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## THE SPEECH ACT OF SUGGESTION IN ONLINE RECIPES IN SERBIAN AND ENGLISH: A RELEVANCE-THEORETIC APPROACH\*\*

This research aims to determine the lexical and grammatical characteristics of the speech acts of suggestion in online recipes in Serbian and American English within the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995). The suggestions were analyzed in terms of the cognitive and communicative principles and possible implicatures. The analysis was based on fifteen examples of suggestions in Serbian and fourteen examples in American English. These examples were further compared to determine whether certain differences regarding the speech act of suggestion appeared. The research shows that every suggestion has its own implicatures and communicative effects depending on the form of the suggestion and the succeeding co-text. As for the two languages, in this research, no significant differences arise except for a few peculiarities. There are only three instances (10.3%) of directly stated suggestions (e.g., *my advice is, I highly recommend*), one in Serbian and two in English. The other 26 examples (89.7%) of suggestions from both languages are given indirectly.

**Keywords:** recipes, culinary discourse, suggestion speech act, Relevance Theory, implicature.

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## 1. Introduction

Recipes are a type of specialized discourse encountered almost daily. The language of recipes presents an excellent source for the analysis of food discourse, regardless of whether recipes are found in old notebooks or well-designed web pages. Fisher (1983: 20) defines a recipe as a formula of the means necessary for the desired results. Tomlinson (1986: 203), in simpler terms, describes it as a set of instructions for preparing food. She continues that recipes might at first appear simple and straightforward. Nonetheless, recipes do not represent clear step-by-step instructions but rather a fully-fledged register characterized by incompleteness, multiple-level presuppositions, and assumptions about cultural knowledge, practical skills, and technical equipment needed for a complex set of practices (Gerhardt 2013: 43).

The first documented written recipes date from the second millennium BC. They consisted of tablets found in the northern Semitic city of Mari on the west Euphrates bank (Goody 2008: 85). The first food-related sources written in English were from the Anglo-Saxon times, but none of these were recipes. There are, however, a few documented instances of writings about food preparation and consumption. These writings were mostly ingredient lists. The few existing instructions were characterized by two key linguistic features of cooking discourse, parallel structures and imperatives (Diemer 2013: 139–140). During the Middle English period, recipes became more elaborate, but they were only aimed at professionals due to the necessity of certain background knowledge for their understanding. The Modern English period noted a shift towards a broader audience. During this time, recipes also included advice for proper “housewifery” (Diemer 2013: 140–146).

In the US, recipes have gone through similar development. Almost until the beginning of the 20th century, recipes lacked the usual details, including times and quantities. The changes were introduced once young wives started taking over kitchen duties from servants. Housewives often not being familiar with the food preparation processes meant that the recipes had to specify the minutest details. In the US, recipes became increasingly popular in the 1960s with the mass production of cookbooks (Lakoff 2006: 157–158).

The first Serbian printed cookbook, *Србскиѹ Куварь/Српски Кувар* (Eng. *The Serbian Cookbook*), by Jerotej Draganović, was published in 1855. Although it contained the word *Србскиѹ* (Eng. *Serbian*) in its title, it did not contain traditional Serbian recipes but was rather aimed at Serbians, namely Serbian housewives. The cookbook mostly included a translation of German recipes

(Stojanović 2019: 68–70). It was followed by *Велики српски кувар* (Eng. *The Great Serbian Cookbook*), written by Katarina Popović-Midžina and first published in 1878. It had five different editions and contained a wide variety of European recipes, mostly Austrian. This was the first cookbook to introduce and name certain dishes, preparation processes, and utensils, mostly by borrowing foreign language words. However, *Велики српски кувар* became outdated once *Велики народни кувар* (Eng. *The Great National Cookbook*), later known as *Патин кувар* (Eng. *Pata's Cookbook*) by Spasenija Marković Pata, was published in 1939. *Патин кувар* dominated the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and paid more attention to traditional recipes (Vitas 2022: 1–4).

Recipe names point to what is to be expected within those recipes. Recipe titles usually possess a certain authenticity (e.g., Oklahoma Turnips, Texas Chicken), evaluation (e.g., Best Ever Cookies), or are related to someone known to the reader (e.g., Mother's Apple Pie). These techniques provide the trustworthiness of the author of a recipe. The instructions presuppose that the reader is a competent member of society and possesses enough knowledge about the culinary measures and preparatory steps not always fully described. The instructions also imply the necessity for background knowledge. For example, the knowledge of how to operate the technical equipment needed for the preparation process is required (Tomlinson 1986: 206–208).

Additionally, Tomlinson (1986: 204) notices the possible appearance of external instructions and comments not necessarily related to the preparation process. For instance, those comments advise when and how to serve the dish, for how many people, etc. Suggestions are usually included within these external instructions. For example, those might be tips and tricks, such as using a pot or a pan made of a particular material, substituting ingredients, or adding additional ones.

