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# Constructing Veganism Against the Backdrop of Omnivore Cuisine: The Use of Adjectives and Modifiers in Vegan Food Blogs

Cornelia Gerhardt

## 1 Introduction

The proliferation of food as a resource for identity construction and distinction in industrialized countries seems to have coincided with the advent of the internet and the rise of new technologies for sharing information and for interacting across space. One such happy marriage of foodiness and computer- or technologically mediated communication (CMC or TMC) is instantiated by vegan food blogs. They allow the bloggers and their followers to construct and celebrate a certain food-based lifestyle, to create symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) and a virtual, but, nevertheless, meaningful and relevant community across the globe. In the context of culinary linguistics (Gerhardt, Frobenius & Ley 2013), food blogs are of interest since they are connected to the centuries-old genre of the recipe. In the linguistic study of CMC, blogs represent an essential area of inquiry because of their importance in terms of popularity, reach, and ubiquity. Still, there has been little work to date analyzing the construction of specific food lifestyles such as veganism in the new media, especially with regard to language use (but see Hart 2018, and Sneijder & te Molder e.g., 2009). This paper adds to our knowledge about CMC, uniting the internet genre “blog” with the discursive conveyance of a lifestyle choice. In the field of culinary linguistics, this paper meets the increasing interest in inquiries at the crossroads between language and food. The analysis also contributes to an understanding of pre- and post-modifications in nominal phrases/groups and adjectives following copular verbs in English, German, and French, and how these are mobilized in vegan blogs.

In this paper,<sup>1</sup> I will analyze adjectives and other modifiers used in vegan food blogs with a view to the collaborative TMC construction of the vegan lifestyle. The data consist of the most popular English-language vegan blog *Oh She Glows* along with one German and one French vegan blog for context and comparison. Concentrating on those words or phrases that are specific to vegan blogs (in contrast to food blogs in general), the paper analyzes two classes of adjectives: (1) *vegan* and *plant-based* (and their German and French equivalents) and (2) adjectives that are derived from animal products (e.g., *creamy*/*crèmeux*). Starting with a closer look at (1), the use of the term *vegan*, it becomes apparent that the contextual synonym *plant-based* has to be taken into account when looking at the three different languages (and blogs). While all three blogs use the term *vegan*, in French *végétal* (plant-based) is also very common. Generally, the term *vegan* is more closely associated with a specific lifestyle and belief system, whereas *plant-based* is limited to descriptions of a type of cuisine. Both adjectives are used in the data to veganize a traditionally animal product-based (non-vegan) cuisine. In other words, vegan cuisine is constructed against the backdrop of known dishes and ingredients (e.g., *vegan pancakes* or *fromage végétal* (plant-based cheese)), which treats meat and other animal products as unmarked or expected. Similarly, (2) the use of terms such as *creamy* indicates that the culinary vocabularies of English, French, and German are deeply entrenched in an omnivore cuisine, representing a further challenge to the blog writers. Even though terms such as *meaty* or *milchig* (milky) are derivations of nouns denoting animal products, they seem unavoidable when describing the textures or flavors of food. While such terms are mostly used without any discomfort, at times the bloggers find it necessary to distance themselves from the meaning of the stem by using quotation marks (e.g., “*meaty*”).

In what follows, after introducing the rising interest in culinary linguistics and literature on (food) blogs, veganism will be presented as a lifestyle choice. In the main part of the paper, I will analyze adjectives and modifications in three vegan food blogs that are respectively written in Canadian English, German, and French. The (1) analysis of the omnipresent adjective *vegan* (and to a lesser degree its contextual synonym *plant-based*) will be complemented by (2) a look at adjectives like *creamy* that derive from animal products.

## 2 Language and food – food blogs

Against the backdrop of a general rise in interest in food and nutrition by the public and long-standing research traditions in neighboring fields like sociology,

anthropology, and history (Gerhardt 2013), there has been a recent surge of linguistic studies in the domain of food. A number of book-length publications have made the many-sided intricate entangling between these two major semiotic systems visible (Lavric & Konzett 2009; Newman 2009; Pinnavaia 2010; Szatrowski 2014; Diederich 2015). *Culinary Linguistics: The Chef's Special* on discourse and culture (Gerhardt 2013) opens with a first attempt of delimiting the field. Recently, an AILA ReN (research network by the Association internationale de linguistique appliquée) has formed under the heading the “Linguistics of food.” In a way, linguistics is only following in the footsteps of philosophy, anthropology, and sociology by recognizing the centrality of food for humankind as a historic, social, cultural, and linguistic construct.

Of interest for the construction of veganism in food blogs is Bourdieu's (1984) classic idea of distinction: the idea that our position in society determines our taste. Interestingly, taste is defined *ex negativo*, as not being the taste of “others”:

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

Similarly, in a study on organic farming, Cook (2007: 19) writes: “Organic food and farming are often defined as what they are not [...] Exclusively organic producers compare their produce with non-organic equivalents; retailers of both organic and non-organic produce do not.” While for Bourdieu lower classes represent the “others” from whom one wants to distinguish oneself, in this paper I show that in vegan blogs it is sometimes the non-vegan cuisine that is indexed as “other,” even though the bloggers heavily rely on it in their posts.

