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Food as a Nonverbal Communication System.

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Introduction.

A great deal of variety in the conceptual issues and topics exists in nonverbal communication research. Terminology changes from study to study. The relationship of verbal and nonverbal communication is not always agreed upon. Robins¹ says the inter-relation of language and behavior is «intrinsically improbable», and there should be «an initial sharp separation» between verbal and nonverbal communication. An opposite view is held by Pike² who stresses «Verbal and nonverbal activity is a unified whole, and theory and methodology should be organized or created to treat it as such». In spite of attempts by Pike and others, there is still no completely developed theory and methodology that is widely accepted. This analysis which is based on the work of the French structuralist Barthes will attempt to provide a model by expanding his taxonomy using as data the nonverbal system of food.

In order to live people must eat. Leach³ says «Natural man is omnivorous. He can digest insects, reptiles, fish, meat, vegetables and

1. R. H. Robins: *Linguistics and Anthropology*, «Man», 1959, p. 2.

2. K. Pike: *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, The Hague 1967, p. 26.

3. E. Leach: *The Influence of Cultural Contact on Nonverbal Communication*, in: R. A. Hinde (ed.): *Non-Verbal Communication*, Cambridge 1972, pp. 340-341.

fruit in wide profusion. Where it not for self-imposed inhibitions about what is or is not proper food, man-in-the-wild need seldom go hungry... As between one society and another the cultural rules which determine food choice may vary enormously, but it is invariably the case that there are such rules and that they are treated as socially important».

Lévi-Strauss⁴ says «there is not society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food». The importance of food and cultural rules is discussed by cultural anthropologists but usually neglected or given very brief discussion in communication studies. In Barthes' *Element of Semiology* food is considered one of the many signifying systems. The others which he discussed are furniture, clothing, and architecture. Barthes' «work is based on Saussure who in 1916 postulated a system of signs, whatever their substances and limits: images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment; these constitute, if not **language**, at least systems of signification»⁵.

Barthes⁶ begins his analysis with the language/speech distinction proposed by Saussure. Food speech «comprises all the personal (or family) variations of preparations and associations (one might consider cookery within one family, which is subject to a number of habits, as an idiolect)». Food language «is evolved only from broadly collective use or from purely individual speech»⁷. Barthes says that the food language consists of rules of exclusion, such as taboos, signifying opposition of units, simultaneous and successive rules of association, and rules which act as a type of food rhetoric.

Both the linguistic sign and the semiological sign consist of the signifier and the signified. Although they share this similarity there is a difference between signs in the two systems. Some nonverbal systems such as food, according to Barthes⁸, have «substance of expression whose essence is not to signify; often, they are objects of every day

4. C. Lévi-Strauss: *The Culinary Triangle*, «New Society», 1966, p. 937.

5. R. Barthes: *Elements of Semiology*, New York 1977, p. 9.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

use, used by society in a derivative way, to signify something». Food is used as nourishment and is also a sign. Barthes⁹ believes «as soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself».

Within a language there are two kinds of relationships or planes between the terms or the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic or associative. These relationships are the syntagmatic exist both in the linguistic and the nonverbal systems.

The syntagmatic is the horizontal plane. It is «a combination of signs, which has space as a support. In the articulated language, this space is linear and irreversible... two elements cannot be produced at the same time... each term derives its value from its opposition to what precedes and what follows»¹⁰. In the verbal system Saussure¹¹ says, «The elements are arranged in sequence on the chain of speaking... The syntagm is always composed of two or more consecutive units». Syntagmatic relations apply to words and groups of words and to longer units such as sentences.

Table 1 is an example of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships as they exist in the linguistic system. In the subject slot a noun such as Mary, John, pronouns, etc. can be used. Verbs such as **walk, talk, run, eat**, etc. with their appropriate inflections can follow. Adverbials can include **quickly, as fast as possible, every day**, etc. There are different types of food sentences. Some units are optional and some units can be placed in different position in both systems.

Table 1. Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relation in Linguistic System English Declarative Sentence.

