

Italianness in the Digital Food Discourse of Italian Restaurants Abroad

A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis

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Abstract This study examines how Italianness is discursively constructed on the official websites of Italian restaurants abroad. Using a CADS approach, it compares English-language website texts from Italian and non-Italian restaurants in Miami. Keyword analysis reveals that the food discourse of Italian restaurants is characterized by keywords that mostly show limited lexical distinctiveness. Concordance analysis shows that, in context, these keywords collectively construct Italianness around three discursive dimensions: food as cultural heritage, authenticity and tradition as cultural ideologies, and Italianness as a lived cultural experience.

Keywords Corpus linguistics. Discourse analysis. Digital business communication. Gastronationalism. Food studies.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background and Previous Research. – 3 Data and Methodology. – 4 Results. – 5 Discussion. – 6 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

The global diffusion of Italian cuisine has made Italian restaurants abroad key sites for the circulation of cultural meanings associated with Italy and Italians. Operating outside their country of culinary origin, these establishments have a dual role: they compete as businesses within local hospitality markets while simultaneously presenting a cuisine strongly associated with national identity (Giampiccoli 2017). Their business communication therefore involves more than the promotion of dishes and dining services, as it also contributes to shaping how Italian cuisine and culture are presented to consumers. Removed from the geographical context with which their cuisine is associated, ethnic restaurants can leverage references to places, traditions, and cultural values to establish a recognizable culinary identity for local and international consumers. Examining restaurant communication can therefore provide insights into how cultural identity is discursively adapted to commercial contexts beyond its place of origin.

Digitalization in business communication has become central to this process. Among the various available digital channels, official websites provide businesses with direct control over their self-presentation (Handler 2017). Homepages and “About Us” pages are particularly relevant in this context as they combine promotional purposes with narratives about the restaurants’ identities, core values, and distinctive characteristics (Breeze 2013; Petroni 2020). Official websites therefore provide a useful space for investigating how restaurants draw on linguistic resources to establish connections between their commercial offerings and the cultural meanings associated with a specific cuisine. From a business communication perspective, these connections are especially significant because culturally meaningful resources can simultaneously contribute to identity construction and market positioning (Mascia, Solano, Jacobs 2025).

Building on previous research examining perceptions and representations of Italianness in food discourse (Bandini, Corduas 2019), this study conceptualizes Italianness as a cultural repertoire of meanings, values, and identity attributes associated with Italy and being Italian. This repertoire is not geographically homogeneous; rather, meanings of Italianness are constructed through the interaction of city-level, regional, and national geographical associations (Rabbiosi 2019). Elements of this repertoire may be selectively foregrounded in restaurant communication, contributing both to cultural representation and to the construction and projection of a distinctive business identity.

While representations of Italianness have been investigated across different forms of food-related communication (Naccarato, Nowak,

Eckert 2017; Sassatelli 2019), the linguistic patterns through which Italian restaurants abroad construct cultural identity on their official websites remain comparatively underexplored. Furthermore, limited evidence is available concerning recurrent patterns across larger collections of digital texts. In this regard, a systematic comparison with the discourse of restaurants associated with other cuisines can further reveal which linguistic resources are comparatively characteristic of Italian restaurant communication rather than common features of restaurant promotion more generally.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the discursive construction of Italianness in the official websites of Italian restaurants abroad, specifically focusing on those in Miami-Dade County, Florida (hereafter Miami). Miami offers a relevant context for this investigation because its multicultural and internationally oriented restaurant landscape brings numerous culinary traditions into contact within the same geographical and commercial environment. This makes it possible to examine the discourse of Italian restaurants not in isolation but in relation to establishments operating within the same market while representing other cuisines.

The research adopts the methodological framework of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker 2023; Gillings, Mautner, Baker 2023) and compares an English-language corpus of homepage and “About Us” texts from 137 Italian restaurants with a reference corpus comprising equivalent texts from 163 non-Italian restaurants in Miami. The study is guided by the following broad research question: how is Italianness constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami? By addressing this question, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on food discourse (Balirano, Guzzo 2019; Diemer 2025; Cesiri, Coccetta, Peruzzo 2026), shifting attention to official restaurant websites as business-produced spaces for the construction of cultural identity. It also demonstrates the value of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate discourse across a larger collection of texts.

2 Theoretical Background and Previous Research

Food-related communication plays a central role in the construction and negotiation of cultural identities, social relationships, and shared systems of meaning. It extends beyond the exchange of recipes, functioning as a discursive resource through which identities are constructed, communities are formed, and meanings associated with food are negotiated (Tovares, Gordon 2021). In contemporary digital environments, the ways in which food is represented and discussed have undergone profound transformation, as websites, social media platforms, blogs, and other online spaces have become key sites for

the circulation of culinary knowledge and cultural values (Cesiri, Coccetta, Peruzzo 2026). These digital environments facilitate the global dissemination of food practices while simultaneously providing spaces in which culturally specific understandings of food are continuously negotiated.