Wharton (2010: 67) points out that recipes are a part of procedural discourse, which also includes directions on how to make something. One of its dominant features is that this is an agency-neutral discourse. More specifically, it is aimed at the person reading it, regardless of who the person is. Wharton (2010: 68) also claims that procedural discourse is time-neutral since it should always exhibit the same results if followed properly. This agency/time neutrality is usually expressed by means of the imperative, as it has no overt subject, no tense, and is time neutral (Wharton 2010: 68).

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. The speech act of suggestion

A speech act is defined as an action performed via utterances (Yule 1996: 47). Two of the most notable researchers who played a part in the development of the speech act theory are J. L. Austin (1962) and J. R. Searle (1969; 1976). Aristotle was the first to suggest the idea that not all sentences are a matter of being verified as truthful. Other scholars who had further worked on this idea before it was properly defined by Austin and Searle include Immanuel Kant, Thomas Reid, Franc Brentano, Edmund Husserl, Anton Marty, Adolph Reinach, A. J. Ayer, Gilbert Ryle and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Baicchi 2009: 212–215). Austin (1962: 1–2) notices that certain sentences, instead of just describing something, actively perform things. Thus, those sentences are not a matter of truthfulness. Austin (1962: 32) also suggests that speech acts (SAs), or performative acts, are characterized by expressions, that is, explicit or implicit performative verbs. Verschueren (1980: 5) proposes a definition that slightly differs from Austin’s take on performative verbs, according to which “performative verbs, even in their performative use, also describe or denote types of SAs, in addition to being a linguistic device for the performance of those SAs.” Moreover, Verschueren (1980: 4) claims that every language has a wide variety of speech act verbs. Nonetheless, the number of speech acts and their verbs may vary from one language to another. Also, the number of speech act verbs in a language does not limit the number of SAs possible in that language.<sup>1</sup>

The first taxonomy of speech acts was introduced by Austin (1962). He suggested the following five categories: *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *expositives*, and *behavitives*. According to Searle (1976: 7–10), the weakness of Austin’s taxonomy was that it was introduced for discussion rather than providing definitive categorization. Thus, he decided to revise this taxonomy. Searle’s SA taxonomy is usually considered definitive and is preferred by most researchers. It includes the following groups: *representatives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives*, and *declaratives* (Searle 1976: 10–13).<sup>2</sup>

Since our main interest is the speech act of suggestion, as a sub-section of directive speech acts, this is the only SA category described in detail. As defined by Searle (1976: 11), directive speech acts are “attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something.” These attempts might be of varying degrees. For example, the strongest one may insist on the hearer doing something, whereas suggestions

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1 For a comprehensive list of speech act verbs in English, see Verschueren (1980: 6–7).

2 For an extensive description of each category, see Searle (1976: 10–16) and Yule (1996: 53–54).

are of a more modest degree (Searle 1976: 11). Nonetheless, suggestions and similar speech acts are not always considered a type of directives. For example, Hancher (1979: 6) claims that an invitation can also be seen as a commissive, as it commits the speaker himself to a certain action or behavior. Similarly, Adolphs (2008: 45) points out that a suggestion can be both a commissive, as it commits the speaker to an action, and a directive, as it also includes the hearer. Therefore, suggestions may be regarded as having a hybrid character.

### 2.2. Relevance Theory

Wilson and Sperber (2012: 1) see pragmatics as a study of language use rather than the study of language structure. Nonetheless, Carston (2002: 4) suggests that, with the development of a cognitively oriented approach, pragmatics is now seen as the mind capacity or an “information-processing system” within an ostensive communicative behavior.

The Relevance-Theoretic framework was developed from the reconsideration of Grice’s ideas. The bases of Relevance Theory (RT later in the paper) are represented through the definition of relevance and its two principles. From this point of view, relevance is defined as “the property of inputs to cognitive processes” (whether internal stimuli or external representations) (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 6). Thus, if everything is equal, the greater the cognitive effect with the smaller mental effort, the greater the relevance of input would be. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 260) devised two RT principles, the cognitive and the communicative:

*The First/Cognitive Principle:*

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

*The Second/Communicative Principle:*

Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

The cognitive principle is broader. It is based on the human biological mechanisms and their function. The only relevant output for this principle is the positive cognitive effect (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 261–262). On the other hand, the communicative principle does not require the maximization of relevance. More precisely, for a communicative process to be successful, a speaker should utilize the least effort to produce just enough effect to interest the listener (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 266–268).

*Explicatures* and *implicatures* are also notions important in RT. According to Carston (2002: 119), an explicature only refers to what is being explicitly uttered. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 182) claim that “an assumption communicated by an

utterance *U* is explicit if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by *U*.” Additionally, Sperber and Wilson (1995: ch. 4) suggest that a single utterance may contain multiple explicatures. On the contrary, implicatures are assumptions that are communicated implicitly (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 182). Carston (2002: 134–135) believes that in many utterances, the implicatures carry the main relevance. In certain instances, utterances do not possess implicatures. Moreover, RT makes use of *ad hoc concepts*. Those are “concepts that are constructed pragmatically by a hearer in the process of utterance comprehension” (Carston 2002: 322). Unlike the concepts readily available through decoding, *ad hoc concepts* are accessed through the inference process (Carston 2002: 322–323).