Syntagmatic	Paradigmatic				
	Subject	+	Predicate	+	Adverbials
	Mary		walk		quickly
	John		talk		as fast as possible
	he		run		every day

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

11. F. de Saussure: *Course in General Linguistics*, New York 1959, p. 123.

In the food system there are also syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. An example of these in middle class North American dinner is in Table 2.

Table 2. Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations on Food System North American Dinner.

Syntagmatic	Paradigmatic				
	Appetizer +	Salad +	Main course +	Dessert +	Beverages
	chicken soup	mixed green	meat (and vegetables)	pie	milk
	tomato soup	cole slaw	fish	cake	tea
	fruit cup	Waldorf	eggs	ice cream	coffee

In the food system there is also order. The order may be set by the sequence in which the food is presented — the main course is served before the dessert. Since no one can consume a meal in a single bite or swallow, people have to provide an order for themselves when none is given to them. Most people still eat the main course before the dessert. The process of eating for most people is irreversible since food is ingested once. If it is regurgitated, it is not eaten again.

This horizontal plane, the syntagmatic, consists of two or more units if it is to be considered a food sentence or meal. Some food units or food words could be divided into smaller units that can be subject to various conditioning factors. A hamburger could be salted or unsalted, made of pure beef or a blend of beef and other things, fried, broiled, etc. The syntagmatic relationships suggests a relatively fixed number of units, which usually occur in a rather determined order. Meals are equivalent to linguistic utterances. The main meal of the day may consist of soup, salad, meat and vegetables, dessert, and beverage. Some of the units are optional, but a unit called the main dish, or main course is usually obligatory. For some people it must contain meat; for others it cannot.

The other plane of language which is vertical is the paradigmatic or associative plane. This dimension is composed of units which are more indefinite in number and indeterminate in order. In the food system, a paradigmatic relationship exists between ice cream, pie, and cake. They are all desserts in middle class urban North American culture and are usually eaten at the end of lunch or dinner.

Changes can occur more easily in food paradigmatic planes than in food syntagmatic planes. This is also true in the linguistic system. The food lexicon is the most flexible part of the food system. New units can be introduced. Perrier has recently become popular in the category. In culture contact situations, food units can be borrowed. After a time they become part of the food lexicon. Pizza is an example of this type of borrowing in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Changes on the syntagmatic planes are possible, but occur more slowly both in the linguistic system and the food system. Although the order is rather fixed, there are some optional changes in order. In the food system salad may be eaten before or after the main course. In the linguistic system some units such as adverbs and prepositional phrases can occur in several parts of the sentence.

But other orders such as the following are not acceptable.

*Walked slowly she into the room.

As appealing as it might be to begin a meal with chocolate cake, in the most settings it would produce raised eyebrows. Some linguistic sequences like some food sequences have more fixed orders than others.

There are different degrees of formality in both the linguistic system and food system. The following directives differ in degree of formality.

Would you please sit down?

Sit down.

Meals, like directives, differ in degrees of formality. Dinner might consist of stew eaten from a can, or it might consist of an eight course meal. The same person might consume both on different occasions.

The universals of food systems can be discussed from many points of view. Lévi-Strauss¹² describes them in terms of oppositions and the meanings that are found. He proposes the culinary triangle which consists on the raw, the cooked and the rotted.

FIGURE 1

The raw is at the apex and the cooked and rotted are at the base. Cooked is cultural transformation. Within the cooked category, roasted is one the side of nature and boiled on the side of culture. Lévi-Strauss¹³ finds that by developing the model «we can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure — or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions».

The food system can be described in synchronic or diachronic terms. Revel in *Culture and Cuisine*¹⁴ analyzes the changes which occur in the food systems of various cultures over time. Butter was unknown to the Greeks and Romans and some food items such as meat have disappeared.

Just as verbal systems differ from culture to culture, so do food systems. This can be seen on both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic planes in each system. The order in which food is eaten can vary from one country to another or in geographic or social groups within a country. Beverage in some areas is obligatory with the main course; in other

12. C. Lévi-Strauss: *op. cit.*, p. 940.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 940.

14. J. F. Revel: *Culture and Cuisine*, New York 1982.

areas it must follow. The units that constitute an associative or paradigmatic class can differ. In some cultures rice is part of the main course while in others it is not. Although dog, guinea pigs, insects, etc., are not usually eaten in the United States, other countries include these in the edible meat class.

