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Linguistic Insights

Studies in Language and Communication

Daniela Cesiri (ed.)

Adapting Food-Related Communication to Children

Interdisciplinary
and Multicultural Insights

Peter Lang

This collection of essays examines the multifaceted nature of food-related communication for children, an area that has become increasingly significant within the digital age. Beyond its nutritional value, food has always served as a powerful social and cultural connector, with traditions and rituals transmitted across generations. In addition, the contemporary media landscape, characterized by the excessive visibility of both children and food on social media, has given rise to the concept of the 'consumer-child'. This has led to concerns about the negative health impacts of marketing that often promotes unhealthy dietary options.

While other fields, such as marketing, media studies, and literary and cultural studies, have explored the symbolic and socio-political dimensions of food representation for children, the volume identifies a significant gap in linguistics and communication studies. To address this gap, the chapters included in the volume aim to shed light on how food is represented, narrated, promoted, and translated for younger audiences across various genres, including corporate communication, digital media, and translation. Finally, the volume also presents the results of the two-year SPIN2023 research project funded by "Ca' Foscari" University of Venice.

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Adapting Food-Related Communication to Children

Linguistic Insights

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Adapting Food-Related Communication for Children in English: A Corpus-Based Investigation Using the FoRCCE Corpus

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1. Introduction

Since at least the early twentieth century, food has been represented and marketed to children in such a way to make it appealing and to influence children’s dietary choices not based solely on the food’s nutritional value but on its attractiveness and pleasantness to the palate, promoting junk food to be consumed as regular meals rather than as treats, thereby transforming children into a “child-consumer” who would in turn influence the whole family’s dietary choices (James et al. 2009; Shepherd & Shepherd 2014; Moshenska 2019).

Disciplines such as marketing, media and cultural studies have considered this aspect with greater attention, concluding that media have a central role in influencing children’s dietary choices and unhealthy eating habits (Linn & Novosot 2008; Jenkin et al. 2014). However, social media can also have more positive role, for instance, experiments conducted on children and adolescents have found out that influencers might play a positive role in promoting healthier eating habits that children would follow more gladly than when parents want to “enforce” on them by means of impositions (De Jans et al. 2021), while adolescents seem also likely to be more open to the adoption of healthier food choices if exposed to more “virtuous” examples via social media (Neufeld et al. 2021), with particular preference for “vegan, homemade and organic food” (Pilař et al. 2021: 1).

Despite the fact that the representation, narration and promotion of food to younger customers by means of traditional, digital and social media is a well-known communicative mechanism, research in the domains of linguistics and related disciplines has been, surprisingly, relatively scarce (see Section 2). This chapter seeks to fill this gap by investigating the materials composing the

so-called FoRCCE Corpus (namely, the Corpus of **Food-Related Communication for Children in English**).

The chapter conducts a corpus-based critical analysis on the materials collected so far to compose the FoRCCE Corpus with a specific focus on the so-called “commercial” products, namely, digital texts that promote food to children. The companies selected, in fact, are specific brands from Nestlé, Danone and Abbott, specialized in infant and baby food, and via their websites they seek to inform the public not only about the products they sell but also about the nutritional value they hold as well as about the appropriate nutrition for infants and young children as indicated by international health organization and health professionals that are quoted as sources on the companies’ websites. The aim of the analysis is to investigate the strategies of the companies included in the corpus whose communication seems to be at the crossroads between promotional discourse and specialist knowledge dissemination.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 presents an overview of the state of the art available on food- and nutrition-related communication with a specific focus on the disciplines of linguistics and communication studies, and some mention of the studies available on food-related communication specifically targeting children. Section 3 introduces the SPIN2023 Project, of which this chapter presents some preliminary results. Section 4 describes the dataset and the method of investigation, while Sections 5 and 6 contain the corpus-based analysis on the verbal component of the so-called “commercial” products composing the FoRCCE Corpus. Finally, Section 7 concludes the chapter by discussing the results of the analysis and by providing indications for future studies connected to the corpus and the project in general.

2. Food-Related Communication: State of the Art

The discourse of, and on, food has been investigated in several domains. Already in the 1930s, anthropologist Audrey Richards, through her work, “launched the formal acknowledgment of foodways as an effective prism through which to illuminate human life” (Counihan & Kaplan 1998: 1). The language of/about food has thus been so widely investigated over the years to the extent that it would almost be impossible to provide here the full list of studies and scholarly investigations that have dealt with this topic in different languages and cultures. As regards the language of/about food in English, and in English-speaking communities, which constitutes the specific focus of this chapter, a sketchy overview might include relatively recent studies that have considered the topic from an anthropological perspective, whereby food is considered a means to construct social hierarchies,

class and identity (Anderson 2005; Counihan et al. 2019). Another perspective comes from the domain of psychology in which the connection between food, morality and body size has been considered (Conner & Armitage 2002). Communication about food has also been revealed to be consistently gendered by feminist and gender studies that have also connected gender-based stereotypes and ethnicity (e.g. Counihan & Kaplan 1998).

From the viewpoint of linguistics and communication studies, the subject has been investigated from a variety of perspectives, such as – to name only a few examples – the relationship between food and translation in several media (Chiaro & Rossato 2015; Desjardin 2021), food and identity (Cherry et al. 2011; Almerico 2014) and food and humour (Jackson & Meah 2019).