To continue with the literature on blogs, according to Miller and Shepherd (2012: 269), blogs consist of “dated, time-stamped entries, organized in reverse chronological order; most also include a link for reader commentary and the author's name” (cf. also Herring et al. 2004; Myers 2010; for more recent overviews, see Frobenius & Gerhardt 2017; Heyd 2017). Myers (2010: 2–4) states that, “despite all the possibilities open to bloggers for inclusion of pictures, sound and video, written language still remains central to most blogs.” Food blogs specifically constitute a new, but by now well-established, culinary genre (Lofgren 2013) or digital food culture (Lupton 2018). The popularity and ubiquity of food blogs can

be seen from attempts to set up associations (e.g., the UK food bloggers association, cf. Cox & Blake 2011). Because of their importance as a social phenomenon, they have been studied from a number of perspectives: the construction of media or culinary personae such as “the online domestic goddess” (Rodney et al. 2017; cf. also Salvio 2012 for blogs and domesticity) or mother (Seddon 2011; Domingo et al. 2014), the function of food blogs in diaspora (for South Asia, cf. Hegde 2014, or, for Russia, cf. Holak 2014), popular topics such as food porn (Dejmanee 2016) or health-related themes (see below), and the discourse about food and exercise (Lynch 2012). The food portrayed in a given blog “plays a defining role in the medium through how it portrays the unique character and community of a food blog” (McGaughey 2010: 74). Besides the obvious impact that culinary lifestyles or cultures have on food blogs, including content and visuality, the opposite has also been observed: namely, that food blogs influence the evolution of food cultures (Lee, Samdanis & Gkiousou 2014). Similarly, Véron (2016) sees veganism as having been popularized in France with the help of food blogs. Of importance for the analysis below, Diemer and Frobenius’s (2013) study of structural and lexical features finds that a special-purpose vocabulary is used in food blogs pertaining to “ingredients, food and recipe types” (Diemer & Frobenius 2013: 59). It is in this lexical field where differences between vegan food blogs and food blogs in general (non-vegan food blogs) can be predicted. Other typical genre features reflected in jargon use (kitchen utensils, measurements), but also blog-specific vocabulary, will probably not differ across types of food blogs (Diemer & Frobenius 2013: 58; Cesiri 2016: 56). For the same reason, other structural, lexical, or syntactic features like verb use (Diemer & Frobenius 2013: 60), sentence length (Cesiri 2016: 55), or visual aspects (Koh 2014/2015) will not be considered here. The analysis will instead focus on lexical phenomena, specifically uses of adjectives and modifiers that construct the recipes as vegan.

### 3 Veganism and vegan discourse

Veganism can be traced back to the 1940s, when Donald Watson founded *The Vegan Society*. Veganism is defined as “a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” (Vegan Society 2017: n.p.).<sup>2</sup> One main pillar of veganism is a plant-based diet with no animal products, including eggs, fish, insects, dairy products, and honey. However, veganism not only represents a specific diet, but also a complex lifestyle choice:

Vegans are people who object to the use of nonhuman animal products for food, cosmetics, clothing, and vivisection – virtually all invasive activities involving nonhuman animals. In the United States adopting such a lifestyle is a major change from the normative practice and ideology of human dominance over nonhuman animals.

McDonald 2000: 2

Hence, people who identify as “ethical vegans” believe in the equality of humans and animals as a general worldview, for instance, by using the terms “human and nonhuman animals” (cf. also public debates under the heading “speciesism”). This ethical position stands in contrast to vegetarianism since the latter tends to be associated with a specific diet only. “Because veganism encompasses all aspects of daily living, not just diet, it is inaccurate for people to define themselves as [vegan] simply because they have adopted the vegan mode of eating” (Stepaniak 1998: 21). Vegans frame themselves as “Living with conscience, conviction and compassion” (Stepaniak 2000: front cover). They learn about the vegan lifestyle through reading organizational newsletters and brochures from animal rights and vegan organizations, as well as cookbooks and magazines (McDonald 2000: 13). I assume that with the proliferation of new media, online genres such as blogs, particularly vegan food blogs, also play a meaningful role in this learning process.

A differentiation should be made between “health” and “ethical” vegans (Dyett et al. 2013; Radnitz, Beezhold & DiMatteo 2015). While health vegans choose the lifestyle assuming that it is beneficial for themselves, ethical vegans are concerned about animal well-being. Both parties not only have different reasons for choosing veganism, but their compliance and nutrition also differ: Health vegans adhere to the diet for longer periods of time, and typically consume more high-sugar food, both fruit and sweets (Radnitz, Beezhold & DiMatteo 2015). However, the health advantages of veganism seem disputable. A publication by the Vegan Society states: “Sensible vegan diets provide ample amounts of all the essential nutrients, but established guidelines must be followed to ensure sound nutrition” (Langley 1995). Hence, as with any diet, the norms of veganism may not always be congruent with their everyday application. While ideal diets may cover all nutritional needs, how often vegans adhere to those guidelines in their everyday lives remains unclear.

