

# Americans at the Table: The Political Language of Food

Dr. Sam Boerboom

Assistant Professor

Department of Communication and Theatre

# Psychology Today, March/April 2016

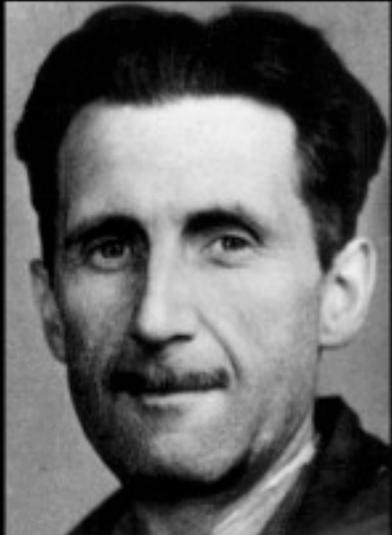


# The Political Language of Food



Edited by Samuel Boerboom

# George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* (1946)



Political language — and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists — is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

(George Orwell)

izquotes.com



**“NEVER USE  
A METAPHOR, SIMILE,  
OR OTHER  
FIGURE OF SPEECH  
WHICH YOU ARE  
USED TO  
SEEING IN PRINT.”**

# Why food

- Obesity causes \$147B health care costs annually
- Health clubs generated \$22.4B in revenue in 2013
- 2 of 3 adults in US is overweight or obese
- No country has lowered its obesity rate since 1980

(Dr. Aseem Malhotra in *The Washington Post* 5/15/2015)

- My approach is interpretive/epistemological: how do we come to understand our bodies and how they function given the information environment?
- Eating is arguably the single most political activity we engage in on a daily basis

# A comparison of *Time* magazine covers on fat



Ansel Keys - Father of the "lipid hypothesis"  
1961

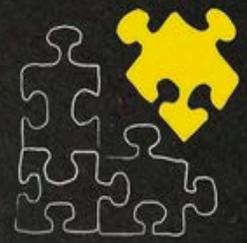
The war on Fat & Cholesterol goes global  
1984

Acknowledging they got it WRONG  
2014

# US Government Updated Food Guidelines (2016)

## The Guidelines

---



- 1. Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan.** All food and beverage choices matter. Choose a healthy eating pattern at an appropriate calorie level to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support nutrient adequacy, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
- 2. Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount.** To meet nutrient needs within calorie limits, choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups in recommended amounts.
- 3. Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake.** Consume an eating pattern low in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Cut back on foods and beverages higher in these components to amounts that fit within healthy eating patterns.
- 4. Shift to healthier food and beverage choices.** Choose nutrient-dense foods and beverages across and within all food groups in place of less healthy choices. Consider cultural and personal preferences to make these shifts easier to accomplish and maintain.
- 5. Support healthy eating patterns for all.** Everyone has a role in helping to create and support healthy eating patterns in multiple settings nationwide, from home to school to work to communities.

## Fruits: Focus on fruits.

- Eat a variety of fruit.
- Chose fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit.
- Go easy on fruit juices.

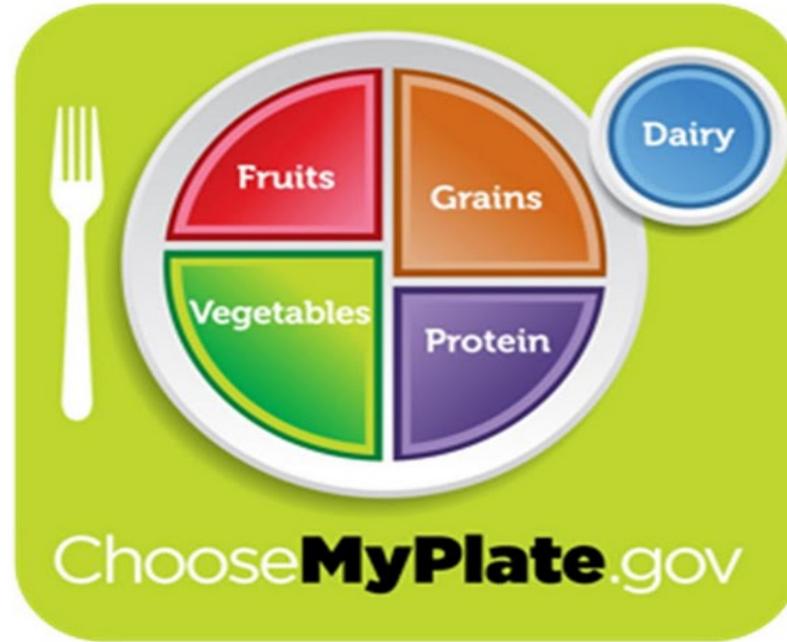
## Vegetables: Vary your veggies.

