a) construct the urgency of a request for an alternative, b) index the liability and safety of a suggestion for an alternative as expert advice, c) construct alternatives as rare and precious finds to share with the community, and d) compliment the blogger.

1. Introduction¹

Recent decades have seen an increasing trend of food as lifestyle choice and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979) rather than as a means for fulfilling a bare necessity. This development includes a proliferation of dietary lifestyles or eating communities such as Paleo, veganism, or raw foodism in many affluent countries. More and more, eating has turned into a complex task demanding nutritional choices that seem to require expert knowledge. Consuming food, buying products, and preparing meals represent meaningful practices that people use to position themselves in their lifeworlds, creating them as they do so (see also Drescher this volume).

This contribution draws a picture of a food-related discursual strategy which frames omission or renouncement as beneficial. While it is often ingredients or food-items that are marked as non-present (e.g. *gluten-free* or *vegan*), production processes may also be excluded (e.g. *non-fry/no-fry* or *raw*). This paper will further the discussion of the use of adjectives or modifiers that are conceptualised *ex negativo* as ‘no-X’. For instance, in this recipe from a vegan food blog, we find the following description of the dish:

(1) Crowd-Pleasing Vegan Caesar Salad

Vegan, gluten-free, grain-free, no bake/raw, refined sugar-free²

Not only is this Caesar salad vegan (i.e. no-eggs, no-meat, etc.), also some other ‘in’-gredients are flagged as non-present (e.g. gluten, grains, or refined sugar) and thus turned into exgredients. While this practice makes it easier to find specific recipes in the case of allergies

¹ I would like to thank Lea Piazza for her help in compiling the corpus and translating the German and French examples, and Maren Luthringshauser for assisting with the paper. I am especially indebted to the editor of this volume and the reviewers of this article for their many enlightening comments.

² All examples are reproduced as they originally appeared in the blogs. Errors were left as they are. Lea Piazza and I translated the German and French posts into English.

or intolerances, it appears that ‘no-X’ constructions have gained a significance in themselves, underscoring the supposed healthiness of a dish or food product.

This paper will focus on the comments section of vegan food blogs and how the omission of certain ingredients is discussed by the readers. One often-applied strategy is the use of extreme case formulations (ECFs), as in the example here:

(2) Le problème de la pâte feuilletée sans beurre, c'est qu'il faut utiliser de la margarine à la place et que même dans les magasins bio, il y a toujours³ de l'huile de palme dedans...Et l'huile de palme, comme chacun sait, ce n'est pas bon pour les orang-outan, ni pour la planète.

‘The problem with puff pastry without butter is that you have to use margarine instead and that even in organic supermarkets there is always palm oil in them... And palm oil, as everyone knows, is neither good for the orangutans nor for the planet.’

The expression *comme chacun sait (as everybody knows)* represents an extreme case in that it purports that there is not a single person in the world who does not have this knowledge about palm oil. It functions to underline the truthfulness of the proposition (that palm oil is not good for the orangutans and the planet) and indirectly to justify the reader problematizing the use of puff pastry without butter. So here the omission of one product (*butter*) is weighed against the exclusion of another (*margarine*), and since margarine always (another ECF) contains palm oil, which is detrimental to the planet, it does not represent a viable alternative to the person here.

This paper will study the discursive use of extreme case formulations in discussions about leaving out certain ingredients (‘no-X’ constructions/exgredients) as found in the comments sections of popular vegan food blogs. The languages analysed include English, German, and French, which means that different instantiations of a global trend will be studied.

³ Underlining in passages citing data is not part of the original posts but serves to orient the reader to the extreme case formulation(s) under discussion.

This paper furthers our understanding about how laypersons negotiate the factuality of certain health-claims associated with different diets. It contributes to our knowledge of how scientific discourses are appropriated and dispersed in society, an issue which is highly topical in light of current post-truth, anti-science movements. Also, this study furthers the general linguistic interest in descriptions of new (online) genres and practices (Herring & Androutsopoulos 2015, Frobenius & Gerhardt 2017) as well as studies focusing on discourses around food in culinary linguistics (Gerhardt, Frobenius & Ley 2013).

2. Literature review

The backdrop to this study consists of research on current dietary lifestyles and the linguistic description of food genres. Also, this paper complements recent papers on vegan food blogs (Gerhardt to appear, Gerhardt & Schul to appear) that have commented on ‘no-X’ constructions in the recipe section of vegan food blogs by adding the blog readers’ perspective to gain a fuller picture of their use. Literature on the use of ECFs will also be relevant.