To contextualize this study, especially with the proliferation of anti-science post-truth rhetoric online – including regarding dietary practices – I summarize some recent research about the healthfulness of veganism. The following studies are all concerned with the nutritional effects of veganism based on physiological

studies (including blood or fecal tests, Body Mass Index, and cardiograms). In other words, they are not concerned with the ideals of vegan dietary guidelines, but with the actual health of practicing vegans.

A number of studies indicate that nutritional deficits are frequently diagnosed among practicing vegans. A major study based on German data recommends that vegans take “supplements containing riboflavin, cobalamin, calcium, and iodine. Intake of total energy and protein should also be improved” (Waldmann et al. 2003: 947). Overall, the study’s “results confirm the notion that a vegan diet is deficient in vitamin B-12, which may have an unfavorable effect on CHD [coronary heart disease] risk” (Waldmann et al. 2005). It is also suggested that young women monitor their iron status (Waldmann et al. 2004). Studies from other countries confirm that “micronutrients of special concern for the vegan include vitamins B-12 and D, calcium, and long-chain n-3 (omega-3) fatty acids. Unless vegans regularly consume foods that are fortified with these nutrients, appropriate supplements should be consumed. In some cases, the iron and zinc status of vegans may also be of concern” (Craig 2009). Again, “vegans may be at increased risk for deficiencies in vitamin B-12, iron, calcium, vitamin D, omega-3 fatty acids, and protein” (Fields et al. 2016, cf. also Burkert et al. 2014 for nutritional deficits for Austrian vegans). With regard to children, Sanders and Manning (1992: 11) find that they “can be successfully reared on a vegan diet providing sufficient care is taken to avoid the known pitfalls of a bulky diet and vitamin B-12 deficiency.”

A number of studies show the benefits of a vegan diet for specific groups of people, such as fibromyalgia (Karttinen et al. 2000) and rheumatoid arthritis patients (Hänninen et al. 1999). Moreover, vegan diets have a positive effect on the prevention of specific diseases like cancer (Dinu et al. 2016), type 2 diabetes (Barnard et al. 2006), or obesity (Turner-McGrievy, Barnard & Scialli 2007). Goff et al. (2005; similarly, Craig 2009) observe that vegan diets are often good for the heart and cardiovascular health generally (but see Waldmann et al. 2005 who found an unfavorable effect).

Since I am not a physician or dietician, I do not want to venture to draw conclusions from this. However, importantly for this paper, the complexity of the question should have become clear: Veganism is not as easy to follow or self-evident as it is often portrayed to be on CMC sites for vegans (Sneijder & te Molder 2009). The question of whether or not veganism is healthy cannot be easily answered. However, existing research indicates that veganism for health reasons entails a number of complex nutritional choices for the individual. Conflicting results complicate the topic even further. In addition, in the framework

of a book on social media and food, it is important to note that food blogs in general do not necessarily offer nutritionally balanced recipes (Lynch 2010; Schneider et al. 2013) and that consumers do not necessarily trust the information on food blogs (Ho & Chien 2010). Moreover, evidence has been found that the content of healthy living blogs, a related genre, is thematically consistent with dysfunctional eating attitudes (Boepple & Thompson 2014).

Studies pertaining to the language used in naturally occurring vegan discourse seem scarce: Hart (2018) shows that traditional gender norms are perpetuated in vegan food blogs. Sneijder and te Molder (2004, 2005, 2009) discuss vegan online forums from the perspective of discursive psychology. In their 2009 paper, they raise a point that is directly related to the section above: Users of the Dutch online forum for vegans that they examine construct vegan meal preparation as simple, ordinary practices (including the avoidance of monotony). Furthermore, methods for health control, i.e., taking pills, are portrayed as routine procedures. In earlier papers, they discuss script-formulations such as *if . . . then . . .*, e.g., *If you ensure that you get enough calcium . . . it's impossible for a problem to occur* (Sneijder & te Molder 2004: 605) or *if you eat a varied diet, then you don't have any problems* (Sneijder & te Molder 2005: 675) which attribute health problems to the behavior of individuals. Even though many vegans choose the lifestyle because of its supposed healthiness, it is often health problems caused by veganism such as vitamin deficiencies that are discussed in such forums (Sneijder & te Molder 2004).

