

To devour one's love: The concept of TASTE in the world of endearments

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The aim of the paper is to discuss the process of foodsemy, in which names of various foodstuffs are employed to characterize human beings and various forms of their activity. To be more precise, we shall focus on food-inspired terms of endearment (e.g. honey, sugar, sweetheart, cinnamon, sweetie) and their historical development in order to account for whether they are metaphor- or metonymy-conditioned. We are going to discuss two general research categories, namely HUMAN BEINGS ARE FOODSTUFFS and FOODSTUFF IS ENDEARMENT and the examples of a handful of specific metaphors which are part and parcel of these groups, for example THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS A (SWEET) FOODSTUFF.

Keywords: *endearment, foodsemy, taste, metaphor, metonymy*

1. Introduction

The category of ENDEARMENTS seems to be a fertile source of pet names given that one can hardly compile a comprehensive dictionary containing all of the lexical items employed in an endearing sense. On the one hand, there is a group of terms of affection which appear to be the most prevalent ones (e.g. *honey, sweetheart, darling, love*); on the other hand, there are numerous creative nonce words whose usage may not be documented in the written sources (e.g. *esquire, cherub, gallant*). In what follows, we are going to discuss one of the most productive motifs as far as pet names are concerned, namely taste. To be more precise, we are going to elaborate on the process of *foodsemy* (aka food metaphor) which may be defined as the metaphorical use of various foodstuffs in order to denote certain qualities of people.

In order to pursue our investigation Crystal's *Words in Time and Place: Exploring Language Through the Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (2014) was used as our corpus. It contains 14 food-induced lexical items (*sweetheart, honey, cinnamon, powsowdie, lamb-chop, sweet-love, sweetkin, sucket, bag-pudding, sweetling, sweetie, cabbage, pumpkin* and *sugar*) which are going to be scrutinized. Obviously, we are aware that a number of other food-related endearments are being deliberately ignored in our analysis (e.g. *peach, muffin, cupcake*); however, our aim is to focus on those lexical items whose human-specific endearing senses are attested in *the Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *the OED*). We are also aware of the shortcomings of the analysis which is based on a limited number of individual lexical items extracted from one lexicographic work and not on coherent discourses employed in real situations. However, the purpose is merely to discuss the source domains that appear to dominate the conceptualization of an object of affection in the English language.

2. Theoretical background and the notion of *foodsemy*

The intellectual roots of cognitive science have a relatively short history which dates back to the 20th century, therefore embodiment has been studied empirically only for a few decades. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that metaphor involves conceptualising one domain of experience in terms of another, e.g. LIFE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS MONEY. Metaphorical meaning

construction stems from conceptual metaphors and various mappings that constitute them. However, one cannot ignore the role of context which is defined by Van Dijk (2009:5) in the following words: “a context is what is defined to be relevant in the social situation by the participants themselves”. In order to comprehend some metaphors we need to refer to the context which enables us to fully understand the meanings of some utterances.

As we will try to demonstrate in this account, FOOD is a source domain in a number of metaphors, even though – as far as the sense-based metaphors are concerned – taste itself is not as productive as the other senses (e.g. sight). Nevertheless, it is occasionally subject to the mechanism of *gustasemy*, also known as taste metaphor (see Pajdzińska 1996: 125), whereby terms literally referring to taste are metaphorically targeted at various aspects of human experience (see Osuchowska 2011, 2012, 2014, Cacciari 2008). In turn, *foodsemy* is a process in which human beings are conceptualized in terms of various foodstuffs (see Kudła 2016: 112-113). The concept of FOOD as a possible metaphorical source domain was discussed by, among others, Newman (1997), Kövecses (2002, 2006), Kudła (2016) or Negro (2019).

As far as embodied cognition is concerned, we may argue that sensory experiences, for instance the perception of temperature (e.g. the word *hot*) or different flavours, often have an impact on how we perceive reality. Thus, it is worth discussing how taste, or – to be more precise – terms of endearment whose senses are connected with different flavours, are related to embodied cognition. And so, we may categorize FLAVOURS into five main categories, that is: salty, sweet, sour, bitter and spicy. As noticed by Miska, Hemmesch and Buswell (2018: 7-9), sweet-oriented lexical items (e.g. *honey* or *sweetie*) are associated with a romantic kind of relationship, whereas spicy-oriented words (like *spicy* itself) are connected with physical attractiveness. Such a division reflects the dual nature of love, as it has both emotional and physical aspects.