The specific interplay between language, media and food studies has also been widely researched. For instance, some contributions have investigated the role that traditional and digital media play in establishing the public's identity through food-based media campaigns (e.g. Bradley 2016; Lupton & Feldman 2020; Johnston et al. 2022; Tovaes & Gordon 2022), while other studies have considered the role that communication plays in people's dietary choices and the importance on their general health (e.g. Gunter 2016).

The traditional genres in which food discourse is constructed for specific communities are recipes and cookbooks, and these are indeed some of the most studied genres. For instance, scholars have consistently revealed the highly conventionalized nature of recipes (e.g. Görlach 2004; Garzone 2017; Cesiri 2024a), while cookbooks have been analysed as a complex genre that reproduces gender- and class-based inequalities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003; Neuhaus 2003; Innes 2006; Matwick 2017). Furthermore, the construction of food-related discourse has been studied in relation to visual media such as cookery shows and YouTube videos (Gerhardt et al. 2013), as well as food blogs, which allow collaborative participation between food experts and members of the public, in contrast with the unidirectional communication of more traditional media. Food blogs have been investigated in particular by Diemer and Frobenius (2013) and Cesiri (2017, 2020, 2024b) with specific attention to communication in English. These studies have illustrated how the affordances of the digital media give chefs and food bloggers new opportunities to share not only recipes but also travel experiences and personal memories, thus creating a complex, multidimensional foodscape that centres around their digital culinary personae rather than around food (Cesiri 2019, 2020).

Most of the state-of-the-art investigating food-related discourse considers communication mainly aimed at adults, while children have been the focus of a relatively limited number of studies. These are, for instance, James et al. (2009);

Rutsaert et al. (2013) and Weintraub Austin et al. (2018). However, they only consider the role of social media in the communication about food when addressing children and adolescents. These are individual studies that investigate the subject from the social media perspective, while studies such as Newman and Oates (2015) or Frerichs et al. (2016) have focused on marketing strategies in food communication and how they influence parents' and children's dietary choices. More recent contributions, along with the present volume, include Cesiri (2022), who conducts a visual and verbal analysis of a sample of baby food advertisements commissioned by Allenbury and Mellin from the late 1880s to the 1940s. The aim of the study is to understand the extent to which baby food advertisements are a reflection of the changing role of children in British and American society. Results point to a change in the way the relationship between children and food was represented: in the earliest samples, priority was given to promoting alternatives to breastfeeding and to raising children without nutrient deficiencies, while in the later advertisements, greater emphasis was given on representing children's playful vitality and how this derived from the promoted food. In both cases, advertisements targeted mothers as solely responsible for the children's nutrition, while fathers and families are absent from the narration. Another contribution, Cesiri (2025), integrates corpus linguistics, discourse analysis and multimodality to analyse the verbal and visual components in several genres that represent and narrate food to children and their families, also taking into account the extra-linguistic factors that shape food-related communication. In applying this perspective to a diverse range of food-related communication materials, such as food blogs, advertisements and institutional websites, the study seeks to understand the features characterizing food-related communication targeting children. Results on the case studies investigated reveal that, for instance, food bloggers showed that most reinforced traditional gender stereotypes, prioritizing motherhood over professional expertise in nutrition. The case study that considered a diachronic analysis of Nutella's advertisements in Italian and in English markets revealed shifts in marketing strategies reflecting changing nutritional trends but persistent gender stereotypes. Children were often depicted with male figures prioritized over girls; mothers were shown as responsible for children's diets (as in the Cesiri 2022 study), while fathers were portrayed as detached. The third case study, a corpus analysis of the institutional websites of World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), showed mixed results in terms of content accessibility. While FAO used simpler language that reflects its practical mission, WHO and WFP used more formal and complex language, which might reduce the effectiveness of communication to lay audiences, that

is, children, their families and schools. Overall, the research conducted in Cesiri (2025) has identified a gap between growing nutritional awareness and persistent gender stereotypes in food-related communication targeting children, which leads to the conclusion that effective communication should integrate health promotion with progressive societal values. Moreover, the investigation sheds light on the complex interplay of marketing, socio-cultural norms and language in shaping children’s food-related communication and points towards more inclusive and health-conscious strategies for the future, which is also at the basis of the SPIN2023 Project.

3. The SPIN2023 Project²⁰

The present chapter aims to partially fill the gap present in the state of the art highlighted in the literature available on communication representing and narrating food to children. To do so, the chapter presents part of the results achieved by means of the SPIN 2023 project, which is a two-year research project funded by “Ca’ Foscari” University of Venice, the present author’s home institution. The university has started this funding opportunity “with the purpose of promoting impact research and strengthening [their] attractiveness for the best international researchers” (Supporting Principal INvestigators (SPIN) n.d.; <https://www.unive.it/pag/31926/>).

The SPIN2023 Project, which in turn started in 2023 and will be concluded in 2025, is entitled “Food-Related Communication for Children in English: A Multimodal and Socio-Cultural Investigation”. Its goal is to investigate the verbal and visual strategies used in both traditional and digital/social media in order to understand how these strategies occur and vary by examining the genres through which food-related communication targeting children happens. For the purposes of the project, they were categorized into three main typologies. These categories are “technical”, “commercial” and “institutional” products.

The material thus gathered is being collected to form a corpus, called the FoRCCE Corpus, from the acronym of the project itself.²¹ The corpus will be investigated through the use of discipline-specific software and then analysed applying several theoretical-methodological frameworks, which include corpus

²⁰ Project Code number “LCC.SPIN2023.CESIRI_daFSREST, CUP H73C23000900005”.