2.1. Dietary lifestyles

As early as 1899, in *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen’s idea of ‘conspicuous consumption’ highlights the connection between luxury products, including food items not associated with mere subsistence, and class (Veblen 2007). Food has long been recognized as a matter of lifestyle and ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1979) rather than as a simple means to quench hunger.

Hand in hand with an individualization of lives and the globalization of cuisines and food items, lifestyles based on food abound today. This paper equates dietary lifestyle and eating communities (the perspective on food cultures proposed by this edited volume) assuming that an eating community is characterized by a certain food lifestyle.

The number of disciplines that have taken to studying food related lifestyles, all with their distinct approaches and methodologies, bears witness to the enormous social significance food has acquired in affluent countries. Consumer science working with surveys and cluster analyses is concerned, for example, with organic and local shopping in the US (Nie & Zepeda 2011). In nutrition science, the consumption of specific food items like vegetables is studied together with food lifestyle using questionnaires (e.g. Nijmeijer, Worsley & Astill 2004 on passers-by in an Australian shopping mall). In marketing and economics, food lifestyle segments are correlated with the perception of different foods based on web surveys and dimension analyses (for salmon, see Onozaka, Hansen & Sørvig 2014). While lifestyles with health or ethical orientations may come more easily to mind, convenience food lifestyles represent an important market segment of interest to food producers (Buckley, Cowan & McCarthy 2007). Psychology is concerned with the identity of those who choose certain food lifestyles, for example, vegetarians (Rosenfeld & Burrow 2017, Ruby 2012). Dietary lifestyles are often researched cross-disciplinarily, such as attitudes and health consciousness in nutrition and food research (Hoek et al. 2004). Epidemiology and public health studies use representative panels to correlate food choice and long-term health effects (e.g. on functional food consumers and dietary supplement users, De Jong, Ocke, Branderhorst & Friele 2003). Medicine generally is interested in the effects of nutrition on different diseases (e.g. obesity, dyslipidemia, hypertension, or Alzheimer, Pasinetti & Eberstein 2008). Even tourism research has an interest in food lifestyles, for instance members of the slow food movement being interviewed with regard to their leisure activities on holidays (Lee, Scott & Packer 2014).

All of these studies are based on ‘non-natural’ data, in the sense that the data would not exist without the researchers’ interventions. While there is a general acknowledgement of the biases associated with such data collection techniques and an attempt to minimize observer effects, the underlying problem remains: People are treated like containers with retrievable, conscious knowledge about their behavior rather than social actors with complex agendas and projects that are not directly accessible to or consciously taken by them (Speer 2002, Potter 2002). Often, by being based on self-declarations, studies also rely on consumers’ own assessments and estimations. As such they may be more a reflection of the desirable and the normative than a representation of actual practices (Ayass & Gerhardt 2012). For similar reasons, the use of food blogs for research purposes has been purported in health science, a traditionally non-discourse based discipline: “Thus blogs provide an innovative data source for researchers: entries are posted in a public arena, allowing for unobtrusive observations with no contact or interference with the authors” (Lynch 2010: 317). Hence, one advantage of the approach taken by this paper is the naturalness of its data: The comments by the readers exist outside of the researcher’s own preconceptions regarding certain food-based lifestyles or eating communities.

2.2. Food genres: Recipes and blogs

The current, increased interest in food seems to have coincided with the advent of the internet and new genres such as blogs. Unsurprisingly, these two important trends often unite, for example, in the form of food blogs (Diemer & Frobenius 2013), vegan online forums (Sneijder & te Molder 2005), or in the media presence of celebrity chefs (Rousseau 2012). The century-old recipe genre has been digitally put in motion and the print on the page has come alive in various new forms.