In the food system cultures determine not only what is considered to be a unit in each category and the order in which they are consumed, but also the number of meals, amount to be eaten, time of the day when eaten, preparation, presentation, temperature of food, position of eater, manner of eating and place of eating.

The food system can be described from a culture contact model. For example, potatoes and corn were introduced to Europe from America. Transmission of food items, as well as methods for preparation and manner of eating are not limited to continents and countries and countries but is found across subgroups within a culture.

The models and definitions taken from linguistics that have been expanded to include the nonverbal system of food provide a useful framework for discussing this method of communication. Linguistic models have been borrowed and adapted with success in other disciplines such as anthropology. Speech act theory has been used to describe the pictorial language of art¹⁵. Adapting terms and models from other disciplines can provide clearer models and deeper insights.

One of the difficulties in the description of nonverbal communication systems has been the lack of a unified set of terms and definitions. This problem is compounded when nonverbal and verbal communication are compared because the terms and models used in one are different from those in the other. The interaction of two systems will not be completely understood as long as different models are used in each. Special terms will be needed for verbal and nonverbal communication systems, but a generalized framework that can encompass both is necessary. The extension of the structural framework developed in linguistics to nonverbal systems such as food can serve this purpose.

The food an individual or a group eats, the way it is prepared, and the way that it is eaten contains many messages. It can indicate geographical origin and social status, the gender and age, and the religion, rituals,

15. G. Kjørd: *Inness and the Battle at Hastings or doing things w/pictures*, «The Monest», 1974.

and taboos of the people who eat it. The analysis that follows focuses on the Caribbean area, Latin America and the United States.

Geographical origin and social status.

The kitchen has worldwide significance in the emotional and biological well-being of people, and the food produced within its quarters carries the cultural traits characteristic of any human endeavor. The foods people prepare and eat are but a part of a closely knit system which identifies them with a group of people from a particular geographical area and from a particular stratum in the social hierarchy. Food communicates nonverbally the geographical background and the status of people in relation to their social group. In Puerto Rico, this does not mean that by eating rice and beans an individual tells others that he/she is of a low socio-economic background, for food must be seen within the more complex system of the culture in which it is found.

In the last hundred years, food from different parts of the world have sometimes been found very far from their geographical origins. This may be due to forced migrations, development of tourism, or to the desire to enrich the national cuisine with a distinctive flavor of dishes of popular and regional origin¹⁶. For example, Cuban and Argentinian food have become favorites of many in Puerto Rico due to the large number of relatively recent arrivals of people from these areas. In addition, there are hundreds of regional specialties consumed throughout the world not only in specialized restaurants but also in average homes in the United States and other countries.

In Barthes' analysis of the food system a menu is constructed within either a regional or national context. Geographically, food systems from different regionals vary according to the time of day, day to the week, and season. In Puerto Rico many years ago, *viandas*, starchy vegetables grown locally were served with codfish for lunch. Rice and beans, another typical Puerto Rican dish, was also served at one meal — dinnertime. To serve it for lunch would have meant that the person serving it came from a low socio-economic background. Now it is

16. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

eaten at lunch or dinner in the great majority of Puerto Rican homes as the main course or a side dish.

In the Caribbean area a food associated with a particular meal may be associated with another meal on a different island. For example, in the Dominican Republic mashed plantain, *mangú* is served at the morning meal. Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, eat a similar dish called «mofongo» but exclusively for lunch or dinner — never for breakfast. In addition to the time of day, the day of the week a particular food is eaten is also indicative of regional origin. For example, in the United States, particularly in the summer, a craze has developed for barbecues often cooked by the husband.

The season of the year is important in regional cooking. In Puerto Rico special Christmas food is called *comida navideña*. The Puerto Rican's concept of the Christmas season is intimately bound to the food at this time. All restaurants include on their luncheon and dinner menus the typical *pasteles* (meat pies), *morcillas* (blood sausages), *lechón asado* (roast pig), and rice and pigeon peas. Social status is not in question here, for all Puerto Ricans are bound by a celebration which goes back to the 1500's.