²¹ For more detailed information on how the Corpus was collected and the categories of products included in the FoRCCE Corpus, together with a general overview of the composition of the corpus so far, see Chapter 5, which details the process of compilation of the corpus, and was written by a postdoctoral fellow within the SPIN2023 project.

linguistics, critical discourse analysis and multimodality. The innovative aspect is the application in the project of all the above-mentioned theoretical-methodological approaches to examine the genres composing the FoRCCE Corpus through a multidisciplinary approach. In fact, no investigation seems to have considered food-related communication aimed at children using these three approaches together to investigate all the products combined into one single corpus. The project unites for the first time several theoretical frameworks and methods of analysis to characterize different genres, which are used not only to communicate nutrition-related information to children and their families but also to promote and to represent and narrate food to the same target audience.

As already mentioned, the chapter presents the results that ensue from the preliminary analysis of the material composing the FoRCCE Corpus, considering in particular the category of “commercial” product since the aim is the investigation of how companies communicate food- and nutrition-related contents to their targeted audience of parents of infants and young children.

4. Dataset and Methodology: The FoRCCE Corpus

The materials composing the corpus are here called “products” instead of “texts” since they include material of different nature (videos, text-only material, image-only material, etc.; see also Cesiri 2025). Moreover, the three typologies of products through which food-related communication happens are, then, “technical” products that include cookbooks and cookery manuals, domestic manuals and food blogs; “commercial” products, which include advertisements published in leaflets, newspapers, magazines, on websites and social media, as well as commercials available through traditional and digital/social media; and, finally, “institutional” products, namely, products that include websites, infographics, booklets, brochures and leaflets in which international institutions – such as the European Commission, the WHO, the FAO, the World Food Programme or UNESCO – inform through guidelines parents, schools and professionals about the correct nutrition for infants, young children and adolescents.

The products thus collected form the Corpus: a general overview of the FoRCCE Corpus and its collection is provided in Chapter 5. This section describes the specific dataset investigated in this chapter, namely, the category of “commercial” products that include, so far in the corpus compilation, the advertisements created in the years 2023 and 2024 (the years in which the SPIN2023 Project was developed) by the companies Nestlé, Danone and Abbot. The material was selected from the websites of those brands that are specialized in children’s food, by which it was meant baby food, as well as products for weaning and early infancy

nutrition. Moreover, the websites were selected to include only those that not only produced advertisements but also informed parents about the appropriate nutrition for their children. The aim was to analyse the communicative strategies of these brands, between marketing and specialist knowledge dissemination. The sub-corpus is therefore composed as follows.

Table 1. Distribution of products in the sub-corpus.

<i>Brand</i>	<i>Nr. of Total Texts</i>	<i>Product & Nr. of Texts/Product</i>
<i>Nestlé</i>	59	KLIM 3
		Nan 3
		Nestum 8
		Nido 18
		Nesquik 20
		Cerelac 7
<i>Danone</i>	48	Nutricia 19
		Aptamil 29
<i>Abbott</i>	57	Similac 26
		Go & Grow 2
		Pedialyte 1
		Phenex-1 1
		PediaSure 12
		Glutarex 1
		Pro-phree 1
		Hominex 1
		Cyclinex 1
		Tyrex-1 1
		Propimex-1 1
		Ketonex-1 1
		PureBliss 4
		EleCare 2
		Volu-feed 1
Calcilo 1		
<i>Texts in Total</i>	157	

4.1. Nestlé

The first company considered in this chapter is Nestlé (n.d.). A multinational food and beverage company that is headquartered in Vevey, Switzerland, and was first founded in 1866 (<http://www.nestle.com>). Its first product was infant

formula but, since then, it has become one of the largest food companies known globally, with a presence in almost every country and the acquisition of several other brands, such as those included in the FoRCCE Corpus, namely, KLIM, Nan, Nestum, Nido, Nesquik and Cerelac, all specialized in infant formula, supplements and young children's several kinds of food.

Nestlé's presence in the infant and children's food market is indeed characterized by the offer of a wide range of products designed to meet the nutritional needs of babies and young children at different stages of development (*ibid.*). As already mentioned, their key products include infant formula under the brands Nan and Nido, which are designed for non-breastfeeding babies who, therefore, need supplementation. KLIM is also a brand producing several kinds of powdered milk for children from one year onwards or for toddlers, while baby food is produced under brands such as Cerelac, which includes purees, cereals and balanced meals. These products are commercialized for weaning babies, but Nestlé also offers products specifically designed for toddlers and young children, such as growing-up milks (e.g. Nido), snacks and supplements to support their continued growth and development (*ibid.*). While most of these products often focus on providing essential vitamins and minerals, Nesquik produces a variety of flavoured milk products for older children, typically toddlers or even older age groups. The most well-known product in the brand is the soluble powder designed to be mixed with milk to create a chocolate, other flavoured drink or Nesquik-flavoured cereals (*ibid.*).

4.2. Danone

The second company investigated in this chapter, Danone, is a global food and beverage company. Its mission is to "bring health through food to as many people as possible" (Danone World Food Company n.d.; <https://www.danone.com/group/about-us/our-mission.html>). The company was originally founded in Barcelona (Spain) in 1919 but is currently headquartered in Paris (France). While its first products were yoghurts to help children fight malnutrition (*ibid.*), today Danone operates across several segments of the food market, including essential dairy and plant-based products, special or flavoured waters and specialized nutrition. The latter focuses in particular on providing nutritional solutions for vulnerable populations, including babies, young children and individuals with specific health needs (<https://www.danone.com>).

