We often take for granted the language we speak every day to communicate with others, but language plays a vital role in our food culture in that people can express the experience of taste of food through a variety of words and expressions. Language users benefit from looking at the language of food from a linguistic point of view in order to understand why certain choices of words and word combinations are more appealing to listeners. The language of food is even more powerful in our communication when we realize that words as taste descriptors and food-related expressions are frequently extended to evaluation of non-food items and concepts, e.g. sweet dreams, bitter experience, and it's icing on the cake. Such extension, regularly processed by means of metaphors, is inevitably shaped by our cultural beliefs and social constructs that are not necessarily shared by speakers of other languages of the world.

Japanese culinary tradition and Japanese language offer a particularly excellent context for a (socio-)linguistic examination of how food relates to language and people as an example of a culture whose food preparation and presentation has had an enormous influence on its own people (and vice versa) as well as on other food cultures in the world. The Japanese context should further give background for looking at other cultures and their people through their language of food. This course will approach the language of food from the linguistic point of view—internally to Japanese, crosslinguistically, and crossculturally—through the topics including, but not limited to, food vocabulary (word meaning and vocabulary organization), loanwords, sound symbolism, metaphors, regional and gender variation, and genre variation (e.g. menus, recipes, advertisements).