Not related to any particular season but a particular kind of weather is the Puerto Rican's tradition of associating rainy days with soups — *sopas*, *sopones*, and *asopaos*. In a tropical country, cool days are unusual; therefore, local rainstorms provide an excellent excuse to eat a boiled dish which Lévi-Strauss identified as the inner family meal.

Three other factors indicate geographical origin: the time for the heavy meal, the time set aside for each meal and the amount of time spent eating. While most North Americans have their heavy meal in the early evening, many Latin Americans enjoy this same meal as late as 10:00 pm.

The paradigmatic and syntagmatic models offer a means of closely analyzing regional origin and social status. In the paradigmatic model the vertical dimension identifies the different possibilities of component units within each category. The units in each category vary according to the country's economic situation, the availability of foods, and the type society in terms of its attachment to traditional values. The better the economic situation and the greater the availability of different products, the greater the number of possibilities in each

category. In a less traditional society there is a higher possibility of increasing variety.

Status is also reflected in the paradigmatic dimension. Members from a higher social level have more choices of food available and greater quantities of those items which are more costly. In a questionnaire given to a group of women belonging to a socially recognized organization in Puerto Rico 100% of the women selected beef, veal, lamb, shrimp, and lobster as their choice for the main course at a dinner party. In the same questionnaire given to middle-class and low-class women, the majority selected chicken, pork, rice, and lasagna for the main course. Both groups rejected rice and beans and the local starchy vegetables.

In the rest of the Caribbean, the members of the lower socio-economic class may have only coffee for breakfast while those in higher classes enjoy both abundance and variety.

The syntagmatic dimension indicates more clearly regional origin and social status. The order in which food is eaten and the combinations that are made of the different syntagms vary according to place and status. The linear order of the breakfast menu in the Dominican Republic cannot be altered; hot tea or coffee is always served at the end of the meal. In the United States, on the other hand, coffee or tea may appear at any time during the meal. In many restaurants coffee is offered once a person sits down.

Combinations of food units are also culturally determined. For breakfast, the Dominicans combine *mangú* or mashed plantain with fried eggs, fried cheese and fried ham, all on the same plate. Later they have coffee with milk. Americans do combine eggs with bacon and toast, but they have fruit or juice first and coffee throughout the meal.

How is status conveyed in the syntagmatic dimension? The number of syntagms or courses in a meal tends to increase with an increase in social rank. The lower socio-economic group has one or two courses while the higher may have up to seven. The idea of serving food in a particular order at great banquets and formal dinners was not introduced in French culinary history until the beginning of the 19th century by the famous Frenchman La Reyniere, the first modern gourmet. Previously all food was set on the table simultaneously and diners would make their selection at their leisure.

Lévi-Strauss states that the choice of cooking methods is not a matter of tastebuds but of culture. A society which uses boiling as its most important method of cooking, regionally speaking, belongs to the most primitive areas and a society which employs roasting, on the other hand, is more democratic. Moreover, the boiled is referred to as endo-cuisine, prepared for domestic use and destined for a small closed group while the roasted belongs to exo-cuisine, that which one offers to guests. Formerly in France, boiled chicken was for the family meal, while roasted meat was for the banquet...¹⁷.

Status is also reflected in the boiled-roasted opposition. According to Lévi-Strauss, boiling conserves the meat and its juices entirely, while roasting is accompanied by destruction and loss. The first is synonymous with economy, the second with prodigality. «The former is plebeian, the latter aristocratic»¹⁸. Therefore, in those societies which prescribe differences in status, this is of primary importance. Thus, the modern societies that boil and fry like the Dominican, have closer family systems and give status more importance. Other modern societies that roast like the north American and Canadian, have family systems that are less close and give less importance to status. Simplistic as it may seem at first, this has been held by Lévi-Strauss to be true in many parts of the world.

Other aspects which determine regional background and status may be analyzed. First is the temperature of the food and beverages served. Iced coffee or iced tea, are virtually unknown in Latin America; in fact, Coca Cola and water are served *al tiempo*, at room temperature. Second, the amount of food served is also a trait that distinguishes regions of the world and particular social classes even though the trend is now towards more wholesome and less fattening food. *Obrero* (Puerto Rican laborer) sandwiches, for example, are noted for their enormous size and content. Combinations of different spices are also used to distinguish regional cookery.