As regards the production of infant and children's food, the company specializes in products that support the healthy growth and development during the early years with the key categories included in the FoRCCE Corpus of Aptamil

and Nutricia. Aptamil, for instance, is a brand that produces infant formulas that are scientifically developed to meet the nutritional requirements of infants from birth onwards, while Nutricia specializes in foods and formulas for babies and children with specific medical conditions or dietary needs such as allergies or intolerances.

4.3. Abbott

The third and last company considered in this chapter is Abbott (n.d.) (<https://www.abbott.com>). The company is a global healthcare company specialized in the production of health-related products such as diagnostics, medical devices, infant formulas and children's food and established pharmaceuticals. The company is headquartered in Abbott Park (Illinois, USA), but it has a global presence in over 160 countries worldwide (ibid.). The company's sector that deals with infant and children's food market is the Abbot Nutrition division. They produce a range of science-based nutritional products that cater to infants and young children. Their products are designed to support healthy growth and development in early life with a specific focus on special dietary needs and children with specific medical conditions that require specific nutritional supplements and food in general (ibid.), as testified by the names of the brands included in the ForCCE Corpus (see Table 1).

4.4. Method of Investigation

The collected small-scale corpus, investigated in three sub-corpora named after the companies from which the materials were collected, was searched by means of the software for corpus analysis *WordSmith Tools Version 8* (Scott 2020). The software was used to examine the terminology of the material, focusing on the accessibility of the information it provides. This assumption is based on the fact that the material is primarily intended for parents with infants and young children; therefore, the aim of the communication should be to promote the products and to inform the public of their nutritional value, ousting the competitors. Quantitative data from the corpus are used to conduct a stylistic analysis on the corpus itself. Special emphasis is placed on evaluating the frequency and occurrence of lexical words, such as nouns, considered as indicators of domain-specific vs. popularizing terminology (cf. Gotti 2003). The next step in the analysis, the qualitative one, aims to identify key terms within the corpus that contribute to the "accessibility" of its content from the lay audience's perspective and to confirm the preliminary assumptions drawn from quantitative data.

5. Corpus-Based Analysis

This section provides the stylistic description of the “commercial” products sub-corpus that comprises the main FoRCCE Corpus. More specifically, Table 2 outlines the corpus’s quantitative aspects, namely, its stylistic features. Comparing its characteristics with existing BNC data clarifies what kinds of features the FoRCCE Corpus displays, considering both general language use and language unique to the specific domain.

To understand Table 2 properly, we need to define its items within corpus linguistics: “tokens”, in fact, refers to all the running words in a corpus; “types” refers to the classes of words in the same corpus, while the acronym “STTR” stands for “standardized type-token ratio” and indicates the normalized proportion between the number of tokens and types. Interpreting this STTR value gets more support from the “Average word length” figure, which tells us the average letter count of words in the corpus. This is relevant because, in English, content words are generally longer than grammatical words (Biber et al. 1999). Moreover, in corpus linguistics, “standardized” typically means adjusting proportions based on a set benchmark. Therefore, in the corpus under investigation, the software we used automatically adjusted the STTR per 1,000 words. This happened when we compared our main corpus to reference corpora of different sizes and also when we compared our own sub-corpora, which varied slightly in size. This adjustment process ensures that type-to-token ratios from different corpora are directly comparable. As Biber et al. (1998: 263) point out, “when corpus-based studies examine the frequency of features across texts and registers, it is important to make sure that the counts are comparable. [...] ‘Normalisation’ is therefore a way to adjust raw frequency counts from texts of different length so that they can be compared accurately”.

Table 2 also includes “Sentences” and “Average sentence length”, rounding out our look at the corpus’s stylistic traits. These figures detail the sentence count and their typical lengths, offering clues about the formality level of the material we are analysing. Indeed, extensive previous research on larger English corpora has established that spoken English tends to use fewer, shorter sentences. In contrast, written English usually features more sentences, and they are generally longer (Biber et al. 1998; Biber et al. 1999; McEnery & Wilson 2001; de Haan & van Esch 2007; Egbert et al. 2022).

5.1. Corpus Analysis

The introduction provided in Section 5 has been useful to clarify the organization of Table 2, which, reading from right to left, is organized as follows: the corpus of “commercial” products as a whole (as investigated in this chapter, which will be part of the larger FoRCCE Corpus). Next, data appear for the Nestlé Sub-Corpus,

followed by the Danone Sub-Corpus and the Abbott Sub-Corpus. Finally, the last column provides figures for our reference corpus: the British National Corpus, serving as the standard reference corpus for comparing the three sub-corpora.

Table 2. Quantitative data from the FoRCCE Corpus and its sub-corpora.