### **2.3. Previous research on suggestions**

The speech acts of suggestion were researched both with participants and using corpora, focusing on different linguistic and social phenomena. For example, Flöck (2011), comparing suggestions from British and American corpora, noticed significant differences in the distribution of head acts and their modification, with certain instances of suggestions being ambiguous or having other illocutionary forces, such as requests or orders. Sharqawi and Anthony (2020) studied the effect of gender on suggestion strategies in the Iraqi EFL context. The findings showed that differences between the genders do exist, with females producing more hearer dominant suggestions, or those with implicit dominance. As regards the sociolinguistic aspect, Heidari-Shahreza (2014) compared the English suggestions of Iranian EFL learners to the suggestions of Iranians and Americans in their respective languages and found that differences existed between the three groups, with gender, interlocutor relationship and topic further accentuating the differences.

As far as Serbian authors are concerned, Čorbić (2023), interested in the communicative strategies in peer feedback, pointed to some forms of the suggestion speech acts in English and Serbian. Dragaš (2021), in a multidisciplinary approach to the study of deontic modality in speech acts in sports discourse in English and Serbian, noticed the existence of the speech acts of suggestion and advice, in the form of a directive and commissive, respectively.

### **2.4 Research on recipes**

One important topic in the research on recipes is how they have developed and changed throughout history. For instance, Bator (2016) compared medieval

recipes, early Modern English recipes, and contemporary culinary instruction. The recipes were compared according to their general structures, functions, and intended audiences. Over time, recipes became longer and gathered larger audiences. Bator (2018) also studied the corpus of Early Modern English recipes and noticed that, unlike Middle English recipes, these were longer and contained additional information, not always related to the preparation process. Vitas (2022) was interested in the differences between the third and fourth editions of *Велики српски кувар*, mentioned in section 1, since a new editor was involved in the preparation of the fourth edition. Vitas (2022) noted that, in the fourth edition, the unknown terms were better explained, but the preparation and serving processes were more complicated, sometimes exceeding the readers' financial and overall dish preparation abilities.

The linguistic and pragmatic study of recipes covers different areas of interest. To name a few, Kaneyasu and Kuhara (2020) were interested in whether native Japanese speakers knew the recipe grammar when asked to write a curry rice recipe off the top of their heads. Diemer and Frobenius (2013) analyzed the lexical characteristics of food blogs as regards computer-mediated communication (CMC) related phenomena, including innovative spelling and vocabulary, food-related jargon, and the existence of spoken discourse phenomena, such as discourse markers, hedges, and address. Fortunati (2015), besides being interested in the culinary attitudes of North-Eastern Italian respondents, looked into the pragmatic aspects and the most important categories of meaning in the messages of an online cooking forum. Adami (2017) searched for pragmatic authenticity and aesthetic strategies in Jamie Oliver's Italian recipes and realized that significant borrowing occurred both between languages and different cuisines. Chondrogiani (2017) pointed to the pragmatic characteristics of author- and topic-centered Greek food blogs. Krstev and Lazić (2015) compiled a list of common verbs in culinary discourse based on the automated processing of data from the domain corpus of Serbian recipes.

Recipe research has also been concerned with the analysis of directives. For example, Al-Azzawi and Abdulameer (2020) concluded that directives are indeed the speech act most frequently occurring in online recipes. Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2009) looked into the indirect directives in recipes from Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages, as well as Hungarian. The constructions in these languages seemed motivated by complex connections made of cognitive, pragmatic, and structural factors.

### 3. Analysis and discussion

The analysis was based on 29 instances of speech acts of suggestions found in 24 online recipes (word count: 5088). Fifteen examples come from Serbian, found in 14 different recipes (word count: 2636). The other 14 occurrences are written in American English, identified in 10 recipes (word count: 2452). The recipes were taken from the Serbian website *recepti.com* and the US website *food.com*. These two websites were chosen because they work similarly in the sense that the recipes are uploaded by the public. This characteristic allows for the analysis of the everyday language used by non-cooking professionals. Considering their layouts, both sites possess the same elements: the title, ingredient section, instructions, and an optional section for notes/advice. The analyzed examples of suggestion speech acts were found in all sections except for the title. The examples were randomly chosen from the list of the most popular recipes. The abbreviations SR and AER are used for the Serbian and American English recipes, respectively.

#### 3.1 Methodology

This research is based on the qualitative analysis of suggestion speech acts within the framework of relevance theory. The analysis relies on the basic tenets of RT: relevance principles, implicatures, and explicatures. In this research, examples from two languages, Serbian and American English, are compared, and their similarities and differences are observed.

#### 3.2. Research questions

The analysis starts with the following questions:

What are the lexical and grammatical devices used in the suggestions?

What are the similarities and differences between suggestions in the SR and AER?