As observed by Kövecses (2006b: 155), both females and males are occasionally perceived in terms of foodstuffs (by means of THE HUMAN BEINGS ARE FOOD metaphor). Let us consider the following conceptual metaphors provided and analysed by the linguist:

WOMEN ARE FOOD

dish

MEN ARE FOOD

dish, hunk of man, meat

Interestingly enough, it is women that are more often conceptualized as foodstuffs. And so, ladies may be either white or dark meat and some appetizing food, as shown by Kövecses (2006: 155) by means of the following conceptual metaphors:

WOMEN ARE WHITE MEAT TO EAT

chunk of (white) meat, piece of (white) meat, tuna, white meat

WOMEN ARE DARK MEAT TO EAT

cunt meat, hunk of woman

In spite of the fact that females may be conceptualized in terms of meat, neither meat-induced foodstuffs nor savoury dishes may be said to be widespread terms of affection in English. It is so because, in comparison with sweet-based terms of affection, saltiness is usually not associated with positive emotions¹ and pet names are employed to show affection, thus they need to be positively-loaded. Meat-inspired pet names or ones not connected with sweetness may be slightly ironic as they usually have something in common with being overweight; take

¹ However, there are a few exceptions to this rule, e.g. *to be the salt of the earth* used with reference to an honest person and *to be worth one's salt* which adverts to a competent specialist (see <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

and *lamb-chop*), fruits (*pumpkin*), vegetables (*cabbage*) and spices (*cinnamon*). Interestingly, there are no drinks/liquids among the pet names. It turns out that we may compare a person to a particular beverage, e.g. *Men are like wine – some turn to vinegar, but the best improve with age* (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/623697-men-are-like-wine-some-turn-to-vinegar-but-the-best>), but we hardly ever use them as endearments.

In terms of chronology, just over a third of the pet names fell into oblivion (*cinnamon*, *powsowdie*, *sweet-love*, *sweetkin*, *sucket* and *bag-pudding*) between the end of the 14th and beginning of the 17th centuries mainly because they were only occasionally employed in an endearing sense in works of literature. The frequency of their usage must have been too low, thus they failed to persist in English.

It is fitting to add that two oldest endearments (*sweetheart* and *honey*) belong to the group of the most widespread pet names in the English-speaking world. The chronological order of the discussed lexical items is as follows:

sweetheart 1290
honey 1350
cinnamon 1386*²
powsowdie 1500-1520*
sweet-love 1560*
sweetkin 1599*
sucket 1605*
bag-pudding 1608*
lamb-chop 1662*
sweetling 1648
sweetie 1778
cabbage 1840
pumpkin 1900
sugar 1930

5. Sweet-inspired endearments

To begin with, as far as the food-related terms of endearment are concerned, we may say that the vast majority of them are derivatives and compounds based on the following words: *honey* (e.g. *honeybee*, *honey-bun*, *honey-bunch*, *honey-bunny*, *honey-pie*, *honey-toast*, *honeycomb*, *honey-sop*, *honey baby*, *honey chile*, *honeysuckle*), *pie* (e.g. *cutesy-pie*, *cutie pie*, *honey pie*, *lambey-pie*, *sweetie pie*, *tootsie-pie*, *sugar-pie*), *sugar* (e.g. *sugar-pie*, *sugar-daddy*, *sugar-britches*, *sugar-booger*, *sugar-bun*, *sugar-lips*, *sugar-smacks*) and *sweet* (*sweet-cheeks*, *sweetheart*, *sweet-pea*, *sweeting*, *sweet-pie*, *sweetie*, *sweetkins*, *sweets*, *sweet-love*). Other lexical items (e.g. *cupcake*, *muffin*) seem to be few and far between here. Obviously, human beings are not fond of tasteless foods and instead they opt for tasty ones, which is an experimental ground for ascribing *sweetness* to positively-valued phenomena, whereas *tastelessness* to negatively-valued ones (see Berrada 2007:8). The above-mentioned examples constitute a sample of the rich systematic manifestations that entail the conceptual metaphor THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS A SWEET FOODSTUFF.

² According to the *OED*, all marked lexical items fell into disuse.

