

**A Food Sociological Analysis of the Finnish
Christmas Meal Tradition in English Language
Blogs by Finns**

Master's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää ruoan sosiologiaan kuuluvan ateriatutkimuksen näkökulmasta, miten suomalaiset bloggaajat kuvaavat jouluateriaa suhteessa ruokaperinteeseen julkisissa, ainakin osin englanninkielisissä blogeissa ja millaisena joulun ajan aterioiden sosiaalinen järjestys esitetään. Aineisto koostuu 13 julkisesta blogista. utkielmaan tulee sisältyä suomenkielinen tiivistelmä (suomenkielisillä opiskelijoilla), jossa selostetaan tutkielman tavoitteita, tutkimusmenetelmiä ja -materiaalia, sisältöä ja tuloksia.	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to analyse the social organization of the Christmas meals as described by Finnish bloggers in their English blogs and the bloggers' relation to the Finnish Christmas food tradition as represented in their blog entries.

The analysis of the Christmas meal related blog entries by Finnish writers is interesting with respect to the Christmas meal tradition, because previous research proposes, on the one hand, that the Christmas meal tradition is a key element in the annual celebration of Christmas and as such the meals have a special role in the Finnish meal system, and, on the other hand, that Finns internalise the rules related to the Christmas meals (Knuuttila 2004: 41). Typically, however, meal studies in the Finnish context focus on everyday meals (see for example Mäkelä 2002), so the present study attempts to fill the gap by studying how the blogs relate to the idea of a nationally shared Christmas tradition.

Furthermore, the present study is interesting because it is designed in a way that combines a core element of the writers' native food culture, namely the Finnish Christmas food tradition, and the use of a foreign language, English. Sociology of food suggests that food culture always reflects the surrounding culture (see for example Douglas 1975, Mäkelä 1990, Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo 1992, Ashley, Hollows, Jones & Taylor 2004). As stated above, Knuuttila (2004: 41) suggests that understanding the rules related to the Finnish Christmas food tradition is one part of being a Finn and that all Finns have an idea of the Christmas menu. Thus, a typical Finn can be expected to be aware of both the Finnish Christmas food tradition and how his/her personal way of celebrating Christmas relates to the tradition. The interesting question here is how the element that is supposedly familiar and taken-for-granted for the writers is described in a foreign language and to a readership that potentially includes readers with a limited knowledge on the Finnish Christmas tradition and Finnish food culture.

The data of the present study consist of Christmas meals related postings in 13 publicly accessible blogs by Finnish writers. The analysis mainly focuses on the parts

written in English, but occasionally non-English sections are referred to as well in multilingual blogs. As far as the authors are concerned, the attribute 'Finnish' is my interpretation of the author's linguistic resources, based on the blog content, rather than an indicator of the writer's actual identity or nationality. In the selection process, I considered 'Finnish' authors who 1) kept a bilingual or multilingual blog in which one of languages is Finnish, 2) kept several monolingual blogs of which at least one is in Finnish, 3) kept a blog primarily in English with Finnish as a backup or explanatory resource, and/or 4) declared Finnish identity either explicitly or implicitly.

The suitability of the data for the purposes of the present study can be evaluated from several points of view. Firstly, using *blog entries written in English by Finns* interests me because of the freedom the genre gives to the writer. It is reasonable to assume that the writers have been able to freely choose whether they want to keep a blog, what they write about and, within their language repertoire, what language(s) they choose to use. Thus, the Christmas meal descriptions produced within such a high degree of freedom are suitable material for study that enlightens the questions of what they consider worth writing about their Christmas meals. Christmas related texts produced in more controlled contexts, such as school assignments, could more easily reflect the interpretation of Christmas imposed on the writers externally. The present data is more likely to represent the spontaneous relation the writers have to the Christmas tradition and how they interpret the rules related to Christmas food and meals. Secondly, being *publicly accessible entries*, the use of the data can be ethically justified; the writers have deliberately chosen to publish the texts so that they are available to any user of the internet.

Thirdly, the concept of *the traditional Finnish Christmas meal* is suitable for my purposes for several reasons. To begin with the sociology of food perspective, the previous research on the Finnish food culture the Christmas meal is seen as representing the core of the Finnish national food culture. Previous study further suggests that in Finland the Christmas tradition is a homogenous and lists the key elements of the Christmas menu. Thus, based on the previous research, the Christmas meal can be seen as an important aspect of the Finnish food culture and therefore suitable as a focus of study. On a more technical level, the data were searchable within the blogosphere because the existing definitions and descriptions of the

Finnish Christmas meal tradition provided potential keywords which, in different combinations, could be used to formulate searches so that the results matched my criteria reasonably effectively.

The analytical framework of the present study is qualitative content analysis. The analytic method draws on the so called Nordic model (Mäkelä et al. 1999, Mäkelä 2002) to the analysis of the meal. Further, the analysis of the blogs is parallel; the structure of the analysis is derived from the Nordic meal model and relevant sections from one or several blogs are discussed.

The main dimensions of the analysis are, firstly, the Christmas porridge meal and the main Christmas meal and, secondly, the Christmas food tradition. The meal analysis consists of three dimensions, namely the naming of the meal, the structure of the meal and the social organization of the meal. In the naming of the meal section, the analysis attempts to describe the rules that are applied to the naming of the Christmas time meals. The analysis of the structure of the meal attempts to define what is eaten at the Christmas porridge meal and at the Christmas meal and how the food is served. The analysis of the social organization attempts to define where and with whom the Christmas porridge meal and the Christmas meal are eaten and who prepares the meals.

The analysis of the Christmas food tradition attempts to describe the awareness and interpretation of the tradition among the bloggers as well as how the Christmas time meals described in the blogs reflect the tradition. The analysis further describes how the blogger's react to omissions and alterations to the tradition.

This thesis is organized in the following way. The next chapter covers background information for the present study. Firstly, the focus is on the Finnish Christmas food tradition. Secondly, sociology of food as a research field is described with an emphasis on approaches that are closely related to the present study, namely the structuralistic approach which is a central framework for the key theory in the field of meal studies, the Douglas' model to the analysis of the meal. Finally, the main theory applied in the present study and an extension of the Douglas' model, the Nordic model to the analysis of the meal is introduced.

The third chapter enlightens the set-up of the present study. Firstly, the aim of the study and the research questions are specified. Secondly, the chapter focuses on blogs as data. The discussion covers on the one hand the phenomenon of Finns blogging in English and on the other hand the selection and collection of the present data as well as short descriptions of source blogs. Thirdly, the analysis method is described in detail.

The analysis is described in detail in the fourth chapter. The discussion is organized in the following way: in the beginning of the chapter, the analysis of the social organization of the Christmas meals is reported whilst the latter part is devoted to discussion on how the meal descriptions reflect the Finnish Christmas food tradition and awareness of it and interpretation of the tradition among the bloggers.

The part dealing with the social organization of the meals is organized in the following way. The porridge meal and the main Christmas meal are discussed separately. The meal-specific discussion on the analysis is organized according to the research questions so that there are individual sections for each dimension of analysis, namely 1) the naming rules, 2) the structure and 3) the social organization of the Christmas meals. In the sections focusing on the naming rules, the chapter deals with how the bloggers name the Christmas time meals and what seems to influence this. The sections focusing on the structure attempt to answer to questions 1) what is eaten and 2) how it is served. Finally, the sections focusing on the social organization, the questions to be answered are 1) where and 2) with whom the Christmas porridge meal is eaten and 3) who prepares it.

The final chapter provides reflection on the present study including discussion on the research process carried out and on how the analysis succeeded in answering to the research questions as well as the usefulness of findings. Next, limitations of the present study are discussed and, finally, potential questions for future research are introduced.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Finnish Christmas meal tradition

This section focuses on the Finnish Christmas meal tradition as suggested by previous research. Firstly, the focus will be on festive meals in general as well as on the role that Christmas celebration has in the Finnish culture and the centrality of meal tradition in that celebration. Secondly, the traditional serving style is described. Finally, this section introduces some dishes that, in the Finnish context, have been traditionally associated with Christmas. The dish level discussion reflects the popular interpretations of what the Finnish Christmas menu consists of and mainly draws on unscientific publications. In sum, this section describes what the traditional Finnish Christmas meal consists of, how it is served and what it typically means for Finns. This is done in order to illuminate the concept that this study uses as the baseline in the analysis.

Universally, what is characteristic of festive occasions is the importance of tradition and rituals, abundance and certain dishes associated with a certain occasion (Mäkelä 1990; Mäkelä 2002; Piispa 2004: 118-119; Mennell & al. 1992; Knuuttila 2006). Previous research suggests that Christmas is the most significant holiday for Finns, and its traditions are most highly valued. The Christmas dinner is the focal point of Finnish Christmas tradition (Mäkelä 1990: 48-49). Knuuttila (2004: 41) describes awareness of what is supposed to be available on the Christmas menu as a means for understanding one's native food culture and its inner system of meanings.

According to Mäkelä (1990: 47-49 and 76), compared to everyday life, in a festive context rules are consciously obeyed and seen as more important. For a meal to be recognizable as such, it is important that there are familiar elements that are repeated unchanged from time to time. Especially important the norms and rituals are for a festive meal. Preparations for a festive meal are typically more complicated and ingredients more sophisticated than what is the case with a normal meal.).

Christmas dinner has a special symbolic value as a carrier of family tradition (Charles & Kerr 1988 as quoted by Mäkelä 2000: 11). Repeating tradition faithfully

is seen as a way of honoring the previous generations and strengthening the bond between family members. Mennell and al. (1992: 10) discuss Douglas's theory on meal systems and note that "there is a very clear idea of what should constitute Christmas dinner". Knuuttila states that if the Christmas menu differs from the traditional one, some kind of an explanation is called forth. The difference from the original menu might be either an omission of an essential element or an addition of a new element. (Knuuttila 2006: 19 and 27.) It is customary that families repeat the Christmas menu year after year. Certain dishes are seen as necessary for creating the proper Christmas spirit. (Mäkelä 2003: 41.)

For festive celebrations, more food is usually prepared than can be consumed (Thursby 2008: 160). Mäkelä (1990: 48-49) and Piispa (2004: 118-119) point out that the Finnish Christmas tradition forms no exception; abundance is in a significant role. Even though the dinner is extensive and rich, snacks are also an important part of Finnish Christmas food tradition. Constant eating and night time snacks are perfectly acceptable during the holiday. One aspect of joy is the awareness of a shared pleasure: the entire nation is feasting and normal restrictions do not apply. One is expected to eat as much as one possibly can.

Traditionally, the Finnish Christmas meal lasts long, is abundant and includes several dishes which in the Finnish context are identifiable as "Christmas food" (Mäkelä 1990: 48-49). As far as the serving style is concerned, the typical method is a Scandinavian buffet which, according to Mäkelä (2002: 13), is a combination of synchronic and diachronic styles. It is synchronic in the sense that "the guest can choose from a large number of dishes served at the same time in each course" (Mäkelä 2000: 9). Yet, as Mäkelä points out, even though it is possible to choose and combine dishes freely, typically people follow the order used in the diachronic style, namely starting with cold fish and meats, then the hot dish and finally dessert (Mäkelä 2002, 13). Therefore, Mäkelä classifies the Scandinavian buffet, and the Finnish Christmas meal, as a combination of these styles.

According to Mäkelä (2003: 41), Finns share the idea of "a traditional" Christmas menu. As far as facts are concerned, Finnish Christmas food tradition is only little over a century old. However, the image is very strong and homogenous. Among the items that are generally considered to belong to the traditional Finnish Christmas

menu are, for example, ham, casseroles and gingerbread (Mäkelä 1990: 47-49; Knuutila 2006: 27). Typically, not all traditional items are included in the menu or in the family tradition, but people are aware of what is missing from the complete set and have some knowledge on the dishes they may have never tasted or seen (Mäkelä 2003: 41).

Christmas is often seen a stable tradition but it has not been immune to change in the past. Salokorpi and Lehmusoksa (1998: 80-81) list as traditional and still popular Christmas dishes the following: ham, rutabaga casserole, prune tarts, gingerbread cookies, rosolli, carrot casserole and rice porridge. Lutefisk, in contrast, divides opinions: it is the favorite dish for some, while some refuse to eat it. According to Linnilä and Utrio (2006: 98), lutefisk had a central role as a festive food from the Middle Ages until 1960's. Since then salted, raw spiced, grilled or smoked salmon has become more popular.

According to Salokorpi and Lehmusoksa (1998: 92) porridge is the oldest festive dish, if bread is left aside, and still a part of the Christmas, even though in a modified form; original rye or barley has been replaced with rice. Further, the contemporary style is to serve rice porridge as either breakfast or lunch.

Ham, which was introduced in the 19th century, is often a central dish in modern Christmas menu and has replaced sausages and brawn (Linnilä and Utrio 2006: 99 and 122). Ham became popular in the 1930's (Hemmi 2008: 39). Even though ham is strongly associated with Christmas, Salokorpi and Lehmusoksa describe urban Christmas as also allowing some heterogeneity: some families buy foods ready-made and, instead of ham, the main dish may be turkey, reindeer or roast beef. There are also entirely vegetarian Christmas menus in some families. (Salokorpi & Lehmusoksa 1998: 125). Mäkelä (1990: 49), however, sees alternative suggestions introduced by media for Christmas menu to be alternative only superficially; as a matter fact, she argues, they only represent a lighter or vegetarian version of the traditional Christmas meal. Further, she argues that new ideas suggested for Christmas have not challenged the tradition, and that, in general, there is no indication of major changes in the way Christmas time eating is socially organized in Finland.

Like ham, gingerbread is strongly associated with Christmas in Finland. According to Koskinen and Vuolio (1989: 38-39) the tradition has arrived from Germany and Sweden in late 19th century and gingerbread house a little later, in the 20th century. Gingerbread houses can be manifestations of skills or imagination and instead of houses they can take form of a castle or sauna, for example.

This section enlightened the concept of the traditional Finnish Christmas meal as well as the cultural role of the Christmas celebration in Finland. This was important because the very concept will be used as a baseline in the analysis phase of the present study. Next, the focus will be on previous research in the field of sociology of food.

2.2 Sociology of food as a field of study

The present study strives to apply theories developed in the field of sociology of food and the Nordic model to the analysis of the social organization of meals, in particular, as the theoretical framework. Therefore, some of the main approaches of the sociology of food are viewed and discussed in this chapter.

Starting from the general field of food related studies, the Academy of Finland defines food sciences as focusing on materials suitable for human consumption and production and on processing of such materials but it also covers the study of food's "status and significance in our culture, attitudes and consumption habits"(Anderson 2006: 28). Within that broadest definition of food sciences or food related research one basic distinction is one that separates approaches that regard food as nutrition and those that regard food as a cultural phenomenon (see, for example, Mäkelä 1990).

The field of culturally oriented food studies can be approached from different angles. Firstly, a rather recent definition considers food studies or food culture studies an emerging, independent field that constitutes a discipline of its own. Currently, there is for example a professorship in food culture in Helsinki University at Faculty of

Behavioural Sciences. The professorship began in 2011. (Kurunmäki 2008: 73 and YLE Helsinki 2011.)

Secondly, food studies can be defined as a field that primarily focuses on food as communication. Fjellström (2009: 19-20) describes the use of food studies related terminology in the Swedish context and calls for a definition that is stricter than the above mentioned distinction between nutritional and cultural emphasis. According to Fjellström, in the Swedish context the term “matkultur”, ‘food culture’, can be used in basically any sense other than nutritional. For example, religious, gender, and value related aspects can be included in it. Fjellström argues that being so widely applicable, the term food culture may lead to misunderstandings and, therefore, other terms are needed. She suggests term “matens kulturella kunskapssystem”, ‘food’s cultural system of knowledge’. The core of this term is that food is seen as a tool which communicates meaning, but it also refers to communication between people in itself. Fjellström (2009: 19-20) describes her definition of meaning of food as being based on Counihan’s model which was introduced 1999 in *The Anthropology of food and body*. This model, according to Fjellström, includes four aspects: 1) cuisine which covers ingredients and how they are combined and prepared, 2) etiquette and food rules, 3) taboos and 4) symbols which covers meanings associated with food in certain situations.

Thirdly, one distinction within the field of food related studies can be made between research focusing on material aspects and studies focusing on the immaterial aspects. According to Varjonen (2000: 7), food culture studies may focus either on food stuffs and ingredients, or on practices, manners, and norms typical for a nation or a region. This separation of immaterial and material aspects brings us closer to ethnology and folkloristic approaches. Mennell, Murcott, and van Otterloo (1992: 7) connect foodways to anthropology. Fjellström’s interpretation of the term foodways widens the scope beyond anthropology; according to her, the term foodways is used primarily in the American context and it covers anthropological, folkloristic and ethnological approaches referring to food as an element involved in behaviour and group membership (Fjellström 2009: 19). Knuutila (1999: 13-16) points out the Nordic and especially Finnish research tradition in which food culture studies have been linked more to ethnology than folkloric studies and the emphasis has been on material aspects and less on, for example, oral tradition. Until the 1970’s, food has

been approached mainly as objects and the focus has been on dishes, food preparation and production. Knuutila further proposes that despite the tendency towards material aspects, traditional research also includes immaterial focus, such as illustrated by etymological studies.

Fourthly, Thursby emphasizes yet other aspects of food culture studies by describing folkloric studies as foodways. Foodways study the “relationship between people and their food practices” (Thursby 2008: ix). This relationship between people and food practices includes also metaphoric and symbolic meanings. Foodways also focuses on prepared and arranged foods, oral information about food and food-related texts. In foodways, physical objects, such as dishes and recipes, are called material folklore. In addition, foodways studies customs, traditions and food as an element in belief systems and practices. (Thursby 2008: vii-x.)