From this perspective, food discourse extends beyond references to food itself. Karrebæk, Riley, and Cavanaugh (2018) define food discourse as the dynamic interplay among food, language, and other semiotic resources across processes of production, circulation, and consumption. Rather than simply describing food, food discourse constructs meanings associated with cultural values, social identities, and economic practices, making digital environments particularly fruitful spaces for investigating how culinary identities are discursively produced.

Among the many culinary traditions represented in the digital food discourse, Italian cuisine occupies a particularly prominent position, as further reflected in its recent inscription on UNESCO's *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* (2025). The symbolic and economic value of the 'Made in Italy' label has contributed to the worldwide recognition of Italian food as an expression of tradition, craftsmanship, and quality (Temperini, Gregori, Palanga 2016; Cappelli et al. 2017). At the same time, globalization and waves of Italian migration have facilitated the international diffusion of Italian cuisine, making Italian restaurants one of the most widespread forms of ethnic dining worldwide (Giampiccoli 2017). Consequently, Italianness has developed beyond a national identity into a broader cultural construct strongly associated with food and culinary practices.

Central to this construct is the notion of authenticity. Rather than constituting an objective property of food itself, authenticity is increasingly understood as a socially and discursively constructed phenomenon. Karrebæk and Maegaard (2017) argue that authenticity is performed through cultural and communicative practices that attribute legitimacy and social value to particular foods and eating practices. Likewise, Gazzardi and Vásquez (2025) observe that authentic food is commonly represented as possessing identifiable geographical origins and historical continuity, whereas inauthentic food is associated with imitation, artificiality, and the absence of cultural provenance. Within dining contexts, authenticity also operates across multiple dimensions involving products, organizations, and consumers themselves (Le et al. 2019), highlighting its negotiated and relational character. Beyond individual dining experiences, authenticity assumes broader cultural significance through what DeSoucey (2010) terms 'gastronationalism', whereby food becomes a symbolic resource for expressing national identity and protecting cultural heritage. In the Italian context, this protective dimension

is also reflected in regulations governing the ‘Made in Italy’ label, which distinguish authentic Italian products from imitations and so-called ‘Italian-sounding’ alternatives (Gazzardi, Vásquez 2025).

These cultural meanings have increasingly become the object of scholarly attention within food discourse studies. Existing research demonstrates that Italianness is negotiated across a wide variety of digital genres and communicative settings. One strand of research has focused on representations produced by organizational and business actors. Federici and Bernardelli (2016) examine advertising campaigns and websites promoting Italian and Italian-American food products in the United States, showing how representations of Italian food are closely intertwined with cultural stereotypes, authenticity, migration, and Italian-American identity. Similarly, Corrizzato (2018) examines how the websites of Italian wineries reproduce the ‘Made in Italy’ label through values associated with authenticity, quality, and artisan craftsmanship. Corrizzato (2023) further investigates how Italian agri-food companies targeting international consumers employ borrowings, compounds, acronyms, and other forms of lexical innovation to promote Italian products and the ‘Made in Italy’ label.

A second strand of research has examined how individual culinary professionals and digital entrepreneurs construct and mediate representations of Italian food and culinary identity in digital environments. Rossolatos (2020) analyzes the digital travelogues of Jamie Oliver, showing how Italy is discursively appropriated as a place brand through lexicogrammatical and multimodal strategies that rearticulate Italianness within Oliver’s global brand identity. Focusing on digital entrepreneurship, Vásquez and Cenni (2025) examine the “Meet your Host” bios of Airbnb hosts offering Italian food ‘Online Experiences’, showing how hosts construct professional expertise and culinary authenticity through references to their education and work experience, passion for Italian cuisine, and, particularly, familial and ancestral lineages. Cenni and Vásquez (2025) extend this line of inquiry to the promotional videos of Italian food Online Experiences, demonstrating how hosts mobilize a range of multimodal resources to construct culinary identities and establish their professional expertise.

A third strand shifts attention from those promoting and mediating Italian food to consumers and their evaluations of Italian dining experiences. Nichele (2019) examines Tripadvisor reviews of Italian restaurants in the United Kingdom to investigate how consumers evaluate Italian dining experiences and the role played by perceived authenticity. Gazzardi and Vásquez (2025) further reveal that Italian tourists reviewing restaurants in the United States validate or contest claims of culinary authenticity through affectively charged and culturally situated evaluations, illustrating the role of consumers in negotiating understandings of authentic Italian food.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that meanings associated with Italianness, 'Made in Italy', and Italian culinary authenticity are constructed and negotiated by different actors across multiple forms of digital communication. Nevertheless, two important limitations remain. First, previous research has largely relied on qualitative analyses of small-scale datasets, providing relatively little evidence of the recurrent linguistic patterns through which Italianness is constructed across larger collections of business-produced texts. Second, although official restaurant websites constitute an important form of business-produced digital food discourse, limited research has examined how restaurant businesses use them to construct and communicate cultural meanings associated with Italian food. Addressing these gaps, the present study combines corpus linguistics and discourse analysis to investigate how Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami.

