

Eating for Your Pleasure – Exploring the Genre of Eating Shows

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The focus of this talk is the genre of eating shows, also called *Mukbang*, on YouTube. *Mukbang* videos originated in South Korea but have in the meantime spread to become a global phenomenon. In a typical *Mukbang* recording, the eating show performer eats copious amounts of food while engaging the viewers with extensive talk about a wide range of topics. Interesting here is the absence of an audience present during the recording, as we would find during regular dinner conversations which have been categorized as social activity with a focus on the “interactional rather than transactional” (Blum-Kulka 1994: 6). *Mukbang* YouTubers construct their discourse as a conversation over food which resembles but is also different from traditional face-to-face food conversations, drawing on the notion that “eating together creates a social bond” (Beeman 2014: 32). *Mukbang* videos, therefore, not only celebrate the pleasure of food (cf. *food porn*; see, e.g., McBride 2010) but also enact the interactional nature of mealtime discourse. As a form of digitally mediated intimacy, eating shows are of particular interest during the current COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting broadly adopted practice of social distancing.

The *Mukbang*-Corpus at the heart of this project consists of 100 Anglophone eating show videos by ten widely-subscribed eating show producers/performers. I will draw on this material to introduce the genre of eating shows – more precisely, the Anglophone instantiations of what I call the ‘second generation of eating shows’ (Rüdiger 2020) – and illustrate its evolution. Besides surveying the act sequences and goals of this communicative event, I also present the discursive and multimodal characteristics of *Mukbang* talk, which often serve to build rapport with the viewers (e.g., through the use of imperatives and questions, affective terms of address, inclusive pronouns, changes of footing, the ‘showing and offering’ of food, etc.).

References

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