In sum, the descriptions above approach food related studies as, firstly, an independent discipline, secondly, as a field that regards food as communication and focuses on ingredients, etiquette and food rules, taboos and symbols related to food, and, thirdly, as ethnology, folkloristics and/or anthropology focusing on food stuffs and ingredients or on practices, manners, and norms typical for a nation or a region. Fourthly, it includes foodways which focuses on prepared and arranged foods, oral information about food and food-related texts.

Next, central approaches within sociology of food are described. Firstly, Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo (1992: 6-8) see the beginning of the sociology of food to be linked to the interest in the social welfare and the unequal food distribution. They link sociology of food to anthropology and semiotics. In their view, its main approaches are functionalism, structuralism, and developmentalism. Mennell and al. describe functionalism as an approach in the sociology of food focusing on “how foodways expressed or symbolised a pattern of social relations” (Mennell & al. 1992: 7). Structuralism, according to Mennell et al., focuses on aesthetic rather than nutritional aspects of food. A central point of view is taste: “ ‘taste’ is culturally shaped and socially controlled” (Ibid 8,12). Developmentalism, in terms of Mennell et al., is an approach that sees cooking as a factor that has influenced the development of human kind as a species and “affected social organisation and

mentality” (Ibid: 14-15). The description of functionalism is close to folkloristic view of food studies, or foodways, in American terms.

Ashley, Hollows, Jones, and Taylor (2004) use the term “food culture studies” and divide research into three main approaches: structuralist, culturalist, and hegemonic (Gramscian) studies. According to Ashley and al. (2004: 7) structuralism includes different sub-approaches which share an idea of meanings being “the product of shared systems of signification”. They describe culturalism as an historical process oriented approach that, unlike structuralism, includes time dimension and interprets society as a network of rivaling groups with the lower resisting the dominance of the upper (2004: 8-16). Hegemonic, or the Gramscian, approach attempts to explain why the so called fundamental social classes are valued by the subordinate ones and why the latter let the former “exert moral and leadership over” (ibid. 18) themselves. Hegemonic interpretation of leadership makes this approach ‘the opponent’ of structuralism and culturalism, which share the idea of dominant groups. (Ibid. 18-24.)

Mäkelä (1990), in turn, uses four main categories to describe the sociology of food: these are 1) structuralistic research according to which food and eating are seen as a system of signs, 2) eating as a process of civilization which leads to a greater distance from nature as a function of time, 3) social organization of food choice and eating, and 4) cultural variation inside given society.

As suggested by these definitions, as far as the focus of the sociology of food is concerned, it seems to cover a wide range of topics. An important field in the sociology of food has been family life. Research has focused on, for example, the power and responsibilities between family members. Mothers have been seen as a key factor in many approaches focusing on for example meals, health and food as a status related issue (Mennell et al. 1992: 91-92). Another key area is the concept of the meal, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. (See for example Mäkelä 2002: 127.)

The present study approaches sociology of food from the social organization point of view, which, in turn, draws on the structuralistic tradition of interpreting food and eating and a system of signs. Further, the present study focuses on the meal study aspect of sociology of food. In this section I have explained the main characteristics

of sociology of food. Next, central approaches within the field of sociology of food will be presented, starting with the structuralistic approach. Then, the Douglas' model to the analysis of meal will be introduced, followed by an introduction on the Nordic model to the analysis of the meal, which is an extension of the Douglas' model. Finally, it is articulated how the present study benefits from the Nordic meal model.

2.3 Central approaches to the analysis of the meal

This section focuses three approaches that are central for the present study. The discussed elements include 1) the structuralistic approach, 2) Douglas' model to the analysis of the social organization of a meal and 3) Nordic model to the analysis of the meal.

2.3.1 The structuralistic approach to sociology of food

The structuralist approach to sociology of food has its roots in de Saussure's linguistic theories introduced in *Course of General Linguistics* (1916). Essential elements in de Saussure's theory were, on the one hand, the attempt to discover universal rules that communication is based on and, on the other hand, the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the former being for example a word and the latter the meaning of the word. In food-related studies the signifier can be the taste or the smell and the signified an ingredient or a dish. (Ashley 2004: 3-6.) Compared to language, food ingredients can be described as sounds, dishes as words and meals as sentences (Mäkelä 1990: 18). In the structuralistic-semiotic approach food is seen a system of signs. Ingredients, preparation methods, eating, and meal each represent their own levels at the system of meaning (Mäkelä 1990: 18). The food-related system of signs is hierarchical: the ingredients must be selected first, then comes the preparation method and only after that can the meal and eating take place (Mäkelä 1990: 35). The previous research commonly suggests as the most influential structuralists Lévi-Strauss and Douglas (see, for example, Mennell et al. 1992: 8, 12). Among the most cited findings by Lévi-Strauss is the culinary triangle, introduced in 1966, which is a model that describes three types of cooking methods.

Douglas is especially known for her model to the analysis of the meal, introduced 1975. This model will be discussed in detail in the following section.

In the context of the present study, the relevance of the structuralistic approach lies in the fact that the main model of analysis used in it, the Nordic version of the Douglas model to the analysis of the social organization of the meal, draws on the very approach.

2.3.2 Douglas' model to the analysis of the social organization of a meal

According to Mäkelä (2003: 51-52), the social nature of eating can be revealed by contrasting snacks and meals, the former representing impulsive eating while the latter is a ritual determined by various rules concerning the sharing of the food and behavior during eating. Mäkelä further notes that meal studies, or the sociology of meals, has been one of the central themes in sociology of food since the 1970's (Mäkelä 2002: 10).

The most influential paradigm in the field of meal studies is the classification developed by the social anthropologist Mary Douglas in the 1970's and different variations and extensions based on her system (Mäkelä 2002: 10). When Douglas launched her study on meals, she was puzzled by the fact that, despite the social dimension of food was generally acknowledged, there was no general theory established and therefore the knowledge on the social aspect could not be used to make nutrition programs more effective (Douglas 1982: 82). Douglas sees meal systems to be culture specific but argues that there is a universal need for some kind of meal pattern in humans and in human cultures. She makes a distinction between the aesthetic and nutritional aspects of food, and compares the aesthetic elements and rules related to food to other domains of cultural rules, namely poetry, music, or dance (Mennell & al. 1992: 9-11).

For Douglas the rules related to food and eating and the system created by those rules are a central element of study. Douglas interprets rules regulating meals as communication and is, with her student Nicod, "interested in the capacity of food to mark social relations and to celebrate big and small occasions" (Douglas 1982: 85).

Douglas introduced a linguistic analogue to analyzing the structure of meals (Mäkelä 2002: 13-14 and 20). Mäkelä enlightens the analogue with the following example: “each meal follows both syntagmatic and paradigmatic rules. The syntagmatic rules define the order of the dishes. - -The paradigmatic rules define what kind of dish can be eaten in each group.” (2002: 9).

Douglas and Nicod have studied the British meal system especially among the working class and formed a grammar of meals based on their observations. The observations included the following dimensions (Douglas 1982, 82-104; Mäkelä 2003, 51-52; Mäkelä 1990, 21 and 30-31; Mennell & al. 1992, 10-11).

- time: time of day when eating takes place during the day; differences between different days of the week, especially Sunday vs. other days; sequence of holidays and fast; life cycle feasts,
- hierarchy of eating events: tea and biscuits representing the lowest and elaborate festive meals the highest level
- meals as indicators of external boundaries: drinks are shared with strangers whereas meals are for family, close friends and honored guests
- meal related rules inside the family; for example for the meal to be qualified as supper more than one plate of soup required.

Douglas describes four different categories for eating defined by Nicod in the following way: 1) food event (any instance food is consumed), 2) structured event (an event organized by time, place and order), 3) meal (both organization and combination on ingredients and dishes is regulated), and 4) snack (an unstructured event). Meals are further divided into three types: a) a major meal (of the day), b) a minor meal, and c) a still less significant meal like a biscuit and a hot drink. In addition to using the terms introduced by Nicod, Douglas separated meals, courses, helpings, and mouthfuls (Douglas 1982: 90-91).

Each meal can be further divided into one or several courses, such as starters, main course and dessert. Further, each course has a certain structure, a specific combination of the following components: staple, centre, trimming and dressing. The staple is the starch providing element of the meal, such as potato, cereal or bread. The centre is the protein part and the one that gives name to the entire meal, for example meat, fish or egg for the main course and fruit for the dessert. The trimming

is the peripheral component of the meal, for example green vegetables, stuffing or Yorkshire pudding. Dressing can be for example brown gravy, cream or custard. (Douglas 1982: 93)

For Douglas, oppositions are important, hence the clear separation of drinks and meals (liquids and solids). As far as food is concerned, Douglas and Nicod focus on the following binary oppositions: savory/sweet, hot/cold, liquid/dry. (Douglas 1982: 90). The structure of a meal is partially based on the oppositions; meal has to consist of “both solid and liquid elements, and has to have a dimension of bland, sweet, and sour” (Mäkelä 2002: 7).

In the analytic model by Nicod and Douglas, each course is analysed individually in terms of mode, structure and elements. The mode refers to the binary oppositions and is determined, when applicable, for an individual component of a meal. The structure combines the course level and the component level; it defines what elements the course in question consists of and at the same time identifies the role of an individual component. By the term “element” Douglas and Nicod refer to the actual foodstuff. (Douglas 1982: 94-95.) For example the major meal of the day could be analysed in the following way:

- 1) The meal consists of course 1 and course 2.
- 2) The structure of course 1 is the following: staple + centre + trimming + dressing.
- 3) The mode of the staple component is hot and the element is potato. The mode of the centre component is savoury and the element is meat. The mode of the trimming component is not defined but the elements are green vegetable and Yorkshire pudding. The mode of the dressing component is not defined and the element is thick brown gravy.

This illustrative analysis is based on the table 4.3 by Douglas (1982: 94).

Douglas and Nicod’s model further includes dimensions for taking into consideration how complex, copious, and ceremonial a meal is. These dimensions are related to the

separation and marking of everyday meals from Sunday and festive meals (Douglas 1982: 109-113).

Douglas' model is also used by Murcott (1982, as cited by Mäkelä 2003: 52, Mäkelä 2002: 14, Ashley & al. 2004: 124-125) in her analysis of "the proper meal" in Welsh context. She draws a conclusion that to be considered "a proper meal", a meal must firstly include certain elements, namely meat, potatoes, vegetables and sauce.

Secondly, the elements have to be prepared in a certain way, namely everything must be cooked and not served raw and further the meat is to be cooked in the oven while vegetables and potatoes are boiled. Finally, the meal is cooked home, preferably by mother.

The Douglas' model forms the basis for the model that is discussed in the next section, namely the Nordic model to the analysis of the meal. The Douglas' model, even though not directly used as the framework of the analysis, is important for the present study because the used model, and therefore also the present study, can be seen as extensions of the Douglas' model.

2.3.3 The Nordic model to the analysis of the social organization of meals

Recent Nordic research has attempted to create a model for eating systems by combining Douglas's grammar of the meal and the eating context. This extended model is three-dimensional and consists of the following levels (Mäkelä 2002: 21):

- Eating rhythm: when eating takes place and when hot/cold food is consumed.
- Structure of the meal: what is the central element of the meal and what accompanies it (central vs. peripherals), order of elements (starters, main course, dessert or parallel dishes) and meal types.
- Social organization: where and when people eat and who prepares the food.

Mäkelä further separates three dimensions of eating: 1) complexity (food choice, preparations), 2) sociality (alone, small group, big group), 3) formality (Mäkelä 2002: 22).

Reflecting the analytic model suggested by Douglas and Nicod, also the Nordic model divides meals into courses and courses further into elements. Even though the model is developed on the basis of the Douglas model, the definitions and possible elements differ from the original. Firstly, as introduced by Mäkelä (2001: 131), there are six component categories, namely 1) the centre, 2) staples, 3) vegetables, 4) trimmings, 5) bread and 6) beverages. Compared to the original, the difference is the categorization of bread as a separate component type, instead of labeling it as staple. The difference reflects the different role that bread has in the Nordic food cultures compared to the British one.

The categories cover the following elements: the centre is typically meat, fish or vegetables. Staples include potatoes, rice, pasta, beans and lentils. The category of vegetables is self-explanatory. Trimmings refers to different sauces, pickles and other minor additions to the meal. Bread is another self-explanatory category. Beverages cover drinks from alcohol and hot beverages to milk and water and also include the option no beverage. (Mäkelä 2001: 133.)

In the Nordic context, the definition of proper meal relies partly on the accepted combinations of the above described categories with the most typical combinations being Centre + Staple + Vegetable and the former added with a Trimming. In Finland, uncooked vegetables are accepted as an element in a proper meal in form of a salad (Mäkelä 2001: 129) The Finnish definition of the proper meal differs from the original British working class meal also in terms of allowed centres. Firstly, soup alone is considered a proper meal in Finland, especially in the role of the minor meal of the day (Mäkelä 2001: 126). Secondly, porridge is also considered an accepted centre in Finland (Mäkelä 2001: 132).

According to Sjögren-de Beauchaine (1988: 166) meals also function as a marker of closeness/distance; what and how is served is connected to how close the social relationships are. In the meal studies, meals and families are often connected to each other, but meals are shared also by other than family members. Mäkelä suggests that sharing a meal may evoke a feeling of togetherness that resembles bonding inside family (Mäkelä 2002: 14.)

The Nordic model is important in the context of the present study because the dimensions defined in the model form the core of the analytic model used in the

present study in the following way. On the one hand, the present study focuses on the dimension of the structure and attempts to describe in the context of the Christmas meal descriptions by Finnish bloggers what is eaten and how it is prepared and served. On the other hand, the present study focuses on the dimension of the social organization and describes where and when people eat and who prepares the food.

The other two approaches are important as providing the context for the Nordic model; the Nordic model is an extension of the Douglas model and the Douglas model is directly connected to the structuralist approach. Therefore, to introduce the Nordic model in detail, the preceding approach and model need to be enlightened as well.

3 THE SET-UP OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This chapter focuses in outlining the design of the present study in three stages. Firstly, the chapter presents the aim of the present study and the research questions. Secondly, the data and the collection process is described. Finally, the method of analysis is introduced.

3.1 The aim of the present study and the research questions

The aim of the present study is to describe how the Christmas meal related blog entries written in English by Finnish bloggers represent, on the one hand, the social organization of the Christmas porridge meal and the main Christmas meal and, on the other hand, how the blog texts represent and relate to the Finnish Christmas food tradition.

This outline of the present study is interesting with respect to sociology of food because of a gap in recent studies on festive meals in terms of the social organisation. Previous research suggests that the Christmas meal, as a central element related to a culturally important annual festival, has a special role in the cultural system of meals both universally (Douglas 1975), and in Finland (Mäkelä 1999, Knuutila 2004). Previous research (Douglas 1975, Mäkelä 1990: 47-49 and 76) also suggests that in a festive context, rules are consciously and faithfully obeyed. Recent meal studies on the Finnish meals have, however, mainly focused on the everyday meals. By finding out how the social organization of the Christmas related meals is presented in the blog texts, the present study attempts to provide new information on the relation the bloggers have to the Christmas food tradition and how the whether the social organization of the meals reflects the emphasis on rules as suggested by the theories.

In order to find out the social organisation of the Christmas meals as reflected in the blogs, the present study attempts to describe what meals the bloggers consider Christmassy. In addition, once the Christmas related meals suggested by the bloggers have been described, my aim is to describe the following dimensions of the meals.

Firstly, in order to describe the structure of the meals, I will investigate what dishes, according to the blog entries, the bloggers include on the Christmas meals menu and how they describe the preparation and serving of the dishes. Secondly, in order to enlighten the social organization dimension of the meals, I will attempt to find out what the bloggers tell about the location and participants of the Christmas meals. Finally, as the third aspect of the social organization of the meals, the focus will be on what the bloggers write about the person who prepares the meal. These dimensions reflect the Nordic model to the analysis of the meal as introduced by Mäkelä in 2002.

Furthermore, the present study attempts to analyse how the descriptions in the blogs relate to the Finnish Christmas tradition. This is done by comparing the comments related to the above mentioned themes to the concept of the Finnish Christmas food tradition as introduced in the second chapter.

In order to provide new information on how the Christmas meal related blog entries written in English by Finnish bloggers represent, on the one hand, the social organization of the Christmas porridge meal and the main Christmas meal and, on the other hand, how the blog texts represent and relate to the Finnish Christmas food tradition, the analysis is organised around the following main research questions:

- 1) How do the bloggers name the Christmas food events and what seems to influence this?
- 2) What is the structure of the Christmas time meals; what is eaten and how is it served?
- 3) What is the social organization of the Christmas time meals? Where and with whom are the Christmas time meals eaten? Who prepares the food?
- 4) How do the bloggers represent and relate to the tradition in the blogs?

In order to answer the main research questions, they are further divided into more narrowed sub-problems in the following way.

Research question 1, “How do the bloggers name the Christmas food events and what seems to influence this?”, is approached by finding out the following:

- How do the bloggers describe the food eaten at the meals they call the Christmas porridge meal or the main Christmas meal?
- What kind of information do the bloggers provide with respect to the timing, location and participants of the Christmas meals?
- How do the bloggers describe eating events other than those they name as the Christmas porridge meal or the main Christmas meal, in other words what elements seem to cause a food event not to be suitable to be named as a Christmas meal?
- How typically do the bloggers name at least some meals as Christmas meals of either type?

Research question 2, “What is the structure of the Christmas time meals; what is eaten and how is it served?”, provides in itself the potential sub-problems:

- According to the blogs, what dishes do the bloggers eat at the Christmas meals? Or, what do the bloggers describe as elements of the traditional menu?
- How do the bloggers describe the dishes in terms of ingredients, preparation or serving?
- How do the bloggers describe the rules related to combining the dishes or the eating order?