- Eat more green dark veggies.
- Eat more orange veggies.
- Eat more dry beans and peas.

## Physical Activity Find your balance between food & physical activity.

- Be physically active for 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Children and teenagers should be physically active for 60 minutes everyday or most days of the week.

# ChooseMyPlate



## Oils: Know your fats.

- Make most of your fat sources from fish, nuts and vegetable oils.
- Limit solid fats like butter, stick margarine, shortening, and lard.

## Milk: Get your calcium-rich foods.

- Go low-fat or fat-free
- If you don't or can't consume milk, chose lactose-free products or other calcium sources.

## Grains: Make at least half your grains whole.

- Eat at least 3 ounces of whole grain bread, cereal, rice, or pasta everyday.
- Look for the word "whole" before the grain name on the list of ingredients.

## Meats & Beans Go lean on protein.

- Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry.
- Bake it, broil it or grill it.
- Vary your choices with more fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds.



think

drink

move

## Balance Matters

A 12 oz can of Coke in the US has 140 calories. All our beverages - along with sensible diet choices and enough physical activity - can be part of an energy-balanced, active healthy lifestyle.

**Think, drink, move. And find your happy balance.**

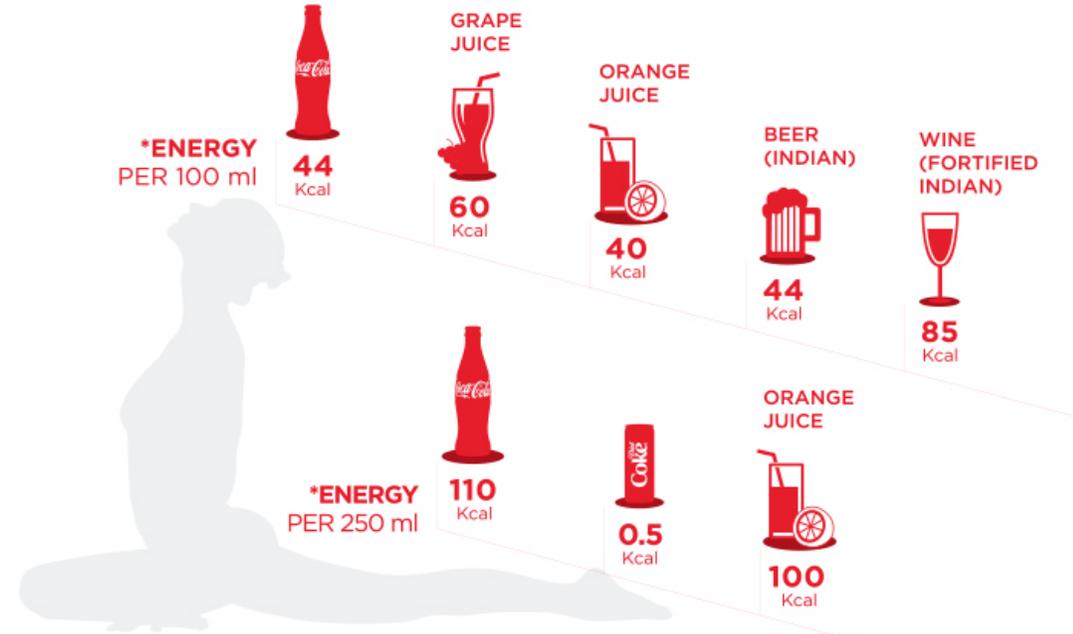
[Learn more about Energy Balance >](#)

[Visit the Exercise is Medicine web site >](#)



# ENERGY BALANCE

To maintain or lose body weight, you need to either burn more calories or consume fewer calories, or both. This concept of balancing calories in and out is what experts refer to as "energy balance".



*\*Note: The comparison above are provided ONLY to show the calorie content of each beverage, and are NOT intended to suggest that Coca-Cola is similar to these products with respect to nutrient content nor can be substituted for them in the diet.*

All foods and beverages can have a place in sensible, balanced diet that is combined with regular physical activity. But it's important to remember that when it comes to weight management all calories count, whatever food or beverage they come from, including our caloric beverages.

