

ABSTRACT

Food is significant beyond its nutritive value and its dietary customs are culturally contextualised. Folklore, the unwritten cultural evidence of a people, presents a stable platform for cultural analysis of oral food cultures. Using a biocultural approach, this study traces folkloristic influences on African indigenous leafy vegetables preference and dietary habits. Folkloristic products with a semiotic dimension are of particular interest. Norms, acts and events that dictate their use are analysed from a sociolinguistic perspective. These studies show that the folklore of the agropastoral Luo abound with useful reference to vegetables; indigenous leafy vegetables are more than just food. Gender, taste, textural preferences, recipe constructs and olfactory attributes of vegetable foods and sectarian taboos are discussed. The argument is that in general vegetable consumption reflects cultural backgrounds and experiences. Sixteen recorded sayings, proverbs, illustrative metaphors, mantras, lexical phrases, tropes and folktales depicting both wrong and right meanings suggest that vegetable foods are a less preferred food. Cultural factors forcefully determine semiotic workings that underlie food consumption and are more imposing largely determining what is palatable and what is not.