#### 3.3. Suggestion speech act in SR

15 examples of the Serbian suggestion speech acts were taken from 14 different recipes, with only one recipe containing two different suggestions. Only one example is direct, in the form of *moj savet je* (Eng. *my advice is*). Other suggestion devices include the following forms: *ja sam radio/radila to* (Eng. *I did that*), *možete* (Eng. *you can/could*), *idealno/najbolje/bolje/najjednostavnije je* (Eng. *it is ideal/best/better/easier*), *po želji* (Eng. *if/as desired, according to taste*), imperatives of different kinds, statements, exclamation marks, reasons for doing or not



doing something, etc. What follows is an analysis of an instance of a suggestion in a cheesecake recipe.

(1) **Idealno je** napraviti ga dan ranije, da bi se voće s želatinom lepo steglo.

English translation: **It is ideal** to make it a day earlier so that the fruit and gelatine set nicely.<sup>3</sup>

This instance of a suggestion is indirect, in the form of *idealno je* (Eng. *it is ideal*), followed by the reasons for the success of this suggestion. This form is used instead of the direct imperative *napravite ga dan ranije* (Eng. *make it a day earlier*) to avoid an additional request in this recipe. This suggestion has the structure of what is in Serbian considered an adverbial copulative predicate. Namely, as Stanojčić and Popović (1992: 219–220) point out, an adverbial predicate can either contain an adverbial unit or a nominal unit in a dependent case. The word order in Serbian being less constricted allows for the adverbial predicate to obtain the first position in the sentence. Kovačević (2024: 91–96) suggests that this and similar forms can also be interpreted as a part of a complex verbal predicate structure. More precisely, the adverbials with incomplete sense followed by the verb in the present tense or infinitive create complex verbal predicate structures (Stevanović 1989: 39). The adverb in question, *idealno* (Eng. *ideally*), means “in an ideal way” (Vujić et al. 2011: 429). In Serbian, as related to the adjective of the same form, it can be synonymous with words including *perfektno* (Eng. *perfect*), *besprekorno* (Eng. *flawless*), or even *najbolje* (Eng. *the best*) (Ćosić et al. 2008: 218).

Considering this definition and the Relevance-Theoretic framework, the implicature of this example is that, even though this step is unnecessary, the author might believe that making the cheesecake earlier provides the best results. Although a suggestion might not bear much relevance for the reader, in this particular instance, this does not seem to be the case. Namely, by presenting this step as being ideal, along with the reason why, the author may believe that they are producing the optimal relevance degree, as is required by the communicative principle of relevance. On the other hand, the reader, to come to the optimal effect, has to be aware of the background knowledge of the cooking methods and the behavior of gelatine. The following example behaves similarly.

(2) Poklopiti posudu i ostaviti u frižider najmanje 2 sata, a **idealno je** ostaviti preko noći (**ja sam meso ostavila** da prenoći u marinadi).

English translation: Cover the pot and leave it in the fridge for at least 2 hours, but **it is ideal** to leave it overnight (**I left the meat** in the marinade overnight).

In this instance, the suggestion is in the same form as the previous example,

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3 The translations for all the examples in Serbian are provided by the author.

but instead of an additional reason, the author confirms that they themselves achieved a better result when applying this method. Therefore, the implicature may be that this is the proper way to ensure a successful dish. A similar form is used in (3).

(3) Takode, kada treba da se izlupaju tučkom za meso, **najjednostavnije je to uraditi** između dve polovine kese za zamrzivač. Tako se meso neće raspadati, niti ostajati na tučku.

English translation: Also, when the meat needs to be pounded with a tenderizer, **the easiest way to do it is** between two sides of a zip-lock bag. In this way, the meat will not fall apart or remain stuck on the tenderizer.

Example (3) is the closest to example (1), but instead of an ideal thing to do, it suggests the easiest thing to do, followed by the reason why. In this case, the copular verb is attached to a superlative form of the adverb *jednostavno* (Eng. easily). To avoid confusion, it should be noted that some adverbs in Serbian can be comparative, even though adverbs generally have a fixed form. Those include some adverbs expressing manner, quantity or place, which usually have the same form as the neuter gender of their corresponding adjectives (Stanojčić and Popović 1992: 118). Vujanić et al. (2011: 491) define the adverb in question as something done simply, without difficulties. Since there does not exist a separate entry for *jednostavno*, based on the entry for its adjective counterpart, this adverb is synonymous with *jasno* (Eng. *clearly*), *razumljivo* (Eng. *understandably*), *očigledno* (Eng. *obviously*), etc. (Ćosić et al. 2008: 251). The adverb meaning and the subsequent reason, therefore, give an insight into why this step might be relevant to the reader, who needs to employ enough effort to understand the importance of the mentioned step. Moreover, the more knowledge the reader possesses about how messy the meat tenderizing process can be, the more relevant they will find this suggestion.

Examples (4) and (5) resemble the previous instances of suggestion. Namely, they have the same syntactic structure as examples (1) through (3).

(4) **Najbolje je** staviti šniclu između dva lista plastične folije (ili obične kese za zamrzivač).

