



Dan Costa

considers some meat-free options for the classroom.

Veg for thought

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (Humane World for animals, 2023), around 92.2 billion nonhuman land animals lose their lives every year to feed humans. Several scientists (BioScience, 2019) have signed climate declarations prompting the move from animal to plant-based products to improve human health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Owing to greater awareness of its impact on health and the environment, as well as moral concerns, vegetarianism has increased on a global scale (World economic Forum, 2022), but to what extent do ELT coursebooks and online resources cater to the nature of meat-free diets? As occasional lesson plans with articles and other texts discussing the pros and cons of the topic are created to raise awareness of the trend (see Selected online resources),

vegetarianism can come across as an unconventional lifestyle. For all the talk of sustainability that permeates the agenda of several countries, how can vegetarianism play a more prominent role in today's language classroom?

Vegetarianisms

The meaning of the term 'vegetarian' is not always clear owing to its broad semantic scope. Unlike the name seems to imply, it does not refer to a diet consisting solely of vegetables. A distinction is typically made between lacto-ovo-vegetarians (who don't consume animals but eat dairy products and eggs), lacto-vegetarians (who don't eat animals or eggs but consume dairy), ovo-vegetarians (who don't eat animals or dairy but consume eggs), vegans (who don't consume animals or any

animal products) and fruitarians (who primarily eat fruit). Yet beyond strict vegetarianism there are also 'pollotarians' (who only include poultry as a source of meat), 'pescatarians' (who include fish in their lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet) and, of course, flexitarians (who vary their diets accordingly, seemingly on the quest for the best of all worlds). This plurality challenges the identity of what exactly constitutes a vegetarian diet and the way it is perceived by omnivores and carnivores alike.

The value of PR

Language can ultimately shape the manner in which diets are perceived and, as a result, adhered to. In this context, recent research has underlined the negative connotation inherent in terms such as 'veganism' (Papies *et al.*, 2024).

Analyses of media and consumer choices have suggested that plant-based diets are often marketed as merely healthy rather than enjoyable vis-à-vis their meat-based counterparts. Such contentions prompted the conclusion that language used to refer to plant-based foods should make reference to enjoyment, sensory appeal and attractive eating situations instead.

This lack of appeal may constitute a hurdle to omnivores, who are still a majority. A study of food literacy competencies and diet quality showed that the flexitarians in the group showed the highest level of general nutrition knowledge whereas omnivores showed the lowest. Vegans showed the highest level of critical nutrition literacy as well as the highest diet-quality score. The investigation also underscored the positive correlation between food literacy competencies and diet quality.

Veg classrooms

How, then, can vegetarian-palatable endeavours be brought to the language classroom? Common activities that involve writing recipes, which are often used for learners to practise the use of the imperative, can make further use of vegetarian recipes as models, bearing in mind students' cultures and preferences. While this can be a challenge in contexts where coursebooks present recipes that focus on the consumption of nonhuman animals, these can be complemented, as we know, by the use of other resources. There are many websites that specifically cater to this need. Just google 'Best vegetarian recipes'. I particularly like the Vegetarian Society, BBC and M&S.

Learners fond of visual learning materials might find comfort in captioned videos devoid of audio. An example is The Cooking Foodie, whose vegan options include an oatmeal brownie: Oatmeal Brownie | No Flour, No eggs, No Butter - YouTube

Vegetarian recipes can also be used to enhance audiovisual skills, rather than merely reading and writing. Websites such as the following ones include videos which can be used as models for learners when preparing production activities, as well as the chance to be exposed to a variety of accents

- Food Network: [//www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJery9rS_Y&pp=0gcJCdgAo7VqN5tD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJery9rS_Y&pp=0gcJCdgAo7VqN5tD) (American English)
- Guest Menu for Dinner Recipes | Veg Thali Recipes | Dinner Combo Recipes | Indian Vegetarian Recipes (Indian English)
- Rainbow vegetable bake with zucchini, tomato, sweet potato & squash | Everyday Food | ABC Australia (Australian English)

Beyond raising awareness, having students produce such recipes, as well as shopping lists or menus for meals in the context of task-based learning, is also likely to increase the diversity of dishes and ingredients, thereby broadening their lexical palette, not to mention their general knowledge and food culture. As a case in point, vegan alternatives to cow milk include soy, quinoa, rice, oat, hemp, coconut, hazelnut, cashew and almond.

Conclusion

While tofu carbonara or vegan brownie may not be your cup of tea, including more vegetarian options in the language classroom can foster greater inclusion, as well as knowledge and language skills. These can present lexis related to food that one is not necessarily accustomed to consuming as a meat eater. The quest for plausible substitutes also brings to light the significance of vitamins and other nutrients that a healthy diet ought to include. In this context, learners should be aware of the challenges that certain diets can entail, such as access to vitamin B12, for instance, which is a major hurdle for fruitarians or vegans if unfortified food is one's sole vitamin source. Regardless of one's stance with regard to this controversial topic altogether, enriching the ELT menu with more meat-free options can ensure that learners who follow such diets feel included as well.

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Selected online resources

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