	“Commercial” Products Corpus (FoRCCE)	Nestlé Sub-Corpus	Danone Sub-Corpus	Abbott Sub-Corpus	BNC
<i>Tokens</i>	64,063	17,073	8,352	38,559	97,860,872
<i>Types</i>	2,881	1,297	1,261	1,556	512,588
<i>STTR</i>	33.71	28.19	33.78	35.98	42.66
<i>Average word length (characters)</i>	5.01	4.85	5.41	4.99	4.68
<i>Sentences</i>	3,531	614	220	2,654	4,754,513
<i>Average sentence length</i>	15.57	14.00	31.17	12.60	20.59

By comparing the statistics for the entire corpus and then for each of the three sub-corpora against the chosen reference corpus, we can observe stylistic differences and similarities. To begin with the latter, the STTR of the Danone Sub-Corpus and the Abbott Sub-Corpus show figures that are closer to the corpus as a whole shows, indicating that the language employed is rich in word use. Previous studies have indeed found that “a high type/token ratio suggests that a text is lexically diverse” (Baker et al. 2006: 162). Therefore, since the corpus here under investigation is much smaller than the BNC reference corpus but shows similar STTRs, the figures point to a lexical richness of the former. These data also suggest that the texts composing the main corpus and the two sub-corpora that its documents are closer to popularizing texts than to specialist ones, which should be semantically dense but lexically poor (Gotti 2003). Specialized texts, in fact, are characterized by the preference for the use of lexical words and, more specifically, of nouns over verbs (a specific feature of specialized discourse known as “nominalization”; cf. Gotti 2003). In addition, the specialized lexical words used in these texts are monoreferential, that is, their meaning is domain-specific to that particular discipline. For this reason, specialist texts are characterized by the repetition of terms to indicate domain-specific concepts, hence their semantic density, accompanied by lexical poverty since authors cannot use synonyms, which might indicate different concepts in that specific discipline (ibid.). The presence of a rich and varied vocabulary, indicated by the high STTR in the corpus (and two of its three sub-corpora), seems to indicate that the language that is employed

in this part of the FoRCCE Corpus is closer to general language rather than to domain-specific discourse, and it is also rich in lexical words (i.e. it is semantically dense but also lexically rich). Data from the Corpus are confirming data already emerged in Cesiri (2025), namely that – unsurprisingly – corpus stylistic data reveal the communicative aim of the companies that is of producing texts whose content is accessible to a lay audience composed of parents and families of the babies and young children to whom the products are aimed for; a common tendency already seen in companies and international organizations and agencies that wish to disseminate food- and nutrition-related specialist knowledge to the same category of public (cf. Cesiri 2025).

The only exception seems to be Nestlé whose sub-corpus shows a much lower STTR, therefore indicating a less varied lexical variety of language, pointing to a specialized lexicon which, in turn, might suggest the use of domain-specific and monoreferential terms that, as already mentioned, need to be repeated in a text since they cannot be replaced with synonyms due to their specialized nature and meaning that is unique to the semantic domain in which they are employed. All these elements seem to suggest that the Nestlé Sub-Corpus is the most specialized of the three sub-corpora under investigation.

Interesting data are revealed from the mean word length values. The main corpus shows unexpectedly longer words than the BCN. The number of sentences is clearly proportionate to their respective size, while it is again interesting to notice that, despite showing features of general language for what concerns the vocabulary used, the Danone Sub-Corpus surprisingly shows very long sentences. It has been found that, in a corpus, this is an indicator of sentence complexity, namely, longer sentences suggest that a corpus includes more complex sentences, which is typical of a formal style, while shorter sentences are indicative of an informal, colloquial style (de Haan & van Esch 2007: 198). However, while this is in contrast with the Sub-Corpus's STTR, it is in line with the average word length (5.41), which is the highest among the three sub-corpora and significantly higher than the BNC. We might interpret data from the Danone Sub-Corpus by hypothesizing that its texts are written with long sentences, indicating a formal written style, while the words they use, albeit lexically varied, are long and complex.

In conclusion, all three sub-corpora reveal some unexpected results from the quantitative analysis: while Danone employs a formal writing style, it seems to use non-specialist words; Nestlé, on the other hand, seems to prefer the employment of a more specialist approach to communicate nutrition-related contents to its target audience, while Abbot – the company that is oriented more towards health-care and medicine rather than recreational food of the three companies – seems the one to use the shorter sentences and less complex words in its sub-corpus. The qualitative analysis in Section 5.2. will confirm or refute these preliminary

interpretations on the communicative approaches by the three companies as provided by the quantitative analysis.

5.2. Keyword Analysis

The qualitative analysis aims to examine the key keywords identified by means of the corpus search. In corpus linguistics, keywords are defined as terms holding particular significance within a specific corpus (Baker 2004). According to Baker (2004: 346), in fact, “a word is key if its frequency in a text reaches or exceeds a user-specified minimum, and its occurrence compared with a reference corpus produces a statistically significant probability computed by an appropriate method”.

The study, however, focuses only on the terms that can be considered “key keywords” (e.g. Scott 1997) in the three sub-corpora. Key keywords are terms appearing at least a minimum number of times in a given corpus, showing how many texts a keyword is identified as significant within the corpus investigated (Baker 2004: 350). Therefore, given that the aim of the study is to identify patterns in the specific linguistic choices in the three sub-corpora, selecting the terminology that is truly relevant in the material composing the sub-corpora would help to understand the strategies employed by the three companies to inform the public on the correct infants’ and young children’s nutrition.