Like the previous one, research question 3, “What is the social organization of the Christmas time meals? Where and with whom are the Christmas time meals eaten? Who prepares the food?” consists of sub-problems as well. Thus, the analysis will attempt to answer to the following questions:

- What information do the bloggers provide on the location of the Christmas meals? In what way, if any, they define their relation to the eating place? For example, is it their home or are they someone’s guests?
- How do they describe the participants of the meals? How do they comment cases of absence?
- What information do the blogs provide on the person who prepares the food? Does the blogger participate in cooking? Does the person responsible for

cooking participate in the meal? Does the blogger seem to know who prepared the food and do they show interest in knowing that?

Finally, the research question 4, “How do the bloggers represent and relate to the tradition in the blogs?” is divided into following sub-problems:

- What elements do the bloggers regard as representing the Finnish Christmas food tradition?
- What kinds of attitude do the entries reflect towards the tradition? Do the bloggers follow, criticize, ignore or modify the tradition and in what ways?
- How do they relate to elements that are present in their Christmas meal events but that do not represent the tradition?

By answering to the above introduced questions and considering the sub-problems, the present study attempts to find terms of how the Finnish bloggers describe the Christmas meals in English and how the descriptions reflect the Finnish Christmas food tradition.

3.2 Blogs as data

This section focuses on blogs as data. First, the central terms related to blogs as well as discussion on the definition of personal blogs are introduced. Next, I will review what the previous research states on the use of blogs as data. This section further includes four subsections. The first subsection will focus on blogging among Finns. The following two subsections describe the collection and selection of the data in two phases. Finally, profiles for selected blogs and bloggers are provided in the fourth subsection.

3.2.1 Personal blogs and use of blogs as data

The definition of blogs as a genre is not necessarily straight forward. In this study the focus is on personal blogs which is one sub-genre of blogs. Personal blogs are,

according to Miller and Shepherd (2009: 269) and Myers (2009: 2 and 26-27), internet pages with dated entries in reverse chronological order, usually providing author's name and possibility for readers to add commentaries. Typically, but not necessarily, blogs include links to other pages. To be considered "live", a blog should be updated frequently. Keren (2006: 5) emphasizes that blogs tend to be linked with other blogs creating the so called blogosphere. Bell (2007: 79) enlightens the related terminology as follows: "The creator is known as a blogger, undertaking some blogging".

According to Giltrow and Stein (2009: 8-9), compared to written and spoken genres, Internet genres in general change constantly and fast, blogs being no exception. On the one hand, the relationship between personal blogs and an older genre, diary, is controversial. Some regard blogs as on-line diaries (see for example Keren 2006: 5) while others classify them specifically not-diaries in order to emphasize difference to "reputedly trivial, feminine ancestor" (Giltrow and Stein 2009: 17). Votka (2005: 232) classifies personal blogs as diaries but considers their public nature and enabling author-reader interaction to be fundamental differences to the traditional private diary format and sees them in that sense to be closer related to published diaries.

On the other hand, recent changes in blogging have, according to Technorati report 2010, brought blogging closer to other Internet genres: "Bloggers' use of and engagement with various social media tools is expanding, and the lines between blogs, micro-blogs, and social networks are disappearing." (Technorati 2010b). Myers (2009, 19) emphasizes that even though blogs are multimedial, 'normal' text is still an important element in them.

Miller and Shepherd regard personal blogs not as one genre but rather as a group of genres, or even "a technology, a medium, a constellation of affordances – and not a genre" (Miller and Shepherd 2009: 283). They name photo blogs and travel blogs, as well as campaign blogs as examples of personal blogs that do not fit in the original, online diary type definition of blogs based on the personal blog type, but rather each form a genre of their own (Miller and Shepherd 2009: 263.)

As far as using blogs as data is concerned, the previous study emphasizes that one should be careful when attempting to use blogs as a basis to draw conclusions, on the

one hand, on the author and, on the other hand, on the blogosphere. Keren notes that in studying blogs it is important to keep in mind that “we know little of the producers of blogs besides their nicknames” (Keren 2006: 7). He further notes that “Generalizations about blogs on the basis of random sampling --- are impossible to make in the absence of a clear, stable, finite universe of blogs to sample” (Keren 2006: 6-7). Also Myers acknowledges the difficulties in defining a representative sample in an environment like blogosphere and suggests using “a theoretically motivated sample” , such as “the most popular, or blogs linked to each other, or blogs in some unusual form or style, or blogs on a topic” (Myers 2009: 160-161).

The present study attempts to take the above described limitations and notions on the use of blogs as data into consideration by a theoretically motivated set of data, namely “food related blogs by Finns” in the initial phase and “Christmas meals descriptions written at least partially in English language by Finnish writers” in the latter phase. Further, the present study does not attempt to generalize the findings to cover other types of blogs.

Myers (2009) discusses how blogs can be located and draws a conclusion that, by default, blogs are placeless but the author may locate the blog using various linguistic techniques. As far the language is concerned, however, Myers proposes that “the language choice does not tell *where* you are; it tells whom you want to read your text” (Myers 2009: 56). Blogs, among other internet content, can be also be defined as glocal, a combination of global and local (Bell 2007: 78). Applying Myers’ argument on language as a cue to intended readership, one could draw a conclusion that Finns writing in English direct their words at least partially to international audiences.

3.2.2 Blogging among Finns

As far as the situation in Finland is concerned, a survey by Statistics Finland, Use of information and communications technology 2010, covered among other areas also blogging and reading blogs. According to the survey, 40% of Finns had read blogs,

12% had posted a commentary on a blog, and 3% had an own blog during spring 2010 (Suomen virallinen tilasto 2010).

Finnish newspaper Ilta-Sanomat maintains a blog directory blogilista.fi and describes the list as including Finnish blogs and blogs about Finland. As per September 2011, the site showed following figures: 37 797 blogs with 4752 entries, 68 new blogs and 55 new users within 24 hours (Ilta-Sanomat 2011).

According to survey Blogibarometri 2010 (Blogibarometri 2010), Finnish bloggers regard blogging primarily as a hobby. The proportion of bloggers who also receive financial benefits by blogging is, however, increasing. As far as the motivation for blogging is concerned, the recipients of the survey list sharing experiences as the primary reason to keep a blog. Financial benefits, for example in form of free product samples, was rated second and networking third. The results further suggest that lifestyle blogs on fashion, style, and beauty are the most popular among readers with food and hobby focused blogs also gaining wide readership.

As far as blogging in English by Finns is concerned, Nikula and Leppänen (in Leppänen et al. 2008: 423-424) emphasize the role of English as a tool for establishing memberships in social communities and constructing identities as well as an indicator of expertise in a communication situation. They link language choice to the individual language user's own aspirations rather than to external factors forcing language choice or to English as a language being more suitable in certain domains.

3.2.3 The collection, selection and classification of food related blogs by Finns

This section focuses on the first phases of the process of selecting and collecting the present data. In order to describe in detail and motivate the decisions I made during the process, the following discussion is organized into three sections, each covering one step of the process. Firstly, the discussion covers the description of the initial focus and details of the first searches which covered food related blogging by Finns in a broad sense. Secondly, the process of organizing the initial results into seven

sub-categories is discussed. Finally, the focus will be on the process of narrowing the scope into one of the categories, namely the people oriented blogs. The next step of the data selection and collection, namely, the selection of Christmas meals related entries as the current data will be illuminated and motivated in the following section titled as The collection and selection of the Christmas related blog entries by Finns.

The initial scope of the study was rather broad, the initial plan was to study food and nutrition related blog entries. Tentative searches were carried out in June 2011 using two methods, namely Google search and by browsing blog directories, in order to find out what kind of food related blogs or entries were accessible in the blogosphere. The results were gathered into one pool of potential sample blogs.

In the tentative search phase I accepted as potential candidates blogs that matched the following criteria: 1) the blog is publicly accessible, 2) the blog includes content on food related issues, 3) the food related content is written at least partially in English and 4) the author is Finnish. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that the attribute ‘Finnish’ is my interpretation of the author’s linguistic resources, based on the blog content, rather than an indicator of writer’s actual identity. In my categorization, a ‘Finnish author’ is one who

- a) keeps a bilingual or multilingual blog in which one of languages is Finnish,
- b) keeps several monolingual blogs of which at least one is in Finnish,
- c) keeps a blog primarily in English with Finnish as a backup or explanatory resource, and/or
- d) declares Finnish identity either explicitly or implicitly.

An example of type c) in blog 2. Hyperlink ‘rösti’ refers to Wikipedia article is English.

“There is some blueberry soup (mustikkakeittoa), crisp bread (näkkileipää), Swedish cider Kopparberg (siideriä), Kalles Caviar (Kallen mätitahnaa), glogg (glögiä), cow berry jelly (puolukkahilloa), Swedish meatballs (jauhelihapullia) and rösti.”

Examples of type d) in blog 2 and 7.

Blog 2: We might have dark and cold winter in Finland

After discovering the mustard, i found Finnish coffee! They had almost everything you could wish to have from back home.

The process of considering the eligibility of a candidate blog in terms of whether the author's language repertoire covered Finnish was subjective in nature and relied on my personal, intuitive interpretation drawing on the language choices and content of the candidate blog. Therefore it is likely that I have discarded also eligible blogs, especially in case of monolingual blogs as well blogs by Finns with Swedish as their mother tongue or bilingual Finns.

The searches were implemented in the following way:

Firstly, I used different combinations of the following keywords in basic Google searches:

- 1) keywords in English: "blog", "Finland", "Finnish", "food", "cuisine", "cooking", "baking", "weight", "control", "watching", "nutrition", "diet" and "special".
- 2) keywords in Finnish: "blogi", "Suomi", "suomi", "suomalainen", "ruoka", "ruoan", "keittiö", "kokkaus", "ruoanlaitto", "leivonta", "leipominen", "paino", "painonhallinta", "laihdutetus", "laihduuttaminen", "ravinto", "ruokavalio", "erityisruokavalio" and "dieetti".

Secondly, the blog directory browsing included two phases. Firstly, blog directories were searched by Google search using keywords "blog directory", "blog list", "blogihakemisto" and "blogilista". In June 2011, the number of hits per keyword in the Google search was:

- "blog directory" 99 000 000 hits
- "blog list" 91 100 000 hits
- "blogihakemisto" 10 100 hits
- "blogilista" 1 210 000 hits

Typically, a blog directory includes links to blogs in both alphabetical order and by category. Categories vary according to directory. I checked categories referring to food, health, Finland or Finnish (in international directories), and English (in Finnish directories).

The category search method proved to be rather ineffective for my purposes for several reasons. Firstly, some of the initial Google search matches were special directories focusing on different categories of for example financially or technically oriented blogs. These directories were thus out of my scope. Secondly, some directories or some blogs required registration in order to open links or view the content which was in conflict with my idea of using freely available material only. Thirdly, my combination of criteria was not easily compatible with existing categories. By selecting relevant categories, I was in most cases able to locate blogs that matched one of my criteria but not others. And fourthly, links often proved dead, in other words the search engine contained address and title information of a blog but the actual blog content was no longer available or the blog contained no entries.

Based on the results of the tentative searches, I could conclude that 1) food related blog data by Finnish authors are easily accessible in the Internet and thus it seemed possible to carry out a research on food related blog entries. At the same time, it was obvious that 2) the data were too heterogeneous for a study of the present scale. In order to solve the problem of too heterogeneous data, I decided to arrange the candidate blogs and try to identify sub-groups within the initial data.

The classification of the blogs relied mainly on the topic(s) of the blogs. In the tentative search results, two main types of food related blogs emerged; those focusing on 1) nutrition and those emphasizing 2) social, cultural or experience aspect related to food.

I further divided nutrition type blogs into 1) weight control, 2) special diet and 3) formal blogs. The blogs of class 1, namely the weight control blogs, focus on author's attempt to lose weight. Typically, a blog of this type included information on author's weight at certain times as well as the target weight and descriptions of author's diet and physical exercise, as well as reflective entries. Content produced by author was primarily in Finnish. English appeared in mottoes and embedded technical elements often visualizing the weight loss process.

Blogs of class 2, the special diet blogs, were not as common as the previous type. In my search, low carb and vegetarian oriented blogs were most common but I also found vegan, allergy related and gluten-free related as well as mixed blogs. These blogs were typically monolingual (in Finnish) as far as the self-produced text was concerned. There were, however, links to English material and English recipes were occasionally embedded in the text.

Formal blogs, identified in this context as class 3, cannot be handled as a single genre or sub-genre. A typical blog of this type was somehow connected to author's professional life or the author was a high profiled enthusiastic. Further, typically blogs of this type were monolingual with a possible sibling blog providing alternative language version. It was not clear in all cases whether the blog was considered a leisure activity or a part of academic or professional life. Topics varied, but among the typical ones were national health, fats and cholesterol, low carb diet, reliability of information given to consumers, and criticism towards franchising groups and food industry.

The remaining blogs, namely blogs focusing on social, cultural or experience aspect related to food, form a versatile group. I separated four main categories: 4) cuisine oriented, 5) ingredient oriented, 6) technique oriented and, finally, 7) people oriented blogs. Cuisine oriented blogs, which form class 4 in my classification, focus on a certain cuisine. Sometimes broader introductions to the culture are also included, such as descriptions of the religion or arts history of a relevant culture. Popular themes seem to be for example different Asian cuisines and Finnish cuisine. In some blogs photos are a central element, especially if culture is handled in a broader sense. As far as the use of English is concerned, typically the blogs of this type combined self-produced English and English in embedded form, such as recipes. These blogs also frequently featured use of loan words or code-switching (in some cases it was not clear which was the case).

Class number 5 in my system, namely the ingredient oriented blogs, focus on how to use, produce or buy a certain ingredient as well as general information on the subject. Most typical entries are recipes including a certain ingredient. Typical themes are chili peppers and chocolate, but blogs on soy or tofu, tea, and spices were also found.

Technique oriented blogs form class 6. This class includes a popular subcategory, namely baking blogs which, in turn, consists among others of cake blogs. Other types are for example BBQ, raw food and smoking blogs. Some blogs focus on equipment or cooking facilities, for example blogs describing the building of an outdoor kitchen and learning to use it.

Finally, by people oriented blogs forming class number 7 of the present system, I refer to blogs which describe food and cooking as a part of either the author's daily routine or as a part of different social events. For example wedding blogs often include entries on the menu and travelling blogs have some commentary on the local food. Food is also referred to in blogs that represent modern versions of the traditional diary.

In sum, the as a result of the classification process I identified the following two main categories and further divided the data into seven classes in the following way:

- Blogs focusing on food mainly as nutrition can be identified as 1) weight control, 2) special diet or 3) formal blogs.
- Blogs focusing on social, cultural or experience aspect related to food can be further labeled as 4) cuisine oriented, 5) ingredient oriented, 6) technique oriented or 7) people oriented blogs.

Once I had formed the classes, I further checked the usability of the classification by conducting new Google searches in the form described in the

As stated above, the purpose of classifying the initial data was to identify, within the food related blogging scene, potential blog types and food related themes for the present study, bearing on mind especially the small scale of the study. Hence the next phase was to consider the suitability of each identified category as data for my purposes. As a result of comparing the candidate data, I decided to focus on people oriented blogs. The decision process is discussed category by category below, emphasizing the reasons for not focusing on the rejected classes.

Firstly, as far as the weight control blogs are concerned, the data was homogenous, even tedious. English content by the author was limited and mostly English appeared in embedded elements. There was also an ethical issue: in several blogs, the target weight was significantly below official recommendations and sometimes photos

included underweighted people or blogs provided links to so called pro-ana sites which promote the eating disorder anorexia nervosa. Using material of these blogs would have required that author's anonymity could have been guaranteed citations from the data would have revealed details on the author. So, because of the ethical issues and small amount of self-produced text in English, I decided not to focus on this class in this study.

Next, I considered the suitability of class 2, namely the special diet blogs. Regardless of the language choice, the proportion of cited content seemed high in blogs of this type. Content in English was typically either copied or contained merely a title functioning as a link to external content. These blogs would be interesting data for a study on how Finnish bloggers rely on information in English. My immediate impression is that in special diet discussion English is often the main language of facts whereas Finnish is used to describe feelings and possible problems connected with the diet.

Formal blogs would be interesting for a genre study because entries differ from stereotypical on-line or blog text. They are often academically formulated with footnotes and source. A typical entry in these blogs could be published as such and some of them actually have been published. I decided not to focus on this class because the contents reflect more the traditions of academic writing than online communication.

Next I will focus on blogs focusing on social, cultural or experience aspect and explain why I chose the personal blog type. Internationally, cuisine oriented blogs seem to be more popular than among Finnish blog keepers. Blogs on Finnish cuisine are primarily either Finnish-only or by authors who are not Finnish according to my criteria, for example third generation Americans with Finnish roots but who do not speak Finnish. These blogs may have Finnish content in dish titles or even as complete copied recipes. The discussion, however, shows that the author does not understand the Finnish text. Foreign cuisine blogs could be suitable data for multilingualism study as they mix Finnish and the language connected to the cuisine they describe. Blogs on Finnish cuisine by foreign authors or tourists visiting Finland could provide material for study on use of Finnish in international context by non-

Finnish-speaking bloggers. For linguistic reasons this category did not fit into my scope.

The next category, ingredient oriented blogs, includes typically blogs with a lot of material, be it recipes, photos, links or other content. List formation seems popular. These blogs are often tightly networked and reference and quote each other frequently. Ingredient oriented blogs could be used for a study like this, but the data found in my tentative search proved rather homogenous linguistically. As one category in a broader genre study, for example, ingredient blogs could be more suitable data.

