Sociolinguistic Variation in the Names of Meals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is twofold: First, to describe the different designations of meals in English, both at a synchronic and diachronic level, by examining the existing written literature (lexicographic works, media, adverts). Second, to explain tlie different factors of both a linguistic and extralinguistic (social) nature, which account for the variation found in the names of the two main meals in Britain (lunch/dinner; dinner/tea/supper) while pointing out the inadequacies discovered in some of the studies dealing with this subject. All findings were reached through empirical data obtained by means of interviews in two areas, Northern nnd Southern England.

The paper also speculates on tlie various conditions which have led to the changes which have occurred within tlie semantic field of meals in the English language and points out tlie striking parallelism that exists in these designations and those of other languages, especially French and Spanish. (Keywords: sociolinguistics, linguistic variation, linguistic change, lexicography, stylistics, English dialectology, history of Enplish).

RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene un doble objetivo: En primer lugar, describir las diferentes designaciones de las comidas en inglés, desde una perspectiva sincrónica y diacrónica, mediante el examen de la literatura escrita (repertorios lexicográficos, medios de comunicación, anuncios). En segundo lugar, explicar los diferentes factores, de naturaleza lingüística y extralingüística (social), que explican la variación encontrada en los nombres de las dos principales comidas en Gran Bretaña (lunch/dinner; dinner/tea/supper) al tiempo que muestra las insuficiencias de los estudios que se han ocupado de esta materia. La investigación fue realizada a través de los datos obtenidos por medio de encuestas orales llevadas a cabo en el norte y sur de Inglaterra.

El trabajo también especula sobre las distintas circunstancias que han conducido a los cambios ocurridos dentro del campo semántico de las comidas en inglés y señala el paralelismo observado en estas designaciones con las de otras lenguas, especialmente el francés y el español. (Palabras Clave: sociolingüística, variación lingüística, cambio lingüístico, lexicografía, estilística, dialectología inglesa, historia de la lengua).

I. LEXICAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION: THE NAMES OF RIEALS IN ENGLISH

The question of variation in the lexicon has a long tradition in linguistics, but it has received a varying degree of attention under different linguistic paradigms or schools. Variation is a complex concept since it is structured under various axes (spacial, stylistic and social) and deals with linguistic categories (style. dialect. etc.) which are not always taken as discrete units. Because of this coniplexity. there was little significant progress made in the study of variation until recent times with the eniergerice of sociolinguistics.

First there was a concern with "spatial" or geographic variation, which was studied by dialectologists. Well into the 20th century, under the influence of structuralism. lexical seinanticists devoted much attention to primitive or basic semantic relations. principally synoiiyrny. and distinguished a great nuniber of diniensions of actual use within words that share identical componential features. Ullmann (1962:145 ff) discusses pairs and triads of words along a stylistic continuuni (e.g., *buy/purchase; end/finish/conclude*) and quotes Collinson's (1939) set of nine principles which underly such variation: literary and non-literary. formal and colloquial, etc. When there existed a series nf lexical options, the choice of orie particular item came to be thought of as intluenced by various factors such as subject-riiatter and individual style. Alternatively. stylistic variation might occur within a given text for euphonic reasons. a subject which later was analysed in depth from the perspective of text-linguistics, when studying cohesion and, more specifically, co-reference.

Linguists have traditionally shown great sensitivity towards "stylistic" (or situational) factors, but they have paid little attention to "social" factors. especially to social class. The consideration of social differences underlying the English lexicon was brougtit to the fore in the fifties by a British linguist, Alan Ross (1956). through his fanious study "U and Non-LJ: An Essay in Sociological Linguistics", the two categories standing foi Upper and Non-Upper class. The subject was popularized by the journalist Nancy Mitford. and pricked the sensibility of sonie English people. Certainly, Ross's study was impressionistic, based on his own intuitions and personal prejudices rather than on objective description. which made it unsatisfactory and open to criticism (cf. Barber 1964:30). but it helped to attract the attention of linguists to this phenonienon (cf. Buckle 1978. Wales 1994:6-8).

Although social connotations have been studied by sociolinguists since the sixties as an integral part of language variation. lexical differences have not been properly examined. at least not as thoroughly as other levels of language such as phonology, and this has occurred fnr several reasons.

First, there are methodological difficulties in trying to elicit tlie "vernacular" so as to analyse variation on solid grounds. Whereas phonological variation can be easily investiyated by eliciting certain variables in speech, with lexical variation one has to resort to written questionnaires in many cases in order to get a large and representative saniple and to study the variation caused by changes in the situational context.

Second. from a more theoretical or conceptual angle. there are authors who question the notion of "sociolinguistic variable". based on the synonymity of variants. if subtles shades of meaninp distinguish theni (Lavandera 1978). Furtherriiore. style and register may operate simultaneously at any level of language. According to P. Trudgill (1983). it is never possible to make a simple statement about language and social variation because other influential factors are involved, such as the sex of the speaker and the formality of tlie situation. There is also an important interaction between social and regional factors.

Other conceptual difficulties refer to the notion of synonymity itself. which. as Lyons points out. is not a straightforward concept. aiid the extension from sameness of meaning to sameness of function (eg. *hey* vs. *excuse me*). which is fraught with difficulty if functions are allowed to hecome very ahstract (Levinson 1988:166).

Nou;. even if we consider lexical variants that are easy to match in meaning. we find a neglect of the study of "sociolinguistic variation". This partly derives from the belief that there is not much social variation in the lexicon. Thus Hughes and Trudgill (1979:8) helieve that "What social variation there is within standard English appears to be limited to a rather small numher of lexical items. the choice of tlie word *serviette* rather than (table) *napkin*. for example. indicating interior social standing." lt is possihle that in some sociocultural systems. association with the upper class may not he signalled by special sociolinguistic variables. as Švejcer (1986:75) argues. hut most social and human groups are suhject to social differentiation and this somehow is reflected in language. There are certain areas of lexis which are especially proiie to social variation in many languages. One is forms of address. particularly in languages which have a pronominal systeni. such as the Romance languages (e.g.. Sp. *tú/usted*, Fr. *tu/vous*; cf. E. *you/thou* in the past). which has given rise to extensive literature. Also interesting in this connection. —and more lexical in nature—. is the sociolinguistic variation found in the designations of 'wife' (e.g., Fr. *femme, dame, épouse*; Sp. *mujer, esposa, señora* (cf. Rochet/Rodríguez 1989. Rodríguez/Rochet 1998).