Our packages provide factual, meaningful and understandable information about our products, including basic nutrition and front-of-pack calorie information to make it even easier for consumers to identify which beverage meets their individual needs.

We are committed to providing a variety of products for every lifestyle and occasion. Consumers who want to reduce the calories they consume from beverages can choose Diet Coke®, our non-caloric beverage.

## Coca-Cola and the Global Energy Balance Network (disbanded in December, 2015)

# Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign



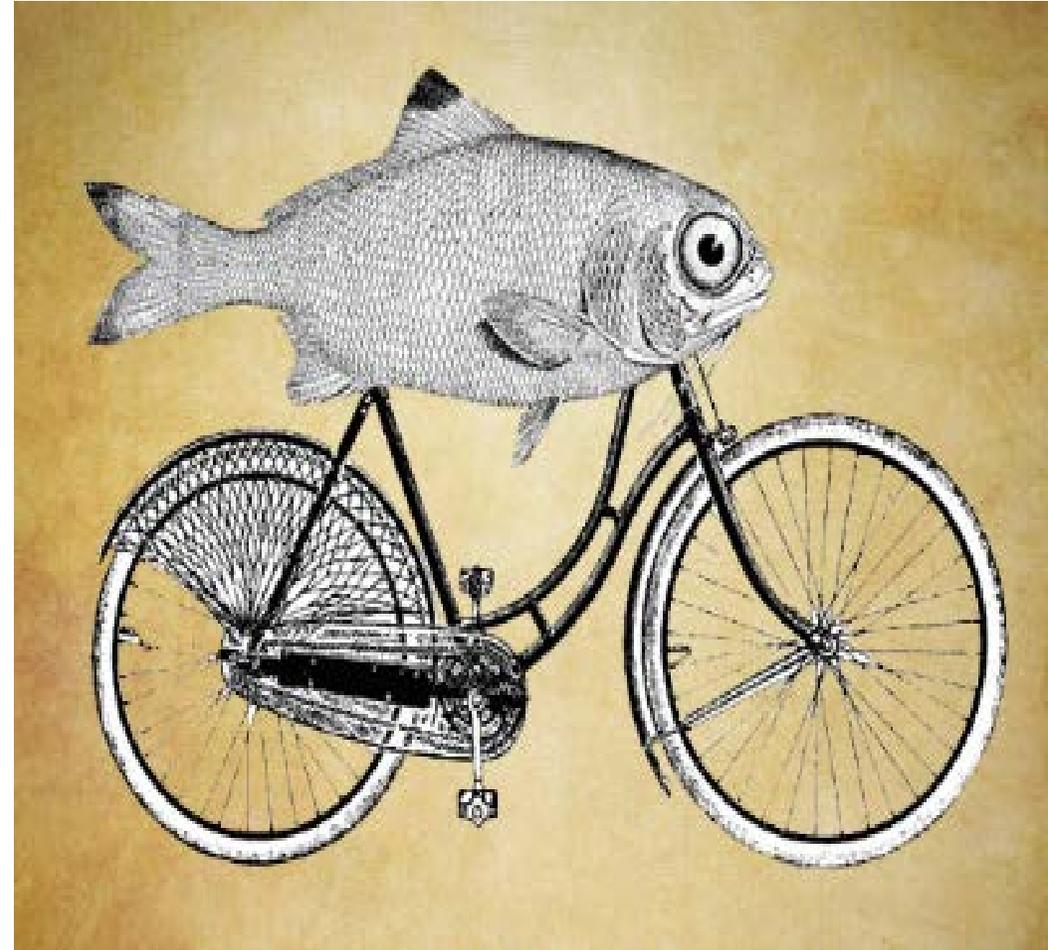
# What are analogies and how do they work?