Technique oriented blogs are a good candidate for data. Especially cake blogs form a group that offers enough material and is at the same time homogenous enough for reasonable comparison. At the same time some blogs are very limited in the amount of content, especially those describing a certain project. Their life span is short and sometimes majority of content is photos. From my point of view, Finnish language is too prominent in cake blogs. But by changing my point of view I could use cake blogs, for example by extracting elements that the bloggers seem to acquire from foreign blogs or other foreign source. A common feature among Finnish cake bloggers is a tendency to follow international scene and buy equipment and raw material overseas or try to learn foreign techniques. It is yet uncertain, though, whether these intercultural and international elements are reflected in the language of the blogs.

People oriented blogs represent blogs of all types, my search focuses on a narrow part of posts in those blogs. In most cases it would not do justice to label them as “food blogs” of any type. In a way, people oriented blogs can be seen a modern version of traditional diaries, a typical blog includes entries on many aspects of an individual’s life and the point of view is subjective and personal. Linguistically this group is heterogeneous but a common factor is that majority of the text body is produced by the author. This is central for me: I am most interested in how the authors actually form their ideas in English, not as much in their willingness and abilities to access resources in English or embed external English elements.

3.2.4 The collection and selection of the Christmas related blog entries by Finns

The previous section focused on the initial phase of the data collection. In this section I will explain how the search was narrowed to focus on Christmas meal descriptions.

After completing the initial phase, I trusted on the blogosphere to include food related blogs by written by Finns in English. Next, I wanted to isolate a food cultural element that was 1) significant within the Finnish cultural system of food, 2) interesting in relation to multicultural expected audience, in other words an element that is interpreted culture-specifically in Finland, 3) was searchable within the blogosphere, in other words an element that can be approached with a reasonable set of keywords and 4) relevant in terms of sociology food which I planned to use as the means of analysis.

I chose intuitively the following elements of the Finnish food culture as potential point of interest for my study: 1) use of sausages, 2) elements linked to acquired taste such as liquorice/salmiac and the Finnish Easter pudding *mämmi*, 3) the Finnish tradition on serving coffee and 4) the Christmas meal tradition. I then made tentative searches based on the intuitive list and found the Christmas theme to produce suitable data for my purposes for the following reasons.

Firstly, using *blog entries written in English by Finns* interests me because of the freedom the genre gives to the writer. It is reasonable to assume that the writers have been able to freely choose whether they want to keep a blog, what they write about and, within their language repertoire, what language(s) they choose to use. Thus, the Christmas meal descriptions produced within such a high degree of freedom are suitable material for study that enlightens the questions of what they consider worth writing about their Christmas meals. Christmas related texts produced in more controlled contexts, such as school assignments, could more easily reflect the interpretation of Christmas imposed on the writers externally. The present data is more likely to represent the spontaneous relation the writers have to the Christmas tradition and how they interpret the rules related to Christmas food and meals.

Secondly, being *publicly accessible entries*, the use of the data can be ethically justified; the writers have deliberately chosen to publish the texts so that they are available to any user of the internet.

Thirdly, the concept of *the traditional Finnish Christmas meal* is suitable for my purposes for several reasons. To begin with the sociology of food perspective, the previous research on the Finnish food culture the Christmas meal is seen as representing the core of the Finnish national food culture. Previous study further suggests that in Finland the Christmas tradition is a homogenous and lists the key elements of the Christmas menu. Thus, based on the previous research, the Christmas meal can be seen as an important aspect of the Finnish food culture and therefore suitable as a focus of study. On a more technical level, the data were searchable within the blogosphere because the existing definitions and descriptions of the Finnish Christmas meal tradition provided potential keywords which, in different combinations, could be used to formulate searches so that the results matched my criteria reasonably effectively.

The present data was collected between June and August 2011 using Google's text search. Different combinations of the following keywords were used: "Christmas", "ham", "gingerbread house", "dinner", "blog", "Finland", "Finnish", "joulu", "kinkku", "piparkakkutalo", "joulupöytä", "blogi", "Suomessa", "suomalainen". Data consists of Christmas food related entries in 13 publicly accessible blogs by Finnish authors.

3.2.5 The profiles of the selected blogs and the bloggers

This section includes descriptions of the 13 blogs and bloggers referenced in this study. The descriptions focus on their Christmas related postings. Here I have drawn conclusions from the immediate texts and pictures rather than from any background information provided by the blogger elsewhere in the blog. The reason for this is that the life spans of the source blogs vary with some blogs covering several years. Bloggers may update any personal information at any point and typically blogs only show the latest version of these postings. That is why there is no guarantee that the

personal information provided in the background information section applies to the Christmas related posting(s) I refer to.

The bloggers focus on different themes and there are differences in what information they give. The blog descriptions below reflect the heterogeneity; each description covers at least some but typically not all of the following aspects. Firstly, the descriptions include comments on the language(s) used and my interpretation or blogger's comments of the intended audience. Photos are commented only if they are relevant to the analysis of the blog in question. The blogger descriptions include aspects that are relevant from the sociology of food perspective, such as information on the gender, age, marital status and social network of the blogger as well as information on where the blogger celebrates the Christmas.

Blog 1

The blog is bilingual and written in Finnish and in English. There are several photos taken by either the blogger or a family member featuring the family and the location. Some culturally bound concepts and habits are opened in a way that suggests an international target audience: "In Finland, Santa visits on Christmas eve". Reader comments suggest that the blog attracts readers who know the blogger and the family personally and that the readers form an international network featuring among others Finnish expats and non-Finnish readers. The style of the actual postings is neutral in that sense. For example, the blogger refers to her family members with kinship terms but the readers tend to use first names.

The blogger is a female representing the classical nuclear family; she has a husband and a young child. By profession the blogger is a pastor. The blogger does not specify where the family normally resides but the text suggests that not in Lapland where they spend the holiday. The Christmas posting referenced in this study actually covers two Christmases. The opening section of the posting functions as a Christmas card or a Christmas greeting and is a description of the previous Christmas which the nuclear family and some members of the maternal side of the extended family have spent at a rented cottage in Lapland in Finland. The latter part focuses on

the current Christmas which the nuclear family spends with the paternal side of the extended family.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 2

The blog is monolingual and written in English with Finnish and occasionally other languages appearing in individual terms in expressions like “the Christmas Ham (joulukinkku)”. The text suggests that the target audience is international, but at the same intimate; the blogger attempts to provide potential Finns in Canada with tips on how to locate Finnish food stuff, but also explains Finnish and Scandinavian Christmas habits to people with other backgrounds.

The blogger is a male. He does not specify his marital status or whether he has children but apparently shares a flat with a female. He works in Canada but the blog is categorised as a travel blog which could suggest that the blogger only plans to stay a limited period in Canada. The blogger spends the Christmas with his female flatmate and with some other people. They share preparation duties. The place of celebration is not specified, but it is probably the home of one or some members of the preparation team.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 3

The blog is bilingual and written in English and in Finnish. The blog is fictitious and describes the life of a teddy bear family. The target audience can be determined at several levels: firstly, the blog is targeted to teddy bear and/or miniature enthusiasts as there are detailed photos on the teddy bears and their dollhouse home as well as bears posing in different locations. Secondly, the blog apparently reflects the life of the actual blogger behind it; the teddy bears participate in different real-life events and travel, and the text and photos describe those events and trips. Thus the blog can be read as a personal blog as well. As far as the target audience is concerned, the main aspect is probably the interest in the production of the miniature teddy bears

and their equipment and creating and documenting scenes with the objects. The nationality of the readers and their intimacy to the blogger are secondary.

The protagonist of the blog is a female teddy bear living with her husband in Finland. The couple either have no children or the children are already adults living on their own. During the Christmas the protagonist entertains in her house family members from Italy.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 4

The blog is bilingual and written in English and in Finnish. The blogger specifies the primary target group of her Christmas posting in the following way: “And my english readers, try to bear with me. This post is mainly for those readers who are looking for tips where to eat in England. Thank you.” It remains uncertain whether the term “english” refers to all readers of the parts written in English or to residents of UK or England only.

The blogger is a middle-aged female with a partner and apparently no children. She is a seamstress and a make-up artist by profession. She lives in Finland but spends the Christmas season in Britain. The blogger’s partner is of the British origin, but the blogger does not specify whether they meet her partner’s family members during their stay in the UK. The Christmas meal takes place at a restaurant.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 5

The blog is bilingual and written in English and in Finnish with occasional differences between the language versions. The initial purpose of the blog has been technical; the blogger originally used it for testing purposes. He continues blogging, however, and my impression is that he expects a typical reader to be someone he knows also in real life or who is somehow connected to the blogger’s professional network. The text suggests that the expectation for knowledge on the Finnish culture is low, for example the process of preparing the ham is carefully documented. The blogger relies on photos and uses external links.

The blogger is a middle-aged male living with his partner. They have no children. They spend the Christmas primarily at home and they prepare a complete meal and put up decorations for the two of them. The Christmas time also involves some visiting.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 6

The blog is monolingual in English. Photos by the blogger and family members form an important element of the posting. The blogger provides background information on the Finnish customs, which suggests that the intended audience is international. The information is formulated for readers with little knowledge on Finland, for example “the declaration of Christmas peace. It has been declared from the town of Turku since the middle ages, and is a huge part of the Finnish Christmas tradition.”

The blogger profile resembles in some respect similar that of blogger (1); a mother of a nuclear family and a priest by profession. The blogger’s age is not specified. The nuclear family visits the blogger’s parents and grandparents and also enjoys meals there but they probably return home to sleep. In any case all the locations are close to each other, within the same town.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 7

The blog is monolingual, in English. The primary target group is probably intimate, consisting of the blogger’s close ones in Finland and possibly an international circle of friends.

The blogger is a young single female who studies in China and is about to start in a new job there. Her childhood family is not in China. She spends the Christmas in a group of four females with Finnish first names – apparently with two flatmates and a friend of either flatmate.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 8

The blog is primarily in English but includes a brief summary of the Christmas meal in dialectal Finnish. The primary audience is probably a circle of pet enthusiasts and thus known to the blogger, but not necessarily to the entire family. The conversation between the blogger and the readers is in English.

The blogger is a mother of a nuclear family and the blog suggests that pets are also considered important members of the family in that households. The nuclear family spends the Christmas at home but the blogger and her husband visit the husband's childhood family and enjoy a Christmas meal there.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 9

The blog is monolingual in English. The blog includes two lengthy Christmas related postings and the style approaches educational blogs but the personal level is also strongly present. The intended audience is international and the writer assumes practically no knowledge on the Finnish food culture from her readers. The postings have encouraged several readers to comment and also the commentary section reflects internationality and multiculturalism.

The blogger is a female. Her description is a combination of general information of national and regional traditions as well as those that the blogger follows or remembers from previous self- experienced Christmases.

The blog was referenced on August 10, 2011.

Blog 10

The blog is bilingual but each posting is typically monolingual and either in English or in Finnish. The blog apparently functions as a diary or a family album for the family themselves and also as a news channel for their friends and relatives. The expected audience consists of real life contacts. The bloggers seem to assume that readers know the Finnish way of life and Christmas tradition even though the postings suggest that the blog is also directed to friends acquired during the sailing trip and thus not necessarily Finnish.

The blog is kept by a couple who are with their children on a sailing trip round the world. During the Christmas the family are at a harbour in New Zealand and spend the Christmas on the boat.

The blog was referenced on August 11, 2011.

Blog 11

The blog is primarily bilingual and written in English and in Finnish. Some Italian text also appears in the blog in an embedded Christmas card element. The intended audience is intimate but the writer is aware of the possibility of a wider readership. The main function of the blog is to document the growing process and life of the son of the family; there is for example a table describing the growth and most of the photos are of the child. The blog also functions as a channel to keep in touch with the friends in Finland. Reader comments are typically in Finnish and suggest that the readers know the writer personally.

The literal text suggests that the family as a whole contributes to the blogging but the impression is still that it is only the Finnish mother of the family who actually posts to the blog. During the time of the Christmas posting referenced in this study the family is living as expats in Italy. The family also has a home in Finland. The posting does not specify which home is the place of Christmas preparations and celebration.

The blog was referenced on August 11, 2011.

Blog 12

The blog is written in three languages, namely Finnish, English and Swedish, of which the primary one is Finnish. The sections in English and Swedish are shorter than the one in Finnish and symmetrical with each other. The blogger expects the readers to be interested in the blogging genre. She comments and recommends other blogs and evaluates her own quality and motivations as a blogger both in the technical and the content sense. The function of the blog seems to be a diary with a self-developing emphasis; the blogger wants to develop as a blogger and in foreign languages but also document and share her experiences. The blogger keeps at least four blogs.

The blogger is a female who has a child. At the time of the posting referenced in this study she lives in a relationship. The blogger spends the Christmas at home with at least her partner. She does not specify whether the child is also there.

The blog was referenced on August 11, 2011.

Blog 13

The blog is bilingual and written in English and in Finnish. The text suggests that the writer assumes at least some of her readers to have little knowledge on Finland and the Finnish Christmas tradition. The style of the blog is two-folded; for the most it is written in the form of precise report and focuses on when-what-where-who but there is also a reflection on the blogger's feelings and hopes concerning Christmas.

The blogger is a female having a partner. The couple stay together the entire Christmas season and commute heavily between family members.

The blog was referenced on August 23, 2011.

The following table 1 provides information on the gender, marital status, place of residence and the location where the blogger celebrates the Christmas.

Blog #	Gender	Marital status	Place of residence	Christmas location
1	Female	Married with children	Unspecified	A rented cottage in Lapland
2	Male	Unspecified	Canada	Home (or friend's home)
3	Female	Married	Finland	Home
4	Female	In a relationship	Finland	UK, a restaurant milieu
5	Male	Married	Finland	Home, visits extended family
6	Female	Married with children	Finland	Visits extended family within one town
7	Female	Single	China	Home and public venues in China
8	Female	Married with	Finland	Home, visits extended

		children		family in another town
9	Female	Married with children	Finland	Home
10	Several writers	Nuclear family	A boat, sailing round the world	Home (= On the boat in New Zealand)
11	Female	Married with children	Italy	Home either in Italy or in Finland
12	Female	In a relationship, has a child	Finland	Home
13	Female	In a relationship	Finland	Visits extended family in several towns

TABLE 1 Blogger profiles in the present data

3.3 Method of analysis

The analysis method of the present study is qualitative content analysis. The analysis model is derived from the Nordic model to the analysis of the social organization of the meal (Mäkelä 2002).

The discussion on the source blogs is arranged by grouping the blogs; each element of analysis is reflected on applicable blogs rather than each blog being discussed separately.

As introduced by Mäkelä (2002: 21) and discussed earlier in the present study, the Nordic model consists of three dimensions. Two of these dimensions are used in the present study. Firstly, the dimension related to the structure of the meal. This covers the investigation of what is the central element of the meal and what accompanies it, order of elements (starters, main course, dessert or parallel dishes) and meal types. Secondly, the present study focuses on the social organization dimension. This covers the investigation of where and when people eat and who prepares the food. In the present study, research question 2 is based on the Nordic model's dimension of

the structure of the meal, while research question 3 is based on the Nordic model's dimension of the social organization of the meal.

The analysis of the structure and social organization of the meals focuses on two meals, the Christmas porridge meal and the main Christmas meal. Research question 1 identifies the food events that the bloggers regard as either of these meals. The first part also focuses on describing the naming rules suggested by the bloggers. Thus, the first part of the analysis focuses on isolating the sections that describe Christmas meals and which can be further analyzed using the Nordic model.

Finally, the research question 4, "How do the blogger's represent the tradition in the blogs?" When attempting to answer this question, I will mainly rely on the findings produced by the previous phases of the analysis and compare those findings to the concept of the Christmas tradition as introduced in the Theoretical background chapter of the present study.

4 ANALYSIS

4.1 The analysis of the social organization of the Christmas porridge meal

4.1.1 The naming of the porridge meal

According to the bloggers, the rice porridge meal, or the Christmas porridge meal, takes place in the Christmas Eve in the morning or at noon. The bloggers refer to the Christmas porridge tradition as the marker of the beginning of the actual Christmas time. The porridge meal seems rather fixed as far as the centre and the timing are concerned: the centre is rice porridge and it is served before afternoon of the 24th December.

Blog 2: We are going to start the Christmas on 24th with Christmas porridge.

Blog 9: Christmas Eve starts with eating rice porridge.

In the citations above, the bloggers draw a direct connection between the porridge meal and the beginning of the Christmas Eve: the Christmas starts when the porridge is served and that event also turns that day into the actual Christmas Eve, regardless of the exact timing. In the households that follow the porridge tradition the morning hours before the porridge seem to lack the special Christmas spirit.

There seems to be some flexibility in the timing but the porridge is definitely served on the 24th and not very late in the afternoon. The data suggests that the porridge meal may function as the minor meal of the day and it may replace either a normal breakfast or lunch or it can be added as an extra meal in the meal system.

Blog 13: My mother and my partner were waking little by little and my mother started to make Christmas porridge (rice pudding). We ate a little bit breakfast and drank coffee before the porridge was ready. about 10:00am the porridge was ready and we ate the "second breakfast" :D

Blogger 13 describes her Christmas schedule in detail. In her system the porridge represents “the second breakfast”, characterized with a laughing emoticon. The emoticon could suggest that there was no need for the porridge meal in terms of

energy or nutrition; porridge combined with a normal breakfast represents the abundance which is one aspect of a festive feeling.

4.1.2 The structure of the porridge meal

In this section, the analysis focuses on what is the structure of the Christmas porridge meal; what is eaten and how it is served.