## 4 Data and research methods

This study is based on the Canadian English-language blog *Oh She Glows* (Liddon 2016). The blog was chosen because it ranked first in a study on vegan food blogs by the Academy of Culinary Nutrition (ACN 2015), thus representing a ratified exemplar within the vegan community. The corpus, collected in January 2016, encompasses 10,631 words (1,841 types and 10,481 tokens)<sup>3</sup> consisting of all blog posts to date,<sup>4</sup> including titles, recipes, and all other text by the blogger. To provide an intercultural and cross-linguistic perspective, the results of this corpus-based research were compared to the language use in one German and one French vegan blog in October 2017. These two blogs were not analyzed quantitatively. Rather, all of their blog posts to date were searched for occurrences of the adjectives and pre-/post-modifiers that were found in the English language blog (for the exact list, see below in Section 5. Both were also



chosen because of their popularity. *Nicole Just*, known as La Veganista (Just 2017), published a number of vegan cookery books and regularly appears on public national television (ARD). The French blog *100% Végétal - Cuisine Vegan* is also run by a woman (Laforêt 2017); it appears that the vegan world is one that is primarily populated by women. Since veganism is a global trend, a broadening of the database to non-English language data may help forestall a local (in this case, Canadian) bias. Even though I look at these three blogs cross-linguistically, they should be understood as three specimens of one global trend, which happen to be in different languages. Hence, differences found in these three blogs should not necessarily be seen as indications of different cultures, but rather as illustrating the scope of vegan food blogs.

## 5 A lexical analysis of vegan blogs: Adjectives and modifiers

As stated earlier, it is primarily with regard to the special-purpose vocabulary used in food blogs that vegan blogs differ from other food blogs in general. Examining the corpus with regard to technical terms pertaining to “ingredients, food and recipe types” (Diemer & Frobenius 2013: 59) it soon becomes apparent that “veganism” is semantically referred to and syntactically constructed with the help of pre-modification and adjectives as subject-complements. The following expressions were used in the English corpus to identify the special features of recipes (the numbers indicate the number of times each expression was used in the corpus):

*vegan* (47), *gluten-free* (26), *raw* (21), *soy-free* (13), *refined sugar free* (10), *cashew cream* (9), *nut-free* (8), *creamy* (7), *almond milk* (6), *grain-free* (6), *coconut whipped cream* (4), *low-sodium* (4), *unflavoured* (2), *unsweetened* (2), *cashew sour cream* (3), *no bake/raw* (3), *coconut cream* (2), *non-dairy* (2), *oil-free* (2), *almond butter* (1), *animal-based* (1), “cheesy” (1), “meaty” (1), *meatloaf* (1), *meaty* (1), *nut and seed based parmesan cheese* (1), *nut and seed parmesan cheese* (1), *plant-based* (1), *soy milk* (1), *taco meat* (1), *veggie-centric* (1), *veggie-packed* (1)

As one can see, the recipes in the Canadian English-language vegan blog are not only qualified as *vegan*, they are also often attributed other qualities such as *gluten-free*. All of these concepts were searched in the French and the German blogs. Because of the grammatical differences between these three languages, syntactic differences must be expected. In German, besides phrasal pre-modifiers

like adjectives, we may expect longer clausal pre-modification. One could imagine constructions such as *der in der Schüssel vorbereitete Teig* (the in-the-bowl prepared dough) or *der bereits abgekühlte Kuchen* (the already chilled cake). In French, on the other hand, most adjectives are post-modifiers such as *Terrine végétale* (plant-based pie). However, as stated earlier, despite these syntactic differences that are without any doubt linguistically relevant, the main interest of this paper lies in the use and the meaning of the terms referring to the vegan nature of the recipes in the blogs.

In the following, the adjectives and modifiers found in the three vegan food blogs will be analyzed in two groups. First, (1) the abundant use of *vegan* will be further scrutinized, also with regard to the contextual synonyms *plant-based*/*végétal*. Then, (2) I will discuss *creamy/cremig/sahnig/crémeux* against the backdrop of traditional food and dishes in Western countries that often include animal products.

### 5.1 Veganizing omnivore cuisine: The adjectives vegan/plant-based and their German and French equivalents

*Vegan* is by far the most frequently used adjective in the Canadian blog (47 times). This finding can be expected for a number of reasons: First, *vegan* represents the base from which *veganism* derived, and is itself a derivation of the clipping *veg* (from *vegetable*) and the suffix *-an* (according to the OED), although its etymology is lost in the pronunciation. It represents the obvious choice of an adjective to modify dishes and food items in vegan cuisine. In the context of CMC, it has the added value of making the recipes easily retrievable for search engines or tagging. The adjective *vegan* often modifies dishes or recipes that traditionally contain animal products.

- (1) *Crowd-Pleasing Vegan Caesar Salad*
- (2) *Easy Vegan and Gluten-Free Pancakes (Strawberry Shortcake w/Whipped Cream)*
- (3) *My Favourite Vegan Chili with Homemade Sour Cream*
- (4) *Cauli-power Fettuccine “Alfredo” (Vegan)*
- (5) *Next Level Vegan Enchiladas*

For instance, *Caesar Salad* (1) traditionally contains parmesan cheese and a dressing made of egg yolks and anchovies (fish), *Pancakes* (2) are prepared with milk and eggs, and *Chili* (3) is usually *con carne*, i.e., “with meat” (Spanish). Similar constructions can be found in the German blog:

- (6) *Veganer Linseneintopf wie bei Mama*  
(Vegan lentil stew like at mom's/like at home)
- (7) *Veganer Käsekuchen*  
(Vegan cheesecake)
- (8) *Vegane Piroggen mit dreierlei Füllung*  
(Vegan pierogi with three kinds of filling)

For instance, *Linseneintopf* (6)<sup>5</sup> traditionally contains sausages or speck, and *Käsekuchen* (7) is made with cheese and eggs. However, in the German blog, we do find examples of recipes that are unmodified with *vegan* (for instance, *Meine 3 Lieblings-Pancake-Rezepte* (my 3 favorite pancake recipes) or *Porridge mit Ananas-Minze-Salat* (porridge with pineapple-mint-salad) even though both contain animal products (eggs and milk, and milk, respectively) in their traditional forms. The German blogger seems to rely on the general multimodal framing of the website as a context for the narrowing of meaning to “vegan X.”