Moreover, the key keyword (henceforth referred to only as “keyword” or “keywords”) analysis aims to ascertain whether the preliminary assumptions of the quantitative analysis in terms of the stylistic description of the three sub-corpora can be confirmed or rejected through the examination of the key nouns used by the three companies. As a matter of fact, the keyword analysis centres on nouns occurring a minimum of twenty times in each of the three sub-corpora. Only the nouns were considered for investigation as typical examples of domain-specific language and instances of a monoreferential and nominalized terminology that can help differentiate a specialist from a non-specialist or a popularizing text (cf. Section 5.1. and Gotti 2003). Therefore, by looking at the kinds of nouns the three companies utilize with greater frequency we can understand whether 1) the hypotheses formulated concerning the specialist/popularizing language of the sub-corpora as indicated by the figures in Table 1 can be actually confirmed and 2) the effectiveness of the companies’ communicative strategies of the companies in disseminating nutrition-related information to infants’ and young children’s parents when using a specific kind of terminology can be ascertained.

Table 3 shows the keywords obtained from the search of the three sub-corpora. As already mentioned, only nouns that occurred at least twenty times in the corresponding sub-corpus were selected. In the table, the keywords are listed as they were returned from the corpus search.

Table 3. Key keywords in the three sub-corpora.

<i>Nestlé</i>	<i>Danone</i>	<i>Abbott</i>
Vitamin/Vitamins, Nutrition, Serving/ Servings, Fat, Calcium, Amount, Iron, Daily, Months, Total, Nido, Powder, Protein, Oz, Minerals, Food, Ingredients, Acid, Nesquik, Value, Product/Products, Sodium, Zinc, Sugars, Infant, Calories, Container, Diet, Soy, Development, Ingredient, Potassium, Sulphate, Allergen/ Allergens, Oil, Nutrient/Nutrients, Day, Chocolate, Corn, Acetate, Sugar, Tbsp, Wheat, Bottle, Probiotic/Probiotics, Toddler, Age, Fibre, Flavour, Strawberry, Size, Dietary, Advice, Baby, Low, Carbohydrate, Facts, Information, Riboflavin, Cerelac, Cholesterol, Cup, Package, Place, Syrup, Cereals, Item, Label, Preparation, Growth, Health, Nestum, Benefits, Instructions, Lecithin, Step, Taste, Whey, Biotin, Child, Source, Cholecalciferol	Vitamin, Milk, Acid, Nutrition, Oil, Sodium, Protein, Children, Calcium, Chloride, Sulphate, Potassium, Range, Mg, Food, Growth, Dietary, Management, Infants, Product, Purposes, Energy, Phosphate Supervision, Riboflavin, Ingredients, Preterm, Biotin, Allergy, Age, Acetate, Monophosphate	Vitamin/Vitamins, Mg, Mcg, Milk, Acid, Potassium, Formula/Formulas, Calcium, Oz, Oil, Sulphate, Water, Chloride, Feeding, Sodium, Ingredients, Protein, Container, Infant/Infants, Soy, Powder, Source, Choline, Instructions, Nutrition, Phosphate, Store, Hydrochloride, Fat, Similac, Magnesium, Iron, Bottle/Bottles, Biotin, Cap, Riboflavin, Zinc, Copper, Inositol, Lutein, Citrate, Manganese, Baby, Children, Monophosphate, Ascorbic, Health, Palmitate, Room Temperature/Temperatures, Carnitine, Directions, Hour/Hours, Lactose, Taurine, Result, Eye, Ring, Total, Storage, Doctor, Corn, Cows, Phosphorus, Acetate, Kosher, Pyridoxine, Thiamine, Tocopheryl, Development, Niacinamide, Pantothenate, Phylloquinone, Halal, Selenate, Brain, Gluten, Growth, Scoops, Iodide, Niacin, Amount, Hydroxide, Calories, Carbonate, Chain, Cup, Product, Weight, Level, Salt, Chromium, Selenium, Hands, Carbohydrate, Disodiud, Nucleotides, Thiamin, Breast, Premature, Schizochytrium, Microwave, Coconut, Refrigerator, Safflower, Utensils, Value, Galactosemia, Guide, Iodine, Lecithin, Minerals, Oven, Carotene, Failure, Foil, Supervision, Syrup, Nipples, Rings, Sugars, Fibre, Hygiene, Opening, Dairy, Hormones, Surfaces, Feedings, Ascorbyl, Amounts, Fluid, Measure, Molybdate, Whey, Birth, Bones, Carrageenan, Monoglycerides, Sensitivity, Tocopherols, Triglycerides, Abbott, Diet, Dietary, Fructooligosaccharides, Nutrient, Olein, Palm, Preterm, Seconds, Toddlers, Adenosine, Bitartrate, Cytidine, Guanosine, Paediatrics, Sole, Sugar, Supplement, Uridine

As shown in Table 3, a few keywords are common to all three sub-corpora, while others are used only in some, or in one, of them. In terms of the semantic fields of the keywords, they pertain to the following domains:

- food and nutrition (nutrients, kinds of food, chemical elements or compounds composing infant formula and baby food and so forth): for example, VITAMIN/VITAMINS, DIET/DIETARY, SUGAR/SUGARS, FIBRE/FIBRES, SYRUP, CORN, CALCIUM, SOY, ACETATE, etc.;
- groups of people/age groups: for example, BABY, TODDLER/TODDLERS, INFANT and CHILDREN;
- instructional terms (i.e. keywords used to instruct parents how to properly prepare formula or baby's food): for example, INSTRUCTIONS, PRODUCT, REFRIGERATOR, MICROWAVE, ROOM TEMPERATURE, etc.