In their traditional form, recipes have been described as consisting of two parts: a list of ingredients and instructions (Norrick 1983a, 1983b). With regard to the instructional section, features of recipes include zero objects (Massam & Roberge 1989), incompleteness of instructions (Tomlinson 1986), and supporters and controllers⁴ (Diemer 2013). More interesting for the discussion of ‘no-X’ constructions (exgredients) is the list of ingredients (Norrick 1983a, 1983b, Gerhardt 2013: 42). In contrast to laboratory manuals, recipes typically do not include necessary items like cooking utensils. Also, flour for rolling out dough, water, or salt may not be enumerated. The striking feature about vegan food blogs and their comments section is that also the lack of some ingredient is flagged (Gerhardt to appear, Gerhardt & Schul to appear). While earlier recipes contained information about ingredients, nowadays the neologism ‘exgredients’ seems called for. While this paper focusses on the phenomenon of the ‘no-X’ construction in the comments section of vegan food blogs, clearly this linguistic feature is more widespread as it can also be found, for example, in the packaging of food items (Freedman & Jurafsky 2011) and in non-vegan recipes.

While also featuring characteristics of diaries or other self-revelatory genres, food blogs represent current, digital versions of cookery books, encompassing pictures, sound, and video (Myers 2010). They consist of dated entries in reverse chronological order (Miller & Shepherd 2004). In contrast to discussion forums, they are hierarchically organized, with the blogger dominating the interchanges (Zhou & Hovy 2006). Blogs on food feature specialized vocabulary but also forms of audience involvement and address that are not part of traditional recipes and cookery books. Besides the recipes proper with their instructions and list of ingredients, food blogs also contain background information about the recipe, often in the form of narratives, which may also be referred to in the comments section, the other major new

⁴ Supporters and controllers “directly address the reader and provide advice for problematic steps in the procedure and a means to check if these steps were successfully completed” (Diemer 2013: 151).

feature of online recipes (Diemer & Frobenius 2013; for a more thorough discussion of recent literature on food blogs, see Gerhardt to appear).

The comments section of (food) blogs has been little explored. Diemer and Frobenius (2013) discuss instances of humorous bantering between the bloggers and the readers. Based on the comments section of the Julie/Julia project,⁵ Blanchard (2004) discusses whether a sense of community can be posited between the bloggers and their readers and to what extent blogs represent ‘virtual settlements’ (cf. Jones 1997). Through the comments section, blog readers can become contributors, producers of content to which the bloggers can reply in return, conceptualizing the comments section as a “virtual town hall” and “neighborhood bar” (Wall 2005: 163).

In the framework of this volume with its interest in global eating communities, one can probably assume that an important way of spreading culinary lifestyles happens through social media. Hence, it is important to note that food blogs do not necessarily offer nutritionally balanced recipes (Schneider et al. 2013) or, even worse, may purport dangerous concepts of dietary restraint while proclaiming a dedication to healthy eating (Lynch 2010). Also, evidence has been found that the content of healthy living blogs, a related genre, is thematically consistent with dysfunctional eating attitudes (Boepple & Thompson 2014).

2.3. Exgredients: The use of ‘no-X’ constructions in food blogs’ recipe sections

Bourdieu has shown that distinction is achieved through negation:

⁵ On her Julie/Julia blog, the blogger Julie Powell discusses her cooking the recipes from Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. The blog has been so popular that it has been turned into a film with Meryl Streep as Julia Child.

Tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of the tastes of others. (Bourdieu 1984: 56)

For instance, in advertising potato chips, claiming that they lack some undesirable property (e.g. *no trans-fat*) indicates that they compare favorably with competitors (Freedman & Jurafsky 2011). In vegan food blogs, it is striking how many other ingredients (besides animal products) are excluded (Gerhardt to appear, Gerhardt & Schul to appear), as one can see in the following example:

(3) Sweet Potato Crumble Casserole: Vegan, gluten-free, refined sugar-free, soy-free

Here, for instance, it is gluten, refined sugar, and soy that are excluded. Hence, besides animal products, a number of other ingredients or production methods are flagged because they are associated with factual or putative health risks or environmental issues. On the one hand, bloggers allow informed choices in this manner. On the other hand, choosing the alternative is also constructed as morally right (Gerhardt to appear, Gerhardt & Schul to appear). This paper will further the discussion of 'no-X' constructions (exgredients) by scrutinising the use of ECFs in comments discussing the omission or substitution of ingredients.

2.4. *Extreme case formulations*

When analyzing the comments section of vegan food blogs with regard to ‘no-X’ constructions, it becomes apparent that the bloggers and readers often use extreme case formulations in support of their claims, suggestions, or compliments. ECFs reference the maximum or minimum property of something, for instance *everybody* or *nothing* (for a recent overview, cf. Whitehead 2015), allowing a classification of these expressions as hyperbole (Norrick 2004). In her pioneering work, Pomerantz discusses three uses of ECFs in legitimizing claims:

- (1) to assert the strongest case in anticipation of non-sympathetic hearings
- (2) to propose the cause of a phenomenon
- (3) to speak for the rightness (wrongness) of a practice (Pomerantz 1986: 227).

