



What's in a (food) name?

From consumer protection to cognitive science... and back

© Viktor Smith, Copenhagen Business School
vs.ikk@cbs.dk





“Having a name for it ” (no matter what “it” is) is crucial to...

- **Cognitive identity**

i.e. to our day-to-day (re)identification and categorization of phenomena and objects in the infinite variety of reality (e.g. Cohen & Lefebvre 2005; Gumperz & Levinson 1996; Vygotsky 1962 [1934]; Piaget 1926)

In the case of foods also:

- **Legal identity**

According to the EU Labelling Directive 2000/13/EC, it is compulsory for any food product sold in the EU to carry a name

Rationale: Consumers should have a chance to check what they are buying (ex: tortellini, ravioli, or gnocchi?), and manufacturers should compete on equal terms (e.g. MacMaoláin 2007; Howells, Micklitz & Wilhelmsson 2009)

And yet consumers sometimes feel misled by the name found on the packaging when matching it with the product inside, and complain about it to the food authorities



***Challenge: How are such cases to
be justly resolved...or better: avoided?***



The law/reality interface in a form/substance perspective (Smith 2007; Hjelmslev 1953 [1943])

Legal form imposed on real-life circumstances under dispute: General provisions against misleading food labelling (EU Regulation 2002/178/EU)
For certain products also: Food standards containing legal definitions, e.g. fruit juice. ***But:*** do/should they reflect real consumer concepts?

Substance on which the form is imposed, i.e. the real-life circumstances themselves: Expected consumer knowledge, concepts, and interpretation of words in human language (... *even for legally defined names?*)

➔ ***That is: Judgments that involve cognitive rather than (only) legal variables and considerations***

Aims of this presentation:

“Translating” the cognitive essence of potentially misleading food naming into more exact theoretical terms, as a basis for

- more precise and coherent analyses of existing experience for improving future best practices, including
- development of customized tools for testing the misleading potential of specific food naming solutions on empirical grounds

Empirical frame of reference: Review of 821 Danish cases on misleading food naming and labelling further analysed in Smith et al. (2009)



First “keynote” observations: Fundamentally different conflict scenarios for established and novel food names

I. Established food names: What does the name mean to different parties of concern (consumers, manufacturers, authorities)?

Ex: orange juice, coffee whitener, macaroons...

II. Novel food names for novel products: What will the name eventually come to mean to the consumer (and others) encountering it on a food label in a supermarkets?

Ex: halal ham, surimi shrimps...

...but also a fuzzy boundary in practice between the two extremes, for individual products and consumers, as a result of ongoing processes of:

Product repetition: yet another brand of peach ice tea, macaroons, coffee whitener, sandwich spread etc.

Product evolution: e.g. guacamole dip with 0,4% avocado powder

Product innovation: e.g. “caviar lookalike” made of sea kelp

Product re-incarnation: e.g. ordinary dark chocolate marketed and labelled as a diet product

Cases for illustration will follow shortly...



But first: Some basic cognitive assumptions and prerequisites

- **Meaning of (food) name = psychologically real concept**
➔ Mental “checklist” facilitating categorization in the course of situated thinking and acting
- **Ad hoc versus “stable” “(≈ lexicalized) concepts**
Ex: <things I need for my upcoming camping trip> versus <friends> and <baked beans>
- **Essential versus prototypical conceptual components**
Ex: <designed to be sat on> versus <has 4 legs> (though 3 or 1 are ok too) for the concept <chair>
- **Sensory versus propositional conceptual components**
Ex: recall of the appearance, flavour and texture of a smoothie versus expectations about ingredients and preparation method