According to the blogs, the centre of the porridge meal is fixed: it is rice porridge. The tradition includes also other kinds of porridge and the title “Christmas porridge” would easily cover those as well, but there are references to neither barley nor oat in the blogs. Typically, the concept of the Christmas porridge or rice porridge is not explained at all in the blogs as far as the centre is concerned. Instead, porridge as a dish type seems to be assumed self-explanatory by the bloggers. For example, writers do not specify the ingredients or the preparation technique of the porridge except blogger 2, who has included the below cited recipe for the porridge, perhaps as a tip for non-Finnish audience and also as a side product of his personal preparations for the Christmas.

“CHRISTMAS RICE PORRIDGE”

Traditional Finnish Christmas dish.

300 ml water

150 ml short grain rice

700 ml whole milk

Bring water to the boil in the saucepan. Add the rice and cook, stirring, until water is wholly absorbed in it. Add the milk and bring the mixture to the boil again, stirring frequently.

Lower the heat to minimum, cover the pan with lid and simmer for about 40 to 60 minutes, or until the rice and milk have thickened into a soft-textured, velvety smooth porridge. Stir every now and then to prevent the porridge from burning on the bottom or forming a skin on the surface. Season with a little salt, sugar and a pat of butter.”

Porridges can be prepared also in the oven and milk is not the only liquid alternative, but the preparation motivates no discussion at all. This suggests that porridge

requires little planning and consideration by the bloggers and it is likely that the porridges mentioned in the blogs all represent the type of the recipe above.

Bearing on mind the fact that the porridge related descriptions are written in English by Finnish writers and therefore potentially for readers with limited knowledge on the Finnish food culture, there is a potential cultural gap. From the meal study perspective the assumption of porridge as a centre of a meal being self-explanatory may be challenging for the international audience: the porridge meal type is very Nordic in nature and represents a meal type of its own in the Nordic model. In the British system, for example, there is no meal type with porridge as the centre of the meal. Therefore it is not problematic for a Finnish person to regard porridge as an independent dish but it may be a very novel idea of a meal for some readers.

As far as the trimmings are concerned, bloggers provide more details on them than on the centre. The tradition of hiding the almond is described in some blogs and as the “proper” trimmings and/or condiments the bloggers accept butter, milk and cinnamon. Mixed fruit soup is mentioned in blog 9:

Christmas Eve starts with eating rice porridge with cinnamon or sugar – or “sekametelisoppa” (something like “assorted noise soup”) a.k.a. sekahedelmäkeitto (mixed fruit soup).

Blogger 6 provides a detailed description on how the porridge was and is to be enjoyed, including the almond tradition with a modern, humorous interpretation:

“Some of us covered their porridge in cinnamon but still wouldn't give away the cinnamon cup. You are supposed to put sugar and cinnamon on top of your porridge and milk on the sides. Whoever gets an almond in his/her porridge gets to make a wish or if I get it it's usually a sign of me getting to wash the dishes. No almond in this year's porridge, so it's not even a real Christmas porridge! Hmmpf!”

Even though trimmings are discussed in the blogs, the bloggers skip all comments on combinatory rules. This is easily understandable: it is not customary in Finland to combine rice porridge with another centre at a meal or to use rice porridge as a staple for meat or fish. Internationally, that is always the case. Blog 13 includes the following comment by a Taiwanese reader concerning rice porridge:

“And that rice porridge for breakfast sounds very interesting - how funny, the Taiwanese also eat a kind of rice porridge for breakfast! Do you have it plain? Is it sweet or savoury? We have ours plain but with savoury accompaniments, like pickle and shredded pork and salty egg”

The porridge meal described in the reader comment is not typical, probably not even existent, in the Finnish meal system and certainly not a traditional Christmas dish. By coincidence, the dish referred to by the Taiwanese reader combines the centres of Finnish Christmas time meals: the rice porridge and the pork. In the Finnish Christmas food tradition rice porridge can be served as the centre of the separate porridge meal but also as one element of the dessert selection during Christmas. It is not, however, seen compatible with ham.

As stated previously, the data suggests that the bloggers assume the Christmas porridge meal as an entity to be a familiar concept to the Finnish audience and seem to regard it as a national tradition, in other words they did not refer to the porridge meal as representing their family tradition. When bloggers provide more information, it regards the serving rules and in one blog also the recipe. The latter example could reflect the fact that the preparation process is new to the blogger.

4.1.3 The Social organization of the porridge meal

In this section, the analysis focuses on where and with whom the Christmas porridge meal is eaten and who prepares it.

The Christmas porridge event may also involve several households. Blog 6 includes a photo of the porridge event. The blogger names participants and specifies the seating order but there is no comment on whether this specific seating order is traditional or not.

Blog 6: Anyway here's a picture of gang having rice porridge

Blog 6: We were invited for Christmas porridge at my parents house, so I didn't make any myself this year.

The citation suggests that this is not an automatic tradition. The blogger does not explicate the reason for gathering for the porridge. At a later point, however, when describing the dinner, she mentions her mother's absence from the dinner:

Blog 6: My mom was at work so present at the Christmas dinner were...

I interpret the porridge gathering as a possibility to share a meal with the whole group; as the mother of the blogger cannot join them for the dinner, the porridge meal functions as a replacing collective meal. Yet it is not named the Christmas meal or Christmas dinner. It thus seems that the porridge meal cannot replace the main Christmas meal even though the naming pattern of the latter indicates flexibility as

4.2 The analysis of the social organization of the Christmas meal

4.2.1 The naming of the Christmas meal

In this section, the analysis focuses on the rules that define the naming of the Christmas meal. According to the bloggers, typically at least one meal during the Christmas season is named the Christmas meal or the Christmas dinner or the bloggers in other ways define one or some meals they enjoy during the Christmas season as a meal with a special ceremonial value.

- Blog 1: We rented a cottage and ordered a ready made Christmas meal
- Blog 2: We are now pretty much ready for the Scandinavian Christmas dinner on Wednesday
- Blog 3: So the head became a part of the Christmas dinner menu with traditional Finnish ham, salmon, potatoes and some cheese. The dinner buffet was so popular that the queue continued all the way to the living room.
- Blog 4: During the Christmas season you should also try famous english christmas meal, roast turkey dinner...Ours was served by rustic Bolney Stage where service was excellent.
- Blog 6: My mom was at work so present at the Christmas dinner were...

The following blogger does not use the term Christmas meal or dinner but his description of the Christmas Eve is ham-centered and emphasizes the ham, eating and abundance:

- Blog 5: Tonight we are going to drop the ham to the oven for an overnight roast and then tomorrow we start eating more than we should.

Even though it seems that the Christmas dinner is an obligatory part of a Finnish person's meal system, the blogs suggest that there is a certain degree of flexibility in the naming pattern.

The first rule that the blogs suggest has already been referred to above in the porridge meal section, namely that despite the company and the setting, the Christmas porridge meal cannot be named the Christmas meal. Even though the Christmas porridge seems to have a strong Christmassy association among the bloggers, as a meal it cannot be the main meal of the Christmas celebration. My conclusion is that this naming rule reflects the status of the porridge in relation to other types of dishes: the blogs thus suggest that porridge cannot function as the centre of the Christmas meal even if it is the most Christmassy meal the blogger enjoys during the holiday season. Acceptable centres will be discussed in detail in the following section that focuses on the structure of the Christmas meal.

The second rule is related to the company. The blogs suggest that the naming pattern reflects the social network of the blogger in three ways. Firstly, the bloggers name as the Christmas meal the meal they share with the people emotionally closest to them, in other words the partner, the children, other family members and in-laws.

According to the bloggers they are aware if some members of the innermost social circle are not present and these omissions often seem to require some kind of explanations. Omissions of the close ones do not prevent the naming of a meal as the Christmas meal, though.

Secondly, the bloggers may refer to several meals as the Christmas meal if they enjoy meals with different people. There were no blogs with exactly the same company enjoying several Christmas meals whereas bloggers who moved between places during the holiday typically reported having several Christmas meals. There were also blogs in which the meal was split and the company or at least the blogger and her immediate company moved to another place between different parts of the meal.

Blog 8: And we had our last Christmas meal of the year here.

Blog 13: 3:00pm My sister and her children came for a Christmas meal.
 about 5:00pm we moved to my sister to Littoinen and drank coffee
 there.

Thirdly, the Christmas meal may take place even if the close ones are not present. In that case the closest people available are accepted as the Christmas meal company.

4.2.2 The structure of the Christmas meal – what is eaten

In this section, the analysis focuses on what is the structure of the Christmas meal, especially on what is eaten. As far as the menu is concerned, the Christmas meals represented in the blogs can be divided into two categories, namely the menus that are versions of the traditional Finnish Christmas menu and those that represent another type of a menu.

The traditional menu is featured in blogs 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 13. The amount of information given on individual dishes varies between the blogs. At the other extreme is, for example, blogger 1 who simply refers to what is eaten as “a ready made Christmas meal” and at the other blogger 9, who provides careful descriptions on several dishes. Typically, the bloggers describe some dishes in a detailed way and refer to the rest in a more general manner.

Blogs 4, 7, 10, and 12 feature untraditional Christmas menus. The menu described in blog 4 is a traditional Christmas menu but represents the British tradition with turkey as the centre. The menu in blog 12 combines some elements from the traditional Christmas menu as well as modern Western festive delicacies. The menu described in blog includes one element that is an adaptation of a dish familiar from the Finnish menu, namely fish dishes. Finally, the menu in blog 7 is not special festive menu in any food culture.

In the discussion below, the analysis focuses first on the traditional menus and then moves to menus that are untraditional in the Finnish Christmas context.

The blogs suggest that the core dishes or ingredients of the traditional Finnish Christmas menu are the ham, casseroles and the rosolli salad. There are further two central fish species that have a Christmassy connotation, namely salmon and herring. The former, according to the blogs, is accepted to the Christmas table salted, raw spiced, or smoked whereas herring is used in spicy cold dishes.

In addition to the above mentioned core dishes, which seem to enjoy the status of a Christmas dish, there are dishes that the bloggers declare Christmassy with less certainty. For example Carelian meat stew and Italian salad represents this type of dishes.

The blogs further suggest that coffee and desserts form an optional part of the menu; a menu without any dessert type dishes is considered a full one but it is also acceptable to consider different pastry and puddings as parts of the actual Christmas meal. A typical approach to this, among the bloggers, is to draw at least a faint line between the other part of the meal and the coffee and dessert part. The data further suggests that dishes with the dessert status are not selected at the same time with the other dishes. The other dishes are eaten first and the dessert type dishes follow either

immediately or, perhaps more typically, after some time. The definition of the Christmas coffee menu seems vaguer than the basic menu of the Christmas meal.

The centre of the entire menu is the ham. Bearing in mind Mäkelä's (2002: 13) definition for the serving style, however, makes it possible to separate from the menu several centres. Mäkelä suggests that even though all dishes are available for free combination, typically a diachronic style is followed at the Christmas table, and thus the meal can be seen as a combination of three courses, namely cold fish and meats as course one, then the hot dish as course two and finally dessert as the third course. (Mäkelä 2002: 13.) Despite ham actually being typically served cold, it is the centre of the main course, course two. The centre of the starter course, course one, could be salmon or another fish dish or perhaps a cold meat dish. The data does not include references to a separate course one, though.

Blogger 9 provides a very detailed description on the Christmas meal tradition of her family and writes on many dishes as well as how she is used to serving them. She makes it clear that the centre of the Christmas meal is the ham and that the role of the other dishes is to accompany the ham:

Blog 9: What my family has on the table is of course the ham... Besides ham, there are different casseroles

The bloggers vary in how and whether they refer to the concept of the Christmas casseroles and therefore the concept can and perhaps needs to be approached from different angles also in the analysis, namely as a general dish type, individual dishes or as an automatic element in the traditional menu. Among the bloggers, blogger 9 provides the most detailed description of the casseroles and her interpretation of the selection of the possible Christmas casseroles is also likely to be the widest among the bloggers.

Blog 9: Besides ham, there are different casseroles: Swedish turnips, carrots (with rice or sometimes without), potatoes (it's made to be a bit sweet) and in some parts liver too (this too contains also rice). Last year we added a new one to our selection: Sweet potato casserole – yummy!
When I was a kid my father's mom used to make a macaroni casserole

with sugar but no meat. It was always a part of the Christmas dinner – so maybe that’s a tradition in Middle Finland, I really don’t know.

For this blogger there seems to be three central casseroles, namely Swedish turnip or more commonly rutabaga, carrot and potato casseroles. For the carrot casserole she accepts two versions, with or without rice but for the potato casserole she seems to accept only the sweetened version. My interpretation is that these three casseroles, with alteration allowed in terms of rice and sweetness, form the core group of casseroles also for the other bloggers, who often choose to refer to them as group or simply include them in the general term Christmas food or Christmas groceries. For example blogger 5 uses the latter strategy in English:

Blog 5: We shopped the last remaining groceries for Christmas dinner ... now we have all the traditional Finnish Christmas items on the menu.

In the Finnish section, however, he is more specific:

Blog 5: Nyt ollaan saatu jouluruokien shoppailut päätökseen.. nyt on rosollia, graavikalaa, laatikoita ja muita joulukerkuja jääkappi täynnä.

In the Finnish section of his blog the blogger opens the concept of “the traditional Finnish Christmas items on the menu” to cover among other dishes the rosolli salad, rawpickled fish and casseroles. Still, he does not specify what kinds of casseroles his menu covers.

The data suggests that casseroles as a dish type belong to the Christmas table but that for many bloggers it does not seem relevant to further specify or describe the particular casserole selection of their own. My own interpretation, partly based on the photos included in the blogs, is that when no further definition or description is provided, the menu includes rutabaga, carrot and/or potato casserole in any combination.

In blog 9 the fourth casserole, namely liver, is mentioned but my impression is that the blogger has seen it being served as a Christmas dish but does not include it in her own menu. I interpret “in some parts” as a reference to regional variation in the

tradition and that the blogger's own family tradition does not belong to the liver casserole region.

She then moves on to describe a novelty from the previous year, the sweet potato casserole. She does not specify whether this novelty is to remain on the menu but I get the impression that is the case.

Finally, she describes a casserole dish familiar to her from her childhood but apparently no longer a part of her Christmas menu, namely the macaroni casserole. She further defines it as a meatless dish to separate it from a common everyday dish in Finland, a macaroni casserole with minced meat.

The liver casserole could form an exception, but my assumption is that when other bloggers use general references to casseroles the last three types of casseroles are not included in the menu. I also assume that the first three casseroles, rutabaga, carrot and potato are widely accepted as traditional Christmas dishes, perhaps even primarily or exclusively such. The latter three, however, are more likely to be considered as novelties to the tradition (the sweet potato casserole), everyday dishes (especially the liver but possibly also the macaroni casserole) or as related to other festive meals especially in certain regions (the meatless macaroni casserole).

Whether an international reader of a typical data blog can grasp the idea of a casserole in general or that they belong to the traditional menu remains uncertain; for the Finnish writers these dishes are familiar but internationally speaking that may not be the case. Especially the most general of the terms, Christmas dishes, is likely to cover at least one but probably three casseroles in the mind of the writer but easily translates as covering the dishes familiar to the reader from his or her native food culture.

The Christmas tradition requires fish to be served at the Christmas meal. There is, however, room for personal, family level and regional variation. The status of a big fish, most likely salmon, when served whole can approach that of ham but bloggers do not report replacing ham with fish. The data suggests that herring and salmon are common elements on the menu but on the other for some bloggers the fish species used in the dish seems irrelevant or taken for granted and they simply define the

preparation method. Lutefisk seems to be accepted as a Christmas dish but no blogger explicitly reported serving it.

Blogger 9 refers to four fish dishes:

Blog 9: Then there's fish. Glazier's herring (basically herring and pieces of onion and carrot in vinegar) is what we have sometimes. Another traditional one is rawpickled salmon *shivers*.

One of the weird Christmas "treats", especially in the Swedish speaking areas of Finland, is Lipeäkala – Lutefisk/lyefish. We don't use it in my family (thank You, God, for that!)

Sometimes rosolli contains also herring and/or garlic but to me that's a horrifying idea so I'm glad our tradition is very basic.

The citations above suggest that the blogger is not particularly fond of the traditional fish dishes and she also defines them as representing not her own family's but regional or general traditions. The fish dishes she refers to all belong more or less to the category of dishes that require the so called acquired taste. Therefore, if the blogger has not been used to trying these dishes in her childhood, the dislike is of little surprise. Also blogger 5 mentions the rawpickled fish, but only in Finnish.

Blogger 10 is somewhat of an opposite of the previously cited blogger; she is sailing on the other side of the world and incapable of following the Finnish tradition. Fish dishes are for her the cornerstone of the Christmas menu and she tries to prepare them as traditionally as she can:

Blogger 10: For Christmas, we need to prepare some fish. I think we try to catch some small prey and try to spice it up according to our family recipes for herring. Local fresh fish can be good in akvavit or cream sauce. Unfortunately, I left my herring recipes home but maybe I remember the key points.

We do not try to put up a Finnish Christmas here but Christmas without a few types of salmon and herring could be difficult.

The blogger is ready to accept to the Christmas table new species of fish and she is also willing to improvise in the preparation process. However, the text suggests that there is a quite clear idea to the writer as to what the proper Christmas fish dishes are like, in other words the family recipes represent the most proper and most Christmassy kind of fish dishes to the blogger.

In the following extract the reference to “the head” related to an Italian guest whose contribution to the menu is a pig’s head that is added to the otherwise Finnish style buffet.

Blog 3: So the head became a part of the Christmas dinner menu with traditional Finnish ham, salmon, potatoes and some cheese.