The logic behind the different uses of ECFs seems to be, for (1) ‘it’s an obvious case’, for (2) ‘it’s not me, it’s the object’, and, for (3), ‘what’s often done, is ok’. Edwards (2000) adds the function of showing the strong investment of a speaker in a claim or an extreme stance or attitude (despite the obvious inaccuracy of the ECF). Sidnell (2004) shows how ECFs are used to avoid accounting for blameworthy actions. This paper will discuss the uses and functions of ECFs in the comments section of vegan food blogs.

3. The data

The data were collected in September 2018 from three popular vegan food blogs: *Oh She Glows*, a Canadian English blog by Angela Liddon, the German blog *Nicole Just* who calls herself La Veganista, and the French blog *100% Végétal – Cuisine Vegan*, which is also run by a woman, Marie Laforêt.⁶ Being a part of a blog, each recipe posted offers a comments section below the

⁶ This study discusses a discourse phenomenon based on publically available texts that are quoted for research purposes only. Hence, no formal consent or contract for data use were deemed necessary or even possible (in the case of the commenters).

text by the blogger herself. These comments sections were searched manually and qualitatively for comments pertaining to the omission or substitution of ingredients, that is, contexts in which exgredients are mentioned or no-X constructions used.

This manual search yielded a corpus consisting of comments pertaining to nine different recipes from the German blog and 10 recipes from the French blog. For this reason, and the large amount of discussions associated with exgredients in the Canadian blog, the data from the English language blog were limited to 10 recipes also. All in all, the corpus consists of 7,081 words (4,036 English, 1,933 German, and 1,112 French). These include the recipe titles, the dates of the entries, URLs, as well as other traces of the multimodal nature of the text, technical affordances of the system such as *Reply* or *NAME a dit (NAME said)*.⁷ Note that besides the readers' comments to the recipes, the replies by the bloggers (or sometimes other readers) are part of these comments sections as well, and, hence, are also included in the corpus. Altogether, the data consist of 64 posts (comments and replies) from the English blog, 28 from German, and 14 from French. The recipes themselves (and, potentially, ECFs therein) were not part of this study. A summary of the corpus composition is presented in Table 1.

	Overall	English	German	French
No. of recipes to which the comments pertain / No. of comments sections	29	10	9	10
No. of words (tokens)	7,081	4,036	1,933	1,112
No. of posts (comments and replies)	106	64	28	14

⁷ If readers used their names in the comments section, they were anonymized by being replaced with NAME. The bloggers' names were left in the data.

No. of extreme case formulations (including literal, non-hyperbolic uses)	109	53	38	18
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Table 1. Corpus composition

This corpus was manually searched for English ECFs based on the articles by Pomerantz (1986), Edwards (2000), and Norrick (2004), for German and French translations of the terms discussed in these papers, as well as other lexical items that were found in the data (e.g. German *prima*, ‘perfectly’). The ECFs found in this way were then grouped according to similar uses as a) constructing the urgency of the request for an alternative as expert advice, b) indexing the liability and safety of a suggestion for an alternative, c) constructing alternative ways as rare and precious finds to share with the community, and d) complementing the blogger. No cross-linguistic or cross-cultural comparison was made, rather the three different languages/blogs were interpreted as different instantiations of one global eating community: veganism (Gerhardt to appear).

4. The ‘no-X’ construction in the comments section of food blogs: Extreme case formulations

While working on recipes in vegan food blogs (Gerhardt to appear, Gerhardt & Schul to appear), I realized that dishes are often not only marked as vegan but also as omitting or renouncing a number of other ingredients such as gluten or refined sugar. In the following, the comments section of vegan food blogs will be discussed with regard to the use of such exgredients, that is, the practice of declaring the absence of certain ingredients or food items. Frequently, extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986, Edwards 2000) are used to discuss exgredients in the comments sections. Other practices used or issues raised by the readers include membership

categorization (Sacks 1992, Schegloff 2007), questions of authenticity (Beal 2009, Johnstone 2009), that is, in how far one qualifies as an authentic vegan, and the focus on health issues (rather than veganism as an ethical position). For reasons of space, this paper will focus on the use of extreme case formulations only.