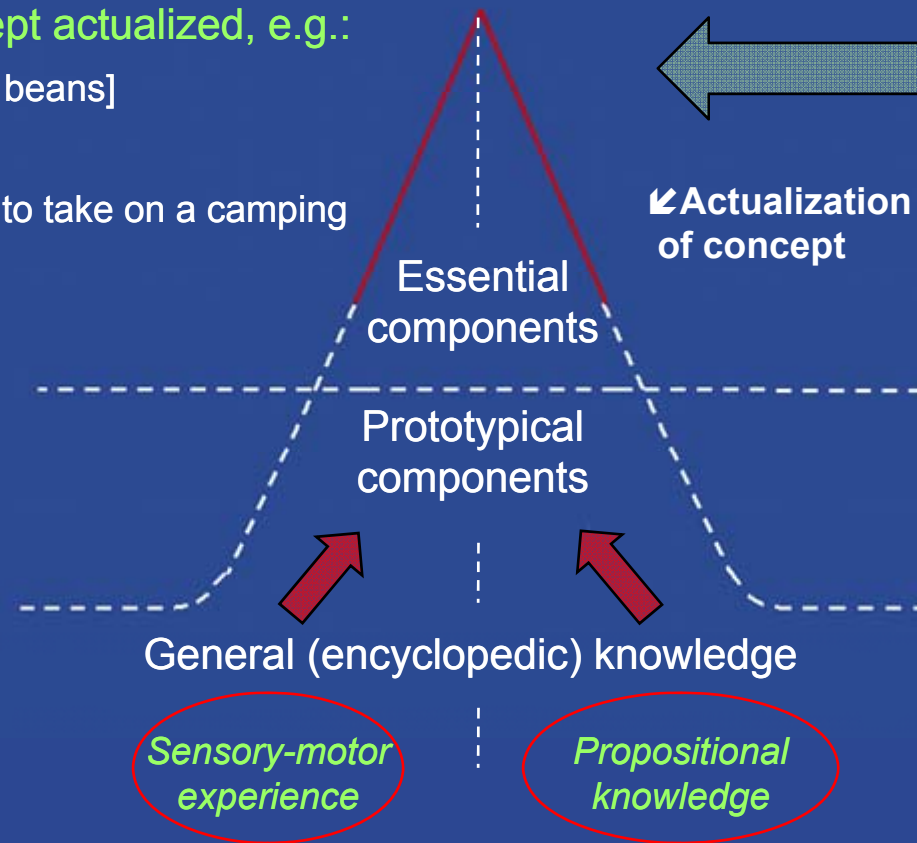
As illustrated on next slide...



The anatomy of human concepts

Concept actualized, e.g.:

- [baked beans]
- [friend]
- [things to take on a camping trip]
- etc.