A few years ago, it was not uncommon for the Puerto Rican woman to prepare and serve food to the family and guests while she ate her meal in the kitchen. In rural areas or in low socio-economic households, rice

17. C. Lévi-Strauss: *op. cit.*, p. 938.

18. *Ibid.*

and beans would be eaten first and the meat eaten last. This sequence was followed when an unexpected guest arrived during the family meal. The guest could then be served the meat which was more expensive and less plentiful than the rice and beans.

What occurs when cultures come in close contact as in the case of Puerto Rico? A *melange*. Puerto Rico is an example of what many cultures have done — eliminated some traditional meals, substituted, combined old elements with new ones or simply added paradigms. The syntagmatic dimension though has been virtually untouched for changes can occur more easily in food paradigms than in food syntagms. Puerto Ricans used to breakfast on bread and coffee with milk, but nowadays, they have added eggs, bacon and juice. Fast foods are now an integral part of Puerto Rican life as they are in the United States.

Gender.

Why are books with such titles as *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* and *Real Men Don't Cook Quiche* so successful? Whether the subject is taken seriously or as a joke, the message is connecting food with gender.

Anthropological, social, and historical studies of human behavior have always given prominence to a subject like food and the messages it conveys in relation with the development of certain groups. In the Mayan culture the principal food was maize and at the main meal men sat in a circle and were served by their women¹⁹. In the other large Indian civilization the Incas also loved corn but in addition ate *charqui* (llama meat) and *chunu* (dehydrated potatoes, reduced to a thick whitish powder) mixed in a kind of stew called *locro*. They also sat in circle to eat, and their women sat outside the circle, their backs to the men²⁰.

In contemporary Puerto Rico and North America where tradition and family mores are different, the distinction between sexes exists, but it is usually expressed in the quality, quantity and combination of

19. V. W. Von Hagen: *World of the Maya*, New York 1960.

20. V. W. Von Hagen: *Realm of the Incas*, New York 1957.

elements that classify the nonverbal message of food into masculine or feminine. As a result of physical needs and heavy manual work, male eating habits may be related to certain types of abundant food and food with high nutritional content. These naturally involve both quality and quantity. Regardless of ethnic background, a hearty meal is often identified with males. In the United States it is a meat and potato dinner, in Puerto Rico rice and beans, in Argentina a *churrasco* (barbecued meat), in Venezuela *pabellón* (rice, black beans and corned beef), and in Brazil *feijoada* (rice and beans and pork). In almost all the countries of the world, there are dishes which distinguish not only gender but also nationality.

Women may prefer more complicated types of food—those that are poached, creamed, minced, and glazed. While men may prefer plain food, some women are attracted by exotic combinations which demand more preparation. The association with quantity underlines foods for males, and it is expressed in the names such as Big Mac, and Hungry Males, etc. Women, on the other hand, are associated with small quantities of food. The mass media stress the importance of being thin; therefore, dieting has become an obsession. Commercially, it is also expressed by such products as Weight Watchers, Figurines, Slender, Lean Cuisine, Ultra Slim Fast, and innumerable diet pills that control excessive hunger.

Socially, gender is reflected in the meals served at parties. In exclusively male parties in the United States large size sandwiches accompanied by beer might be served, while at women's gathering dainty tea sandwiches and *petit fours* accompanied by tea or coffee may replace the massive sandwich. In mixed parties and dinners where the same type of food is served for everybody the difference seems to lie in quantity with most men having seconds and women being content with one serving.

Places to eat are also indicators of quantity and quality. It is well known that a heavy dinner can be found at a truck driver's stop rather than in a French restaurant where the expectation is to find better prepared food. In Puerto Rico restaurants known as *Restaurante El Obrero* (The Laborer's Restaurant) serve hearty meals. Restaurants of this type are found the world over.

Age.