4.1. Non-rhetoric extreme case formulations

Not all formulations including, for example, superlative forms or determiners such as *all* or *no* should be interpreted as ECFs in the sense that they represent hyperbolic expressions (Norrick 2004). The following examples illustrate that, at times, the extreme case simply represents a faithful description:

(4) Man muss bei der Umrechnung von einer 26-er auf eine 18-er Form alle Zutaten mal 0,48 multiplizieren. Grob gesagt kannst du also alle Zutaten halbieren.

‘To convert all amounts from a 26 form to an 18 form, you have to multiply all ingredients by 0.48. Roughly speaking, you can divide all ingredients by half.’⁸

In this case, *alle Zutaten* (‘all ingredients’) is simply an exact description. Since the ingredients represent a closed list, *all* here literally means all items on that list. When it comes to excluding something, however, as is the topic of this article, the borderline between ECFs as hyperbolic figures and those representing genuine (extreme) cases becomes much less clear. The example here refers to the complete exclusion (*not any*) of nuts

(5) The one thing I struggle with is finding a good cheese sauce substitute that doesn’t contain any nuts!

⁸ In this case, it is not the replacement of an ingredient that is discussed but an alternative to a certain sized cake tin, a substitution which is strictly speaking a different matter.

The first difficulty is that the word *nuts* has a different meaning depending on whether it is used botanically (with e.g. strawberry seeds being nuts) or in its everyday culinary use (often including seeds like cashew). While we would usually assume that in non-specialist texts it is the everyday usage that prevails, this cannot be taken for granted in the context here. In these food blogs, not only vegans but also people with allergies often position themselves as experts having acquired specialist knowledge. To add to the unclear usage, not only is the word *nut* imprecise, different people are also allergic to different nuts/seeds (the use in *nut allergy*). So while the person using the word *nuts* here may or may not have a complete list of what they consider nuts in their minds, in the end, this reference is less exact in nature and more hyperbolic, constructing the urgency of the matter for the comment writer. This is also underlined by (pseudo-)clefting with the nominal ECF construction *The one thing I struggle with* and the exclamation mark at the end. As we will see in the following, in the end, the data have only few instances where extreme cases are referenced literally in an obvious manner such as in (4).

4.2. Constructing the urgency of the request for an alternative

As in example (5), ECFs are frequently used in conjunction with specific dietary restraints. However, not everybody feels a need to explain their dietary rules. Just as in the example above, an ingredient is also completely ruled out in the excerpt below (*not any oil*):

(6) Do you have a suggestion on what to use instead of coconut oil? We don't use any oil in our house, but this looks delicious! Would it turn out ok without it?

By adding *in our house*, the writer frames the omission of oil as a general family regulation or part of codified house rules rather than her momentary personal whim. This seems to underline

the urgency of her request: Her eating community's rules are the cause for her request, not she herself as a person (Pomerantz 1986).

In the following example, the ECF flags the person's expertise in baking and underlines the intensity of her despair in being unable to bake with substitutes:

(7) j'ai eu l'occasion de tester quelques recette de type cake, gâteaux aux yaourts (soja) mais à chaque fois le résultat n'est pas concluant ... le gâteau ne cuit pas ... je me demande vraiment ce que je peux bien rater. J'ai toujours pâtisser et cette intolérance commence à me gâcher la vie si je n'arrive même plus à faire de simples gâteaux.

'I've had the opportunity to test some recipes of the sort cake/gateau with yogurt (soy), but each time the result wasn't convincing... the cake doesn't bake through... I really ask myself what I could have done wrong. I've always baked, and this intolerance begins to ruin my life because I can't even manage to make simple cakes anymore.'

Here, the ECF *j'ai toujours pâtisser* ('I've always baked') informs the blogger and the other readers of the blog that she is an experienced baker. Thus, the reason for her failure of baking with substitutes cannot easily be blamed on her, rather it lies in the object itself (Pomerantz 1986).

However, ECFs are mainly used in suggestions rather than in requests for alternatives. In the context of suggestions for replacements for food items that cause allergies or intolerances, they function differently, as we can see in the following section.

4.3. Indexing the liability and safety of a suggestion for an alternative as expert advice

Let us start with a classic example where the liability of a suggestion is backed by claiming expertise through membership to the same category:

(8) we buy Royal Nuts which are gluten free and peanut free! They are on the expensive side, but with a peanut allergy in the family it's one of the only safe options I've found here in Ontario.