Anothei area is tlie name of meals. Because of social iiiequality and differerit cultural hahits and life-styles. the names arid times of meals vary** in many European languages and cultures. Simply stated. we can distinguish three main meals in a tripartite scheme that has existed since Roman times. Of these three meals. the last two have different names which are usually the ohject of sociolinguistic variatiori. This is particularly rioticeahle in international languages such as English. French and Spanish. where. along with their differences. one can notice a certain parallelisni in their present and past usage which immediately leads us to think of similar cultural referents. In this article I will focus primarily on English while also coninienting. for the purposes of comparison. on other languages such as French and Spanish. l will analyse the names of meals. hoth on a synchronic and diachronic level hy using various approaches. gathering contributions from lexicography. etymology arid structural semantics. hut without forgetting the pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspective. Only in this way will we contrihute to a hetter understanding of their various and complex uses.'

I.1. The First Meal: *breakfast*

If there is some consensus today among speakers of English on both sides of the Atlantic. it is in naming the first meal of the day. *breakfast* (lit. 'hreaking the fast from the previous night'). with an etymological hasis similar to Fr. *déjeuner* and Sp. *desayuno*. The term is first attested in the second half of the 15th century (*brekfast/breffast* in 1463). lts forerunner seems to have been Old English *morgenmete* 'morning food (nieal)'

From the term *breakfast* soine shortened and hypocoristic forms have been created. such as *brakky*. used in tlie Australian dialect. arid *brekkers*. from the speech of British children. The latter is also found in tlie British student slang of the beginning ofthis century; its characteristic *-er* suffix is helieved to he a creation of Oxford University.

The ingredients and size of the meal vary according to individual taste. among other factors. hut in general we can distinguish two types in British usage: a) the *continental*

breakfast, which consists of tea or coffee and toast, and is characteristic of the middle class. and b) the *great* (or *full*) *British breakfast,* which consists of tea or coffee, cereals aiid fried eggs with bacon (to which sometimes mushrooms, sausages, fried tomato, etc. are added) and is typical of the lower classes (cf. Newmark 1988: 122). In tlie United States we also find differences in the size of breakfast. but more ofteii thaii iiot tlie size is thc result of the haste of the individual rather than the social class to which he or she belongs.

Although the term *breakfast* has a general use. as I pointed out earlier, in some dialect areas such as Jamaica and Bahamas, *tea* is also employed, especially among the lower classes (cf. Cassidy/Le Page 1967: Holm/Shilling 1982). Thus. in Jamaica, *tea* for tlie peasants and workers is the light meal taken from 5 to 7 o'clock in the morning and precedes *breakfast,* which is a heavier meal taken from 11 onwards (cf. DeCamp 1963:543; Burling 1970:35). In Jamaica I have also documented the expression *little dinner* used to refer to the meal taken when people get up earlier than usual. Sirnilarly, in the Middle Ages *dinner* was the meal with which lords broke their fast. in many cases around noon (cf. Shipley 1964). Under these circumstances, the resulting polysemy led to the differentiation hetween *first dinner* (for 'breakfast') and *secound dinner* (second rneal). as the main meal[2]. One should remember at this point that the name *dinner,* like *breakfast,* is used in accordance with its etymological meaning, for its far or ultimate etymon is Latin *disjejunare* ('break one's fast').

In present standard terminology there is a term to refer to the breakfast taken at a later time and used as a substitute for the second meal. or lunch. The blend *brunch* seems to have been coined by the British author Guy Beringer in 1896. and has kept part of its original artificial. humorous and affected connotation. However. according to Mencken. the word arrived in America about 30 years later and is so widely used nowadays that it is often described as an americanism (Clark 1987:263: Malkiel 1983:400). Generally, it refers to tlie first meal of a Sunday niorning. often after having been at a party thc previous night. In Anierica. hotels announce 'Sunday brunch' served after 11 o'clock.

1.2. The Second (and Midday) Meal: *lunch/dinner*

The second standard meal, taken at midday, has two names in English. *lunch* aiid *dinner,* which show some denotative and connotative differences.

In the Middle Ases. *dinner* was tlie chief rneal. taken originally between 9 in the morning and midday. which is a good reminder of its etymological meaning (from OFr. *di(s)ner,* and ultimately from Latin *disjejunare,* as I mentioned above). One can understand the original aura of the term in the light of the prestige associated with French cookery since Norman times. as is retlected in present-day English culinary terminology (*beef, mutton, dessert,* etc.). In some contexts *dinner* also meant tiesta and meal in a general sense. hence the use of the ordinal *first/second* prefixed to the noun to mark the time distinction (cf. *supra*).

Lunch as a term designating a meal is considered to be a shortened form of *luncheon* and its first appearance is docuniented in 1829. *Luncheon* originally meant a thick piece or hunk. and Iater a light meal (1706). taken between two of the ordinary meal-times. especially between breakfast and midday dinner. thus with a meaning similar to tlie present-day British term *elevenses*[3]. *Luncheon,* like *lunch.* was also used in a wider sense. as a meal taken at any time of the day. but in modern times the word has given way to *snack.* According to the *OED.* the original sense of *luncheon* is probably aii extension of *lunch* 'slice'. perhaps derived from Spanish *lonja* (although to me its spelling variant *loncha* sounds more plausible) which has

precisely that meaning.

As a name for a midday meal. *lunch* is used when the meal is customary and uneventful ('Pick me up for lunch'). and *luncheon* if it is a formal occasion. usually with invited guests and possibly speakeis ('The annual luncheon for employees will be given next week'. 'a literary luncheon'). Thus one understands why in the program of activities of the English Royal family published daily in *The Times. luncheon* is the form always employed. Because of its shortness *lunch* can also serve as a verb ('lunch with me') whereas *luncheon* is a noun only (cf. Shaw 1975).