Actualization of concept

Category member(s) identified

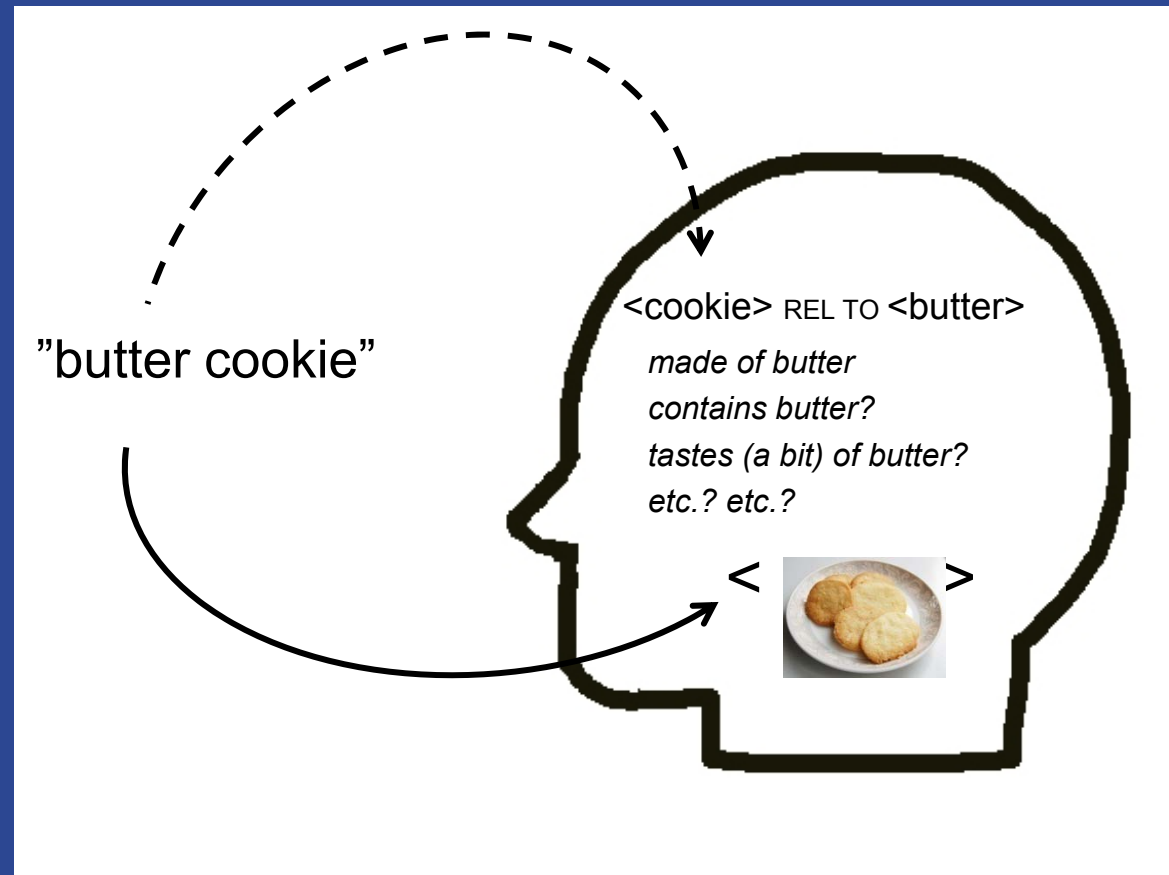


Barsalou (1983; 1987; 1999; 2005) incorporating cognitive modelling of prototypicality and graded structure, e.g. Smith, Shoben & Rips (1973); Rosch (1975); Lakoff (1987); Taylor (1989); Talmy (2000); Ratneswahr (2001); Cohen & Lefebvre (2005)



Online processing of established (food) names

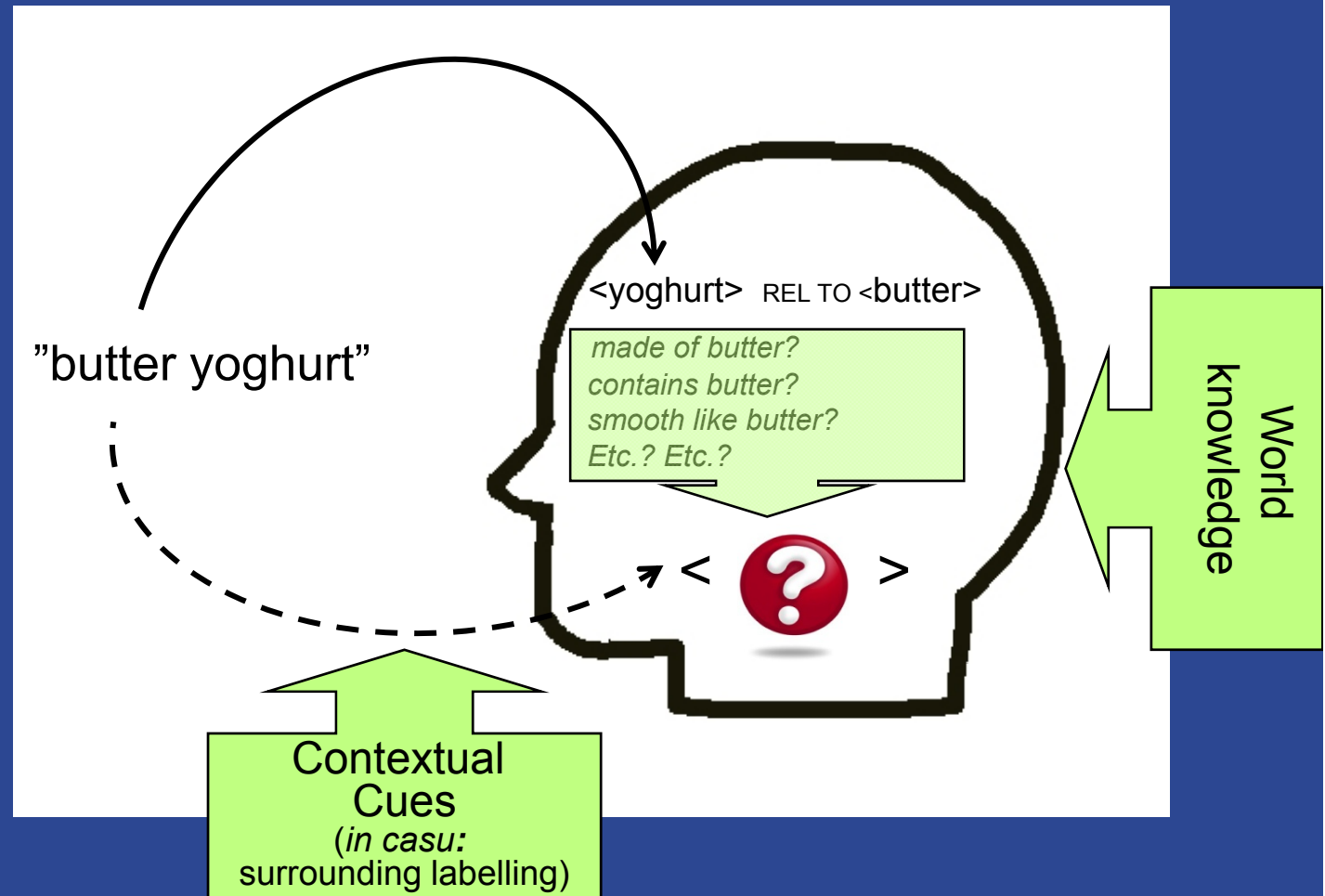
For general experimental evidence on the processing of established and novel composite words, cf. Lieber & Stekauer (2009), Libben & Jarema (2006); Andrews & Davis (1999); Gill & Dubé (2005)