English translation: **It is best** to put a schnitzel between two pieces of plastic wrap (or two sides of a plain zip-lock bag).

(5) **Dobro je** da izmerite tačnu količinu oraha i lešnika, da bi vam redovi bili jednake debljine.

English translation: **It is good** to measure the right amounts of walnuts and hazelnuts so that the layers will be equal in thickness.

The only difference is that these examples contain two different degrees of the

adverb *dobro* (Eng. *well*). One uses the superlative form *najbolje* (Eng. *best*), while the other uses the positive form *dobro* (Eng. *well*). The first form is almost identical to the suggestions for doing something ideally. The example containing the form *dobro je* (Eng. *it is good*) does not have the strength of the previously used superlative form, thus, it implies that this step may not be as relevant for the recipe to succeed.

Examples (6) through (8) exhibit the suggestions in the form of *možete/može* (Eng. *you/it can/could*).

(6) **Možete obogatiti** mešavinu i sa malo rendanog sira.

English translation: **You can enrich** the mixture with some grated cheese.

(7) **Možete umesto običnog** staviti i biljni kačkavalj, što je jeftinija varijanta, a podjednako dobra kao i klasična.

English translation: **Instead of regular, you can** put vegan cheese, which is a cheaper alternative but as good as the ordinary one.

(8) **Može se ovo raditi i** u činiji, ali je ovako praktičnije, kesu posle samo bacite.

English translation: **This can also be done** in a bowl, but this is more practical, you just throw the bag in the trash afterward.

These three examples utilize what is, in Serbian, known as predicate infinitive. According to Piper and Klajn (2013: 412–413), predicate infinitive is common in predicates containing modal verbs, in this case, the verb *moći* (Eng. *can/could/be able to*). This modal verb is defined as *to be allowed or possible* (Petrović and Dudić 1989: 51) or *to be adequate for a specific purpose* (Vujanić 2011: 720). The definitions, thus, lead to the possible interpretations of examples (6) through (8). More precisely, a possible implicature is that an optional step does not affect the quality of the dish much. These suggestions are mostly concerned with the reader's adaptation of the recipe according to their taste. It can be concluded that these steps may not be as relevant for the success of the recipe as the compulsory steps. Nonetheless, the subsequent co-text may produce different implicatures, degrees of relevance, and the need for background or encyclopedic knowledge. This is noticeable once the examples are analyzed in more detail.

As regards example (6), this suggestion form points out that the author may not consider this action very relevant. In that case, the implicature is that this step is not essential for this recipe and does not bring about much change if performed. Here, the focus is more on whether the reader prefers and plans to perform this step. Example (7), along with the suggestion in the form of *možete* (Eng. *you can*), contains a reason for doing this step. This instance may be seen as a more relevant step to undertake, as compared to the previous example, since the implicature is that the author believes the reader would appreciate a cheaper alternative, producing the

dish of the same quality. Regarding example (8), the speech act is followed by the conjunction *ali* (Eng. *but*), which may suggest the negative effect of this approach on the dish preparation process. This might even be considered as a type of warning. For the reader to invest optimal effort in understanding this suggestion, they should possess the background knowledge of how the meat seasoning process can be messy and how time-consuming it is to clean the bowl afterward. It can be assumed that the author wants to simplify the preparation process for the reader.

The following two examples represent a suggestion speech act given in the form of *po želji* (Eng. *as/if desired*).

(9) Pečen kuglof posuti šećerom u prahu ili glazurom od čokolade, **po želji!**

English translation: You can cover the baked bundt cake with confectioner's sugar or chocolate glaze, **as desired!**

(10) **Po želji**, možete u sredini svake kuglice staviti po jedan lešnik, takođe propržen. Mada su i ovako fantastične! :)

English translation: **If desired**, you can put a whole hazelnut, also toasted, inside each ball. Nonetheless, they are also fantastic in this way! :)

This phrase, despite containing a preposition and a noun in the locative case, performs the function of an adverbial describing the manner in which something is done (Stanojčić and Popović 1992: 276). Since the outcome of this step depends on the reader's wish, that is, their will, intention, or decision (Ćosić et al. 2008: 181), this suggestion implies a greater shift towards the reader. Thus, the relevance of these steps in their respective recipes is lowered. Nonetheless, each of the examples has its own characteristics. In example (9), the suggestion may be seen as an alternative, rather than a step not so relevant for the reader. In other words, this cannot be one of those steps the reader regards as not being relevant and worthy of investing any effort in understanding it. The only choice the reader can make is between the options, based on their background knowledge and opinion. In example (10), the suggestion is followed by the conjunction *mada* (Eng. *nonetheless*), without necessarily meaning a bad thing or a warning. More precisely, if a reader invests optimal effort in understanding the implicature, they can conclude that this recipe is great without modifications. The changes can only make it better. This interpretation can be additionally supported by the exclamation point and the smiley face emoticon added at the end.

Example (11) is the only instance in SR with a suggestion in the direct form.

(11) **Moj savet svima** koji se odluče da je prave da dupliraju sastojke, jer se brzo pojede za tili čas.