As regards their social coiiiiotatioiis. *dinner* is a term frequently used in Britain for the main midday meal among the lower classes and children. whereas *lunch* is especially used among the urban middle classes who postpone the chief meal until the evening (cf. Room 1985: 1988)

The English writer George Orwell was aware of these class connotations when he wrote in his novel A *Clergyman's Daughter*: 'Luncheon, Dorothy. luncheon. said the Rector with a touch of irritation. I do wish you would drop that abominable lower-class habit of calling the midday meal dinner!'

1.3. The Third (and Fourth) Meal: *dinner/tea/supper*

The picture offered by the names of the third —and. for most people. the last— meal in English is more complex because of the number of meals as well as the polysemic value of one of its most important terms. *dinner*. used to designate the second as well as the third meal.

The usual time for the evening meal in Anglo-Saxon countries. like in most of Europe. is from 6 to 7 pm (from 12 to 1 foi the midday meal) in marked contrast to the Spanish time which oii average is 10 o'clock. This time difference has a great impact on the organization of work aiid business schedules and on the program of leisure and public activities in Spain. and it is oftcn unpopular with foreigners.

In addition to dinner. in British English two other terms are also used: *supper* and *tea. Supper* (*super* in Middle English) etymologically comes from OFr. *soper* which was originally applied to the last meal of the day. *Soper* in its turn derives from OFr. *supe.* later *soupe.* aiid French *soupe* comes from Latin *suppa.* a word of Germanic origin which was borrowed from the Franks. who used it to designate the piece of bread on which they poured broth. that is. 'soup' (cf. Partridge 1961: Coromines 1988).

In line with this meaning. it is used to apply to a late meal following an early evening dinner. for example when coming home after the cinema or the theatre and before going to bed. In this sense it is a less formal meal than *late dinner*. Nowadays. taken at an earlier time. *supper* can designate a meal made the occasion of a social or festive gathering. especially if it is held for raising funds for charitable or other purposes (e.g.. *church supper*)[4]. A still more distinctive use of *supper* is the religious. for it is the term used to refer to the Eucharist or Holy Coinmunion. as in the expressions *The Lord's Supper, rhe Supper of the Lord, the Dominical Supper, the Last Supper,* or simply. *the Supper.* which has been the favoured form by the extremist protestants since the 16th century (cf. *OED*).

Tea (or *high tea*) is tlie main meal if taken in the early evening (between 5 and 6 approximately). that is. between the midday *lunch* (or *dinner)* and a late *supper*. This meaning of *tea* is used in Britain especially by the working class. and in the north of England and in Scotland generally (e.g. 'I always come hack to find the tea ready'. 'at tea we all sat round the

table and talked about the day's events').

The name *tea* also refers to a light meal taken in the afternoon. between 4 and 5. usually consisting of sandwiches. scones and cakes taken with tea. It is also more formally known or announced as *afternoon* ten. This meaning of tea is used in Britain mainly by middle class people (e.g. 'Mr. Evans is coming to tea').

The widespread use of the term clearly shows how rooted the drink is in the eating hahits of the peoples of the British Isles (cf. Kane 1985 and Hannali 1987. on this issue). It is worth nientioning. however. that the term has a Chinese origin *(t'e* in the Ainoy dialect. *ch'a* in the Mandarin. whence the British colloquialism *char, cha* 'tea') and is said to have been introduced to England around 1655. perhaps by the Dutch or the Portuguese.

A century later (c.1738). and as a result of further seniantic change. the woid came to designate a meal or social entertainnient at which tea was served: from there it came to refer to the ordinary afternoon or evening meal at which tea is the main drink, and it is first attested with this meaning in 1738. This use. without the necessary presence of tea. has survived until today in British English as well as in some overseas areas like Australia and Newfoundland. where it has the meaning of the main nieal of the day (Rawson 1988: Story et al. 1982).

The adjective 'high'. applied to food and drink to refer to their rich quality. was uced with ten since at least the first half of the 19th century (e.g.. 1831. as recorded by *The Century Dictionary*. 1889). *High* ten originally referred to a tea at which Iiot meat was served, as opposed to 'ordinary' tea with hread. hutter. cake, etc. Nevertheless. such a nieal was usually less suhstanrial and elaborate than dinner, hence less ceremonious. This fact. together with the popularity that tea as a heverage had gained among the lower class (after 1715. according to Dr. Johnson). would partly account for the lower class connotation of the word. as in the following 19th century quote. recorded by J.A. Murray (1901): 'For people who are not in the habit of giving dinner parties... high tea is a capital institution.'

1.4. Other Terms

Apart from the names of the three main meals, there are others which are occasional variants or correspond to intermediate or irregular meals. Earlier I referred to British *elevenses* and American *brunch*. The former. more frequently known today as *coffee break*. is taken between 10 and 11 and usually consists of coffee and hiscuits.

For the light midday meal (*lunch*) there are other names. One of theni. *tiffin* (or *tiffing*). etymologically a 'little drink', is primarily Anglo-Indian and is widely used in India instead of *lunch*. Its origin goes back to the end of the 18th century (1785).

Other terms used in very resrricted contexts are *dindins* (a reduplication of the first syllable of *dinner*). which means a heavier meal for young children among the upper middle classes. and *snap* ('bite'), a packed lunch among the working class in northern England[5]. Variations include *fork* lunch (a cold buffet eaten standing). *ploughman's lunch* (a simple pub lunch of bread. pickles. cheese and heer). and a *wedding breakfast* (a ceremonial morning nieal after a wedding)[6].

Otlier irregular meals are *harvest supper* (a nieal in a church hall. after harvest time). *Christmas dinner* (taken from 1 to 3 and consisting traditionally of turkey plus Christmas pudding). and *tea break,* the name the British give to the tea and hiscuits taken mid-morning or mid-afternoon (and, some would say, at every other opportunity available to the British working man).

Finally come the narnes for a light rneal in a relatively non-specific sense: the formal *collation*, the informal *bite*, the originally Yiddish *nosh* (frorn the verb *naschen* 'to nibble or eat on the sly') and the currently frequently used *snack,* whose rneaning of a mere bite or morsel, light rneal, is first recorded in 1757. Similar terms which have becorne obsolete or are dialectal include *nacket, doggy, dumper, biting-on, piece* (cf. Partridge 1933:42-52).