While German borrowed the word *vegan* from English and the blogger uses it almost exclusively to describe her recipes, the French blog studied uses *végétal* much more frequently, an adjective that has been borrowed from Latin (a derivation of “vegetare”) in the sixteenth century. Hence, its literal meaning in English is plant-based (for the use of the English borrowing *vegan* in French, though, see below). Note that vegetables in present day French are called *légumes* (not *végétal*). So, in the French blog, *végétal* is used like *vegan* in the English and German blogs:

- (9) *Blinis de sarrasin et caviar végétale*  
(Buckwheat blinis and vegan caviar)
- (10) *Terrine végétale aux noix*  
(Vegan terrine with walnuts)

In both dishes (9, 10), the dough or mixture presupposes the use of animal products like milk and eggs. Rather than using *vegan* though, a borrowing that can be found in French (see below), the blogger uses the term *végétal* (plant-based). Also, in contrast to the Canadian and German blogs, the French recipes or dishes are far less often described on that level (as vegan or plant-based). For instance, the blog contains 6 recipes for *Terrine* and only one (example 10 above) is modified with *végétale* (with the feminine gender inflection).<sup>6</sup>

The term *vegan* is also used, albeit much less frequently. It is marked as a foreign borrowing, not fully integrated into French syntax and phonology. For instance, in *cuisine vegan* (vegan cuisine) or *Makis vegan colorés* (colored vegan makis) the adjective *vegan* is not inflected (interestingly, in contrast to the

Japanese term *maki* that does get the French inflectional plural morpheme). In addition, the acute accent is missing that one would expect in this position for French phonology and spelling (*végan*).

Apart from dishes or recipes, it is often specific food items which semantically presuppose an animal product that are modified by the adjective *vegan*.

- (11) *I recommend serving this casserole with a pat of vegan butter or coconut oil to really take it over the top.*
- (12) *This time I served the chili with a homemade vegan sour cream and now I can't believe that I've been eating my chili without it for all this time.*

Both *butter* (11) and *sour cream* (12) are typically dairy products. By adding *vegan*, the blogger clarifies that it is actually an entirely different substance that is used in these recipes. Such substances are often necessary for the texture (e.g., to replace eggs or cream), or they have to be added to bulk up the recipe (e.g., to replace the meat in chili con carne). The example in (13) involves cheese: *fromage végétal*.

- (13) *Tartelettes aux figues et fromage végétal aux noix*  
(Fig tarts and vegan walnut cheese)

The exact nature of this vegan cheese (13) is left open. It may be made out of nut milk or the walnuts may represent extra ingredients, like in non-vegan walnut cheeses. Even classic meat products can be veganized in this way:

- (14) *Veganes Mett – Das muss mett dabei sein!*  
(Vegan ground meat – This must be part (of this blog))<sup>7</sup>
- (15) *Lentil loaf: le pain de viande vegan*  
(Lentil loaf: the vegan meatloaf (syntactically: the loaf of meat vegan))

In the German example (14), the nature of the whole dish “vegan ground meat” is opaque. One cannot know what it is actually made of and what type of dish this recipe title advertises until one reads the list of ingredients. In the French example (15) the blogger first uses the borrowing *lentil loaf* which may be unclear to French speakers (even though *lentil* might be close enough to its origin, which happens to be French, i.e., *lentille*). The following explication though *le pain de viande vegan* (the vegan meatloaf) is, again, nontransparent regarding the actual nature of the dish. In other words, if one wanted to know what kind of dish (15) represented or what the main ingredient was, one would have to gather that from the English *lentil*. Hence, with regard to recipes that consist entirely of

meat in traditional cuisine, the modification with *vegan* raises the question of what dish one would actually prepare. So regarding recipes that one could label as surrogates or substitutes (for animal products) e.g., *fromage végétal* (vegan cheese), it seems that it is often taken to be more important to frame them in terms of an omnivore cuisine than to inform the readers about the nature of the actual dish, i.e., its main ingredients. The synonym *plant-based* is used only once in the Canadian corpus. This may partly be an effect of CMC, since *vegan* will be the more common search term. However, it is also connected to the discourse about veganism being a lifestyle. The adjective *plant-based* applies to a certain kind of diet with no or little animal products. While it may be a contextual synonym in the data, elsewhere it might be more ambiguous. *Vegan*, in contrast, indexes a whole worldview which gives animals the same status as humans, e.g., through the use of terms such as “nonhuman animal” (McDonald 2000). Hence, the use of *vegan* positions the blog within the vegan movement, indicating that it is not just a website listing plant-based recipes.