As for the distribution of the keywords in the three sub-corpora, the Nestlé Sub-Corpus shows the use of keywords that belong to the three semantic fields and are overall accessible to an audience of non-specialists with a few notable exceptions that are constituted by the nouns RIBOFLAVIN, SULPHATE, BIOTIN and CHOLECALCIFEROL. These nouns might be opaque for the non-specialist audience if not properly explained. The concordance analysis was conducted in Section 5.3. will ascertain whether Nestlé's website compensates for the opaqueness of the term by providing its explanation to the parents accessing the corresponding text.

The list of keywords in the Danone Sub-Corpus is significantly shorter, proportionate to the size of the corpus. However, it shows the same trend noticed in the Nestlé Sub-Corpus, namely, that nouns can refer to names of foods (MILK and OIL) or accessible terms (PRODUCT and DIET), but they can also be domain-specific terms such as CHLORIDE, SULPHATE, RIBOFLAVI and MONOPHOSPHATE, which might not be understandable by the lay audience, if not properly addressed in the main text. As in the previous case, Section 5.3. will conduct a concordance analysis to see whether Danone's website disseminates specialist knowledge by adopting popularizing strategies and making these terms more accessible to parents.

The Abbott Sub-Corpus provides the longest list, in line with its size. In this case, domain-specific terms outnumber general nouns, making the terminology of the sub-corpus more similar to specialist language rather than to popularizing discourse. Terms such as CHOLINE, HYDROCHLORIDE, INOSITOL and PALMITATE might be completely opaque to the target audience, making the texts inaccessible and, therefore, communication ineffective. The concordance

analysis in Section 5.3. will explain whether Abbot's website clarifies these terms for the target audience.

In conclusion, the keyword analysis has partially confuted the quantitative analysis results. In that case, the figures from both the Nestlé and the Danone Sub-Corpora indicated texts that were rich in word use but with traits typical of formal written texts (long sentences and long words), therefore pointing towards mixed results, which were confirmed by the keywords analysis in which general terms are mixed with domain-specific terminology. The extent to which the latter are explained to the target audience and, therefore, made accessible by the websites will be revealed by the subsequent concordance analysis. The Abbot Sub-Corpus, instead, contradicted the results from the quantitative analysis, which suggested a corpus rich in word use (looking at the STTR), with texts made of short sentences (the shortest value in the three sub-corpora) and relatively short words. This suggested a rather popularizing approach in terms of communicative style and the use of terms from general language. However, the keyword analysis revealed that these short terms are indeed domain-specific, specialist nouns and prevail over equally short general, non-specialist terms. This usage is in line with the company's main line of production, which is healthcare and medical products, but it does not align with the website's target audience and target customers of the product, who are parents of infants and young children. As in the case of the other two sub-corpora, Section 5.3, in which the concordance analysis is conducted, will reveal whether these terms are explained (or not) to the target audience of non-specialists.

5.3. Concordance Analysis

The terms to be investigated in the concordance analysis of the three sub-corpora were chosen as case studies of the first four most recurrent keywords occurring in the corresponding sub-corpora. Thus, the keywords searched in the WordSmith Tools software Concordance tool were the following ones (as extracted from Table 3).

- Nestlé Sub-Corpus: Riboflavin, sulphate, biotin and cholecalciferol.
- Danone Sub-Corpus: Chloride, sulphate, riboflavin and monophosphate.
- Abbott Sub-Corpus: Choline, hydrochloride, inositol and palmitate.

In the Nestlé Sub-Corpus, the search produced a total of 112 concordances. All the searched keywords appear as listed ingredients composing the baby formula or infant food with no corresponding note to explain their nutritional value, definition or provenance. However, they are usually associated with another component that they specify, as illustrated in examples 1)–4), which represent

all the occurrences of the corresponding keywords found in the sub-corpus, one for each keyword (emphases added):

1. vitamin B2 (riboflavin);
2. ferrous sulphate (iron);
3. vitamin B7 (D-Biotin);
4. vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol).

The examples show that the domain-specific nouns are associated with another term that corresponds to the same ingredient indicated with its more commonly known term. Linguistically speaking, these are all examples of the so-called juxtaposition strategy, a defining technique that has been found to be very productive in popularized texts, whereby “the specialized term is [typically] followed by its periphrasis with the two separated by a comma, dash or parenthesis” (Gotti, M. (2008). *Investigating specialized discourse*. Bern: Peter Lang; 209). Therefore, in this case, even though no further comments or explanations are provided, parents are made aware of the nature and nutritional value of the ingredients they are giving their children and, as a consequence, communication is made accessible and transparent.

As far as the Danone Sub-Corpus is concerned, the eighty concordances returned reveal some different results from the previous sub-corpus, even though some keywords were the same. For instance, in the case of CHLORIDE, SULPHATE and MONOPHOSPHATE, these terms are only listed as ingredients and never indicated in their common names (unlike Example 2), for instance, nor does Danone provide any explanation or definition (see examples 5) and 6), bold type added):

5. magnesium acetate, potassium **chloride**, high docosahexaenoic acid oil from *Cryptocodinium cohnii* and sugar;
6. magnesium hydrogen phosphate, ferrous **sulphate** and vitamin C;
7. Cytidine 5'-**monophosphate**.