In addition to a nonverbal message about gender, food also gives a message about age. Babies do not speak but cry to request food when they are hungry. In most cultures, some form of milk is the basic nutrient for infants. As the child grows so does the in-take of food. When the child gets teeth the transition from liquid food to solids shows that the child is growing, and she/he is entering a new stage. In highly industrialized countries, baby food is classified according to age and needs. Regular table food is introduced and eventually baby food eliminated. When children go to school and spend more time with peers, they realize junk food is very appealing.

Teenage years create the need for enormous quantities of food and a greater desire for junk food. At this stage food preferences of boys and girls may be distinctive. Teenagers of both sexes have become weight conscious. Good looks is equated with a good body; therefore, amounts of food are reduced. Television and its commercials have a great influence in supporting these popular images as do teenage sports, and fashion magazine where hints to improve personal appearance are countless. Young adults are somewhat similar to teenagers and they also stress health and outdoor living. The importance of food is taken quite seriously by expectant mothers who are advised to avoid alcohol, caffeine, excessive spices, salt, and sugar. Advertisements too are directed to age and sex using nonverbal announcements presenting products directed to different groups.

The eating habits of the elderly may also contain nonverbal messages. The quantity of food consumed diminishes in old age. In cases of very advanced age softer meals are eaten. Sometimes an old person is changed to a liquid diet when health requires special treatment. The food cycle in life is like a circle. The same type of food a person had as a baby he/she may go back to in old age.

The paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in the food system can indicate the gender and the age of a person. These dimensions are interdependent though the syntagmatic dimension is not necessarily time-ordered as in the case of gender. Food can be considered a distinctive nonverbal marker of gender and age.

Religion.

«Ceremonies are the bond that holds the multitudes together, and if the bond is removed, these multitudes fall into confusion»²¹. One of the bonds, religious and ritual, which holds many cultures together is the observation of significant holidays with the preparation and consumption of special foods.

This section will discuss the religious, ritual, and taboo importance of foods, and will concentrate on the Puerto Rican culture.

Christmas is associated, as so many religious observances are, with food. Each ethnic group prepares and consumes foods that have been especially made for this particular holiday. Puerto Ricans have developed definite food customs which complete the holiday tradition. If certain Christmas foods are eliminated from the menu, they will feel that the holiday is incomplete.

Preparation of food for specific holiday feasts in Puerto Rican homes begins early. Puerto Ricans prepare *morcilla* (pork blood sausage), *pasteles* (flat rectangular dumplings made of *yautía* and *plátano* filled with pork and spices), *arroz con coco* (candied coconut rice pudding), and *tembleque* (coconut pudding) on Christmas Eve.

No specific fish or non-meat dishes are served to guests in the Puerto Rican home because fasting to observe the Christmas vigil is usually observed with the nuclear family. Instead the Puerto Rican attends *Misa de Gallo* (Midnight Mass), returns home with family and friends and breaks the Christmas vigil with *pasteles*, *almojábanas* (fried cakes), *tembleque*, candied fruit and tops this late evening meal with *coquito* (tropical egg nog).

The Puerto Rican Christmas celebration lasts from before Christmas Day to the Epiphany or Three Kings Day, and sometimes it may be extended to the middle of January. Before the North American culture came into contact with the Puerto Rican, the island only celebrated the Epiphany (January 6), the day the Three Kings appeared to the Christ child. Children placed small boxes of hay under their beds for the camels, and gifts, fruits, candies were left by the grateful Three Kings. At present, both December 25 and January 6 may be celebrated. The Christmas meal, therefore, may be held on either the 25th or the 6th,

21. *Book of Rites*, quoted in Radcliffe Brown (1965), p. 159.

or it may be served on both days. The principal meal for the Christmas season for the Puerto Rico includes *lechón* (pork) fixed in a variety of ways, rice with *gandules* (pidgeon peas), *pasteles*, and desserts.

Puerto Rican Christmas dishes are part of the popular cuisine. They are prepared with foods and ingredients grown in a particular region and/or available during a particular season. Today with improvements in food processing and transportation, the foods and ingredients for the dishes of the popular cuisine are readily available. The Christmas Eve meal of Puerto Ricans is not one to which many guests are invited; it is for the nuclear family and close relatives and/or friends. The Lévi-Strauss culinary triangle (Figure 1) places boiled foods on the right side which signifies the endo-cooking or cooking in a receptacle. This manner of food preparation is utilized for small groups. The main course for the Christmas meal is roasted, an example of exo-cooking which is designated for large gatherings²². Family and friends are invited to celebrate the birth of Christ by sharing the many special dishes of Christmas.