- Two concepts—one familiar, one less so
  - Hope is that audience transfers via inference positive attitudes of a known concept to a lesser known concept
- Give no proof, make no demonstration of validity or similarity
- Essentially dissimilar
- Carrying-over of terms from one context to another/”perspective by incongruity”

Family: Corporation::Upset child: Disgruntled Employee



“A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle” (Irina Dunn)



# The Energy Balance hypothesis of obesity





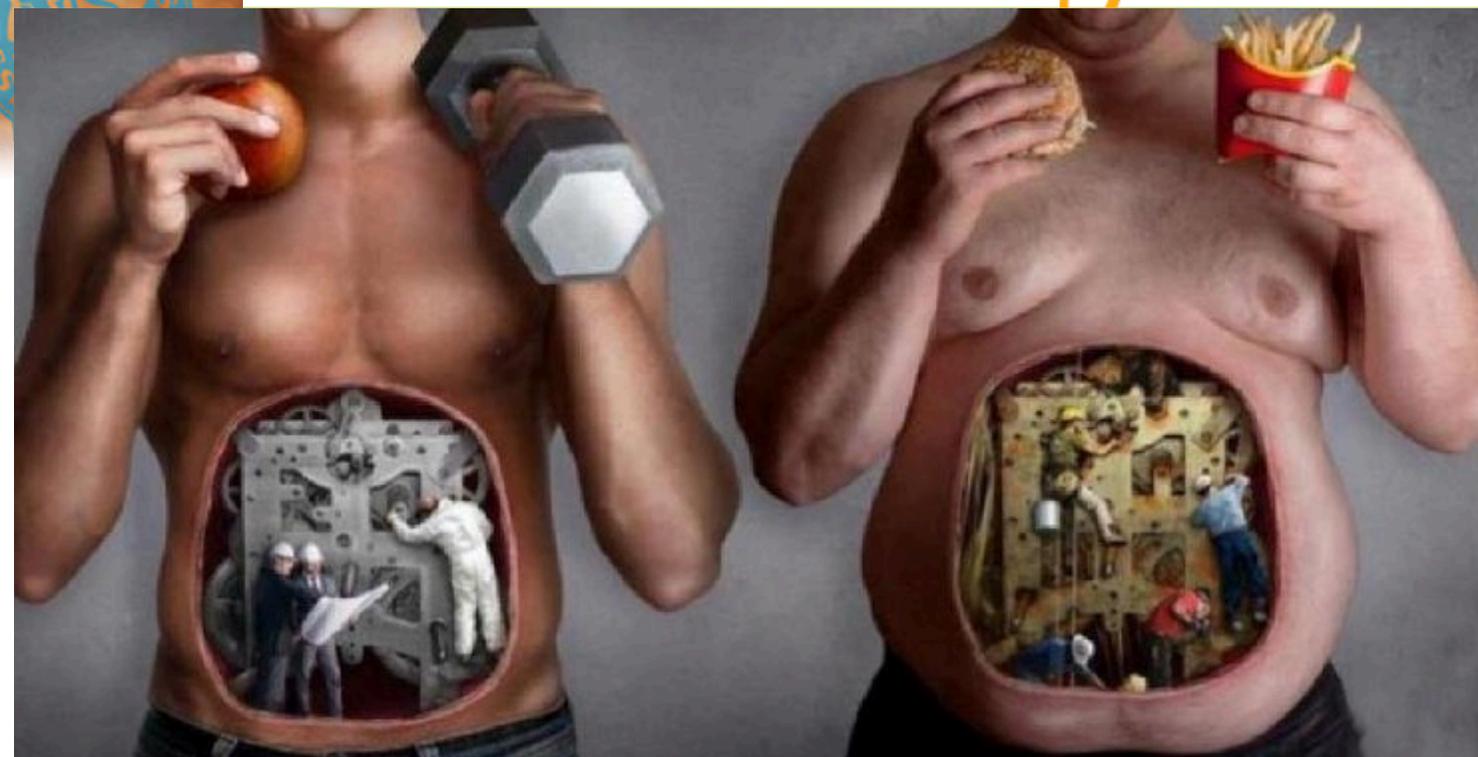
Talking Points for Teaching Kids Nutrition 



food  
is fuel

Energy Balance Hypothesis analogies

Body is a machine  
Food is fuel for the machine



# The case of the calorie



**Table 2 Energy Value of Macronutrients**

1g carbohydrate = 4 calories

1g protein = 4 calories

1g fat = 9 calories

1g alcohol = 7 calories

# Fat Cell analogy (Energy Balance hypothesis)



# Implications of Energy Balance model

- Obesity is VERY preventable/Individual is to blame for unwanted pounds
- Food producers have done their part to make transparent the calorie information necessary for us to make responsible choices
- No environmental factors (obesogenic compounds from industrialization)
- No emphasis on genetics and unique gut microbiome