As for the term RIBOFLAVIN, it is sometimes indicated alone (example 8), bold type added) and sometimes with its corresponding common equivalent (example 9), bold type added):

8. DL-alpha tocopherol, **riboflavin** and thiamin hydrochloride;
9. **Riboflavin (B2)** 0.19 mg/27 %.

The two examples refer to two different products, namely, example 8) is contained in the list of ingredients of Nutricia Human Milk Fortifier, “a food for special medical purposes for the dietary management of preterm infants under 1800 g”

(<https://www.nutricia.com/products/preterm/nutrilon-human-milk-fortifier.html>), while example 9) in Aptamil Profutura Growing Up Milk, “nutritionally tailored for toddlers 1–2 years” (<https://www.nutricia.com/products/first-1000-days/profutura.html>). The two products are aimed at two different targets of parents who are not likely to access both types of information. In addition, example 8) is extracted from the list of ingredients, while example 9) is from the product’s nutritional value table, so they are also reported on different parts of the container. This lack of a homogenous way of reporting information on the same part of the product’s container and on all the product does not make the company’s communicative strategy efficient nor transparent, especially in consideration of the fact that both products are for infants and toddlers in delicate conditions or phases of their growth, so parents would need to access that kind of information as easily as possible.

Finally, the search in the Abbott Sub-Corpus produced 387 concordances. As in the previous cases, the four keywords searched were contained either in the list of ingredients or in the tables with nutritional values. They are represented in examples 10)–13), which report one example for each keyword and the first one produced by the software in the concordance search (bold type added):

10. calcium phosphate, ascorbic acid, **choline** chloride and ferrous sulphate;
11. thiamine **hydrochloride**, pyridoxine hydrochloride and riboflavin;
12. potassium hydroxide, carrageenan, **inositol**, taurine and sucralose;
13. riboflavin, vitamin A **palmitate** and copper sulphate.

As we can see from the extracts in the examples, in neither case, however, were they accompanied by their corresponding common term or any other explanation that would give parents a clarification or any form of information concerning the nature, origin or nutritional value of the substance, elements or ingredients they are about to give to their children. Therefore, the communication produced by Abbot in this case is neither transparent nor effective and is based solely on the fact that the parents are entrusting their children’s nutrition during a delicate stage of their lives to a specialized company.

6. Conclusions

The present study has investigated a corpus of “commercial” products, namely, promotional materials written in English collected from the websites of three companies (Nestlé, Danone and Abbott) specialized in infant and baby food. The aim of the analysis was to investigate the communicative strategies used by

these companies and whether they managed to effectively transmit nutrition-related specialist knowledge concerning their products to the children's parents. The quantitative part of the analysis revealed that the Nestlé and the Danone Sub-Corpora showed mixed results, revealing communicative strategies that indicate a language typical of a formal written style, but with a terminology that points to general terms. This was later confirmed by the qualitative analysis that showed how the keywords in both sub-corpora included both general terms and specialist nouns, which the concordance analysis revealed to be explained to the parents by means of the juxtaposition strategy, a defining technique typical of popularizing text. This was interpreted as an indicator that favours effective and accessible communication between the company and the target audience of non-specialists who are made aware of the composition, in terms of nutrients and nutritional value, of their children's special food, especially in the case of preterm babies or of toddlers with medical conditions. As for Abbot, a company specialized in medical nutrition and healthcare devices, the quantitative data indicated a corpus that used short sentences and short words, all elements that could be signals of a popularizing language. On the contrary, the qualitative investigation revealed opposite data and the keywords revealed that domain-specific terms are used with no explanation or juxtaposition strategy, despite the fact that the website addresses parents and the wider audience. Therefore, the company's communicative strategy to communicate the nutritional value of its products appears ineffective, and this was all the more surprising considering that most of its products are devised for infants and young children with specific conditions such as preterm babies or food intolerances, so informing parents of the nutritional composition of the products through a transparent terminology and accessible information should be the company's priority, which, however, does not transpire from the present analysis.

Future research will integrate the results of the present study into the main FoRCCE Corpus and the larger SPIN2023 Project. Moreover, it will examine the nature of food-related communication directed at children across a more comprehensive range of media, encompassing traditional formats such as television and print, as well as other contemporary digital platforms such as social media and websites of other companies. A primary objective will be to ascertain how these communicative strategies manifest and diverge across various genres. For example, the presentation of food within "technical" products, a category defined by the project to include items such as cookbooks and food blogs, which has already been anticipated to differ significantly from its depiction in "commercial" products like advertisements and social media campaigns, or within "institutional" products, which include guidelines issued by health organizations.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding, future projects will employ integrated methodological frameworks. This involves the application of corpus linguistics for detailed language analysis, critical discourse analyses to investigate underlying messages and power structures and multimodality to consider the interplay of textual, visual and other communicative elements within the collected materials (as already tested in Cesiri 2025). The synergistic application of these three methodologies to the diverse array of products within the FoRCCE Corpus represents a novel and significant contribution to the field.

Finally, the overarching aim is to advocate for and contribute to the development of more health-conscious and inclusive strategies to narrate and represent food and nutrition to children. This entails not only the promotion of sound nutritional practices but also ensuring that these representations align with contemporary societal values and actively address and counteract anachronistic gender stereotypes identified in prior research (e.g. Cesiri 2022, 2025). The ongoing compilation and analysis of materials for the FoRCCE Corpus will serve as the empirical foundation for these future investigations. For a more detailed exposition, Chapter 5, in which this study is situated, provides a thorough overview of the FoRCCE Corpus and its methodological compilation.

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