The ECF *the only safe option* is really only evoked here, being put in the plural. The expression *with a peanut allergy in the family* is an epistemic stance adverbial (not a modifier or circumstance adverbial) saying 'I have this knowledge and I make this reliable claim because I have a peanut allergy in the family'. In other words, the writer is not a professional expert in peanuts or allergies or retailing, but her authority is based on her having the same problem, being in the same boat as the person asking for advice. Similarly, in the next example, which contains a number of ECFs, the reader claims being a member of the same class of people as the one asking for advice:

(9) please be aware of this info with regard to a candida imbalance with which I'm personally familiar: Nutritional yeast is an entirely different strain of yeast — also known as *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* — and bears no relationship or connection to candida. In addition to being a different strain, it's heated and therefore not an "active" yeast. Therefore, it has no effect on candida whatsoever, positive or negative. Your body treats it just as it would any other food.

Again, there is first a claim of being personally concerned *I'm personally familiar* before the advice including an array of ECFs: *entirely different, no relationship or connection, no effect [...] whatsoever, any other food*. Again, the liability of her advice and the safety of following it is backed up by ECFs, and the writer strongly invests in that claim (Edwards 2000).

ECFs may also be used to reassure the reader about substituting food items, in this case with regard to the taste of a dish:

(10) For this recipe in particular, you can totally omit the cashews and it still tastes great (it just lose a tiny bit of richness).

The adverb totally highlights that the person concerned does not have to worry about a lack of taste in this vegan recipe, even when omitting the nuts. So the readers who feel insecure about the omission or replacement of ingredients get reassured by the blogger. Similarly, in this German example, another blog reader points out that besides Zoodles⁹ being *vegan* (no-animal products) and *low carb*, they also taste good:

(11) Diese Zoodles haben nur Vorteile!

Sie sind komplett vegan, dazu auch noch Low-Carb und schmecken einfach lecker.

Ich könnte mich jeden Tag von ihnen ernähren!

‘These zoodles only have advantages! They are completely vegan, on top of that they are also low carb and taste simply delicious. I could eat them every day!’

The adjective phrase komplett vegan (‘completely vegan’) is an obvious case of rhetoric hyperbole since the term *vegan* is ungradable.¹⁰ Instead, it advertises the recipe. Also, the claim that she could eat them jeden Tag (‘every day’) reassures the other readers that this is the right choice of recipe/blog. Note that this positive stance is not projected by the blogger herself, but by one of her readers.

The bloggers in their replies also use ECFs, here definitely, to reassure the reader that having trouble is normal.

⁹ Zoodles are zucchini noodles, that is, zucchini cut to look like spaghetti.

¹⁰ With regard to veganism as a lifestyle, this could possibly be arguable when it comes to including domains like clothing, cosmetics, or other non-food choices. However, in the domain of food, dishes or ingredients are either vegan or not.

(12) Oh no, I'm so sorry to hear that swap didn't work out. :(It can definitely be tricky making substitutions in vegan baking, and even trickier when you go gluten-free on top of that.

So again, it is vegan (and gluten-free) baking that is to blame and not the persons who are baking (Pomerantz 1986). The last example in this section will also take us to the next context in which ECFs appear.

(13) Eben musste ich 2 Stücke von diesem genialen Käsekuchen essen. Danke für das Rezept. Da ich eine Weizenunverträglichkeit habe, nahm ich Roggenmehl. Ist prima gelungen.

‘Just now I had to eat 2 pieces of this genius cheesecake. Thank you for the recipe.

Because I have a wheat intolerance, I used rye flour. Worked out perfectly.’

The elliptical *Ist prima gelungen* (‘Worked out perfectly’)¹¹ does not only reassure the reader that the substitution works fine, but at the same time, it represents sharing information about substituting certain products, a strategy that is described in the following section.

4.4. Constructing alternative ways as rare and precious finds to share with the community

Being able to directly interact with one another is one of the major differences between classic cookery books and food blogs. The employment of ECFs is also often found in contexts where readers share their experience with one another.

¹¹ *Prima* could be translated in various other ways. Even though the nature as ECF might be more prominent in the translated version, I would maintain that *prima* (from Italian via the meaning ‘first class’ to classify products) is an extreme case formulation here since it signifies that the outcome could not have been any better.