For this blogger the ham is a central element but not as solely the centre as with most; the description of the salmon is symmetrical to that of the ham and this could suggest that the ham and the salmon share the role of the as the centre. In the Finnish section she describes the three elements, the pig’s head, the ham and the salmon, in a rather symmetrical manner:

Blog 3: Sianpää päätyi siis joulupöytään kinkun seuraksi. Kinkku ostettiin jo ajoissa ennen joulua, Mirjalta sekin. Myös joululohi hankittiin tunnetulta lohenkasvattajalta.

The pig’s head is represented as an accompaniment to the ham. The acquiring of ham and salmon, the two elements provided by the hosts, is described with an emphasis on knowing where the ingredient comes from. The supplier of the ham is referenced by the first name indicating familiarity and the supplier of the salmon as a well-known producer of salmon. The treatment of the pig’s head probably shows more politeness to the guest who brings it than the value given to it as a dish.

Traditionally, fresh vegetables are not a part of the Christmas meal. Due to the timing in the middle of the winter that would have been difficult of impossible in the old times and traditionally there has also been a tendency to consider prepared and often warm dishes more festive than uncooked ingredients. The traditional way to include vegetables in the Christmas meal has been, in addition to the casseroles, the rosolli salad. Below is the description of the dish by blogger 9.

Blog 9: Rosolli is one of our two salads. It's made out of cubed, cooked carrots and beetroot, added with pieces of pickled cucumber. Rosolli is served with a dressing made of either whipped cream with vinegar or sour cream with vinegar and black pepper. Sometimes the dressing is coloured pink with the beetroot juice. Sometimes rosolli contains also herring and/or garlic but to me that's a horrifying idea so I'm glad our tradition is very basic.

In addition to rosolli, another salad is also mentioned:

Blog 9: The other salad is my favourite. I'm not really sure if it's really a traditional Christmas dish, but we've had it every year as long as I can remember. We call it italiansalaatti (Italian salad) and it's made of peas, carrots and apples. The small cubes are mixed into the dressing that's made of mayonnaise, whipped cream and vinegar. Yummy, yummy, yummy!

The blogger describes the ingredients in detail but does not comment the preparation process much, only that the ingredients are diced. She shows hesitation in the labelling of the dish as a Christmas dish.

Blogs 4, 7 and 10 represent a non-Finnish menu and blog 12 a strongly modified version. Blogger 4 enjoys the Christmas meal in a British restaurant and thus her meal belongs to the "Roast turkey and all the trimmings" category. As the centres and the side dishes the blogger lists the following.

Blog 4 : turkey, ham, sausages wrapped in bacon, roasted potatoes and parsnips, brussels sprouts, turkey stuffing and gravy

The most obvious difference, compared to the traditional Finnish Christmas meal, is the central role of the turkey. The ham, potatoes and gravy represent familiar elements for a Finnish eater even though roasting is not the typical cooking method for potatoes and the British gravy may be slightly different from the typical sauce prepared for the ham in Finland. The blogger seems satisfied with the meal and she does not seem to miss the traditional Finnish menu. She even recommends that kind of a Christmas meal to her readers.

Blog 4: During the Christmas season you should also try famous english christmas meal, roast turkey dinner.... Ours was served by rustic Bolney Stage where service was excellent.

The Christmas meal enjoyed by the blogger 7 is not a traditional Christmas meal in any culture. In fact the blogger enjoys during the Christmas two meals that could be regarded as the main meals of the day. It seems that for the blogger the meal served at lunch time represent the Christmas meal whereas the other meal, a dinner at a restaurant, seems to represent more an ordinary eating out food event.

For this blogger the deviation from the tradition is not voluntary but a result caused by circumstances:

Blog 7: We tried to make Christmas as it is at home in Finland

Being a young, single expat in China she cannot follow the routines she is used to; the people, the setting and the raw materials are all different from what she is used to. She names two Christmas dishes she is unable to prepare: “no ham, no rosolli”. Instead, she and her friends prepare the following menu:

Blog 7: Well what we did, we cooked chicken/potato/macaroni/vegetable salad, eggs with mayonnaise, then we had one chocolate box from Finland and then Christmas cookies. That was our lunch

Even though the blogger writes, as cited above, that she attempts to follow the routine in what ways she can, the blogger’s solution differs in practically all aspect from the Finnish Christmas tradition, Firstly, it is not a buffet at all. Secondly, the centre is salad and apparently cold. And thirdly, the name ingredient of the salad is chicken which traditionally has no place in the Finnish Christmas menu.

4.2.3 The structure of the Christmas meal – preparation and serving

The data suggests that the bloggers take the traditional Finnish serving style of the Christmas meal as granted; typically they do not explicate that the Finnish tradition represents the buffet style. Blogger 3 refers to the meal as “The dinner buffet” and blogger 9 uses also a term “Christmas table” which could be interpreted as a translation of the Finnish term “joulupöytä” which refers to the Christmas buffet.

Photos included in the blogs and descriptions of the menu all imply that if the Christmas meal is seen as a “typical”, “traditional”, “normal” kind of the Christmas meal the buffet style is the only possibility. There are no references to a three course, in other words a starter, main dish and dessert style, Christmas meal in the blogs that describe a meal that the blogger considers a typical Finnish Christmas meal.

The blogs suggest that ham is the most important element on the menu for Finnish Christmas makers. It is the centre and all other dishes served simultaneously can be seen as staples, trimmings or condiments of the meal. For example for blogger 12 ham is the only traditional salty element accepted on the menu whereas for blogger 7 ham and rosolli are the two elements she explicitly misses from the Christmas table. The central role of the dish is emphasized by the fact that ham is the dish that encourages most detailed comments on how it should be prepared and served.

Blog 9: What my family has on the table is of course the ham. A big, salted ham that’s baked in the oven for hours and hours. When it has cooled it’s coated with mustard and breadcrumbs and eaten cold, sliced during the Christmas and so.

The preparation and serving method provided in the previous citation is in concordance with the typical description to be found in the blogs: ham is preferably big and home baked and there should be enough for several meals. The meat must be prepared as one large piece and sliced cooked.

Blogger 5 documents the preparation process very carefully; there are also photos of the process.

Blog 5: We did stop by at the grocery store to pick up the ham

 Just popped ham into the oven for overnight roasting.

 Now the ham is done ... we just got it out from the oven. It looked and tasted great!

For this particular blogger the ham seems to be the centre of the entire Christmas for at least the preparation time. He measures time in terms preparing the ham; there is the day when the meat is to be chosen and brought home and then each step of the preparation follows and marks the approach of the holiday. Once the ham is ready

and the maestro has approved it, the Christmas is practically there and the celebration may begin:

Blog 5 Next we will go to sauna and prepare ourselves for Christmas eve.

The most important condiment for ham is mustard:

Blog 2: Like every Finnish people know, when you eat Christmas Ham, you have to have mustard.

Apart from the mustard being associated with the ham, the bloggers are not very specific on how the ham should be combined with other dishes. The core message is that ham on top of the hierarchy and other dishes accompany it. For example blogger starts her description of the menu with ham and introduces other dishes in the following way:

Blog 9: Besides ham, there are...

And then follows a description on casseroles, fish dishes, and salads.

Ham also seems to be the most central symbol for abundance, on the one hand in the sense of eating it too much and on the other hand in the sense of there being too much it:

Blog 5: Tonight we are going to drop the ham to the oven for an overnight roast and then tomorrow we start eating more than we should.

Blog 9: It's about a week of eating ham and other Christmas foods. The good thing is there's no cooking. The bad thing is that after several days of eating the same food you get really tired of it...

Blog 2: Kalle and Emelie had found couple weeks earlier this store in Montreal, that sells everything from Scandinavia and they had ordered us Christmas Ham (Joulukinkku).

Blogger 9 comments on the serving alternatives of the rosolli:

Blog 9: Rosolli is served with a dressing made of either whipped cream with vinegar or sour cream with vinegar and black pepper. Sometimes the

dressing is coloured pink with the beetroot juice. Sometimes rosolli contains also herring and/or garlic

The ham and the rosolli seem to be the only dishes the bloggers describe in terms of serving. It would be interesting to interview international readers and ask them to specify how they imagine the dishes are served and combined during the meal. It remains, in my opinion, uncertain also for a reader with knowledge on the Finnish tradition what rules if any followed in combining the dishes in different families.

4.2.4 The social organization of the Christmas meal - the location and company

In this section, the analysis focuses on where and with whom the Christmas meal is eaten. An analysis of the social organization of a meal typically attempts to answer the questions where and with whom. This analysis forms no exception but this time the two dimensions are combined. This is primarily to avoid redundancy; the data suggests that the location influences the combination of participants of the Christmas meals so heavily that discussion on participants with no accompanying information on the location would fail to capture the social implications.

The location of a meal event can be determined at two levels. On the one hand, there is the immediate level, the actual place where the eating takes place. For example the blogger's own kitchen, a hamburger place or a fine restaurant. On the other hand, there is the general level which refers to the environment in which the blogger spends the Christmas time. For the general level, the following categories of place are used: Finland vs. abroad, bloggers home vs. somewhere else, and multiple places. The nature of the place in terms of private vs. public is also discussed to some extent. The immediate level is relevant for some blogs but not all.

In this section the blogs are grouped and discussed in the following order, based on the location. Firstly, the analysis focuses on the bloggers who spend the Christmas in Finland. Secondly, the analysis moves on to blogs in which the location is outside Finland. Within these main groups, the blogs are further divided according to the place of the meals and preparations: home, outside home and multiple places.

As far as the participants are concerned, the analysis involves two aspects, namely a) the circle involved and b) number of generations present. The categories for the circle involved are the following: alone, nuclear family, extended family and friends.

As far as the country level of the place of the celebration is concerned, only one blogger reports having travelled from one country to another for Christmas. Yet another travels between homes prior to Christmas but does not specify whether she travels in order to be in Finland for Christmas and she also leaves the location of Christmas celebration unspecified. Others spend the holidays in the country they reside, with one blogger being a special case as she is on a long term sailing trip and spends the Christmas on the boat.

The data suggests that private homes are the most typical places for the Christmas meal. The data further suggests that Christmas meals typically involve more participants than those who actually share the home, for example grandparents or adult children with their partners and children. In other words the most typical environment for the Christmas meal in the Finnish context is a private home but not necessarily diner's own.

6 bloggers specify their own home as the place where they enjoy the Christmas meal, namely bloggers 3, 5, 7, 10, 11 and 12. For one blogger, blogger 10, a sailing ship functions as their home. Blogger 11 has two homes, one in Italy and one in Finland, and she does not specify in which the family spends the holiday.

Further 3 bloggers, namely bloggers 6, 8 and 13 have the meal at their relatives' homes. All define the place in terms of a female family member; grandmother, mother-in-law and mother respectively. The natures of the visits are apparently slightly different: blogger 6 only visits her grandmother for a short time for the meal. Blogger 8 has also been invited explicitly to the Christmas meal but the visit covers the entire day and not just a meal time. Blogger 13, on the contrary, stays overnight and enjoys several meals during her stay. She also visits her sister from her mother's place to have coffee and then returns to her mother's place for yet another eating event.

Blogger 8 probably serves at least one Christmas meal at her own house in addition to the meal she describes in her posting. The described meal takes place at her mother-in-law's place on the 27th.

Blog 8: Then we started towards my mother in law's place. She and my husbands brother were waiting for us to come and eat with them.

Blogger 13 commutes a lot during the holiday and there are several places where she eats but for the blogger the primary Christmas meal is the one served by her mother. The location and company pattern of the blogger's meals is the following: the meal at the mother's, coffee at the sister's and a snack type food event in the evening

Blog 13: The Christmas Eve was almost like the other eves what they usually are at my mother's.

...

3:00pm My sister and her children came for a Christmas meal.

about 5:00pm we moved to my sister to Littoinen and drank coffee there.

...

about 9:00pm me, my partner and my mother left from my sister and at my mother's we ate a little bit and drank mulled wine

Blogger 2 does not specify the place but it is presumably either his home or home of another member in the group of four adults. These four acquire foodstuff together and share preparation duties but the blogger does not describe the environment of the meal or other celebration. It could also be that all four share one apartment and hence there only is one home where to dine.

Blogger 9 refers in the posting to several Christmases dating from her childhood to present time. She focuses on aspects other than place but the text suggests that a typical Christmas meal for the blogger is enjoyed at a private home, either the home where she lives or at a relative's place. The following examples focus on the way the blogger connects the meals and dishes to the family members.

Blog 9: When I was a kid my father's mom used to make a macaroni casserole with sugar but no meat. It was always a part of the Christmas dinner – so maybe that's a tradition in Middle Finland, I really don't know.

Mr Right's cousin always has Karelian meat stew ... on their Christmas table but we never do.

When I was a kid my mom used to make a sort of rice pudding. And her mom always made us red and yellow jelly

My interpretation is that the first example above refers to a meal served at the blogger's paternal grandmother's place in the Central Finland even though grandmother may have brought dishes with her to the blogger's childhood home as well. The second example suggests that the blogger has sometime enjoyed the Christmas meal in the home of her husband's cousin. Finally, the third example refers to the Christmases spent at the own home. The comment on the grandmother could refer to a situation where the grandmother participates in cooking in the blogger's home or where the blogger visits the grandmother.

As far as the location type is concerned, all the examples represent Christmas meals enjoyed at a private home, either the actual home or a home of a relative/in-law.

Blogger 1 has the meal at a rented cottage. In terms of privacy the cottage is like an ordinary private home.

Blog 1: We rented a cottage and ordered a ready made Christmas meal

Only one blogger eats the meal in a truly public place; blogger 4 is travelling and enjoys the Christmas meal at a restaurant with her boyfriend.

As far as the place within home is concerned, the bloggers do not specify where in the house the Christmas meal is eaten area and whether the place differs from the usual eating place. Neither do they specify whether there are special arrangements involved for example to make room for all participants in cases where the company includes more people than those who regularly live in the house. The background theory does not provide tools for the analysis of these findings but in my opinion this could be interpreted as a sign of the repetitive nature of Christmas routines: whatever the place is and whatever arrangements are required to fit in all participants, the

system is the same every year and therefore need not be mentally solved. Another possible explanation is that there is no need to specify the place because the expected reader knows the house and where the family dines. The omission of this information could, however, also reflect an aspect that is deeper related to the Finnish organization of the meal: perhaps the modern Finnish households, or at least the households of the bloggers, lack a hierarchy of places in terms of festiveness. Thus the Christmas meal is enjoyed in the sole place used for eating in a certain house or in the only place that is big enough for everyone to be seated regardless of the nature of that room, be it the kitchen, a separate dining area or room, living room or some space in the house. This finding would suggest a change in tradition; Finnish language separates rooms according to festiveness and there is a term *sali* which refers to a dining room that is used to dine guests and where . The term is also a little archaic.

The bloggers describe the list of participants in various ways. At a collective level some bloggers use simply first person plural while others may combine different terms that refer to groups of people. At an individual level some bloggers refer to participants by their first names while another technique to list persons is to give the kinship titles or other terms that define the role of that individual either to the blogger or in the specific context in question. Typically the bloggers combine the techniques.

Blog 1: My parents, brother, and our family

This Christmas we celebrate with my husband's extended family.

Blogger 2 refers to three people with first names. One of these shares a flat with the blogger and possibly is his girlfriend or wife and the other two could be a couple or single friends. It thus seems that the group consists of four adults who are either all friends to each other or two couples or one couple and two single friends.

Blog 3: My sister Maria, my brother Sergio and Alberto's cousin Roberto with his kids arrived to stay as our guests over the Christmas.

Bloggers 4 and 5 have the meal with their partners. For blogger 4, the immediate company consists of the blogger and her boyfriend but as the meal takes place at a restaurant there are presumably present also a lot of other people. Blogger 5 enjoys

the meal with his wife at home. Blogger 12 may fall into the same couple only category but her child may be present as well.

Blogger 6 enjoys the meal with the extended family. She lists all participants in a careful way:

Blog 6: present at the Christmas dinner were myself, Janne and Ebba, both my siblings, my father, my aunt Kirsi and grandma of course

The “of course” that follows grandma is likely to refer to the location; the meal is enjoyed at the grandmother’s home. This company includes members of four generations.

Blog 7: Piia, Tytti, Piia's friend Meri and I

The blogger does not specify her relationship to the females named Piia and Tytti but they are probably flatmates; the blogger describes the participation and roles collectively and there are no roles of a hostess or a guest (other than that of Piia’s friend) assigned to anyone.

Blog 8: Then we started towards my mother in law's place. She and my husbands brother were waiting for us to come and eat with them.

Blogger 9 describes Christmas meals in different environments and her focus is more on the location than on individual participants.

Blogger 10 enjoys the meal with the nuclear family and a guest from fellow sailor they have met at the harbor.

Blogger 11 does not specify the company and the description leaves room for different interpretations. At least the blogger and her son seem to be at the place but blogger’s husband and relatives may or may not be present. The blogger’s family has houses both in Finland and in Italy and shortly before Christmas the blogger and the son travel from Italy to Finland. The blogger then provides description on the state of the preparations but there is no mention of further travelling or whether the mother and son team join relatives for the meal.

Blogger 13 travels during the Christmas and therefore there are different people present at different meals. It seems that the main Christmas meal is the one served at

her mother's and at her sister's. The location and company pattern of the blogger's meals is reflected in the following citation from the blog:

Blog 13: The Christmas Eve was almost like the other eves what they usually are at my mother's.

...

about 10:00am the porridge was ready and we ate the "second breakfast" :D

...

3:00pm My sister and her children came for a Christmas meal.

about 5:00pm we moved to my sister to Littoinen and drank coffee there.