3 Data and Methodology

This study adopts the methodological framework of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker 2023; Gillings, Mautner, Baker 2023) to investigate how Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad. Specifically, the analysis draws on a corpus of official website texts from Italian restaurants in Miami, focusing on homepages and "About Us" pages, where restaurants communicate their culinary identity, cultural origins, food practices, and values. CADS combines the quantitative affordances of corpus linguistics with the qualitative interpretive approach of discourse analysis, enabling researchers to identify recurrent linguistic patterns while examining how meanings are produced within specific sociocultural contexts. This approach is particularly suitable for the present study because it allows for the investigation of food discourse across a large dataset while maintaining attention to the social and ideological dimensions through which cultural identities are represented.

3.1 Data Collection and Corpus Building

Data were collected through Tripadvisor, one of the most widely used digital platforms for hospitality-related information (Antonio, Correia, Ribeiro 2020). The platform was selected because its categorization system enables the identification of restaurants according to both geographic location and cuisine type. Using the filters 'restaurants' and 'Miami', an initial population of 6,077 restaurants was

identified in February 2024. Applying the additional filter ‘Italian cuisine’ reduced the population to 430 restaurants categorized as offering Italian cuisine. A 1:2 systematic sampling procedure was then applied, resulting in an initial sample of 215 establishments. Restaurants without an official website and duplicate listings were excluded, while chain restaurants sharing a single official website were considered only once. Following these exclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 137 Italian restaurants. To create a reference corpus, the same procedure was applied to the non-Italian restaurants. A 1:20 systematic sampling procedure was applied to the remaining 5,647 restaurants, resulting in an initial sample of 282 establishments. After applying the same exclusion criteria, the final reference sample consisted of 163 non-Italian restaurants. In the present study, ‘Italian restaurants’ refers operationally to restaurants categorized by Tripadvisor as offering Italian cuisine, while ‘non-Italian restaurants’ refers to the sampled restaurants not categorized as offering Italian cuisine.

For each restaurant, its official website was examined, focusing specifically on homepage and “About Us” texts. Content unrelated to culinary and cultural discourse – such as contact information, opening hours, reservation instructions, and legal notices – was excluded. Subsequently, the relevant content was manually extracted and compiled into individual text files, maintaining a 1:1 correspondence between restaurants and files. Following a web-for-corpus approach (Lutzky, Kehoe 2022), the text files were compiled into two corpora using #LancsBox X (Brezina, Platt 2026): the **Italian** corpus, consisting of texts from Italian restaurants, was used as the corpus of interest; the **Non-Italian** corpus served as the reference corpus for identifying lexical patterns that were comparatively salient in the food discourse of Italian restaurants.

Table 1 provides an overview of the two corpora. The Non-Italian corpus is moderately larger than the Italian one in terms of files, tokens, types, and lemmas. This difference reflects the respective population sizes, together with the different systematic sampling intervals adopted for the two groups. Nevertheless, the corpora are comparable in terms of their geographical context, communicative domain, website sections, period of collection, and procedures of extraction and compilation. The difference in corpus size was taken into account through the use of a normalized effect-size measure in the keyword analysis (§ 3.2).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Italian and Non-Italian Corpus

	Italian Corpus	Non-Italian Corpus
Files	137	163
Tokens	40,632	57,474
Types	5,994	7,924
Lemmas	5,546	7,289
Average number of tokens per file	296.58	352.60
STTR	147.52	137.87

The average document length is 296.58 tokens in the Italian corpus and 352.60 tokens in the Non-Italian one. Although the texts in the reference corpus are somewhat longer on average, both corpora consist of relatively short website texts. The standardized type-token ratio (STTR) values likewise indicate broadly comparable levels of lexical diversity. However, the Italian corpus displays a slightly higher value, which suggests a greater degree of lexical variation in the food discourse of Italian restaurants.

3.2 Keyword and Concordance Analyses

The analysis was conducted using #LancsBox X and focused on lemmas, combining keyword analysis with concordance analysis to identify recurring lexical patterns and examine how they contribute to the construction of Italianness in digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad.

Keyword analysis was first conducted by comparing the Italian corpus with the Non-Italian one. This comparison aimed to identify lexical items that were comparatively salient in the food discourse produced by Italian restaurants and that could therefore provide insights into the cultural meanings associated with Italianness. Keywords were identified using a measure of effect size: Cohen's *d* (Egbert, Biber 2023). A threshold of $d \geq 0.2$ was adopted in order to capture lexical items showing meaningful differences between the two corpora. Unlike measures based solely on statistical significance, effect-size measures indicate the magnitude of differences in lexical frequencies between corpora, thereby showing how strongly individual lexical items differentiate the corpus of interest from the reference corpus (Pojanapunya, Watson Todd 2018). The interpretation of Cohen's *d* adopted in this study follows the conventional classification presented in Table 2 (Cohen 1988).