Honey seems to be one of the most productive sources of endearments as it gave rise to a number of compounds listed above. Even though some of these lexical items failed to withstand the test of time and fell into oblivion prior to the 17th century (*honeycomb*, *honey-sop*, *honeysuckle*), there is also a group of extensions which emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g. the abbreviated form *hon*, the compounds *honey-bunch*, *honey chile* in the 19th century and *honey-child* in the 20th century) (see Crystal 2014: 105) and have been used since then. Historically speaking, the noun *honey* appeared in English in Anglo-Saxon times (825 “Swoetran ofer *huni*Æ³ and biobread”).) (the *OED*) when it started to be used in the sense ‘a sweet viscid fluid which is the nectar of flowers collected by certain insects’ (the *OED*). In the very middle of the 14th century the term acquired a novel human-specific sense and started to be employed in an endearing sense (1350 “William seide, ‘mi *hony*, mi hert al hol þou me makest”).) (the *OED*). The connection of honey and sweetness dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, since when honey has been used as a sweetener. Thus, given that we associate a sweet taste with positive values, whereas bitter, salty and sour tastes with negative ones, the noun *honey* became an endearment (see Palmatier 2000). Let us look at the metaphoric pattern underlying the interpretation of *honey*:

Source domain	→	Target domain
Food	→	People
Sweet taste	→	Positive values

People have been employing sweetness to talk about their beloved ones since the very beginning of the 14th century when the endearing term of address *sweeting* was documented for the first time (1300 “Hom rod him aylmer king, And wit horn þe *sweting*”).) (the *OED*). Oddly enough, following the *OED*, the history of one of the most frequently employed pet names, namely *sugar*, dates back to as late as the 20th century (1930 “*Sugar-pie*, common term of endearment”. → 1930 “A-settin’ on the ice till my feet got cold, *sugar-babe*”. → 1936 “When am I going to see you again, *sugar*?”) (the *OED*). Historically speaking, it was attested in English at the close of the 13th century (1299 “*Zuker Roch*”).) (the *OED*) and it took seven centuries until it acquired the sense in question.

Sweet taste, just like love, may imply both pleasure and indulgence. In order to show their affection, English speakers have been naming one another using the word *sweet* and its extensions for centuries. Interestingly, only one sweet-inspired pet name, namely *sweetlove*, has faded from usage, but that is mainly because it may be found in a literary translation of Virgil’s work (1560 “O husband *sweet-love* most desired”).) (Crystal 2014: 108), thus its usage was motivated only by the metre of the line. Likewise, the *OED* provides its readers with a single quotation from the very end of the 16th century of a derivative *sweetkin* (1599 “Flocking to hansell him and strike him good luck as the *Sweetkin* Madams did about valiant S. Walter Manny”).) (the *OED*).

In all the above-mentioned cases the shift from the domain of FOOD to the domain of ENDEARMENTS was inspired by the positively-loaded association evoked by the sweet taste of a given foodstuff. Thus, to show our affection we are inclined to employ terms that hold pleasant associations. Given that the majority of food-related pet-names are the names of something sweet, we may formulate the metaphor THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS A (SWEET) FOODSTUFF.

³ Emphasis mine.

Chronologically speaking, the compound *sweetheart* was the first sweet-based term of affection that was documented in the *OED* (1290 “Alas þat ich scholde a-bide þat mi child, mi *swete heorte*, swych cas schal bi-tide”). Initially, and until the 17th century, it was written as two separate words. The noun may be employed either for a beloved person or, more generally, as a familiar term of address. However, as noted by Crystal (2014: 105), in the second half of the 19th century the word underwent the process of pejoration and it acquired a negatively-loaded ironic or contemptuous sense (1977 “Try harder, *sweetheart*, or I’ll plug you in the guts”). (Crystal 2014: 105).