...

about 9:00pm me, my partner and my mother left from my sister and at my mother's we ate a little bit and drank mulled wine

The core group for the blogger consists of her mother and partner who are present at all three, four or five (the number depends on whether the breakfast time eating is counted as one or two events and whether the coffee drinking event is seen as an independent event or a dessert phase of the Christmas meal) eating events. The Christmas meal involves more participants; the blogger's sister and her children join the blogger's core team at the mother's house. Once the meal is finished, the entire company moves to the blogger's sister's house. There another food event, coffee drinking, takes place. This event can be regarded as a dessert phase of the Christmas meal as well, especially since the participants are the same. Later in the evening, the core group returns to the blogger's mother's house where a less structured food event takes place.

The data suggests that the bloggers are aware of a "complete" list of participants of a Christmas meal and that the lists vary according to whose point of view is emphasized. The texts describe who participates but also who is missing and who would like to have the blogger with them.

In the following citations the bloggers specify who is missing and provide a practical explanation:

Blog 3: Roberto's wife is running a popular catering business in Naples and as the Christmas is a high profit season for her, she couldn't follow her husband and kids this year either.

Blog 6: My mom was at work so present at the Christmas dinner were

In the examples above the omission of the mentioned individual does not seem to affect their Christmas feeling. In the former case the missing person is not that close to the protagonist at least in kinship terms and the protagonist also has the house full with other people. In the latter case the missing person is close to the blogger but they have shared the porridge meal earlier that day.

For blogger 7 the real situation features deviation from her ideal or expected in two ways. On the one hand, one member of her usual team is missing due to meeting her mother. On the other hand, the entire situation, the fact she is as the only member of her childhood family abroad, forces the blogger to celebrate without the people she is used to having around at Christmas times.

Blog 7: Then was Christmas which we celebrated just us four (Piia, Tytti, Piia's friend Meri and I). Mari unfortunately was in Shanghai with her mom and sister who came to China just before Christmas Eve. We tried to make Christmas as it is at home in Finland, but it was hard; no snow, no Christmas decorations, no Christmas tree, no presents, no ham, no rosolli (what ever it is in English), no mom, no family, no Christmas tv programs, no nothing!

The omission of a friend does not seem to bother the blogger but not being with her family, on the contrary, does.

Blogger 8 comments missing persons only in the Finnish section. The original is written in dialectical Finnish. Thus the style translates poorly but the basic meaning is provided in English below after the original:

Blog 8: Moksut jäivä kotti, tais tulla valvottuu pitkäl yähö, ku lomal kerta ova.

The kids stayed home. It seems like they, having a break from the school, stayed up late last night.

The children did not join their parents on a day trip to the paternal grandmother. The blogger also explains that the omission is due to children's sleeping rhythm; for the children a school break is a time they are apparently allowed to stay awake later than usual.

Blogger 12 spends the Christmas home and there are no elder generations present. She does not report missing anyone's company during Christmas but is aware that her choice may not reflect the wishes of some other people. Below is the original in Finnish and my free translation below it.

Blog 12: Ja kyllä, olen hyvin tyytyväinen, että pidin pääni emmekä lähteneet viettämään perinteistä joulua sukulaisteni pariin.

And yes, I am very pleased with my sticking to my plan and not going at my relatives' to spend a traditional Christmas with them

The text suggests that there has been persuasion from the relatives and that the blogger would have been an expected guest.

4.2.5 The social organization of the Christmas meal - who prepares

In this section, the analysis focuses on who prepares the Christmas meal.

Blogger 11 describes the preparations in a way that reveals to the reader that the Christmas dishes are home made. She does not, however, specify how the work is shared between the family members:

Blog 11: the ham needs to be picked up today. ...the last casseroles are on their way into the oven like the gingerbread.

Three bloggers enjoy meals that have been commercially produced but for one of the bloggers the restaurant meal does not represent the Christmas meal.

Blogger 1 is one of the bloggers who have outsourced the preparation. She spends the holiday at a rented cottage with her family, so the meal is both commercial and private:

Blog 1: We rented a cottage and ordered a ready made Christmas meal which turned out to be a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas. We had time to enjoy each others' company and relax since no one had to stress about cooking and cleaning.

According to the blog the family celebrates in a very traditional way except for the outsourcing process. The text emphasizes the importance of the social aspect for the blogger: for her the shared time and experience are more important than being in control of the preparation process. She feels no urge to justify the decision and openly expresses relief from the work load and responsibilities related to the preparation of the meal.

Blogger 4 is the only blogger who reported travelling abroad in order to celebrate the Christmas. Her meal is a restaurant buffet and the menu follows the British tradition.

4.3 The analysis of the emergence of tradition in the blogs

In this section, the analysis focuses on of the Christmas food tradition, namely on the awareness and interpretation of the tradition among the bloggers as well as how the Christmas time meals described in the blogs reflect the tradition. The analysis further describes how the blogger's react to omissions and alterations to the tradition as well as how the tradition and the ideal relate to each other.

As far as the awareness of the tradition is concerned, in all the blogs the bloggers show awareness of the Finnish Christmas food tradition which includes for example ham, casseroles, certain fish dishes and rosolli. There is, however, also variation in the relation to the tradition.

One aspect that reflects variety is how the blogger ties the tradition to geography and families. Blogger 9 shows awareness of possible regional heterogeneity in the tradition. She begins her description with a disclaimer of some sort:

Blog 9: Things written here are not the absolute truth or scientific facts but the way I personally see life in this beautiful country and how I've grown to know them. Many things vary a lot between different areas, too. My life experience is limited to South and Central Finland.

She also carefully specifies her personal relationship to each aspect of the tradition. In other words, she explicates whether an aspect of the tradition belongs to her own menu or to her family's habits or whether she just describes it because it is a part of the general tradition but has not had a part in her Christmases. She further explicates that the tradition covers also dishes that she personally does not find pleasant.

In the following citations the blogger draws connections between certain regions and Christmas related dishes in the following way:

Blog 9: One of the weird Christmas "treats", especially in the Swedish speaking areas of Finland, is Lipeäkala – Lutefisk/lyefish. We don't use it in my family (thank You, God, for that!)

When I was a kid my father's mom used to make a macaroni casserole with sugar but no meat. It was always a part of the Christmas dinner – so maybe that's a tradition in Middle Finland, I really don't know.

With the first comment, she apparently connects Christmas traditions also to language communities. This could, however, be a purely geographical observation despite the language comment; the Swedish speaking areas in Finland cover the archipelago and some parts of the Western and Southern coasts and thus the closeness to the sea could explain possible differences especially in the habits related to fish and fish dishes. Whatever the actual focus of the remark, be it linguistic or geographical, she separates her own tradition from that of the Swedish speaking areas.

The latter comment shows that on the one hand the blogger regards traditions as regional and on the other hand as a family level phenomenon. She knows that the grandmother from her father's side did consider macaroni casserole a Christmas dish but she is not certain whether that reflected more that particular house's habits or a habit common in the area, namely "Middle Finland" as she chooses to call the area she also refers to as "Central Finland" in the disclaimer cited above. The blogger is open about what she does not know and her comment also signals that the macaroni casserole tradition is a thing of the past for her. Food studies typically emphasize the maternal lines in explanations of how traditions are passed forward. Perhaps this is a reversed example of the importance of the maternal lines and omission of the macaroni dish and unawareness of its regional status is related to the fact that they represent blogger's father's food heritage.

Further, the same blogger describes another element of the tradition that is not included in the menu of the blogger and which also has a paternal connection to the family:

Blog 9: Mr Right's cousin always has Karelian meat stew (pieces of pork and beef, sometimes with onion and carrots, cooked in a big pot in the oven) on their Christmas table but we never do.

Whether there used to be Karelian meat stew on the Christmas menu in the husband's childhood remains uncertain but the blogger apparently has no personal Christmassy association with the dish and does not include it in her menu.

The definition of whether a dish is a Christmas dish may be unclear, as in the following example, further from the same blog:

Blog 9: The other salad is my favourite. I'm not really sure if it's really a traditional Christmas dish, but we've had it every year as long as I can remember. We call it italiansalaatti (Italian salad)

Even though the dish has belonged to all the Christmases the blogger remembers, she is uncertain as whether to classify it as a traditional Christmas dish. And she is probably right in doubting the role of that dish in the most typical Christmas meal menu; that dish is not mentioned by other bloggers and literature suggests that the salad dish of the Christmas time is traditionally the so called rosolli.

The method used for introducing the dishes illuminates the emphasis given for tradition in defining the Christmas dishes: the blogger lists with no hesitation as Christmas dishes some dishes she has never included into her Christmas menu and which she may have never seen being served in her childhood home. At the same time, she is not certain whether to label the Italian salad as a Christmas dish even though that dish has been served every Christmas she remembers.

As far as the faithfulness to the Christmas traditions are concerned, it seems that the greater the distance between Finland and/or the socially and emotionally closest people, the more willingly novelties are accepted; newly acquired friends and colleagues are accepted as Christmas company, Swedish or Scandinavian goods can be regarded as genuine parts of the Finnish tradition and significant menu modification is allowed. These modifications and novelties are discussed below.

Blogger 2 collects most items for the Christmas from local shops abroad and his adaptation method is to widen the Finnish tradition into Scandinavian one.

Blog 2: Scandinavian food from IKEA. God bless Sweden.

K and E had found couple weeks earlier this store in Montreal, that sells everything from Scandinavia and they had ordered us Christmas Ham (Joulukinkku). I have to warn you, that after being near four months away from your home country, this kind of store might get you nuts. Before we got there, i though i got almost everything i need from IKEA, but boy was i wrong...

We are now pretty much ready for the Scandinavian Christmas dinner on Wednesday.

The blogger's relationship to the Scandinavian dimension seems to vary depending on the situation. He is pleased with IKEA providing Scandinavian foodstuff and he introduces the newly found shop as having a Scandinavian selection. A more detailed description on the shop, however, shows that within the selection he prefers Finnish items when available:

Blog 2: So, what did they have in the store, well of course Finnish mustard, Turun sinappia. After discovering the mustard, i found Finnish coffee! They had almost everything you could wish to have from back home.

When i got inside the store, first thing i saw was salmiak candy (salmiakkia) on my left side, and after surviving the first shock, i noticed that they had all the Finnish candy you can wish.

I mostly bought Finnish candy from the store, and of course i took Turun sinappia (mustard). Jamie bought hapankorppua. Now that i found the place, there isn't anymore need for people to send me Finnish candy's!

Being overseas, he also accepts onto his Christmas shopping list items primarily because they represent Finnish or Scandinavian food culture rather than being considered especially Christmassy as can be seen in the citation below:

Blog 2: On the photo on right, you can see what i got from IKEA. There is some blueberry soup (mustikkakeittoa), crisp bread (näkkileipää), Swedish cider Kopparberg (siideriä), Kalles Caviar (Kallen mätitahnaa), glogg (glögiä), cow berry jelly (puolukkahilloa), Swedish meatballs (jauhelihapullia) and rösti. We eat the same stuff in Finland, so it was nice to find them in IKEA.

All of the items mentioned are familiar in Finland, yet the only one with Christmassy association is glogg. Even though the rest of the items do not belong to the core elements of the Christmas tradition suggested by media, my personal interpretation of the Christmas menu would allow meatballs, cowberry jelly and Kalles Caviar (as a condiment to eggs, perhaps) as parts of a Christmas menu, or rather as elements of the Scandinavian buffet in general. Further, in order to avoid overtly interpreting the source text, it should be borne in mind that the blogger does not specify whether he bought all items for the Christmas meal. Thus at least some of the elements may be

intended to be enjoyed during the Christmas holidays but not necessarily at the main meal.

Blogger 10, a family sailing around the world and during the Christmas in New Zealand, takes distance from the Finnish food tradition but lists some fish dishes as crucial for the Christmassy feeling:

Blog 10: We do not try to put up a Finnish Christmas here but Christmas without a few types of salmon and herring could be difficult.

The family of the blog 10 post to the blog together and the language choices vary. In English they provide little comments on the company but in Finnish they describe how a fellow sailor, a Swede they have met at the pier, joins them for the meal and contributes to the menu at least in terms of gingerbreads.

In the previous examples the fact that the bloggers spend the Christmas abroad causes deviation from the tradition. The following sample, however, is a possible example of the Finnish tradition followed abroad. Blogger 11 does not describe the actual Christmas time. Instead, her posting focuses on the phase the preparations are at the point of writing:

Blog 11: We are still in the middle of Christmas preparations, the house needs some more decorations and the ham needs to be picked up today. However, the Christmas tree is already in the balcony waiting for Christmas Eve morning and the last casseroles are on their way into the oven like the gingerbread. Christmas is soon here!

This blogger is an expat but according to the description the family follows the Finnish tradition in a faithful manner and all the Christmassy elements referred to in the text are familiar from the Finnish context: the ham, the casseroles and the gingerbread. In fact, nothing in the text suggests that the place is outside Finland. Whether the place is Finland or not cannot be determined based on the text; the family has houses both in Italy and in Finland and the text does not specify which house is the place for celebration.

Ham being the typical centre of the traditional Finnish Christmas meal, the Finnish tradition is obviously different from those with turkey as the centre. Typically, the bloggers do not emphasize the omission of the turkey. This is expectable in terms of Finnish food culture but may evoke questions in foreign readers. Below is an example from blog 9 where a reader of the blog shows in his/her comment surprise because there is no mention of turkey.

Blog 9: (a reader's comment)

What a lovely idea the red ribbon of words is on the Christmas Tree.
But – no goose or turkey??

(the blogger's response)

these days turkeys have found their way into some (very few) Finnish Christmas tables but it isn't a tradition. In my family we've never had turkey.

For the reader either goose or turkey seems to represent the default Christmas meat. The blogger describes the position of turkey in Finland in general as well as in her own family. In her answer to the reader she ignores the goose alternative completely. Ham is the default meat in Finland but turkey has also become a possible meat for the Christmas table for a minority of Finns. Goose, on the contrary, has no place in the Finnish Christmas menu and it seems that the blogger's answer reflects that situation.

Blogger 12 criticizes the tradition - at least in the form her parents follow it - quite explicitly but only in Finnish. Firstly, she states that she does not share her parent's idea of how Christmas should be celebrated. Below is the original followed by my free translation.

Blog 12: minun käsitykseni mukavasta joulusta eroaa siitä, miten joulua vietetään vanhempieni luona.

my idea of a nice Christmas differs from the way Christmas is celebrated at my parent's.

The blogger's definition of a "proper" way of celebrating Christmas is not directly derived from the way she has been used as a child. She further comments food tradition, specifically the tendency to follow the traditional menu despite personal preferences and perhaps implicitly also the tradition of abundance. Like in the example above, the original is in Finnish and my free translation is given below it.

Blog 12: Perinteen vuoksi tehtävät ruuat, joista kukaan ei tykkää ja joita sen takia heitetään joulun jälkeen pilaantuneina roskeen, eivät vaan sovi ajatukseeni jouluherkuista.

Food prepared just for the tradition's sake, food that nobody actually likes and which is therefore thrown away after the Christmas when it's gone bad simply does not fit into my idea of Christmas delicacies

For this blogger the individual variation and following personal preferences seem quite acceptable and natural approaches to the tradition. She seems to interpret her parent's tradition to be externally exposed to the parent's; in her childhood home the menu apparently includes dishes that belong to the traditional menu even if nobody eats or likes them.

Also blogger 13 expresses criticism towards the tradition but her criticism focuses on social expectations. The connection to the food tradition is therefore less direct but nevertheless the company and the norms applied to the meals are connected.

The data suggests that changes to an old routine represent no automatic threat of compromising the Christmassy feeling. For example for blogger 1 the described Christmas represents major novelties in terms of both place and preparation; instead of preparing the meal herself and serving it at home she travels with the family to Lapland and enjoys a ready-made meal and seems very pleased with the decision as the following quotation suggests.

Blog 1: We rented a cottage and ordered a ready made Christmas meal which turned out to be a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas.

The description does not suggest that the participants missed Christmassy elements related to the home or dishes prepared in the family way.

Also blogger 4 seems satisfied with novelties in terms of both place and menu; she evaluates the British pub menu as recommendable for her readers.

The following example suggests that usually the blogger makes Christmas porridge herself and that the family enjoys it home. This year, however, the porridge meal is served by the blogger's parents.

Blog 6: We were invited for Christmas porridge at my parents house, so I didn't make any myself this year.

The blogger seems happy with that; her Christmas feeling does not seem to be distracted by not participating in the cooking process.

It has been assumed that preparing the Christmas foods by oneself is an important element in the Christmas food tradition but the data does not support this. On the contrary, blogger's seem quite satisfied with being served a meal cooked by someone else and they also accept that dish may have been prepared according to another recipe than the one most familiar to them. The data further challenges previous research which proposes that the more festive the meal the more important the details of the rules. Namely, the data suggests that the blogger's show flexibility in many sense.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides reflection on the present study including discussion on how the research process was carried out and on how the analysis succeeded in answering to the research questions and how the answers compare to previous research. Next, I will analyze the limitations of the present study. After this, the usefulness of findings will be discussed. Finally, potential questions for future research are introduced.

The purpose of the present study was to find out how the social organization of the Christmas meals and the bloggers' relation to the Finnish Christmas food tradition are represented in English in 13 publicly accessible blogs by Finnish writers. The Christmas meals related postings were approached from a qualitative content analysis perspective. For the analysis, the Nordic model to the analysis of the social structure of the meal was used.

The outline for the present study is selected so that the study can fill gaps in the previous research in the following areas of research 1) the use of English by Finns in blogs, 2) the use of English in describing a phenomenon that is closely related to the Finnish culture, namely the Finnish Christmas meal tradition and 3) the application of a model to the analysis of the social organization of a meal in analysis of festive meals.