Taboo.

There is also a large variety of dishes present not to celebrate a religious holiday but to conform to the restrictions generated by taboo. The food taboo may be permanent and apply to all members of the group, e.g. no Moslem may eat pork, no vegetarian may eat meat, or it may be temporary and refer to a traditional status of an individual, e.g. pregnant women should not consume caffeine.

A person observes a taboo because a change in ritual status may occur if the rule is not kept. A Roman Catholic, unless granted a special dispensation, is required to observe a particular fast day and if he/she fails to do so, will have to request absolution or an undesirable change in ritual status occurs. The Roman Catholic strict adherence to the observation of fast days is a strong tradition among South Americans and Puerto Ricans. At one time, approximately one-third of the year was dedicated to fasting — 40 days of Lent before Easter, 25 days of Advent before Christmas, and all of the Fridays and vigils before

22. C. Lévi-Strauss: *op. cit.*

major religious holidays. The Church now has less restrictive rules concerning fasting; however, during Lent Good Friday is one day when a change in ritual status will occur if one does not abstain from meat.

Revel²³ states that Lenten cuisine is an area of food preparation which truly reflects one's culinary skill. There is a long tradition of creative cooking from poor kitchens to royal houses which produces some of the most delicious fish and non-meat dishes in the western world. In the 16th Century, wealthy landowners and well-endowed monasteries redefined «fish» to include frog and creatures that were around water, such as duck and beaver, thereby, expanding the repertoire of Lenten cuisine. In contemporary times, one-third of the year is no longer devoted to fasting, but Good Friday is still observed by Roman Catholics. Good Friday fish and non-meat dishes for the Puerto Rican vary from those of other Catholics and combine foods native to the island and imported from Spain and/or Europe. More than one item in each category may be eaten; they are part of endo-cooking and, like the Christmas Eve family meal are, designated for small group use.

Ritual.

Food is used not only in the family celebration or religious holidays and in the observance of days of abstinence but also in the rituals of various faiths or cults. The Puerto Rican *santero* (saint worshiper) places a glass of dark rum in front Yemayá (Goddess of the Ocean) or a glass of light rum in front of Santa Clara, and the Cuban offers an apple to Santa Bárbara for a special favors or as an act of absolution. The Venezuela Indian sets out a dish of water after the death of a family member so the dead will not go thirsty and will be grateful to her/his survivors and do them no harm. The Roman Catholic consumes wine and bread, the blood and body of Christ, at a specific section of the mass to celebrate her/his communion with Christ. The North American child may leave milk and cookies for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve to express appreciation. All of these actions involving

23. J. F. Revel: *op. cit.*, p. 251.

the use of food and/or liquids are part of the vast ritual or ceremonial practices of some religious faiths.

Food, as nonverbal channel of communication, reveals information about one's religion, taboos and rituals. It also give messages about one's feelings, attitudes and values through the manner of its preparation and consumption.

Conclusion.

One of the difficulties in the analysis of nonverbal communication and its relationship to verbal communication has been the lack of a model which can be used to describe both systems and a unified set of terms and definitions. The use of Barthes' structural model, which is based on Saussure, is a way to encompass both the nonverbal and verbal systems within the same framework.

The nonverbal system of food is one that is often not fully discussed in communication studies. However, in its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships it can indicate social status, geographical origin, age, gender, and religion. In the nonverbal system, as in the verbal system, the paradigmatic plane is more flexible. New items can be added and older items omitted. The syntagmatic is more resistant to change.

The nonverbal and verbal systems both communicate. They are similar but not identical. Too often the differences have been the starting point of analysis. The description here provides a method for discussing the similarities. Future analysis using the structural model may require new terminology to describe the unique features of each system. This, however, will be necessary only after a better understanding of how the two systems function and how they interrelate. The structuralist approach which has led to clearer understanding of the language system can also be useful in analyzing the nonverbal system.