To sum up, the English blog uses *vegan* more consistently than the German one and even more than the French one, though this could be idiosyncratic for this blogger (this exploratory study does not allow a generalization because of its limited scope and should not be taken as indicative of the three different languages). In the context of CMC, with respect to search engine optimization, the Canadian blogger’s frequent use of *vegan* seems an effective strategy to increase the likelihood of having her recipes found and featured prominently. While *vegan* can be understood as representing a lifestyle choice, the contextual synonym *plant-based* functions as a descriptor of a type of recipe. This section has illustrated that vegan bloggers predominantly use omnivore cuisine as a backdrop for their vegan recipes, in this manner referencing the known and traditional culinary culture. This strategy is all-prevalent with regard to classic dishes containing animal products such as pancakes or lentil stew, and for a number of animal products that are frequently used in omnivore cuisine such as cream or milk. While this practice allows the readers to rely on their existing knowledge both about a cuisine that has been passed down through generations (e.g., cheesecake) or about recent global trends (e.g., chili or blini), concurrently, this may entail a lack of information about the exact nature of the dish (e.g., a mixture of crumbled rice cakes with tomato paste as vegan ground meat). While in such cases, the terms *vegan/végétal* index the replacement of animal-based products with plant-based substitutes, the following section concentrates on adjectives that derive from animal products.

## 5.2 The use of adjectival derivations from animal products (e.g., creamy and meaty)

This section will examine the adjective *creamy* – for the German blog *cremig/sahnig* and for French *crèmeux* – as well as *meaty* and *cheesy*, all derivations of nouns denoting animal products. Since there are hardly any “native” vegans in the sense that such vegans would have only tasted vegan food throughout their lives, the bloggers can typically rely on their readers’ knowledge of the taste and texture of animal products and meat. Furthermore, it seems that the languages studied here – all historically representing cultures that have no long-standing vegan tradition – make the use of animal-based concepts unavoidable. So the affordances or deficiencies of English, German, and French may force the bloggers to use such words. As we can see in the following examples from the Canadian blog, the derivations *meaty* and *cheesy*, which can be used to refer to specific tastes or textures, are clearly “othered” (Bourdieu 1984) or flagged as being out-of-place through the use of quotation marks.

- (16) *Browned, almost caramelized bottoms, crispy, blackened leaves, and a tender yet “meaty” texture. Yes, I just said meaty texture.*
- (17) *The nutritional yeast gives this sauce a lovely “cheesy” flavour while the blended cauliflower creates a luxurious (but light) creamy base.*

By using quotation marks, the blogger distances herself from the meaning of the stem of the word that refers to an animal product. In addition, the repetition, an indirect self-quotation, *Yes, I just said meaty texture* (16), together with the quasi-interaction with the blog users indicates that the blogger is well aware that her choice of words may seem out of place in the context of a vegan food blog. In (17), *cheesy* might potentially also be used with quotation marks because of its polysemy, with the figurative meaning being much more common. In German, too, the uncommon use of *käsig* (cheesy) is marked with quotation marks in *käsig-würzig* (cheesy-aromatic) (18), potentially because of the uncommon ad hoc compounding. *Fleischig* (meaty), however, can only be found in *rotfleischig* (red-fleshed) as a denomination for a certain type of melon.<sup>8</sup>

- (18) *Nährhefeflocken\*: Auch als Würzhefeflocken im Handel. Schmecken ganz leicht „käsig-würzig“. Ich mache daraus veganen Parmesan,*  
(Nutritional yeast flakes\*: Also available as seasoned yeast flakes. Taste slightly “cheesy-aromatic”. I make vegan parmesan out of them,)

In French, these derivations could not be found: Neither *fromageux* nor *viandeux* were used in the blog. The reason may be that both adjectives are used in vegan contexts to refer to people who eat cheese or meat.<sup>9</sup>

Of further interest is the adjective *creamy*, derived from *cream*, an early borrowing from Old French to Middle English, which also denotes an animal product.

- (19) *For a creamy twist, try subbing some of the butter/oil in the sweet potato mash for full-fat canned coconut cream.*
- (20) *A delicious, creamy vegan Caesar salad that will please a crowd!*
- (21) *Eric is in love with this creamy cauliflower pasta dish.*

As one can see in these examples (19–21), they all mean creamy in texture. Moreover, *creamy* is used unapologetically; it seems that no reference to the animal origin remains. Apparently, the “beastly nature” of the term is not transparent in the usage of the blogger.<sup>10</sup>

The linguistic forms used in German and French are different. German uses another word, *Sahne*, for the animal product (its adjectival derivation being *sahnig*); the noun *Crème* is reserved for cosmetic or medical creams (the adjectival derivation being *cremig*). So in German *cremig* is not a derivation from a word denoting an animal-product word. Its use is similar to the use of *creamy* though, in the context of food.