Table 2 Standard Interpretation of Cohen's *d* Effect Sizes. Source: Authors' elaboration based on Cohen 1988

Cohen's <i>d</i>	Effect	Interpretation
0.20-0.50	Small effect	Indicates a subtle difference between corpora. While the lexical item may not be strongly exclusive to one corpus, its higher relative salience may reveal meaningful discourse patterns when examined in context.
0.50-0.80	Medium effect	Indicates a moderate and noticeable difference between corpora, suggesting that the lexical item has a more prominent role in distinguishing the discourse of one corpus from the other.
≥ 0.80	Large effect	Indicates a substantial difference between corpora, suggesting that the lexical item is strongly associated with one corpus and may represent a central feature of its discourse.

Because keywords alone cannot account for contextual meaning, concordance analysis was subsequently employed to examine the co-textual environments in which they occurred. Rather than treating keywords as isolated indicators of meaning, the analysis explored their semantic associations and pragmatic functions within broader textual contexts. A structured bottom-up approach (Gillings, Mautner 2024) guided the analysis, whereby recurring patterns were identified through the systematic qualitative interpretation of concordance lines and subsequently organized into broader thematic categories relevant to the discursive construction of Italianness.

4 Results

This section presents the findings of the corpus analysis. Consistent with the methodological procedure outlined in Subsection 3.2, the findings are presented in two stages. Subsection 4.1 reports the findings of the keyword analysis, providing an overview of the lexical profile of the Italian corpus in comparison with the Non-Italian one. Subsection 4.2 presents the results of the concordance analysis, exploring the co-textual environments of the identified keywords and highlighting the main semantic dimensions and pragmatic functions through which Italianness is constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad.

4.1 Keyword Analysis: Lexical Profile of the Italian Corpus

Keyword analysis identified 160 statistically salient keywords in the Italian corpus (Appendix), which together contribute to the discursive representation of Italianness. Of these, only three keywords ('Italian', 'Italy', and 'pasta') displayed medium or large effect sizes, whereas all remaining keywords fell within the small-effect range. This distribution indicates that the lexical distinctiveness of the Italian corpus does not depend on a limited number of highly salient lexical markers but instead emerges through the cumulative contribution of numerous moderately distinctive lexical items. Although the identified keywords occur more frequently in the Italian corpus than in the Non-Italian one, many also occur in the latter, indicating that the contrast primarily concerns their relative frequency rather than their lexical exclusivity.

The keyword profile of the Italian corpus encompasses a broad range of semantic domains. Beyond the highly salient references to national identity ('Italian', 'Italy'), the identified keywords include numerous lexical items associated with emblematic foods ('pasta', 'pizza', 'tiramisu'), ingredients and food preparation ('oil', 'flour', 'tomato', 'recipe', 'homemade'), traditional food establishments (*trattoria*, *pizzeria*, *osteria*), regional and geographical references ('Neapolitan', 'Sicily', 'Florence', 'Roman'), evaluative vocabulary ('authentic', 'genuine', 'traditional'), affective expressions ('memory', 'beloved', 'childhood'), and descriptors of dining environments ('cozy', 'homey'), among others. These semantic fields indicate that the representation of Italianness extends well beyond references to individual foods, encompassing broader geographical, cultural, emotional, and experiential dimensions.

While the keyword analysis provides an overview of the lexical profile that distinguishes the Italian corpus from the Non-Italian one, keywords alone cannot account for how these lexical items contribute to the construction of meaning. The following subsection therefore examines the identified keywords in their co-textual environments through concordance analysis, identifying the principal semantic dimensions and associated pragmatic functions through which Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad.

4.2 Concordance Analysis

Concordance analysis of the identified keywords shows that Italianness is discursively constructed through three interconnected semantic dimensions. Specifically, the analysis reveals that the digital discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami represents food as cultural

heritage, invokes authenticity and tradition as cultural ideologies, and constructs Italianness as a lived cultural experience. While analytically distinguishable, these dimensions frequently overlap in the corpus, collectively linking food to cultural identity, inherited practices, geographical rootedness, and everyday forms of social and emotional experience.

4.2.1 Food as Cultural Heritage

Concordance analysis reveals that the most salient lexical items identified through keyword analysis consistently converge in the representation of food as cultural heritage. Rather than presenting Italian cuisine simply as a collection of dishes or ingredients, the texts construct it as a repository of history, place, and cultural continuity. Across the corpus, references to food are systematically embedded within narratives that connect culinary practices with national identity, regional traditions, and inherited knowledge, thereby transforming food into a marker of collective cultural belonging.

A first recurring pattern concerns the representation of Italy as the legitimate source of culinary authenticity. References to 'Italian' and 'Italy' are repeatedly embedded within evaluative constructions such as 'authentic Italian cuisine', 'true Italian flavors', 'classic Italian traditions', 'imported from Italy', and 'the flavors of Italy'. In these examples, Italy is not merely presented as the geographical origin of food but as the cultural authority from which culinary legitimacy derives. The recurrence of these expressions frames Italian cuisine as historically grounded and culturally authenticated, positioning food within a broader narrative of national heritage.

Food itself is similarly represented through narratives of craftsmanship and cultural continuity. Rather than merely naming dishes, the corpus repeatedly embeds them within descriptions of artisanal preparation and family transmission. Expressions such as 'homemade lasagna from our family recipe' and 'traditional Neapolitan pizza' associate emblematic dishes with inherited culinary knowledge and long-established practices. The emphasis is therefore placed not simply on consumption but on the preservation and transmission of culinary traditions, representing food as an expression of cultural memory rather than a commercial product.