(14) Have you ever tried Aduki (also known as Adzuki) beans? You can get a can of them by Eden Organic, just to try them. Also, they don't add any salt so that makes them even better for us. [...] Also, have you ever used a strip of Kombu when cooking your beans? It's a sea vegetable and helps to take some of the discomfort beans bring to the table.

The suggestion containing the ECF *ever tried* or *ever used* is in both cases followed by the effect of the swap or an account of the reason for undertaking it.

Angela Liddon, author of the Canadian blog analyzed in this study, frequently repeats her invitation to share experiences with alternative ingredients or methods in the closing sequences of her replies to posts by the readers:

(15) Please let me know if you try anything out.

(16) Anyway, if you try anything out I'd love to hear how it goes!

(17) If you experiment, please report back! I'd love to hear what you try and how it goes.

And if I test anything in the future, I'll report back, too. :)

The use of the ECF *anything* indicates how valued the contributions are since any tiny change of the recipe seems reportable. Angela's strong investment in this stance (Edwards 2000) is mirrored in the use of ECFs. In the following piece of data, a blog reader had suggested leaving out garlic and onions because of the way they *resonate*¹² and Angela replies:

(18) Thank you NAME! So happy you enjoy the blog and books. I have never heard that about onions and garlic before, but that's interesting. I really don't know if I could do

¹² The suggestion to the blogger, which cannot be discussed here, is based on rather unscientific evidence: "As an avid yoga/meditation practitioner, one of the disciplines I follow is no garlic/onions or any foods in that family (leeks, spring onions, chives etc) [...] but you really won't miss them at all =)". In a second post, the original commenter continues: "... It is believed that out of all the plant foods, those in this family resonate at a different frequency and have subtle effects on the energy of the mind [...]"

without them long-term but I might have to try it for a few days just to see if I notice any difference. ;)

With regard to underlining the importance of sharing alternatives, ECFs help construct substitution and omission as positive and ‘share-able’ (cf. ‘notable’, Gerhardt 2012). This courteous tone of voice and friendly manner is mirrored in the compliments the readers of the blogs pay to the bloggers, the last context I want to discuss in which one can frequently find ECFs.

4.5. Complimenting the blogger

This last context in which ECFs are found helps display the enthusiasm of the blog readers regarding the blogger’s recipes and suggestions. When complimenting the blogger, the ECF may demonstrate the certainty of them preparing the dish again, which in (19) below is *definitely*.

(19) Thank you so much for the recipe, Angela! I will definitely make these again (and again)!

This in turn highlights how good the recipes are and how successfully one can use them, especially when following the instructions, as in the following example:

(20) Ah I AM SO HAPPY! So I used the Bob’s Red Mill pizza crust flour mix and followed Angela’s instructions exactly (replacing the all purpose flour with the BRM pizza crust flour mix) and oh my goodness, I don’t think I’ve had a GF¹³ cinnamon bun THIS good. It was like perfect texture with that short and chewy cinnamon heaven in the

¹³ GF or gf is an acronym for gluten-free.

middle. I really really really recommend my GF people try this out. I was so impressed
:)

So even though the bloggers invite the readers to try variations of their recipes or experiment with replacements (see examples (15)-(17) above), especially with regard to substituting potentially harmful ingredients, following *Angela's instructions* exactly seems to be a key to success according to this blog reader.

In the following comment, it is the blogger who thanks one of her readers for asking about a fructose substitute. The ECF ganz neu ('completely new') underscores how positively she values this question.

(21) vielen Dank für deine Frage, die bringt mich nämlich auch auf ganz neue Pfade. Über Fructose habe ich mir früher nie Gedanken gemacht, in letzter Zeit lernte ich aber einige Menschen mit dieser Unverträglichkeit kennen.
'Thank you very much for your question because this takes me on completely new paths. I've never really thought about fructose in the past, but recently I met some people with this intolerance.'

The second part *Über Fructose habe ich mir früher nie Gedanken gemacht* ('I've never really thought about fructose in the past') portrays her as a person who is now more considerate of others and their special demands in food choices. Finally, with *in letzter Zeit lernte ich aber einige Menschen mit dieser Unverträglichkeit kennen* ('but recently I met some people with this intolerance') she ratifies the demand by the blog reader as well as her newly found state of someone who thinks about fructose intolerance as more generally valid and relevant. The metaphor of finding new paths or exploring new horizons is often found in vegan blog recipes, potentially to counterbalance the restrictions that vegan cuisine imposes on people (Gerhardt to appear, Gerhardt & Schul to appear)

However, compliments including ECFs also appear in the context of critical comments. The following post appears after (20), a post in which a blog reader reports her successful use of a new substitute and finishes *I really really really recommend my GF people try this out*.