- (22) *Cremiges Kokoseis mit Vanille: Nur 5 Zutaten, ohne Kochen*  
(Creamy coconut ice cream with vanilla: only 5 ingredients, no cooking)
- (23) *Buntes Gemüse, zu Rosen gedreht und in einer cremig-herzhaften Quiche mit Mürbeteigboden verpackt.*  
(Vegetables with different colors, rolled up into roses and boxed in a creamy, savory quiche with a short pastry base.)

As these examples indicate (22–23), *cremig* is used in the same way as in English, to indicate texture. Likewise, the same seems to hold for *sahnig*, even though it represents a derivation from the animal product *Sahne* (cream):

- (24) *Aus den Resten im Mixbehälter mache ich schnelle „Cashewmilch“ oder „-sahne“. . . Nun solange Wasser zugießen, bis die gewünschte Konsistenz (von sahnig bis milchig) erreicht ist.*  
(Out of the residues in the blender I make fast “cashew milk” or “cream” . . . Now add water until the desired texture (from creamy to milky) is achieved.)
- (25) *Die eingeweichten Cashewkerne mit 300 ml Wasser sehr fein pürieren, so dass eine sahnige Flüssigkeit entsteht.*

(Blend the soaked cashew nuts very fine with 300 ml water to produce a creamy liquid.)

In example (24), it is the nouns „*Cashewmilch*“ oder „*-sahne*“ (“cashew milk” or “cream”) that are marked as non-standard usages with the use of quotation marks. However, again the adjective *sahnig* indicates the texture and is not understood as referring to an animal product. So even though German offers the alternative *cremig* (a derivation of medical cream) for *sahnig*, the blogger does not seem to mind using a derivation which is based on the animal product. The blogger uses both alternatives without any quotation marks or other means of signaling distancing from the term(s).

In French, the cognate *crémeux*, on the other hand, is not a borrowing and may for this reason be potentially semantically more transparent. However, in the French blog, too, *crémeux* is used without any signs of distancing:

- (26) *Le mélange va devenir plus épais, bien crémeux et une partie de l'alcool du vin va s'évaporer à la cuisson.*

(The mixture will become thicker, quite creamy, and some of the alcohol in the wine will evaporate during cooking.)

- (27) *Fondante, crémeuse (un poil plus que la fêta d'origine animale pour être exacte, mais personnellement je ne suis pas dérangée par un peu plus de crémeux !) incroyablement parfumée,*

(Melly, creamy (a little more than feta of animal origin to be exact, but personally I'm not bothered by a little more creamy [texture!]), incredibly fragrant,)

Interestingly, the French blogger distances herself from the use of *simili carné* (meat surrogates or substitutes) though:

- (28) *Pour un projet ... on m'a demandé de créer quelques recettes autour des fameux "simili carnés". Ces deux mots ont tendance à me faire grimacer*

(For a project ... I was asked to create some recipes for those famous “meat substitutes”. Those two words tend to make me make faces)

So surrogates for dairy products, hence, words for dairy products (e.g., in the German blog „*Cashewmilch*“ oder „*-sahne*“ (“cashew milk” or “cream”) (24) or in the English blog *vegan butter* (11)) are used very frequently and often without any distancing, whereas meat-related products and words (*meaty* or *carné* (out of meat)) are projected as “the other” (Bourdieu 1984).

In sum, while *meaty* and *cheesy* are only used carefully by the English blogger, the derivations of *cream* do not seem reminiscent of their etymology as an



animal product, but rather are used to describe texture throughout. Even though German offers a contextual synonym (*cremig*) that is not based on an animal product, one still finds the derivation *sahnig*, which in turn does derive from an animal product, *Sahne* (cream). In French, *crèmeux* might be more transparent, since *crème* is not a borrowing. However, both the German and the French blogs use terms derived from animal products without any signs of discomfort. While the use of *creamy* and *crèmeux* may seem to a certain extent unavoidable in English and French, the German example indicates that the blogger does not seem to be as aware of such issues of word use or does not seem to mind. The abundance of dairy surrogates and relative scarcity of meat surrogates indicates that meat is considered more problematic than other animal products.

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

The present analysis of adjectives and modifiers in three food blogs in different languages represents an inquiry into the construction of veganism as found in a CMC context. By far the most frequently used adjectives are *vegan* (English), *vegan* (German), and *végétal* (French) to modify dishes and ingredients. While *vegan* may represent the most obvious word choice, in a CMC context, this also represents a good strategy since it allows the recipes to be more easily found with the help of search engines; put differently, they become “searchable talk” (Zappavigna 2018). Different patterns emerged for modifications of dishes compared to those of ingredients. With regard to dishes, *vegan* usually not only represents a syntactic, but also a semantic modification in that the core of the dish seems preserved. Examples include *Fettuccine* (4), *Pancakes* (2) or *Linseneintopf* (lentil stew) (6), all of which continue to remain fettuccine, pancakes, and lentil stew after being modified as/with *vegan*. In contrast, this is not the case for ingredients modified with *vegan*. By adding *vegan* to some animal product, the nature of the ingredient becomes unclear and the question arises as to how transparent these designations are. The actual ingredients, for instance, of *fromage végétale* (vegan cheese) (13) are unclear. This holds even more for dishes that are made almost entirely of meat: *Veganes Mett* (vegan ground meat) (14) frames the recipe in a traditional context, with *Veganes Mett* as a replacement for *Mett* (ground meat). However, the actual ingredients, the taste and texture cannot be inferred from the name of the recipe. Moreover, the functions that *Mett* may have as an ingredient for other dishes is not fulfilled since this *Vegane Mett* consists of crumbled rice cakes with tomato paste.<sup>11</sup> Nominal compounds (here for dairy products) uniting the surrogate (as modifier) with the