II. MAIN MEALS: VARIATION IN USE

As noted earlier. variation in the use of narnes of rneals occurs especially with the two rnost substantial. rnidday *lunch/dinner* and evening *dinner/tea/supper*. At first sight, the use of such terrns should be easy to differentiate, given their different denotative meanings in terms of time and size. but difficulty arises when sorne crisscrossing or overlapping (social) factors are considered.

Generally speaking we can say that those who take a light *lunch* at rnidday do so because their rnain rneal will be in the evening. and they will call it *dinner.* If they have their rnain cooked rneal at rnidday, they will have a light *supper* (or *tea)* in the evening. But at a social level we have a double scherna: for rnany people. particularly working class (and above all manual workers), the rnain rnidday rneal is called *dinner.* The rniddle classes. on the other hand, prefer the terrn *lunch* for rnidday and *dinner* for the evening.

This pattern *lunch* and *dinner* is the rnost common today, especially in Arnerica. and it ernerged in the first half of this century (cf. Mencken 1945:513). According to Marckwardt (1958:126), in the early 1920's and 1930's it was considered proper, particularly by wornen. to refer to the evening rneal as *dinner,* and *supper* was old-fashioned. *Luncheon/lunch*, for the sarne speakers. in turn replaced *dinner* as the designation of the rnidday rneal. Along the sarne line. we can rnention Steadrnan's article "Affected and Efferninate Words" (1938:18). where we find that a nurnber of students classed *luncheon* as an affected or pedantic word. One of thern put it this way: 'We always had breakfast, dinner and supper in my family. *Luncheons* were always essentially ferninine to me, and the rnasculine use of the word seerns affected.' These are very interesting cornrnents for they are in accordance with Labov's staternent (1966a:288) that wornen are more sensitive than rnen to the stigrnatized variants of a given variable (the more so if we consider that both cornrnents preceded Labov's formulation of the thesis).

This shift of terms is also interesting frorn a sociological point of view. According to Marckwardt, such a shift was a delayed retlection of the changed eating habits of rnany Arnerican farnilies as a result of increased urbanization and industrialization. For farming and small-town farnilies at the beginning of the century. the heaviest rneal of the day was served at noon. and the evening rneal was lighter. Thus for that time. *dinner* and *supper* could be considered appropriate terrns, but soon after they started to be replaced by *lunch* and *dinner* (cf. also Morris 1975).

This terrninological turnover can be explained by sorne of the social changes related to industrialization which began to occur in North Arnerica in the 20's: the disappearance of live-in servants in rniddle class households and new opportunities for wornen to work outside the horne which brought about the use of new technical aids to housework. These changes no doubt contributed to the upset of the established rnanner of eating (*The Rituals of Dinner.* as Margaret Visser explains in a recent book by this title. Viking. 1992). And the process has been

reinforced considerably in our age with our tendency toward casual informality in our meals, due to time constraints, which has a clear manifestation in our liking for *fast food* (or *junk food)* at MacDonalds and lighter meals at noon (frequently consumed away from home. in the workplace or in public places like cafeterias and wine bars). Under these conditions one can understand why the heavier meal of the day *(dinner),* previously served at home. was shifted to the evening, with a resultant change of meaning and a gradual displacement of *supper*.

In Britain the decline in the use of *supper* started to occur even earlier, in the 19th century. as is reflected in the comments of some mid-19th century British travelers. On the other hand, the changes which occurred there are similar to those produced in France: in fact they were produced by imitation of them, according to Mencken. But despite the establishment of *dinner* as the standard form for the evening meal in Britain. *tea* and *supper* also co-occur with a certain frequency, in marked contrast to the United States where *tea* is no longer used.

A good barometer for measuring the British and American differences found today is the terminology of the hotel trade. which is usually determined by two forces which do not coincide: the need to be precise and the frequency of the term. In the U.S.. the examination of a number of meal adverts has led me to confirm the generalization of *lunch* and *dinner.* which indicates that *ditiner* is not felt to be ambiguous. In Britain. however, the polysemy of this term explains its not infrequent replacement by other variants. I recall a sign with the times of the meals *lunch* and *dintier* exhibited on the outside door of the University of East Anglia main cafeteria. in marked contrast to another on the wall inside showing the menus for *lunch* and *supper.* On the journey made round the restaurants of that region —the county of Norfolk— I came across signs advertising the service of *lunches, afternoon teas & evening meals,* all of which have the unambiguous character that *dinner* lacks. Also the accommodation adverts of the University often include the term *evetiing meals,* as a more precise description.

Despite the equivocal character shown by *dinner* in British English, this term is the most frequently used in everyday speech. which results in a complex variation of the names of the meals. The situation is further complicated by the general meaning that *dinner* has in English as it is often used as a generic name for a meal.

Figure 1: Times for Meals in Britain (from T. McArthur (1981) *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*		
among the English middle class, and the upper class generally	among the English working class, and in Scotland generally	time (approximately)
breakfast		in the morning, on getting out of bed
lunch fml: *luncheon*	*dinner*	12 noon (12:00 hrs) — 2 pm (14:00 hrs)
(afternoon) tea	*a cup of tea*	4 pm (16:00 hrs) — 5 pm (17:00 hrs)
	(high) tea	5 pm (17:00 hrs) — 6 pm (16:00 hrs) a cooked meal, but less than dinner
dinner, supper		7 pm (19:00) — 8.30 (20:30 hrs) a large cooked meal, usually the main meal of the day
	supper	9 pm (21:00) —10 pm (22:00 hrs) a small meal before going to bed

The variation in the rneal terrns described has been registered in lexicographic works with unequal attention. Most dictionaries account for the denotative and contextual (stylistic) but rarely for the geographic or social differences. On this point it is worth mentioning the diagrarn for the names of rneals found in McArthur's *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* (1981:217) which includes brief remarks about social and regional distribution as well as time of day and other denotative features (see Figure 1).