In this case we are dealing with a *pars pro toto* type of transfer discussed by, among others, Kövecses (2002), Bierwiazzonek (2013) and Kiełtyka (2020). As maintained by Littlemore (2015: 4), “metonymy is a figure of language and thought in which one entity is used to refer to another”. In cognitive terms, if two entities are somehow related, one of them provides mental access to the other one. In other words, in this cognitive process one conceptual element (in this case BODY PART – HEART) provides mental access to another one (HUMAN BEING, namely THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION), which is the target within the same domain (ENDEARMENTS) (see Kövecses 2006a: 99). One thing, or part of a given entity (heart) represents the whole (body – human being), because it is a physical part of it. Thus, we are discussing here A BODY PART FOR THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION metonymy. Following the division of metonymy proposed by Radden and Kövecses (1999), the BODY PART FOR THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION type belongs to the group of WHOLE AND PART metonymies, or – to be more precise – THE PART FOR WHOLE one. Note that in this case, metonymy serves a relation-building purpose. As far as *sweetheart* is concerned, it is not taste that formed the bridge between the literal and figurative senses of *sweetheart*, but rather the process of metonymy which is at work here. To sum up, the term in question is a metonymy-based pet name and it is not the *sweet* element of it that motivated the emergence of the endearing sense, but the body part (heart) which is associated with love (see Grząśko 2015). As convincingly argued by Palmatier (2000: 352), the heart is the seat of all emotions, including “love and the person so addressed has an abundance of it”. One may hypothesise that the semantics of the word was shaped in two stages by the working of two conceptual mechanisms, first metonymy and then metaphor, as depicted below:

Stage 1	PART FOR WHOLE metonymy	
	<i>heart</i> ‘body part’ stands for a person	
Stage 2	THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS SOMETHING/SOMEONE THAT EVOKES PLEASANT EMOTIONS metaphor	
	Source domain	Target domain
	Taste (sweet)	Positive values

There are also two derivatives, namely *sweetling* and *sweetie*, which are a continuation of the sweet motif. The former was documented in the first half of the 17th century (1648 “And (*Sweetling*) marke you, what a Web will come Into your Chests”. → 1903 “Speaker ‘*Sweetling*, show me thy face,’ cried he”). (the *OED*), whereas the latter one appeared in the second part of the 18th century (1778 “O My Yankee, my Yankee, And O my Yankee, my *sweet-ee*, And was its nurse North asham'd Because such a bantling hath beat-ee?”) (the *OED*). Crystal (2014: 112) notices that the diminutive suffix *-ling* that may be found in, for example, *duckling* is devoid of pejorative associations as in e.g. *princeling*. In turn, *sweetie* is usually employed with reference to a lovable person, not a lover himself.

From the cognitive viewpoint, apart from the case of *sweetheart*, which is a metonymy-conditioned pet name, in all the instances discussed above (*honey*, *sugar*, *sweetling* and *sweetie*) it is the associations with pleasant (sweet) taste of the foodstuffs that gave rise to the endearing human-specific pet names. We may postulate the general metaphor THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS A SWEET FOODSTUFF. The concept of ENDEARMENTS may be comprehended by means of the concept of FOOD, or – to be more precise – SWEET INGREDIENTS. However, we shall not ignore the context which may change the perception of *honey* and *sweetheart*. On the one hand, the words are terms of affection; but on the other hand, they may carry some negative overtones. Compare the sentences extracted from the *OED*:

1859 “*Sweetheart*, I love you so well that your good name is mine”.

1977 “Try harder, *sweetheart*, or I’ll plug you in the guts”.

In the former case, *sweetheart* functions as a term of affection; however, the latter usage suggests that we are dealing here with a term of contempt, given that *plugging somebody in the guts* is vulgar and it fails to carry any positive overtones. The context changes the meaning and the perception of a lexical item generally labelled as an endearment.

6. Plant-related terms of endearment

Apart from the process of foodsemy, there is yet another one that plays a particular role in the rise of the human-specific senses of various lexical items, namely plantosemy (see Mierzwińska-Hajnos 2010, Kowalczyk 2019). In such cases the rise of the endearing senses of the words hinges on two processes, namely plantosemy and foodsemy simultaneously. The former one is also known as plant metaphor; here some names of plant species are employed to denote and characterise human beings. And so, if a person is very tall, they may be referred to as a *cornstalk* (1848 “The average height of the Australians is probably more than that of the English, but when they exceed a certain standard they are apt to become loose made and weedy, thereby justifying their appellation of ‘*cornstalks*’”) (the *OED*). In what follows we shall discuss the semantic development of the lexical items whose endearing senses are based on the above-mentioned processes.