English translation: **My advice to everyone** who decides to make it is to double the ingredients because it gets eaten in the blink of an eye.

In this case, the advice is not marked with a performative verb or unconventional syntactic structures but an NP in the position of a sentence subject. The suggestion is followed by the reason why accepting the advice is important. If optimal relevance is achieved, a possible implicature is that this recipe is excellent, and it would probably require the ingredients to be doubled.

Example (12) is based on the suggestion previously proven efficient.

(12) ... pa u tome razmutite brašno da ne bude grudvica i da se dobije izjednačena masa. **Ja to radim mikserom.**

English translation: ... and, in there, stir the flour so that it does not get lumpy and that the mixture is smooth. **I do that with a mixer.**

This example contains the advice in the form of a complete sentence. Since the action is attributed to the first person (Stanojčić and Popović 1992: 100–101), it can be concluded that this instance of suggestion is rooted in the author's experience. The implicature is, thus, that this is the quickest and easiest way to perform this step. The readers, on the other hand, need at least some pre-existing knowledge of the effort required to mix flour with liquid ingredients smoothly.

The final three examples in Serbian were found in the recipe sub-section titled *SAVET* (Eng. *advice*).

(13) **Poslužiti toplo!**

English translation: **Serve warm!**

(14) **Umesto hleba sa sarmom se služi proja.**

English translation: **Sarma is served with cornbread instead of regular bread.**

(15) **Ne spremati dečku, ako nećete da vas ženi.**

English translation: **Do not prepare for your boyfriend if you do not want him to marry you.**

They are characterized by syntactic devices not often utilized in suggestions. Example (13) is expressed in the form of an imperative. If the reader does not invest optimal effort, it might seem that the author suggests serving the dish hot only to achieve a better taste. Nevertheless, this suggestion implies that this is a necessary step, even though it is found in the section titled *SAVET* (Eng. *advice*). The following example is characterized by the impersonal passive verb (Klajn 2005: 135–137), in this case, *služiti* (Eng. *to serve*). The suggestion in this form is, therefore, intended for anyone reading the recipe. The implicature of example (14) is that the author does not only advise serving the dish with cornbread. More

precisely, they might even reprimand those who use regular bread as it is not traditionally practiced, even though most people do it.

Example (15) exhibits a peculiar syntactic structure. Namely, even though this is a conditional sentence, the independent clause has a non-finite structure. Such structures are, in Serbian, referred to as *special* or *incomplete* sentences, and they achieve full communicative function with the right intonation or interpunction (Stanojčić and Popović 1992: 371). The negative infinitive, when used in special sentences, usually has the communicative function of a general prohibition (Stanojčić and Popović 1992: 373). Nonetheless, if example (15) is approached with optimal relevance, then the reader realizes that the sentence has a humorous intention. Besides its usage to lighten the mood, this sentence would imply that the dish is so delicious that it would classify those making it as expert cooks. To come to this conclusion, certain background knowledge on the importance of cooking in the Serbian culture is necessary. Namely, it is commonly believed that a woman is ready for marriage once she masters all the housework, especially in the kitchen.

### 3.4. Suggestion speech acts in AER

Considering the AER, 14 instances of the speech act of suggestion were found in 10 different recipes. Two suggestions were given directly, using the performative verb *to recommend*. Other suggestions were in the following forms: *you/it can/could*, *I usually do this*, *if desired*, *with desired*, *we prefer*, *it may be used*, *my experience is*, *it is better*, etc.

The first AER example is given in the form *it is better*.

(16) Cover and chill 2 hours (**it is even better** if you can chill this overnight and serve the next day).

The first AER example is in the form that Quirk et al. (1985: 1392) describe as being a marginal case. Namely, the *if*-clause can be seen as an extraposed subject, as well as an adverbial clause. Thus, the usage of the anticipatory subject (*it*), or as Biber et al. (1999: 125) refer to it, a dummy subject, and the comparative form, rather than the positive one prompts the reader to appreciate the suggestion more. Considering the pragmatic aspect of this suggestion, it points to the fact that, even though this step provides better results in the preparation process, it may not be a necessary one. Such a conclusion may be drawn from the fact that this advice is given within parentheses, thus, undermining its relevance as compared to the other steps in the recipe.

Similarly to SR, the highest number of suggestions in AER has the form of *you/it can/could*.

(17) (**You can also freeze** this recipe in zip-lock bags for later use ... **I generally pull** it out the night before and allow macaroni and cheese to reach room temperature.)

(18) (**Dough can** be stored in the fridge for up to 4 days, but in this case, **it should** be frozen. Return to room temp before using.)

(19) **You can** use broiler for these ribs, just watch more closely, and adjust cooking time.

(20) Note: **you can do many things** with these cookies. **You could** roll the dough out and cut shapes. **You could** slice them even thinner and sandwich them with chocolate or jam or lemon curd. **You could** make them and then dip them half into chocolate. **You could** just make them and eat them, which is my favorite. **Whatever you do, they will be delicious.**

*Can* is a central modal verb that refers to permission, possibility, or ability (Biber et al. 1999: 485). Examples (17) through (20) fit mainly the possibility category. Therefore, the actions recommended in such a way are generally just an alternative in the preparation process. But again, the succeeding co-text might offer different implicatures, so what follows is a more in-depth look at the examples.