Newrnark (1988:122) provides another interesting diagrarn in his textbook on translation. No doubt this cornplex variability in the semantic field of rneals has ben adequately described in dictionaries and similar works. But there are sorne divergent points that suggest that the description is incomplete and not entirely reliable. Thus. for exarnple. according to Collins and McArthur and the *OED, supper* can be a large rneal. whereas Newrnark gives a simplified account when defining it only as a light meal; furthermore, for McArthur the term has social (rniddle-class) connotations when it refers to a rnain rneal. No less sirnplified is the account that Newmark gives of *luncheon* whose usage is restricted only to nobility. With regard to *tea*, Collins ernphasizes its use in northern England. whereas McArthur finds it characteristic of Scotland. As for *dinner* as a midday rneal, according to J. Clark's *Harrap's Dictionary of English Usage* (1990), the terrn is used by many, without further specification. while according to M. Manser's *Bloomsbury Good Word Guide* (1990) it is used by sorne. especially in Northern England and Scotland.

Certainly imprecisions and contradictions of this kind in dictionaries and linguistic studies are partly the result of brevity and condensation of presentation. Nevertheless, they are proof of the tlaws and dangers that vcan be encountered in the description of language use when this is based only on the intuition of linguists. however skilled they might be.

III. THE SURVEY

In order to gateher more reliable evidence, I carried out a sarnple survey by interview. in which I asked inforrnants to point out the different rneals taken in an ordinary day, with their corresponding times and details about size (whether 'light' or 'substantial'). The interview was basically open: however. in the few cases in which the inforrnants chose a terrn that fell out of the standard set here considered (for exarnple. *snack* or *evening meal*), they were asked to give a further explanation. I introduced myself as a sociologist interested in examing the life-styles of various countries so as to disguise rny real intentions and thereby elicit the rnost natural answers[i].

The research was carried out in 1992 in two areas of England fairly distant frorn each other: Greater London. and Leeds and Sheffield, in Yorkshire, henceforth referred to as South and North. I obtained a randorn sample of 220 respondents frorn the South and 325 from the North. stratified according to sex (rnen and fernale), age (4 groups: under 25, 25-45. 45-60. and over 60) and social class. For social class. I grouped people into 4 categories on the basis of professional occupation (P), by collapsing the classification of occupations used by Reid (1977) in *Social Class Differences in Britain.* and also in accordance with the 4 broad socio-economic categories used by Labov in *The Social Stratification of English in Nrw York City* (1966):

P4: "Professional": doctor, lawyer. university teacher...

P3: "Intermediate": manager. nurse, schoolteacher.. .
P2: "Skilled non manual": clerk, secretary, sales representative..
P1: "Manual": bus conductor, carpenter. electrician...

The data were analysed by means of a statistical program. the SPSS/PC+. and offered the overall results shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Overall Survey Results		
Meal	**South**	**North**
Midday meal		
Lunch	91.8%	69.8%
Dinner	8.2%	30.2%
Evening meal		
Dinner	70.7%	44.6%
Tea	17.2%	52.3%
Supper	12.1%	3.1%

Comparing the results, one notices that in both the North and the South the use of the meal terms for midday, ordered from most to least frequent, follow the same pattern: *lunch-dinner.* Although in both regions *lunch* is the unmarked term, *dinner* is more frequently used in the North. As for the evening meal, the results offer a more striking difference: whereas in the South the order is *dinner-tea-supper.* and the occurrence of *dinner* is markedly higher, in the North the order is *tea-dinner-supper.* Furthermore. while in the South *tea* and *supper* have a similar distribution, in the North *tea* is more frequently used than *dinner.* and much more than *supper*

The use of these terms in both regions is not uniform; it varies according to such social parameters as socioeconomic status (SES). education (ED), sex, and age. The SES and education are in themselves interrelated in so far as they point to a single dimension or concept, social prestige, which turned out to be the most clear independent variable, as can be seen from the results in Figure 3. Here. the use of *lunch* instead of *dinner* for midday. and of *dinner* vs. *tea/supper*, clearly correlates with professional status. The contrast between P1/P2 and P3/P4 is well marked in the North. The use of *dinner* for the midday meal is only evident among the working class (P1), especially in the North where its occurrence is higher than *lunch*. As for *tea,* its use is higher than *dinner* in the two lower groups (P1, P2) and it is only clearly rejected among the highest P4.

As for the second indicator. education, the use of the pair *lunch-dinner* is higher among the more educated. This is especially true in the case of *lunch,* which reaches a categorical use (100%) among the ED3 group in both areas. Conversely, the variants *dinner-tea* diminish with education and in the North they are the most frequently used among the less educated (Ed1).

It should be pointed out that the data refer to the most natural context since some variation was observed. especially in the North. There were people, particularly in the higher classes and among the more educated, who answered *lunch-dinner* first. but when asked a second time to relate their use directly to the most familiar situations. as when with family or friends, they shifted to *lunch* (or *dinner)* and *tea*. This was a clear indication that, despite the greater frequency of use of *tea* (and of *dinner* among P1 speakers). it is the pair *lunch-dinner* that is felt as the mark of prestige.

Figure 3: Socioeconomic Status and Education							
Socioeconomic Status							
	South				North			
	SES				SES			
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P1	P2	P3	P4
Midday meal								
Lunch	78.1%	98.6%	100%	100%	43.3%	68%	87%	90.9%
Dinner	21.9%	1.4%	-	-	56.7%	32%	13%	9.1%
Evening meal								
Dinner	61.1%	74.2%	76.7%	84%	25.8%	44.3%	42.2%	64.2%
Tea	34.7%	12.9%	4.7%	-	72.7%	52.6%	46.3%	32.8%
Supper	4.2%	12.9%	18.6%	16%	1.5%	3.1%	4.5%	3%

Education						
	South			North		
	ED1	ED2	ED3	ED1	ED2	ED3
Midday meal						
Lunch	81.7%	98.5%	100%	46.7%	73.9%	86.2%
Dinner	18.3%	1.5%	-	53.3%	26.1%	13.8%
Evening meal						
Dinner	63.7%	75.1%	76.3%	27.1%	50.5%	54.9%
Tea	34.1%	6.4%	3.4%	71%	45.1%	41.8%
Supper	2.2%	18.5%	20.3%	1.9%	4.4%	3.3%

As to the sex variable. an analysis of the data in Figure 4 shows that the prestigious pair *lunch-dinner* is more frequently used among women in the two regions, which is in agreement with Labov's proposition that women are more sensitive than men in such matters.