(22) Yay!! Definitely going to try the BRM pizza crust. It's so hard to find gf AND vegan baked goods that have the right consistency. And when you're taking the time to make something with a bit more effort like cinnamon rolls, you want it to be worth your effort. Thanks so much for sharing! I'll be making these for thanksgiving and Christmas breakfast! (Angela, you should consider putting this gf sub in the recipe notes bc it took me a while to scroll back through the comments and read each of them. Just a thought). I love all of you recipes!

The post seems to be a reply to (20) by opening *Yay!! Definitely going to try the BRM pizza crust*. However, then, in a bracket, the footing is shifted (Goffman 1981) by using Angela's name as term of address. The criticism appears in the form of a suggestion followed by the reason for the suggestion. *Just a thought* frames it as being non-essential criticism. These brackets are surrounded by text containing ECFs which underscore that the person posting the comments is both happy about the gluten-free alternative (*Definitely going to try*) as well as the blog in general (*love all of you recipes*).

This last post illustrates the same pattern of use for compliments:

(23) I'm going back to grain-free eating and oatmeal is a no no besides it rips my stomach apart :(and this looks absolutely wonderful! Any substitute for oatmeal possibly? If not, I guess I'll go back to drooling over the pictures! haha....Thanks!

The blog reader simply states her 'no-X' food choice without accounting for it (*grain-free*), followed by the logical consequence: [for this reason] *oatmeal is a no no*. To make her claim more valid, she adds a reason for omitting oats: *besides it rips my stomach apart*. After this

hyperbolic metaphorical claim about the potential harmfulness of the recipe for her health, the compliment containing the ECF is added: *and this looks absolutely wonderful!* The following sentence constructing a scenario about Angela not being able to suggest a substitute again proposes that this particular reader is suffering because of the make-up of the recipe since she can only *drool[...] over the pictures*. Even though this is framed as a humorous remark, *haha*, altogether this blog reader seems to purport that Angela has some kind of moral obligation to deal with the intolerances or dietary choices of her readers. In this way, ECFs in the context of compliments can also be used to counterbalance criticism.

5. Discussion and conclusion

When requesting alternatives for ingredients that have to be omitted, ECFs are used to attribute the cause for this request to the diet itself or the complications it involves rather than to the person asking, underscoring the urgency of the request. Furthermore, personal experience is used to account for the expertise to reassure (other) readers about substitutions or omissions, also with regard to taste. With the help of ECFs, sharing alternative preparations is given a strong positive evaluation. Finally, ECFs are used when complimenting the blogger, also in the context of thinly disguised criticism.

Since ECFs in the context of ‘no-X’ constructions are often tied to the discussion of allergies or intolerances, we could witness this entanglement of health and omission, in other words, leaving something out is perpetuated as being healthier. The advent of exgredients¹⁴ in recipes

¹⁴ Literature on the historic development of the recipe (e.g. Diemer 2013 or Arendholz 2013) as well as 20th century genre descriptions (e.g. Norrick 1983a, 1983b, Tomlinson 1986) do not mention any listings of

can be linked to an increase in health consciousness in people. However, as for negotiating the factuality of health claims, they are often just proclaimed without any accounts or reasons for the choices and ECFs help underscore the strong persuasion of the speakers. Hence, we could not really witness any appropriation of scientific findings with regard to nutrition and a balanced diet. Rather claims are based on experience with the same diet or allergy/intolerance. Potentially practices detrimental to health (e.g. no oil) could be perpetuated in this online genre, a finding of interest with regard to the spread of anti-science movements. In general, this research also adds to the growing body of the description of online genres and practices, as well as the current interest in culinary linguistics.

When talking about food on the internet, particularly in the comments section of vegan food blogs, an eating community constitutes itself that uses ECFs in various ways to negotiate the omission or substitution of different ingredients, a category that only came into being when the centuries-old recipe genre moved into the online world.

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ingredients. However, to date there has been no systematic enquiry into the diachrony of the phenomenon ingredient.

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