original dairy (as head) such as *full-fat canned coconut cream* (19) or „*Cashewmilch*“ oder „*sahne*“ (“cashew milk” or “cream”) (24) are semantically more transparent. These constructions also function as nominalized teaching sequences: The blog readers learn which vegan ingredients they can use as surrogates, e.g., for dairy products with regard to texture, function, or, potentially, taste. In this way, the readers of these blogs can develop their vegan competencies as they learn about vegan cooking and nutrition, and the vegan lifestyle. The lack of meat surrogates indicates a more pronounced distancing from meat than other animal products (cf. The French blogger’s disdainful comments about *simili carnés* (meat surrogates)). While the adjectives *meaty* (and, potentially *cheesy*) seem to require distancing, *creamy*, *sahnig*, and *crèmeux* are used unapologetically, seemingly without the realization that they too derive from animal products.

The data suggest that veganism is a global trend (illustrated by e.g., the use of borrowings) which may instantiate in digital media in slightly different fashions, because of the affordances of different languages, both syntactically (e.g., French post-modification) and lexically (e.g., German choice between *sahnig* and *cremig*). Overwhelmingly, though, the three blogs from different cultures, different languages, and different parts of the world underline that veganism is a global phenomenon that faces the difficulty of having to be constructed against the background of omnivore cuisine. This holds for all of these three different data sets. It would be interesting to compare these findings to blogs from a culture where vegetarianism and veganism are much more traditional (e.g., the Jainist culture in India). Another aspect that is beyond the scope of this study, but deserves further exploration, is the interactional features of blogs. Because of the nature of the data (online blogs rather than, for instance, recipes from cookbooks), it is possible to see how the bloggers’ constructions of veganism are taken up by the readers of the blogs (Gerhardt 2020). In other words, studying the comments section of vegan blogs would allow for an exploration of whether the readers may protest against the use of e.g., *creamy* or *sahnig*. This co-construction of discourse represents one of the affordances of digital media and differentiates it from the appropriation of classic media, e.g., television discourse and its reception (Ayass & Gerhardt 2013).

## Notes

- 1 Parts of this research have been published in German (Gerhardt 2019).
- 2 Note that in this definition, too, veganism is framed as *not* something (as the lack of something), namely cruelty to and exploitation of animals.

- 3 To explain the type-token difference with the help of an example: *Vegan* occurs 47 times as a token, but it only represents one type.
- 4 I would like to thank Isabel Schul for allowing me to use her corpus and examples from her Bachelor's dissertation for this paper.
- 5 Interestingly, the lentil stew is described as *wie bei Mama*, i.e., "as at mom's" or "like at home," even though one can probably assume that mom was not a vegan herself. Instead, we can see that veganism is constructed against the known, in this case the food that we are used to eating at home when we were kids. Thus, it is the whole phrase *Linseneintopf wie bei Mama* including the post-modification that is pre-modified here with *veganer*. As we will see elsewhere in this paper, usually it is omnivore cuisine that is used as a point of reference, that is, as the known.
- 6 The blogger also refers to *la newsletter végétale* on her site, again with the feminine ending. Apparently, the French *lettre*, a feminine noun, has returned (from English) to French in the borrowed compound *newsletter*.
- 7 This is a very free translation since *blog* is not mentioned. Literally it means, "this must with along be" *mit* (with) being replaced by *mett* (ground meat) as a word play. The sentence could also be translated as "it must be taken along," e.g., for a picnic.
- 8 The compound *fleischartig* (meat-like), which could also be used as a synonym for *meaty*, did not occur in the data.
- 9 There is one comment by a blog reader, though, mentioning *un goût de fromage "Classique"* (a classic taste of cheese). This represents the only case where the prepositional phrase *de X* (*de fromage* or *de viande*) is used in the same sense as the derivations *fromageux* or *viandeux*.
- 10 For the ingredient cream, surrogates are used: *full-fat canned coconut cream* (19). In those cases, the stem *cream* is used as nominal head in compound constructions.
- 11 The blogger herself writes: "Schon erstaunlich, mit welch einfachen Mittel man tierische Produkte veganisieren kann!" (It's amazing how easy it is to veganize animal products). Note the neologism *veganisieren*, which also exists in English *veganize* and French *veganiser* (25).

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