It turns out that both fruit and vegetables are few and far between as far as attested food-inspired pet names are concerned. This seems to be thought-provoking given that we associate fruit with being sweet, juicy, delicate and soft. All these features may refer to both a beloved person and the act of love. Hence, we would expect more terms of affection adverting to fruits. In Polish, Bańko and Zygmunt (2010) provide two instances of fruits that are employed in an endearing sense, namely *truskaweczka* ‘strawberry’ and *brzoskwinka* ‘peach’. In both cases it is the similarity between sweet taste plus the delicacy of the objects, and the beloved person that provides the grounding for the conceptual metaphor THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS FRUIT. However, we believe that in these two cases we are also dealing with the process of metonymy. The resulting two-stage pattern showing the interpretation of fruit-inspired Polish pet names is as follows:

Stage 1	PERSON FOR THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION metonymy	
Stage 2	THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS FRUIT metaphor	
	Source domain	Target domain
	Sweet taste and smell	Positive values

Interestingly enough, in English, none of these cases is attested in the *OED*, although it is evidenced that *peach* refers to an attractive young woman (1930 “Now would you think that a *peach* like her would fall for a fat-headed chump like that?”) (the *OED*), so we may hazard a guess that in a particular context it may be employed in an endearing sense.

Crystal (2014) provides us with two attested examples of plants, namely *cabbage* and *pumpkin*, employed as terms of affection. The former has been used as a pet name since the first half of the 19th century (1840 “Oui, mon chou, mon ange; yase, my angel, my *cabbage*, quite right”. → 1968 “Ambrose drew her close and murmured menacingly: ‘But I’m completely merciless, my little French *cabbage*.’”) (the *OED*) and it is likely to have been inspired by the equivalent French expression *mon (petit) chou* ‘my (little) cabbage’. The etymology of *cabbage* is quite surprising. On the one hand, we may say that it is not taste that motivated the human-specific sense of the pet name, but the size and shape (small and rotund) of the object that are associated with a child’s head (see Palmatier 2000). On the other hand, in French, *chou* describes puff pastry, thus it is often known as *chou a la crème*, so here taste must have influenced the human-specific endearing sense of the noun in question. The following pattern portrays the figurative development of *pumpkin*:

Source domain	→	Target domain
Vegetable	→	People (esp. children)
Shape and size	→	Body part (head)

Similarly, the motivation behind the latter plant-based endearment also seems to be dubious. The noun *pumpkin* is an altered version of *pumpion* which appeared in English in the first half of the 16th century (1545 “Pepo, a kynde of Melones called *Pompones*”.) (the *OED*). Note that, by and large, *pumpkin* refers to children (1942 “Terms of endearment, *pumpkins*”. → 1987 “Listen, *pumpkin*, I thought you ought to know”.) (the *OED*). According to Palmatier (2000), the loveliness of pumpkins is connected with their colour. Hence, this might have given rise to the figurative endearing sense of the noun in question. As far as the process of foodsemy is concerned, we may conclude that the language of love is rich in various sweet-relate terms with only a handful of exceptions to this rule. Hence, we may propose the tentative hypothesis that the language of love is very “unhealthy” as it generally lacks fruit and vegetables. The following pattern portrays the semantic development of *pumpkin*:

Source domain	→	Target domain
Fruit	→	People (esp. children and girls)
Colour (bright orange)	→	Positive values

In order to account for the fact that Polish *truskaweczka* ‘strawberry’, *brzoskwinka* ‘peach’ and English *pumpkin* and *cabbage* are used as terms of affection we need to bear in mind that plantosemic transfers have their basis in – by and large – the visual, gustatory and olfactory resemblance of some fruits and vegetables to parts of the body which underlie metaphorical shifts from the domain of PLANTS to the domain of ENDEARMENTS.