This representation is further reinforced through geographically specific references that anchor culinary practices within identifiable places, such as 'Florence-style steak' and 'flavors of Sicily'. These examples systematically associate foods with specific areas of Italy, foregrounding regional diversity while simultaneously reinforcing the coherence of a shared national culinary tradition. Rather than portraying Italian cuisine as culturally homogeneous, food discourse

presents regional variation itself as an essential component of Italian food heritage.

A further characteristic of this representation is the preservation of Italian linguistic forms within predominantly English-language texts. Dishes are frequently referred to through their original Italian names, as in *cacio e pepe* and *pizza napoletana*, while interpersonal expressions such as *buon appetito* also remain untranslated. The incorporation of Italian lexical items extends beyond simple naming conventions. Instead, these expressions function as linguistic markers of cultural continuity, maintaining an explicit connection between food, language, and place of origin while reinforcing the cultural specificity of the culinary narratives.

These patterns demonstrate that the discourse of Italian restaurants consistently constructs food as cultural heritage through the interaction of national identity, regional provenance, traditional culinary practices, and Italian-language resources. Rather than functioning independently, these elements combine to represent Italian food as a culturally embedded tradition whose value derives from historical continuity, geographical rootedness, and collective memory.

4.2.2 Authenticity and Tradition as Cultural Ideologies

Concordance analysis further reveals that Italianness is systematically constructed through references to authenticity and tradition. Rather than being presented as objective characteristics of food, authenticity and tradition are repeatedly invoked as culturally valued attributes through which Italian cuisine is legitimized. Across the corpus, restaurants employ evaluative language that positions culinary practices as faithful to inherited traditions, thereby transforming authenticity into a central organizing principle of food discourse.

This pattern is particularly evident in the recurrent use of evaluative expressions such as ‘crafted with authenticity’ and ‘traditional family recipes’. Rather than merely describing ingredients or cooking techniques, these expressions construct authenticity as a cultural ideal associated with fidelity to tradition and inherited culinary knowledge. Similarly, lexical items such as ‘true’, ‘genuine’, and ‘traditional’ repeatedly function as evaluative resources through which restaurants distinguish their cuisine from implicitly less authentic alternatives.

Authenticity is further reinforced through references to artisanal food preparation. Concordance lines repeatedly foreground practices such as ‘prepared daily’, ‘freshly made’, ‘ingredients sourced with care’, ‘homemade recipes’, and ‘handcrafted pasta’. Rather than emphasizing efficiency or innovation, these expressions consistently

highlight manual production, freshness, and careful ingredient selection. Food is therefore represented as the outcome of skilled craftsmanship, where culinary quality derives from artisanal labor and respect for traditional preparation methods.

References to traditional Italian food establishments similarly contribute to this ideological construction. The lexical items *trattoria* and *osteria* regularly occur in descriptions such as ‘a small Roman osteria’ and ‘family-owned *trattoria* with homemade recipes’. These expressions evoke culturally recognizable spaces associated with simplicity, tradition, and domestic hospitality. Rather than functioning simply as restaurant labels, they activate wider cultural narratives in which food is embedded within everyday social life and intergenerational continuity.

Authenticity is also strengthened through recurrent references to place-specific ingredients and culinary specialties. Expressions such as ‘imported from Italy’, *Parmigiano Reggiano*, and ‘traditional Neapolitan pizza’ connect food directly with geographical provenance. In these contexts, the origin of ingredients and recipes functions as evidence of authenticity, reinforcing the cultural legitimacy of the culinary practices being represented.

The recurrent association of authenticity with tradition, artisanal preparation, geographical provenance, and culturally recognizable food spaces constructs authenticity as a discursive achievement rather than an intrinsic property of food. Within the corpus, Italian cuisine is therefore represented as culturally legitimate because it is repeatedly anchored in inherited culinary practices and historically situated forms of knowledge. This representation, however, extends beyond authenticity alone. As will be shown next, food also functions as a medium through which Italianness is constructed as a lived cultural experience, through narratives of memory, interpersonal relationships, and sensory environments.

4.2.3 Italianness as a Lived Cultural Experience

Beyond representations of heritage and authenticity, concordance analysis shows that Italianness is also constructed as a lived cultural experience. Rather than presenting food exclusively through its ingredients or methods of preparation, the corpus repeatedly embeds culinary practices within narratives of memory, family, hospitality, and sensory environments. In doing so, food is represented not only as something to be consumed but also as a medium through which social relationships, personal histories, and everyday cultural practices are experienced.

A recurrent pattern concerns the use of affective vocabulary associated with memory and family life. Lexical items such as

'memory', 'history', 'life', and 'beloved' occur in expressions including 'dishes that bring back memories of home', 'sharing our family's beloved recipes', and 'celebrating life with Italian flavors'. Rather than functioning as purely promotional language, these formulations frame food as an emotional link between past and present, representing culinary traditions as repositories of shared experiences and intergenerational continuity. References to family recipes similarly reinforce the idea that culinary knowledge is transmitted across generations rather than acquired solely through professional expertise.