Simple use of familiar word – if interpreted at all, the semantic information deducible from the constituents of the word itself will merely give rise to meta-linguistic reflections and expression-based connotations on the part of the hearer



Online processing of novel (food) names



Online sense-making and concept formation with the consumer's world knowledge and available contextual cues serving as disambiguating variables (Smith 2001, 1999/2000; Zlatev, Smith, Weijer & Skydsgaard (in press); Gagné et al. 2005; Clark 1993)



I. Conflict scenarios *involving (more or less) established food names*

Example 1: Whole milk or skimmed?

Product labelled *sødmælk* ≈ 'whole milk', but tastes more like *letmælk* ≈ 'semi-skimmed milk' according to consumer
Case No(s): 2004-08-274-00162 (id 272) CONSUMER



Example 2: What's (in) a smoothie?

According to consumer, the product does not *taste* like what (s)he would expect of a smoothie. Complain sustained by authorities, but decision motivated (only) by *low fruit content* (0,2%). So what if the "smoothie feeling" had been simulated better...?
Case No(s): 2003-04-274-00297 (id 102) CONSUMER



Example 3: Almonds for texture or for taste?

Makroner ≈ 'macaroons' made of apricot kernels, not of almonds as suggested by traditional Danish recipes. Almond flavour is added. Manufacturer(s) insists that this has been so since the 1940ies, and that consumers like and buy the product. Case No(s): 2007-S5-274-0792 (id 735) DAF; 2007-S5-274-00795 (id 736) DAF



Example 4: Nutrition and taste vs. tradition... and facts?

Very traditional Danish meat product called *rullepølse* re-introduced in a low-fat version made of fillet and not pork belly. Fat reduced from 25% to 3%... but has the standard recipe and *name* been violated?
Case No(s): 2005-04-271-00034 (id 329) DAF; 2005-05-274-00437 (id 370) DAF





Key cognitive observations & research questions:

- Different “variants” of food concepts with consumers, manufacturers, and authorities
 - ...displaying different “mixtures” of sensory and propositional criteria (components), and different lines between essential and prototypical criteria (components) of either type
 - *Polysemy or “division of linguistic labour” (cf. Putnam 1975)?*
 - *Is the expert’s final judgment always built in as a default “slot” in consumer food concepts ? (And who’s the expert?)*
- “Competition” between (first-order) sensory-motor experience and (often second-order) factual knowledge – both in conceptual structures and in the “ammunition” selected by the parties for explicit argumentation
 - *Is product identity a matter of taste of facts?*