Figure 4: Sex				
Meal	South		North	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Midday meal				
Lunch	87.3%	97%	65%	74.4%
Dinner	12.7%	3%	3%	25.6%
Evening meal				
Dinner	69%	72.8%	40.9%	47.8%
Tea	19.8%	14.1%	56%	49.1%
Supper	11.2%	13.1%	3.1%	3.1%

Finally. age differences also have an effect on the use of meal terms, although the correlation of this variable is not so clear, or at least it is not so clearly perceived by speakers. However. an examination of the data leads us to notice an interesting contrast between the two surveys: see Figure 5. Whereas in the South the frequency of the prestigious variants *lunch* and *dinner* is higher among the younger group (-25), in the North it is lower. In the South the higher frequency of these terms within this group should be considered as revealing the stage of the process of change. Conversely, in the North its lower frequency could be understood in the light of various factors: in a situation of great variability in the use of the terms, the younger

group is prone to be less sensitive to the mark of prestige for. since they are still under parental influence. they are more inclined to use the variant (especially *tea*) which is more frequently employed in their family environment, the more so if it associated with a system of values. In addition to this. one could consider at this age the influence of the phrase *school dinner*, especially among high school adolescents. who were also included in the sample.

Figure 5: Age								
	South				North			
	Age				Age			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Midday meal								
Lunch	97.7%	92%	91.9%	86%	52.2%	72.9%	84.1%	70.9%
Dinner	2.3%	8%	8.1%	14%	47.8%	27.1%	15.9%	29.1%
Evening meal								
Dinner	72.1%	65.5%	81.1%	70.8%	33.3%	42.1%	53.1%	52.7%
Tea	11.6%	20.7%	16.2%	16.7%	64.4%	54.7%	40.7%	47.3%
Supper	16.3%	13.8%	2.7%	12.5%	2.2%	3.2%	6.2%	-

Besides these results, the interviews provided other interesting data for. apart from asking informants to name their meals, they were invited to make some open comments, and asked whether there were any differences in the naming of the meals over the weekend and with reference to those taken away from home in a restaurant.

In general, responses showed that. on the weekend, especially on Sunday, there is a delay in the two first meals. to such an extent that breakfast is often turned into *brunch* or *late breakfast* (about 11) and *lunclz* into *dinner*. which becomes a more elaborate yet relaxed family meal. A Sunday *lunclz*, however, is also common. especially in restaurants. When that is so. the evening meal becomes *tea* and its time stays the same (about 6 p.m.).

With regard to the second question, all the respondents coincided in pointing at *dinner* as the most appropriate term when they go to a restaurant. No doubt this has a lot to do with the degree of refinement that goes along with the change of place[S]. This usage corresponds to the evening, a time most usually associated with formal invitations to go out. otherwise *lunch* is the preferred term.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The older system for designating meals in English, the Anglo-Saxon *morgenmete, undernmete, aefenmete.* was purely descriptive. the differences being marked with reference to the time. morning, noon or evening at which people ate their food (*-mete* 'meat', but also *gifl, gereord.* etc.)[9]. This compound terminology. which brings to mind present-day German (*Mittagessen, Abendessen...*), would in time be displaced by more specific and simple terms related to the size of meals (e.g. *dinner* vs. *lunclz*) and some of their characteristic ingredients *(tea* and soup. as seen in *supper*). Such associations, nowadays lost for most people. are at the root of the denotative and connotative differences between those terms as well as their varying usage.

Furthermore. the evolution of these terms has led to a broadening of meanings. which has resulted in a great deal of ambiguity. This is especially true for the evening meal. One can.

in effect, ask when he is having his *dintier* (at midday or in the evening?). *Ten* can be had at virtually any time with different meanings which may vary according to the social position of the speaker and the time reference. Only by knowing these factors can one answer questions like: 'What time did you have tea'?'. 'Are you coming for tea?' And finally, the common meaning of *supper* is an unusual or additional late evening meal, but for some speakers it may also denote an ordinary evening meal.

As for the social connotations, one can notice that the habit of using the word *tea* to refer to the early evening meal, and. to a lesser extent. *dinner* for the midday meal, is still ingrained in the working classes of many parts of the country. The use of *tea* with this special connotation is also seen in *tea break* vs. *coffee break,* the latter term being more frequently found among middle classes: the fact that coffee is a more expensive product might not be alien to this curious distribution. The higher frequency of *tea* is especially noticeable in northern England. Yorkshire for example. a region with a working class cultural tradition. in great part derived from the mining and industrial activities which made it famous in the past (steelwork. textile mills. etc.).

This "old" terminological system continues to be in marked contrast with the "modern" system represented by *lunch* and *dinner,* which was brought in by the middle classes and has become characteristic of the more affluent and fashionable South, especially the metropolitan area of London. By becoming the norm. this pair has been established as the pattern to follow in Britain as well as in other English-speaking countries. and is the accepted usage. for example. of the hotel industry.

The usage in northern England is more complicated since there the division hetween upper and lower classes does not have the same effects as in the South. Cutting across the class distinction is a personal attitude of fidelity to the past, a psychological factor which some informants made obvious to me, sometimes in very explicit terms. The choice of *tea* instead of *dinner* for many middle class speakers in the North is a way to show strong pride in the values of their community and in their local standard.

The existence of so many crisscrossing factors in the system of meals in Britain makes these terms a good example of a highly (if not the most) complex lexical variable in English. This complexity is also found in other European languages. as noted below.

V. A BRIEF LOOK AT OTHER LANGUAGES

On the basis of the data gathered on the names of meals in English, French and Spanish for a previous study. I will show their similarities and differences in order to provide some new insights into the nature of the conditioning factors intervening in their present day usage and in the changes undergone.

The designations that comprise the semantic field of meals are based on lexemes which were originally motivated by and helped to mark the denotative differences that existed between them. The meanings on which such distinctions rest are varied, but they can be grouped into various categories if we consider their common specific semes.