The experiential dimension of Italianness is further developed through representations of the dining environment. Concordance lines such as 'cozy vintage *trattoria*' and 'ambiance inspired by the Italian countryside' combine lexical items including 'cozy', 'homey', 'ambiance', and 'atmosphere' to construct dining spaces associated with familiarity and comfort. Other recurrent expressions referring to 'gardens', 'patios', and 'outdoor' spaces similarly contribute to idealized representations of Italian everyday life. Rather than merely describing restaurant interiors, these lexical patterns transform physical settings into symbolic extensions of Italian culture, where food is experienced within aesthetically and emotionally meaningful environments.

Interpersonal relationships also constitute a recurrent component of this experiential representation. Restaurants frequently employ inclusive and relational expressions such as 'we invite you to share our family's love for cooking' and 'the brothers grew up in Naples and brought their passion to Miami'. These narratives foreground hospitality, kinship, and personal engagement, presenting food as an activity centered on sharing rather than individual consumption. Culinary practices are therefore represented as inherently social, reinforcing the cultural association between Italian cuisine and communal experience.

An additional dimension concerns the incorporation of consumer voices in the restaurants' websites. Although the corpus consists exclusively of homepage and "About Us" texts, several restaurants embed excerpts from customer reviews originally published on platforms such as Yelp and Tripadvisor directly within these webpages. The keyword 'Yelp' reflects this practice, while the first-person pronoun 'I' frequently occurs in these embedded testimonials ('I had the best pasta...'), introducing customers' voices into the restaurants' self-presentation. By integrating these externally produced evaluations into their official websites, restaurants extend the construction of Italianness beyond business-produced discourse, allowing customers to participate in the discursive affirmation of authenticity, hospitality, and culinary quality. Italianness therefore emerges not only through restaurants' own narratives but also

through the strategic incorporation of external voices that reinforce and legitimize these representations.

Collectively, these discourse patterns shift the representation of food from a material product to a culturally situated experience. Culinary heritage and authenticity are not presented as abstract cultural values but are embedded within everyday practices of remembering, sharing, hosting, and inhabiting particular spaces. Through these interconnected narratives, Italianness is ultimately constructed as a way of experiencing food that simultaneously evokes place, emotion, and social belonging.

5 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Italianness is discursively constructed through a coherent system of cultural meanings in which food functions as considerably more than a culinary product. Across the corpus, references to dishes, ingredients, places, traditions, and interpersonal experiences systematically converge in representing Italian cuisine as a form of cultural heritage that embodies collective memory, historical continuity, and shared identity. In this respect, the study supports the view that food discourse is fundamentally concerned with the production of cultural meanings rather than the simple description of food itself (Karrebæk, Riley, Cavanaugh 2018). Rather than functioning as isolated lexical choices, the recurrent patterns identified through keyword and concordance analyses collectively construct a discourse in which food becomes a symbolic resource for representing Italian culture, thereby positioning Italian restaurants abroad as cultural ambassadors (Giampiccoli 2017).

A particularly significant dimension of food as cultural heritage concerns the role of regional diversity in the construction of Italian culinary identity. References to geographically specific traditions demonstrate that the corpus does not represent Italian cuisine as culturally homogeneous. Instead, city-level and regional traditions provide geographical specificity and historical depth while simultaneously being incorporated into a broader representation of Italian culinary heritage. Regional diversity therefore functions not as a source of fragmentation but as a constitutive resource in the discursive construction of Italianness. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of city-level, regional, and national geographical associations in the construction of Italianness through food (Rabbiosi 2019).

The analysis further demonstrates that authenticity is not represented as an inherent quality of Italian food but as a discursive achievement produced through recurrent linguistic patterns. References to traditions, artisanal preparation, and family recipes

repeatedly position Italian cuisine within narratives of historical continuity and cultural legitimacy. These findings resonate with Karrebæk and Maegaard's (2017) argument that authenticity is performed through communicative practices rather than residing in food itself, while also supporting Gazzardi and Vásquez's (2025) observation that authenticity is closely associated with provenance, tradition, and culturally situated expectations. Similarly, the recurrent association between Italian cuisine and identifiable places, traditions, and historically rooted culinary practices reflects what DeSoucey (2010) conceptualizes as 'gastronationalism', whereby food operates as a symbolic resource for expressing and safeguarding national identity. Within the corpus, authenticity therefore emerges as a cultural ideology through which Italian food is legitimized and distinguished from implicitly less authentic alternatives.

Beyond authenticity, the findings reveal that Italianness is constructed through narratives that transform food into a lived cultural experience. Rather than presenting culinary traditions solely through recipes or ingredients, the websites repeatedly embed food within stories of family, memory, hospitality, and sensory environments. These narratives extend representations of Italianness beyond material food practices by emphasizing the social relationships and emotional experiences surrounding food consumption. Such representations are consistent with research showing how digital food discourse provides a space for the construction and negotiation of identities and communities (Tovares, Gordon 2021). Likewise, the incorporation of customer testimonials into official restaurant websites illustrates how business-produced and user-generated discourse interact in constructing culturally meaningful representations of Italian cuisine. Although these reviews originate outside the restaurants themselves, their selective integration into official websites reinforces rather than challenges the dominant representations identified throughout the corpus, suggesting that the discursive construction of Italianness is co-produced through the interaction of businesses and consumers.