Example (17) suggests freezing the dish as a possibility, but it need not be done. If the reader decides to perform this step, the author then may believe that the reader can benefit from an additional piece of advice. Namely, by pointing out their previous experience, the author may imply what is best to do if the dish is frozen. Example (18) follows a similar pattern. Here, the dough can be kept in the fridge, but it should be frozen rather than not. In example (19), the suggestion using the modal verb *can* is followed by a warning. To understand the relevance of this suggestion, some background knowledge on broilers is necessary. The reader needs to know how a broiler works, how it is different from a regular oven setting, and that not all broilers function the same. Example (20) may offer a completely different implicature, despite containing many *you could/can* forms. First of all, this suggestion is more relevant than the previous one. In fact, something has to be done with the cookies, and the author offers different options. By reading the final two sentences, the reader can conclude that, based on the author's experience, there is the best action to choose. On the other hand, it can also be assumed that the recipe will be delicious, regardless of the option chosen.

Example (21) also contains a modal verb, in this case, *may*.

(21) Wholly guacamole **may be used** as a topper with tacos, enchiladas, fajitas, etc. However, some say it is at its best with a bowl of warm tortilla chips and an ice-cold beer.

The modal verb *may* has the same syntactic function as *can*. Therefore, it offers a few possible ways to undertake this step. Nonetheless, the use of the conjunct *however* leads the reader to the implicature that some people give the best solution, usually from their previous experience.

Example (22), similar to (9) and (10), presents a step purely dependent on the reader.

(22) Sprinkle chopped walnuts over top of the frosting, **if desired**.

(23) Cut out cookies **with [a] desired cutter** – the gingerbread man is our favorite of course.

As defined by the *Online Cambridge Dictionary*, the adjective *desired* refers to something that is wanted or sought after.<sup>4</sup> Thus, regardless of whether adverbials have the form of an ellipted if-clause or a prepositional phrase, the shift towards the reader is noticeable. More precisely, the reader decides whether to undertake this step. If they do, then, this step leads towards the maximization of relevance. Namely, in this case, this step is regarded as important as any of the necessary steps. Otherwise, if disregarded, the reader does not even invest the optimal effort in understanding the importance of this step. Similar is the case with example (23), where it is up to the reader to choose the cutter type. However, the author also suggests their favorite solution, implying it is the best one.

The only instances of directly expressed suggestions using a performative verb could be seen in (24) and (25).

(24) Note: **I highly recommend** a pop-up timer in the chicken because some crock pots cook faster/slower than others.

(25) I used Wilton's Bake Even Strips on my cake pans ... **I highly recommend** these, or good quality professional baking pans.

The direct performative verb and, subsequently, the importance of the recommendation are enhanced by the adverb *highly*, which qualifies something as being *to a large degree*.<sup>5</sup> Both examples suggest additional actions, with different implicatures depending on the following co-text. In the first example, the author may imply that this is a worthy suggestion due to a particular reason. In the second one, however, the author gives a recommendation relying on their previous experience of what worked best in the dish preparation process.

In the final four examples, the speech acts of suggestion are rooted in the author's experience, as judged by the use of first-person pronouns.

4 Information retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/desired>, accessed on November 11, 2024.

5 Information retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/highly>, accessed on November 11, 2024.



(26) Place in resealable plastic bag and refrigerate overnight (**I usually skip this step because I'm always in a hurry**).

(27) **I usually brush** them with a powdered sugar glaze when I am in a hurry, *but* they look wonderful decorated with Royal icing.

(28) By the way, for some reason, **we prefer this cake chilled**, right out of the refrigerator. The rich chocolate and cool frosting just seem to taste best this way.

(29) Some folks use lemon, **but it's been my experience** that if you accidentally add too much lemon, it seriously affects the guacamole's flavor.

Once optimal effort is invested, it may be discerned that the authors suggest these solutions since they provide the best results. Again, each instance has its own peculiarities.

For instance, example (26) might at first seem like an obligatory step in the preparation process. Nonetheless, it is followed by the advice in the parentheses that disregarding this step would not affect the recipe much, despite possibly lowering its quality. In example (27), the actions usually performed by the author are followed by the statement, '*...but they look wonderful decorated with Royal icing*'. More precisely, the author probably has in mind that Royal icing would enhance the aesthetic quality of the cookies, although powdered sugar is usually used. Example (28) seems to express a suggestion where the author, despite offering what is, in their experience, the best solution, does not want to undermine the reader. Namely, there exist instances of hedging<sup>6</sup>, such as *by the way, for some reason, it seems*, according to which the reader is given more independence in the preparation process, even though the suggestion may produce the best possible results. The final example presents a recommendation encouraging the reader to do the opposite of what is usually preferred in recipes for this dish. To understand the relevance and importance of this suggestion, the reader needs certain knowledge about guacamole making and the way avocado and lemon interact.