> **a.** size of the meal (light): 'mouthful. morsel' (Sp. *almuerzo*), 'bite' (E. snack). 'a piece' (E. *lunch*, Germ. *Stück*, a piece of bread. in *Frühstück*); 'little' (Fr. *perir déjeuner).*

b. function: 'breaking one's fast' (E. *breakfast,* dinner; Fr. *déjeuner, dîner;* It. desinare): Sp. *desayuno,* O.Sp. and Port. *yantar.*

c. nature or type of food: 'soup' (Fr. *souper,* E. supper; 'tea (E. *tea),* 'coffee' (E. *coffe* break). 'bread' (Ger. Aberidbror or Vesperbror).

d. contextual circurnstance: 'taken communally, with the farnily' (Sp., It. cena).

e. order: 'first' (It. *prima colazione,* ME (*first* diner), 'second' (It. *seconda colazione,* Middle E. *secound diner).*

f. time:

> 1. part of day: 'morning' (E. *morning* tea. Port. café da manha), 'afternoon' (E. afternoon *tea),* 'evening' (E. *evening meal:* Gerrn. Abendessen, Abendbror, Abendnmhl: cf. also Vesperbrot); 'night' (Swiss Gerrn. Nachrmahl).
>
> 2. temporal scale: 'early' (Gerrn. *Frühstück*), 'high' [in the sense of late (E. (*high* tea).
>
> 3. hour (E. *five* o'clock tea, *elevenses,* Arn. Sp. las once, Col. Sp. medias *nueves).*

g. generic sense of 'eat'. as in Sp. comida. E. dinner. ('meal'); cf. also Gerrn. *Mittagessen.*

The categories formed by such sernes are not watertight cornpartrnents: they overlap since sorne of the rneanings have relations of equivalence or implication. Thus. *breakfast,* the 'breaking of one's fast'. is connected with the beginning of the day, and time and chronological order show a similar close relationship.

One should bear in rnind that all these characterizing features were originally denotative and formed the basis of the etyrnology of their narnes, but today they have lost part of their transparency. The readjustment of terms that has taken place hand in hand with sorne social and cultural changes has brought about adjustments in their sernic configurations. The greatest changes have been produced in the area of the connotative sernes, that is, in the area of virtual sernes ("virtuernes"). based on the associations evoked in the various speakers. To this type belong the sernes related to the "irnportance" of the rneal (the most or least important). the "formality" of the event (cerernonious or ordinary), the "social class". etc. In the last analysis. they are individual or social evaluations. but they are not general in character since they do not hold any relation with the rneaning of the constituents.

The following diagram (Figure 6) with the lexernaries of the narnes of the main rneals in French, English and Spanish (including their European and Arnerican varieties) also show striking sirnilarities and differences.

Figure 6: Similarities and differencies in French, English and Spanish			
Meal	**French**	**British English**	**American English**	**Spanish**
1	*(petit) dejeuner*	*breakfast*	*breakfast*	*desayuno (*almuerzo)*
2	*dejeuner/diner*	*lunch/dinner*	*lunch/dinner*	*comida/almuerzo (*yantar)*
3	*diner/souper*	*dinner/supper/tea*	*dinner/supper*	*cena/comida*

Meals on the whole follow the tripartite scherna of ancient times, although today there is a

greater division and variation —intermediate meals, time differences— as a result of greater hierarchization and professional specialization, and a general improvement in living conditions.

As the arrows indicate, the most outstanding feature has been the gradual displacement of the three meals that has taken place over time with the increasing modernization of society, which is well reflected in the variation in meaning of some terms. The most extreme case is French *diner* and English *dinner,* which, like Portuguese *jantar*, have switched from a morning to an evening meal.

Semantic changes in the names of meals have not been sudden or completely uniform, which has resulted in various ambivalences: Sp. *almuerzo* and Fr. *déjeuner* are used for breakfast as well as for the midday meal, and Fr. *diner* and E. *dinner* refer to both midday and evening meals. The new forms introduced as a result of this displacement were first adopted by the highest strata of society. As regards Fr. *diner* and E. *dinner,* the change from breakfast to the midday meal originated at the medieval court, as happened some time later with the Spanish change from *yantar* to *comida.* More recently, we could point to the replacement of *dinner-* by *lunch,* and *supper* (and *tea)* by *dinner* due to the influence of the emerging middle class, and the same social meaning can be attributed to the change from *cena* to *comida* in some countries of Latin America.

The analysis of the social assessment of such terms in the three languages has led me to discover other curious coincidences. In the three, the prestige term for the evening meal being favoured by the high sociolects is an archilexeme, although the derivative process involved has not always been the same (thus, whereas in Spanish *comida* there has been a "restriction" of meaning, in Fr. *diner* and E. *dinner* there has been an "extension" of it). This isomorphism has as a correlate the same cultural referent. In effect, following the path of the Roman tradition, the evening meal today is regarded as the meal 'par excellence', and this is true in Europe as well as America, Spain being a really atypical case. In this light we can understand the differences between Spanish *cena* and American Spanish *comida,* which is nearer to the North American or Anglo-Saxon tradition."'

If we look at the stigmatized term, which is the most prone to be replaced in the process of change, the parallel is no less significant. The general tendency, especially in the urban middle class, is to disfavour terms like *tea* or *supper* in English, *souper* in French, and, to a lesser extent, *cena* in American Spanish, unless they are used to designate minor meals (intermediate *afternoon tea* or *late supper,* Fr. *souper,* Sp. *cena).* thus giving them a specialized meaning. The unfavoured term in the majority of cases has as 'far etymon' a name of food (soup in *supper* and Fr. *souper,* tea in E. *tea)* although not many people are aware of the etymology of the former.

This fact, in addition to the influence of the ellipsis phenomenon, would account for the substitution of *Vesper* for *Vesperbrot* in German, but also many German speakers' preference for *Abendessen* instead of *Abendbrot,* which has an archaic, regional, and even colloquial register. In any case, the two terms are frequently used due to the powerful associations on which they rest. On the one hand, *Abendessen* rests on the analogy with *Mittagessen,* since *Abend* and *Mittag* act as qualifying prefixes which make the compound name very precise in its meaning: this has resulted in "lexical polarization" which has been well received in hotel trade terminology, thus contributing to reinforcing its use. *Abendbrot* for its part has been propped up by sociosemantic associations: in German food customs *Mittagessen* (like archaic *Mittagsmahl*) designates the midday repast, which is usually a main and elaborate hot meal; the evening meal, on the contrary, is usually a cold dish consisting of

bread, cheese, fruit and pastry, and. under such circumstances, Abendbrot turns out to be a most appropriate term on account of its semantic transparency (lit. 'evening bread').