The material level of the concept of the Finnish Christmas food tradition was illustrated by describing dishes that are held as Christmassy in the Finnish context. This was done to provide the reader with a concrete idea of what is typically understood by the traditional Finnish Christmas menu but the description also formed a basis for the list of keywords used in the data search. In addition, previous studies in the field of sociology of food were introduced in order to illustrate the role and status of the Christmas related food in the Finnish cultural system of meals. This was to make clear 1) the centrality of the Christmas food tradition within the Finnish culture and 2) the culture-specific nature of the tradition.

Further, central approaches for the study of the meal were introduced, namely the structuralistic approach, the Douglas' model to the analysis of the meal and the

Nordic model to the analysis of the meal. These approaches were important in order to illustrate how the sociology of food acknowledges the centrality of the Christmas meals tradition and to show how so far little study is carried out in relation to the social organisation of the Finnish Christmas meal.

The primary data consisted of 13 blogs that are publicly accessible and written by a person whose language repertoire covers Finnish in addition to English. The data selection was carried out in July and August 2011. The initial search focused on any food or nutrition related blog postings but that proved to be too wide a scope and needed to be narrowed. In terms of text features, the selected blogs represented freely formatted input which allows the writers to freely select what they want to write about and how they wish to formulate it and as such provided more suitable material for analysis than blogs in which English is primarily used in quotations or embedded elements and not produced by the blogger. In terms of the topic, the Christmas meal and Christmas food tradition were suitable for my purposes because they represent an element that is to some extent familiar to a person with a Finnish cultural background and the familiarity of which to a person with a non-Finnish background varies. Therefore, this particular topic was suitable to enlighten the strategies a Finnish person uses when discussing in English on a subject that is familiar in Finnish and may or may not be familiar to international audience. Further, from the sociology of food perspective, the data were suitable because typically the recent Finnish research on meals has focused on the everyday meals. Thus the data could be used to extend the modern analysis model to festive meals.

The main dimensions of the analysis were, firstly, the analysis of the social organization of the Christmas porridge meal and the main Christmas meal and, secondly, the analysis of how the texts reflect and relate to the Finnish Christmas food tradition. The meal analysis consisted of three dimensions, namely the naming of the meal, the structure of the meal and the social organization of the meal. In the naming of the meal section, the analysis attempted to describe the rules that are applied to the naming of the Christmas time meals. The analysis of the structure of the meal attempted to define what is eaten at the Christmas porridge meal and at the Christmas meal and how the food is served. The analysis of the social organization attempted to define where and with whom the Christmas porridge meal and the Christmas meal are eaten and who prepares the meals.

The analysis of the Christmas food tradition attempted to describe the awareness and interpretation of the tradition among the bloggers as well as how the Christmas time meals described in the blogs reflect the tradition. The analysis further described how the blogger's react to omissions and alterations to the tradition.

Next, the main results of the analysis will be discussed. As far as the naming rules of the meals are concerned, the data suggested that the bloggers' systems of meals includes two Christmas related meals, firstly, the Christmas porridge meal and, secondly, the main Christmas meal. The rice porridge meal consists, according to the blogs, of rice porridge with milk, sugar, cinnamon and/or butter as condiments and it is enjoyed in the morning or early afternoon of the Christmas Eve. The "proper" Christmas meal for the bloggers is a Scandinavian buffet style meal including ham as the centre. Further, the "proper" Christmas meal is prepared and served at home and enjoyed with family, typically involving also members of the extended family. In this context, I use the term "proper" to indicate that the bloggers reported the above described features as neutral characteristics of the main Christmas meal whereas deviations from them were reported as novelties, exceptions or omissions or the bloggers showed hesitation in defining the elements as genuinely Christmassy. The findings related to deviation from the tradition will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, focusing in particular on findings concerning comments on deviation from the tradition in terms of what is eaten.

The two meals described above were the two meal types specifically associated with the Christmas time eating, according to the blogs. In addition, it seemed that the main Christmas meal is an obligatory element in the meal system of the bloggers. According to the blogs, the bloggers were willing to negotiate the naming rules when necessary: in the absence of such a "proper" Christmas meal, a different meal was named the Christmas meal and the deviation to the "proper" meal was reported. The data suggested flexibility in what kind of a meal may be named as the main Christmas meal, but one restriction seemed to be applied: the Christmas porridge meal cannot replace the Christmas meal. Furthermore, there were cases of multiple meals being named as the Christmas meals. In those cases, the naming reflected the social network of the blogger in the following way. If the blogger shared meals with companies that were different in terms of who participated but symmetrical in the sense that the party included people that were socially closest connected to the

blogger, the blogger named all such meals as Christmas meals. Consequently, the location, timing, company, menu and even the number the number of the Christmas meals may vary, but the bloggers still named at least one meal as the main Christmas meal during the holidays.

The role of the Christmas porridge meal was, according to the bloggers, less obligatory. The data suggested that if the porridge meal was enjoyed, the time, as mentioned above, was the morning or early afternoon of the Christmas Eve. The data further suggested, however, that skipping the porridge meal was perfectly acceptable. As far as the relation between the two Christmas meals is concerned, it seems that the rice porridge meal, even though concerned Christmassy, cannot replace the main Christmas meal.

As far as the results relating to the structure of the meals are concerned, the data suggested that the bloggers are aware of the structure of the traditional menu. That menu includes ham, casseroles, rosolli salad and fish in some form, typically salmon or herring.

The role of the internalised interpretation of what the traditional Finnish Christmas menu includes seemed central for defining whether a particular dish is a Christmas dish: a dish from the traditional list was seen as a Christmas dish regardless of whether that particular dish belonged to the blogger's personal experience of Christmas while a dish not included in the traditional menu was either not labelled as a Christmas dish or was done so with hesitation even though the dish had been served at every Christmas meal since the blogger's childhood. When reporting novelties to the traditional menu, the bloggers showed hesitation in labelling novelties as "proper" Christmas dishes either by explicitly pondering whether a certain element is truly Christmassy or by marking the element linguistically as an addition to the core Christmas menu.

The ham is the centre of the Christmas menu, but there is also another foodstuff that has traditionally been seen as an icon of the Finnish Christmas, namely the gingerbread. Gingerbreads were mentioned by the bloggers but not described as an element of the Christmas meals. This suggested that the gingerbreads are regarded as Christmas time snacks or elements of the Christmas time coffee serving menu. Even though the data suggested, on the one hand, that gingerbreads were related to the

coffee serving event and that, on the other hand, the coffee event, in turn, was by some bloggers seen as the final part of the main Christmas meal, there data showed no direct connection between the Christmas meal and the gingerbreads.

The bloggers showed little interest in the details of preparation as well as to the rules related to serving/eating order of the dishes as well as combinatory rules. This finding will be discussed in more detail below in a section focusing on how the findings correlate to previous research.

In sum, the most important findings related to the structure of the meals were the following. 1) The bloggers were aware of the traditional Finnish Christmas menu and seemed to consider ham, casseroles, rosolli and fish in some form as essential elements of the menu. 2) The definition of the traditional menu seemed to draw on the national food culture heritage rather than on the personal experiences which was manifested in that 3) the bloggers show hesitation in labelling novelties to the traditional menu as Christmassy. 4) The bloggers showed little interest in the details of preparation as well as to the rules related to serving/eating order of the dishes as well as combinatory rules.

As far as the findings related to the social organisation of the Christmas meals are concerned, they suggested that the porridge meal is more important as a marker of the actual Christmas time than as a symbol reflecting social intimacy. In other words, in the context of the porridge meal, the bloggers were not concerned with who could participate and did not indicate they missed someone.

The bloggers' interpretation of who participates in the traditional main Christmas meal, on the contrary, seemed to be more fixed. The data suggested that the bloggers regarded as expected participants in the main meal, on the one hand, eater's partner, children, parents and siblings and, on the other hand, symmetrically the in-laws, in other words partner's parents and siblings. The data also suggested that in case of adult children, the idea of parents and adult children sharing the main Christmas meal is more important to the parents than to the adult children. Further, according to the bloggers, it is typical that the Christmas meal is shared by representatives of several households, typically all members still members of extended family.

As stated above, the bloggers showed awareness of the family-centred Christmas meal tradition. Yet, at the same time they showed understanding of the fact that the tradition easily leads to conflicts of interests as well as logistic challenges in reality. Typically, these challenges involved geographical distance or work responsibilities. Bloggers also reported cases where they were aware of someone expecting or wishing them to join that person for the meal, but the blogger did not share that wish. A typical approach by the bloggers to the question of who participates in the meal was pragmatic. Those who would have liked to share the meal with certain people but were not able to, joined an available group and decided that it was their Christmas meal company. Others commuted to maximise the coverage of their social network. Some had to choose between mutually exclusive alternatives and thus exclude someone from the meal. In case there was someone missing from the default list, an explanation was provided by the blogger, typically with some sort of an emotional expression included, such as indicating missing a person or frustration towards conflicting opinions.

The findings related to the social organization of the meals in terms of when the meals were eaten were the following. Firstly, as already stated previously, if the porridge meal was included in the blogger's meal system, it was eaten in the morning or in the early afternoon of the Christmas Eve. Secondly, the main Christmas meal was typically eaten in the evening of the Christmas Eve. However, if the meal enjoyed at that point of time did not match the blogger's idea of the Christmas meal, they did not name it as such but chose another a meal eaten at another point of time instead and named that as their Christmas meal. Further, if the blogger enjoyed meals with different but equally close people during the Christmas time, several meals could be referred to as the Christmas meals.

Finally, as far as the place of eating is concerned, the findings suggest that the location is of little significance for the bloggers with respect to the Christmas meals. The data did suggest, though, that the private home of either the blogger or a close relative/in-law was considered the "normal" place for the Christmas meal, but commercial locations were also quite acceptable among the bloggers. Further, the bloggers pondered the location in terms of commuting between several places of celebration in the following way. As the reason to commute and as the benefit, they saw the fact that commuting between different groups of close ones makes it possible

to share the holiday and the meals with a maximum number of people. Yet, at the same time, the bloggers identified as unpleasant aspects the fact commuting forces the bloggers to be separated from some individuals close to them as well considered the activity as not particularly Christmassy.

Previous research suggests that the Christmas meal, as a central element related to a culturally important annual festival, has a special role in the cultural system of meals both universally (Douglas 1975), and in Finland (Mäkelä 1999, Knuutila 2004). The results are in accordance with the idea of a Christmas meal belonging to the cultural system of meals and Finns internalising the concept and rules of the Christmas food tradition.

Previous research (Douglas 1975, Mäkelä 1990: 47-49 and 76) also suggests that in a festive context, rules are consciously and faithfully obeyed. The data does not support the idea of focusing on rules on all the levels of the organization of the meals. It seems that at the menu level the rules are important; there is a clear idea of what the “proper” menu includes and the elements that belong to the menu are seen as automatically Christmassy, whereas the Christmassy nature of other elements needs to be negotiated. Despite the bloggers seemed to be aware of the menu related rules, they did not in all cases follow the rules as a result of circumstances or as deliberate deviation from the rules. In both cases the deviation was reported and explained.

The bloggers did not, however, comment much on how the food was to be arranged and in which order the dishes should be eaten and how they should be combined. This, in my opinion, can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, the tendency among the bloggers not to focus on the recipes and the preparation phase may reflect the chosen genre, the people oriented blogs. Perhaps recipes and detailed discussion on cooking represents typical content in blogs that focus more on food or cooking. Secondly, the choice of topic could reflect the blogger’s own mental processing related to different elements of the Finnish Christmas tradition; they do not write about what they take for granted. For example, baking the ham requires a slightly different process each time depending on how much the ham weighs and so on. Therefore, the baking process requires conscious calculation and that is reflected in the entries. Or, when the blogger operates in a foreign environment, finding

traditional ingredients or suitable substitutions may be challenging and that, in turn, is possibly reflected by the blogger describing the process of acquiring the raw materials.

Mäkelä (2002: 13) suggests that the structure of the main Christmas meal, despite the buffet style serving, reflects the three course organization of a meal with cold fish and meats chosen first as the first course, then ham accompanied with casseroles and side dishes eaten as the hot dish and finally dessert. The data, however, challenged the idea of bloggers regarding the main Christmas meal as a three course meal. On the one hand, they did not specify the eating order of the salty dishes. Based on the data, it cannot be concluded whether the writers combined all dishes into one plateful or selected several combinations and whether the order and possible combinations reflected personal taste, family level habits, general festive manners or particularly Christmassy order of eating. On the other hand, the data further challenged the three-course setting suggested by Mäkelä as far as the dessert is concerned. Namely, the bloggers seemed to regard the salty dishes as the core elements of the menu and showed either little interest or great flexibility in defining whether the traditional menu includes dessert type dishes at all and if so, what exactly the dishes are. The bloggers did name sweet Christmassy foods, such as star shaped prune tarts, but did not specify the role of those in the context of the main Christmas meal. The bloggers further mentioned some dessert type dishes that are served year round but typically the comments suggested that those were not seen as parts of the main Christmas meal.

The briefness of bloggers on the combinatory rules may reflect that the rules have been internalized in a way that they are followed unconsciously. Therefore my conclusion, based on the data, is that the salty dishes are served in a buffet manner and that there may be combinatory rules as well as rules concerning the eating order, but that those rules are not consciously followed. My further conclusion is that the sweet dishes are not considered a part of the actual Christmas meal but rather a minor meal that may or may be served soon after the main meal. That meal is not, however, named as a distinctive Christmassy meal like the porridge meal and the main meal.

Leppänen and others (2008) suggest that the Finns use the English language increasingly as a second language, not as a foreign language. My conclusion is that

the data supported the idea of Finns approaching English as a second language resource to some extent. My assumption is that the bloggers had chosen to use English at least partially because they wanted to reach readers who cannot speak Finnish and who are not familiar with the Finnish (food) culture. In most blogs, however, there was little adaptation of contents to the international readership. Even though the blogs typically included some background information on dishes that the bloggers probably would not have included in a text directed to an exclusively domestic audience, the blogger did not provide much information on the culture as if not regarding the communication truly international or not being aware of what elements of the Christmas tradition are specifically Finnish and thus might need further explanations to be comprehensible for a foreign reader. In general, it seems that the amount of information given in the blogs reflects more what the writer focuses on than what the writer expects the readers to know beforehand.

When evaluating the relevancy of the results of the present study, the following limitations should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the analysis is based on a relatively narrow set of data. Secondly, the collection method relied on the core elements of the tradition and therefore the data is likely to present only certain type of Christmas related discussion. In order to find out whether there are Christmas meal descriptions that do not reflect the Finnish Christmas food tradition, searches should be based on other criteria than that derived from the tradition.

Bearing the above mentioned limitations in mind, the results yielded by the analysis are important in the following respect. Firstly, the bloggers do not show much adaptation to the international readers; what is clear for them they do not explicate to the readers.

The present study could be used as a starting point for further research on different fields of study, namely 1) use of English in Finland, 2) sociology of food and 3) genre analysis on blogs. Firstly, in relation to the use of English in Finland, it would be interesting to find out whether the language choice reflects the expected audiences of the blogs. Do the texts or bloggers, if they are interviewed, suggest that the English is used in the blogs as a tool to maintain social relationships that have been established in the off-line world, or is it a way to reach audiences beyond the existing social network? Or is the use of English perhaps a way to exclude certain groups of

readers, namely those whose language repertoire does not cover English? Are there bloggers who use English even though they expect their readers to be Finns? Further, do those who expect the readers to have no experience of Finland provide more information on the Finnish tradition compared to those with different reader expectations?

In the field of sociology of food, it would be interesting to extend the analysis to all reported Christmas time food events in Finnish blogs in order to find out whether and how the minor food events are socially organised. It would be particularly interesting to attempt to define the role of minor Christmas time food events in relation to social relationships, for example whether there are patterns concerning extra-familiar contacts, such as friends of single young adults as well as how the social organization of meals reflects modern family structures including for example ex-partners. Descriptions of the minor food events could also provide suitable data for the analysis of Christmas related food as a tool of distinction, for example what types of beverages and snacks are consumed how those relate to the Finnish Christmas food tradition and to the European delicacy tradition. Further, relevant problems for future research in the field of sociology of food would be how the blogs by Finns represent, on the one hand, the dimension of everyday versus festive and, on the other hand, the social organization of festive meals other than those related to Christmas. One potential point of interest in further research focusing on the festive versus everyday would be the concept of abundance which could be studied by comparing the blog entries written during the Christmas with those written at more everyday contexts to find out whether the entries show differences in the attitudes towards abundance and what is considered a suitable amount of snacks and amount of food eaten at each food event. A food sociologically directed study covering blog descriptions on any festive meals could, depending on the research frame, focus on issues like 1) how central a role food and food tradition have in the texts by Finnish bloggers with respect to different festive occasions, 2) do the descriptions by Finnish bloggers include novelties to traditional Finnish festive occasions, for example are there descriptions on meals that relate to, from the traditional Finnish perspective, exotic religions and if so, how the organization of the meal relates to Finnish festive food traditions.

In conclusion, the present study described the social organisation of the Christmas meals as represented by Finnish bloggers. The present study showed that the Finnish bloggers were aware of the Christmas related food tradition and how their own way of celebration related to the tradition. The present study also showed that the bloggers were aware of what the “proper” Christmas menu includes and that the elements that belong to the menu were seen as automatically Christmassy, whereas the Christmassy nature of other elements needed to be negotiated. This indicated that at the dish level the rules related to the Christmas meals were important for the bloggers. On the other levels, however, the study showed that the bloggers were less rule-conscious. In sum, the present study suggests that regardless of how precisely the Finnish bloggers followed the Christmas food tradition, they showed awareness of it. Furthermore, the bloggers’ meal system included the Christmas meal as an obligatory meal: at least one Christmas time meal was considered the Christmas meal even if it differed from the tradition drastically.

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