### 3.4. Similarities and differences between suggestions in SR and AER

The process of collecting the data for this research showed that approximately every other recipe contains instances of suggestion in both SR and AER. Considering the frequency of these speech acts in individual recipes, the situation is slightly different in the two languages. More precisely, SR usually contains a single instance of suggestion, with only one of the recipes providing two diffe-

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<sup>6</sup> Hedging is a phenomenon related to Grice's maxims, used by speakers or writers/authors to point out their awareness of the conversational maxims possibly being violated. This phenomenon is also often utilized in politeness production. For more information on hedges, see Yule (1996: 38–39).

rent instances. In AER, these speech acts were more frequent, with two recipes having two suggestion examples and a single recipe with even three individual recommendation instances. Regarding the directness, there was a single instance of a directly stated suggestion in Serbian, in the form of an NP, in example (11) (*moj savet je*, Eng. *my advice is*). Two instances of direct suggestions appeared in American English, using the performative verb *recommend* (examples (25) and (26))

Only one striking difference appears when SR and AER are compared. Namely, SR, unlike AER, noted the existence of suggestions that can also be understood as warnings. Additionally, this language exhibited an instance of a recommendation with a humorous effect.

## Conclusion

This research showed that the speech act of suggestion appears approximately in every other recipe, with the frequency being usually between one and two per recipe. In some instances, there are more recommendation examples. Suggestions are directly presented in only three instances (10.3%), one in SR and two in AER. Other used structures are: 8 instances (3 in SR, 5 in AER) of modal verbs (27.6%), 6 instances (5 in SR, 1 in AER) of *it is ideal/easiest/best* (20.7%), 5 instances (1 in SR, 4 in AER) of *I usually do that* (17.3%), 4 instances (2 in each language) of *if/as desired* (13.8%), 2 instances (both in SR) of imperative (6.9%), and a single instance of a statement (in SR), with 3.4%.

The analysis also shows that the derivation of implicatures depends on the lexi-co-grammatical structures used in the recipes as well as the following co-text. When the two languages are compared, no significant differences arise, except for the speech acts of suggestion being more frequent in AER. Additionally, SR noted a few recommendations in the form of imperatives or warnings, as well as a humorous statement.

Although this is a small-scale study of suggestions in recipes, it can contribute to the study of culinary discourse, especially focusing on the language of recipes. It may also serve as a starting point for further research, not only of culinary discourse in general but also of culinary discourse and the suggestion speech act in the realm of RT and the speech acts theory. As regards further research in culinary discourse, other recipe structures, including directives in the form of imperatives, can be observed from the point of view of pragmatics.

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Ex. (16) <https://www.food.com/recipe/potato-salad-25768> [21/4/2024]  
Ex. (17) <https://www.food.com/recipe/fannie-farmers-classic-baked-macaroni-cheese-135350> [21/4/2024]  
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Ex. (19) <https://www.food.com/recipe/should-be-illegal-oven-bbq-ribs-8701> [21/4/2024]  
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## The speech act of suggestion in online recipes...

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- Ex. (21) and (29) <https://www.food.com/recipe/wholly-guacamole-8739>  
[21/4/2024]
- Ex. (22) <https://www.food.com/recipe/best-ever-banana-cake-with-cream-cheese-frosting-67256> [21/4/2024]
- Ex. (24) and (26) <https://www.food.com/recipe/crock-pot-whole-chicken-33671>  
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**Gordana Ivković**

## **GOVORNI ČIN SUGESTIJE U ONLAJN RECEPTIMA U SRPSKOM I ENGLESKOM U OKVIRU TEORIJE RELEVANCIJE**

### **Sažetak**

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je utvrditi leksičke i gramatičke karakteristike govornih činova sugestija u onlajn receptima na srpskom i američkom engleskom jeziku u okviru teorije relevancije (Sperber i Vilsonova 1995). Sugestije su analizirane u skladu sa kognitivnim i komunikacijskim principima i mogućim implikaturama. Analiza je zasnovana na petnaest primera sugestija u srpskom i četrnaest u američkom engleskom. Ovi primeri su zatim upoređeni kako bi se utvrdilo da li postoje konkretne razlike po pitanju govornog čina sugestija. Rezultati pokazuju da svaka sugestija ima svoje jedinstvene implikature i komunikacijske efekte u zavisnosti od forme u kojoj je sugestija data, kao i od teksta koji sledi. Što se tiče dva jezika, u ovom istraživanju nema značajnih razlika sem nekoliko karakteristika koje se javljaju u samo jednom od ovih jezika. Postoji samo tri slučaja (10.3%) direktnih sugestija (npr. *moj savet je, toplo preporučujem*), jedan u srpskom i dva u engleskom. Ostalih 26 primera (89.7%) sugestija u oba jezika dati su indirektno.

**Ključne reči:** recepti, kulinarski diskurs, govorni čin sugestije, teorija relevancije, implikatura.