Besides these two terms. in the past there was a third one, *Abendmahl*, which has been associated with Christ's Last Supper to the extent of becoming its only meaning. *Abendmahl* is a good illustration of the reluinctancy in various European countries to use the name which is given a liturgical or religious sense for an ordinary meal, thereby acting as a kind of taboo. The process is similar to the one undergone by French cene (which gave way to *souper*) and Portuguese ceia (replaced by jantar) (cf. Malkiel 1983:400). The same feeling might explain. in part, the gradual disuse of *supper* in English and cena in some areas of Spanish America.

Apart from the aforementioned similarities between English and French, these languages show a remarkable parallelism in the geographical distribution of some of their meal variants. If in England, like in America. the emerging pattern, lunch-dinner, takes place predominantly in the South, and the "old" system, dinner-tea (and to a lesser degree supper) in the North, the pattern to be generalized in the North of France is *déjeuner-dîner* whereas in many areas of the South *dîner-souper* is most common. just like in Catalan dinar and *sopar*. Although this may appear to be a real contrast, when taken from another angle, in fact. it is not, as the "modern" system is in hoth cases particularly linked to the metropolitan areas of their respective countries (London. Paris).

From the preceding comments we may conclude that, on the whole, although there are some national and idiosyncratic uses, one can also notice common patterns in markedly different languages. The differences in the names of meals can be explained if we take into account the cultural differences of some countries as well as the intricate network of intra and extralinguistic (sociolinguistic) factors which at times operate.

On the one hand, we are particularly attracted by and ready to find semantic transparency in the word pair designating the two sizeable meals (e.g. E. *lunch* < dinnei; Port. *almoço* < jantar; Sp. Am. almuerzo < *comida/cena*; Pen. Sp. comida > *cena)*. On the other hand. from the same lexico-semantic perspective. we can also consider the hlocking of a certain form prompted by a desire to avoid a homonymic clash —the recurrence of forms in the same speaker is very rare— or. on the connotative level, various associations having to do with a religious use (E. supper. Sp. cena, Fr. cene) or the denotative or referential meaning of the etymons (E. tea, *supper*).

Now then, this connotative value of names may be ambivalent, positive or negative, and here is where the different social evaluation comes into play. As a general rule. there seems to be a tendency in the higher classes to prefer the simplicity of the generic (or archilexemic) term. and to disregard the names with religious or formal connotations. The convergence of these two factors is not accidental: in some ways, it is in agreement with the view of some American lexicologists for whom a characteristic feature of the upper classes is their preferente for plain and unpretentious words. As Pyles and Algeo (1970:41) put it: "In general. it may be said that the U-usage [upper class] of *any* language is blunter. more earthy. more spade-calling than non-U. In this respect, as in a good many others. it is closer to substandard speech than to middle class speech".

Now, it is obvious that *dinner* in English is ambivalent. and apart from its general sense (a dinner. a meal) it has high connotations (meaning banquet. or important or ceremonious meal). and for this reason its extended use can also be considered a reflection of the tendency of the middle classes to make use of expressions smacking with affectation, pretense and conceit, as argued by Lord Melbourne (cited by Packard 1959: 140-41; cf. Pyles/Algeo

170:41); somehow. this arpument is in line with Labov's (1966b) hypercorrection hypothesis. This is at least the feeling which underlies the beginning of the change process. although today it might not be perceived so clearly as a result of the standardizing effect of the mass media.

NOTES

1. This article is a revised and expanded versioii of "The naming of iiieals". *English Todav*, 9. 4 (1993), 45-52.

2. Cit. by Sherman 1975: cf. also *dinat de matí* vs. *dinar major* in iiiedieval Catalan (cii. by Coroniines 1988:135).

3. Accordiiig to Barnhart (1988). tlie semantic development was probably iiitlueiiced by north English *lunch* (hunk of hread or cheese). aiid tlie morphological developnient may Iiave been by alteration of dialectal *nuncheon* (light meal), developed froiii Middle English *nonechenche* 'noon driiik'.

4. As exaniples I will cite two adverrs contaiiied in a leaflet published by the English Club of San Juan, Alicante. in 1986. They said 'Septeniher supper to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of tlie club' and 'Special Royal Wedding Supper —Wednesday, 23rd of July' (Tliis supper in particular included in its program a toast to the Royal couple with a glass of champagne).

5. *Bagging* is also used as an alteniative in the north aiid midlands (Thorne 1990)

6. Cf. Newmark (1988:122)

7. This survey was preceeded by a pilot-study whicli I carried out one year earlier in Norwicli. where 1 distributed written questioiiiiaires. following rlie iiiethod I used for my aork oti the Spanish ternis for 'wife' (cf. *supra*). Noa, whereas in tlie case of rhe Spanish variable. tlie written questionaires were almost compulsory because of tlie great variety of situational coiitexts iiivolved, tlie survey oii tlie terms for iiieals could easily be coiiducred orally. I aiii grateful to Peter Trudgill for suggesting rhis possibility and for other valuahle comments at tlie preliminary stage of this research. Aiiy flaws or errors of iiiterpreiation this article may contairi. Iiowever. are entirely mine.

8. The degree of refuieineiit diat goes along with the change of place is similar to the one ohserved with 'dessert': as oiie informant noticed, in a restauraiit 'you Iiave *dessert* and not *pudding'*. For the social connotation of the nanies for tlie last course of the nieal. see Barber (1964:17) aiid Brook (1979: 38).

9. Cit. by Bosborth (1972); Buck (1949); Hall (1916)

10. A reference to the nanies of meals in Spanish caii be found in Carnicer (1972) aiid Criado del Val (1973). for Peninsular Sp.. aiid Valeiicia (1984) for Chilean Sp.

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