Methodologically, the study also contributes to research on digital food discourse by demonstrating the value of CADS for investigating culturally embedded food representations. Previous research has predominantly relied on qualitative analyses of individual texts or platforms (Federici, Bernardelli 2016; Cenni, Vásquez 2025; Vásquez, Cenni 2025); by contrast, the present study combines quantitative keyword analysis with qualitative concordance analysis to identify recurrent linguistic patterns across a relatively large corpus of digital texts. An important finding emerging from this approach concerns the distribution of keyword effect sizes. Only three keywords ('Italian', 'Italy', and 'pasta') displayed medium or large effect sizes, whereas the remaining statistically salient items exhibited relatively small

effects. Rather than indicating weak representations of Italianness, this pattern suggests that cultural identity is constructed cumulatively through the interaction of numerous moderately distinctive lexical choices. Italianness therefore emerges not through a limited set of emblematic cultural markers but through the accumulation of interconnected linguistic resources that collectively construct a coherent cultural discourse. This finding illustrates the importance of combining quantitative corpus techniques with qualitative discourse analysis, as the cultural significance of individual lexical items only becomes apparent when interpreted within their broader co-textual environments.

Overall, the findings suggest that the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami represents Italian cuisine as a culturally situated system of meanings in which food simultaneously functions as heritage, evidence of authenticity, and lived cultural experience. In doing so, the discourse transforms culinary practices into symbolic expressions of collective identity that extend beyond food itself. The study therefore contributes to food discourse research by demonstrating how digital communication participates in the ongoing discursive construction of traditional food, while also illustrating the potential of CADS for identifying recurrent cultural representations across large collections of digital texts.

6 Conclusion

This study has investigated how Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of official restaurant websites in Miami. By comparing homepage and “About Us” texts from Italian restaurants with equivalent texts from non-Italian ones, the analysis has identified the lexical patterns that distinguish the food discourse of Italian restaurants and examined the broader cultural meanings produced through their co-textual environments. The findings demonstrate that Italianness is not constructed through isolated references to national identity or emblematic foods alone. Rather, it emerges through a network of interconnected linguistic resources that collectively position Italian food as cultural heritage, authenticate it through tradition and provenance, and embed it within narratives of lived cultural experience.

These three dimensions construct Italian cuisine as simultaneously rooted in cultural continuity and accessible through contemporary dining experiences. References to national and regional origins, inherited culinary knowledge, traditional dishes, and Italian linguistic resources represent food as cultural heritage, while family recipes, artisanal preparation, and geographical provenance establish

authenticity and tradition as sources of culinary legitimacy. At the same time, narratives of memory, family, hospitality, atmosphere, and social interaction extend Italianness beyond food itself, presenting Italian cuisine as a cultural world that consumers can temporarily experience.

Taken together, these patterns show how restaurant websites participate in the circulation and commodification of cultural identity while simultaneously presenting that identity as historically continuous and culturally legitimate. This is particularly relevant to Italian restaurants operating outside Italy, whose digital communication must establish a recognizable connection to the culture from which their culinary identity derives while positioning them within local markets. Italianness consequently operates both as a cultural identity and as a strategic symbolic resource in digital business communication. Importantly, its discursive distinctiveness does not depend primarily on lexical exclusivity. With the exception of 'Italian', 'Italy', and 'pasta', the keywords identified in the analysis displayed small effect sizes, indicating that Italianness emerges through the patterned accumulation and contextual deployment of multiple linguistic resources rather than through a limited set of highly distinctive lexical markers. This finding also demonstrates the value of CADS for investigating complex forms of cultural identity: keyword analysis identifies comparatively salient lexical patterns, while concordance analysis reveals the cultural and communicative meanings produced through their interaction in context.

Some limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The corpus is geographically restricted to Miami and focuses exclusively on restaurant homepages and "About Us" pages collected during a specific period. The findings should therefore not be interpreted as representative of Italian restaurant discourse across all international contexts. Moreover, the analysis concentrates primarily on verbal discourse, whereas restaurant websites are multimodal environments in which photographs, typography, color, layout, and other semiotic resources may contribute substantially to representations of Italianness. Finally, the study examines the discourse produced or strategically incorporated by restaurants rather than its reception by consumers.

These limitations provide several directions for further research. Comparative studies could examine whether similar constructions emerge in other cities or national contexts, particularly where Italian migration histories, consumer expectations, and culinary cultures differ. Multimodal research could investigate how verbal representations interact with visual and spatial resources, while further research could explore variation among Italian restaurants themselves, examining how differently they mobilize Italianness as a cultural and strategic resource in their brand communication.

Research combining business-produced discourse with consumer responses could further illuminate how claims to authenticity and cultural identity are accepted, contested, or reformulated by audiences.