Challenges for best practices:

- *Which criteria should be decisive? And why?*
- *Are food standards the only (and the right) solution?*
- **Also:** *Is there a need for different fairness criteria in cases of product repetition (≈ yet another brand of whole milk, macaroons, etc.) vs. product evolution where established concepts are challenged (e.g. low-fat rullepølse)?*



II. Conflict scenarios *involving novel names for novel products*

Example 10: Halal ham

Consumer insists that a product cannot be correctly labeled *halal-skinke* 'halal ham' since it is made of turkey and not pork (which may possibly compromise *skinke* 'ham', but at the same time justifies *halal*)

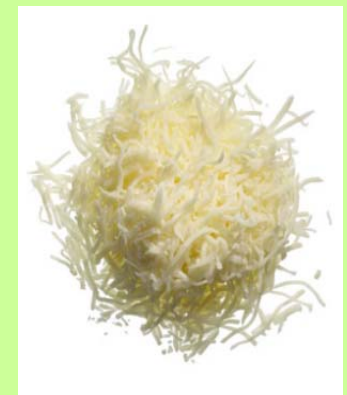
Case No(s): 2005-01-274-00386 (id 319) CONSUMER;
2003-10-274-00462 (id 177) CONSUMER



Example 11: Pizzatop

Product developed as functional (and sensory) equivalent to pizza cheese, but mainly containing other ingredients than cheese, marketed under the names *Pizzatop* and *Pizza Topping*. Main complaint: Cheese *is* what you normally put "on top" of a pizza.

Case No(s): 2006-N4-274-00998 (508) DAF;
2006-N4-274-00999 (id 509) DAF



Example 12: Spread or butter?

The name *Lurpak smørbar* ≈ 'Lurpak spreadable' on a blend product made of butter and vegetable oil claimed to be misleading for two interconnected reasons: 1. The brand is also associated with "real" (high quality) butter, 2. the word *smørbar* ≈ 'spreadable' is etymologically related to *smør* ≈ 'butter' in Danish.

Case No(s): 2006-06-274-00467 (id 58) CONSUMER





Key cognitive observations & research questions:

- The examples illustrate the crucial step from product evolution to product innovation.

In casu: Replicating the sensory qualities of one product in a different kind of product

- *Is that bad (or even misleading?) in itself?*
- In all three cases, the manufacturer has actually tried to signal to the consumer that (s)he needs to crystallize a novel food concept by constructing a novel name – so what went wrong? Was the fault in...
 - a. The “built-in” semantic potential of the novel name as such?*
 - b. (Some) consumers’ knowledge and “retrospective” expectations?*
 - c. The insufficient disambiguating power of the surrounding labeling?*

Challenges for best practices:

- How can innovative manufacturers best meet the challenge of actively modifying the “conceptual world” of consumers in a fair way on the limited space of food labels and under the severe time pressure of in-store food-to-consumer communication?
- Where goes the line between food politics and misleading food naming?

Or plainly: *Is the word wrong or is the world going wrong (according “to some consumers)?*



Concluding remarks

Obvious need and potential for interdisciplinary research into the cognitive dimensions of food naming, providing:

- New evidence for lawyers and government official for underpinning future rule-making and practices in a still more strictly regulated field
- New insights and tools for pre-testing the fairness of specific food naming and labelling solutions for marketing officials in companies concerned with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- An obvious “case” for cognitive scientists that may (also) serve a catalyst for general research human concept formation and processing of complex verbo-visual stimuli under time pressure

Further perspectives and next steps:

- Ongoing **FairSpeak** research includes:
 - ☞ Test of limits to consumer acceptance in cases of product evolution (or devolution?) by comparing responses to sensory vs. propositional (verbal) stimuli
 - ☞ Test of impact of the total verbo-visual context of food labels on misleading vs. fair interpretation of novel names in the process of product innovation, focussing on names of origin



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Thank you for your attention

Now, could anyone please tell me...

...what is this?!





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