7. Obsolete food-inspired terms of endearment

Some of the endearments seem to be counterintuitive and *lamb-chop* provided by Crystal (2014) is one of such cases. The use of the noun is evidenced only by a single quotation from 1662 (in which one of the characters is described as *quite a lamb chop*). Thus, it might not be a direct endearment given that *chop* is the appellation for someone with fat cheeks. Interestingly, among the terms of endearment we may encounter one spice, namely *cinnamon*. According to Crystal (2014: 106), the endearing usage of the noun in question was attested once only and it was at the very beginning of the 15th century (1405 “My fayre bryd, my swete *cynamome*”).⁴, thus one can hardly say that it was a widespread term of affection in the past. By the same token, Crystal (2014: 106) provides us with yet another example of a pet name which was documented in a poem by Dunbar. According to *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, the noun *powsowdie* used to be a ludicrous term of affection in the 16th century. Given that there is only one quotation documenting its use, we may hazard a guess that it was employed in an endearing sense only to create a rhyme (1500-20 “My claver, and my curldodie, My hwny soppis, my sweit *possodie*”) (the *OED*) and not because of its taste. According to the *OED*, it was the name of a sheepshead broth or a drink of spirits and spices, which were known as a *posset*. As far as other obsolete food-related pet names are concerned, we shall briefly discuss the term *sucket*. The noun is an altered form of *succade*, which refers to fruit, especially the citrus species, preserved in sugar (see the *OED*). Following Crystal (2014: 111), there is only a single attested use of the word in question in an endearing sense. In this case the item’s meaning may have been motivated by the sweetness of *succade*, thus inviting the postulation of a metaphor THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS A SWEET FOODSTUFF.

Similarly, *bag-pudding* is documented only once in a play written by John Day. The pet name in question literally refers to a pudding which is boiled in a bag. However, this obsolete term was employed as a jocular endearment at the beginning of the 17th century (1608 “Farewell, sweet heart. God a mercy, *bagpudding*”). (the *OED*) and contrary to what might be expected it stems from the compound *jackpudding* ‘a buffoon, clown, or merry-andrew’ (1648 “The Junto-men, the Hocus-Pocusses, the State-Mountebanks, with their Zanyes and *Jackpuddings!*”) (the *OED*).

In terms of the cognitive approach adopted here, almost all of the pet names mentioned in this section are instances of situational thinking and contextual associations. Generally speaking, their usage is motivated by the meter of a line or some random associations with other words (*bag-pudding*). They all prove that human beings are able to be ingenious and conceptualise reality in a creative way (see Kövecses 2015). They once were context-dependent which, as one seems justified in conjecturing, is a reason why they failed to gain popularity and – as a result – they all fell into oblivion.

According to Lakoff’s (1993) theory, highly poetic or creative metaphors are – by and large – produced on the basis of what we are acquainted with in our own culture. However, there are idiosyncratic and unsystematic metaphors that often fail to be associated with notions specific to a given culture. Such artistic metaphors may result from the author’s personal experience or vivid imagination. They are not consistent with how we comprehend and perceive various things and concepts (see Berrada 2007: 33).

8. Conclusions

⁴ According to the *OED*, the endearing sense of the noun comes from 1386.

The role of context is crucial in determining the motivation behind some of the endearments. Depending on context and tone of voice, the terms may be either patronizing or they are likely to represent fondness (as in the case of *sweetheart* and *honey*). A number of pet names represent cases of words that were employed only once (e.g. *cinnamon* and *sweelove*), but these instances prove that human beings are capable of being creative in that they associate particular foodstuffs and flavours with affection. Such words conflate the pleasure of taste with those we love. It turns out that the processes that take place in our brain make us think in trans-sensory terms. When we invoke people as *sugar*, *sweet* or *sweetheart* we imbue them with such notions as sweetness and pleasure.

One needs to be very careful to avoid making sweeping generalizations as far as the universality of the pet names is concerned. Given that there is no data or cross-linguistic research devoted to the issue in question, we shall resist the temptation to overgeneralize and thus we shall talk about the marked phenomena typical of a single European language as some of the pet names are culture-conditioned (e.g. *pumpkin* is used in English-speaking countries), thus the interpretation of the metaphors varies with context. We may formulate some general metaphors: HUMAN BEINGS ARE FOODSTUFFS, FOODSTUFF IS ENDEARMENT or THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS FOOD, THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION IS A SWEET FOODSTUFF and there are a number of linguistic expressions that illustrate them, e.g. *honey*, *sugar*. In fact, it seems to be a universal rule in English that it is – by and large – sweet foodstuffs not the salty or sour ones that are employed in an endearing sense, but this is because of the positive associations they evoke. We seem to perceive people we feel affection for in terms of luscious food.

The weaknesses of the corpus we relied upon in our research was that it enabled us to draw only general conclusions and that the number of lexical items was limited. I also believe that in order to obtain a broader picture of the use of terms of endearment and the mechanisms conditioning the process it would be essential to conduct a fully-fledged, cross-linguistic contrastive study, given that there are a number of differences between pet names employed in different cultures.

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