Ultimately, the study shows that the digital representation of Italian food abroad involves considerably more than the promotion of dishes. Through recurrent references to place, tradition, craftsmanship, memory, family, and hospitality, restaurant websites transform food into a resource for communicating cultural identity. Italianness emerges from this discourse as both inherited and performed: rooted in narratives of cultural continuity yet continually reconstructed through contemporary digital business communication. Examining these processes contributes to understanding how food becomes a site where cultural identities are not simply represented but continuously constructed, negotiated, and commercially mobilized.

Appendix

Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness
1	italian adj	1.20	33	authenticity n	0.28	65	naples n	0.24	97	again adv	0.22	129	historic adj	0.20
2	italy n	0.78	34	important adj	0.28	66	importance n	0.24	98	risotto n	0.22	130	fall n	0.20
3	pasta n	0.65	35	daily adj	0.27	67	acclaimed adj	0.23	99	neighborhood n	0.22	131	coast n	0.20
4	pizza n	0.48	36	unforgettable adj	0.27	68	reliable adj	0.23	100	invite v	0.22	132	book v	0.20
5	import v	0.41	37	quality n	0.27	69	buon adj	0.23	101	worth adj	0.22	133	childhood n	0.20
6	neapolitan adj	0.39	38	patio n	0.27	70	ravioli n	0.23	102	dining n	0.22	134	wood-burning adj	0.20
7	dough n	0.39	39	house n	0.27	71	really adv	0.23	103	cacio n	0.22	135	outdoor adj	0.20
8	atmosphere n	0.39	40	sourced v	0.27	72	allow v	0.23	104	district n	0.21	136	come v	0.20
9	selection n	0.36	41	touch n	0.26	73	freshly adv	0.23	105	executive adj	0.21	137	florence n	0.20
10	ambiance n	0.35	42	europe n	0.26	74	margherita n	0.23	106	vineyard n	0.21	138	oven n	0.20
11	trattoria n	0.34	43	famed adj	0.26	75	pepe n	0.23	107	i pron	0.21	139	roman adj	0.20
12	memory n	0.33	44	enthusiast n	0.26	76	vegas n	0.23	108	wide adj	0.21	140	artisanal adj	0.20
13	world n	0.33	45	host v	0.26	77	traditional adj	0.23	109	third adj	0.21	141	herb n	0.20
14	tiramisu n	0.32	46	appetito n	0.26	78	medium adj	0.23	110	satisfaction n	0.21	142	charcuterie n	0.20
15	true adj	0.32	47	originate v	0.26	79	history n	0.23	111	parmigiano n	0.21	143	suitable adj	0.20
16	italian n	0.32	48	prosciutto n	0.26	80	gourmet adj	0.23	112	walk v	0.21	144	hesitate v	0.20
17	di prep	0.32	49	gnocchi n	0.26	81	classic adj	0.22	113	bomb n	0.21	145	handcraft v	0.20
18	bolognese adj	0.30	50	high adj	0.26	82	trip n	0.22	114	napoletana adj	0.21	146	rigatoni n	0.20
19	brother n	0.30	51	friendly adj	0.25	83	genuine adj	0.22	115	life n	0.21	147	contemporary adj	0.20
20	oil n	0.29	52	dinner n	0.25	84	breeze n	0.22	116	homey adj	0.21	148	boy n	0.20
21	entire adj	0.29	53	cool adj	0.25	85	custom adj	0.22	117	inside adv	0.21	149	tomato n	0.20
22	key adj	0.29	54	miami n	0.25	86	ordinary adj	0.22	118	study v	0.21	150	osteria n	0.20
23	flour n	0.29	55	ingredient n	0.25	87	happen v	0.22	119	alla prep	0.21	151	refined adj	0.20
24	approach n	0.29	56	yelp n	0.24	88	dish n	0.22	120	restaurant n	0.21	152	dessert n	0.20
25	homemade adj	0.29	57	beach n	0.24	89	recipe n	0.22	121	harbor n	0.21	153	hidden adj	0.20
26	wine n	0.29	58	napoli n	0.24	90	gateway n	0.22	122	residential adj	0.21	154	regular adj	0.20
27	olive adj	0.28	59	garden n	0.24	91	olive n	0.22	123	seal v	0.21	155	customize v	0.20
28	pizzeria n	0.28	60	knowledgeable adj	0.24	92	save v	0.22	124	crown n	0.21	156	winner n	0.20
29	amazing adj	0.28	61	northern adj	0.24	93	lasagna n	0.22	125	connection n	0.21	157	craft v	0.20
30	be v	0.28	62	extra adj	0.24	94	directly adv	0.22	126	creamy adj	0.21	158	from prep	0.20
31	memorable adj	0.28	63	authentic adj	0.24	95	arugula n	0.22	127	fire v	0.21	159	extraordinary adj	0.20
32	cozy adj	0.28	64	beloved adj	0.24	96	sicily n	0.22	128	antipasti n	0.21	160	timeless adj	0.20

Keywords of the ITALIAN Corpus

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