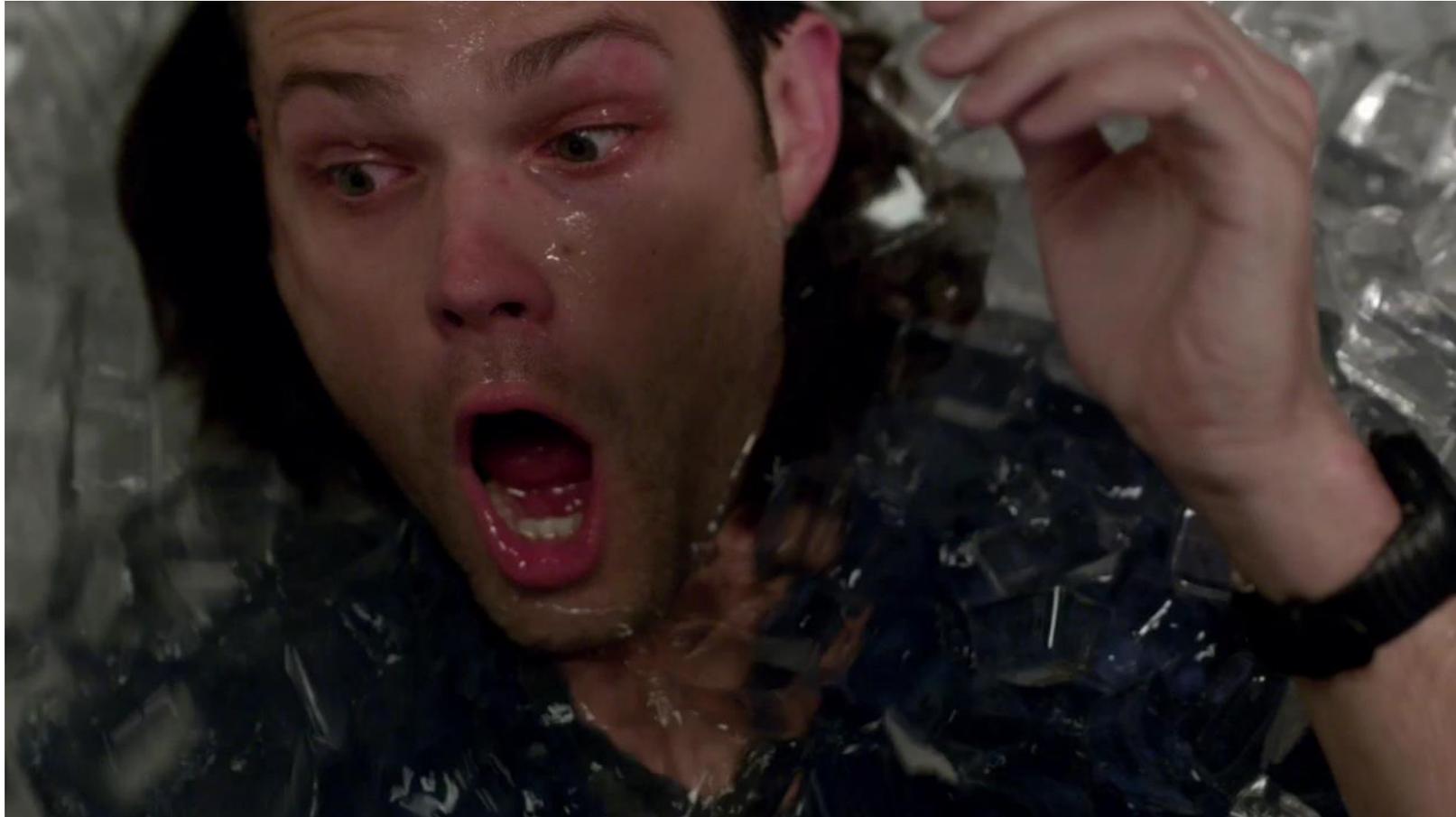
# What is the Alternative/Insulin Hypothesis of Obesity?

- Obesity is akin to starvation
  - Fat cells store too much energy (too few in the bloodstream)
  - “When fat cells feast, the rest of the body starves.”
  - Sugars and processed carbohydrates raise insulin, which ushers calories into fat cells and restricts their passage out. Fat cells do nothing unless instructed by hormones.
- “insulin is the ultimate fat fertilizer” (Dr. David Ludwig)
- “Brain doesn’t register that there are plenty of calories still stored in fat cells. It just sees that there aren’t enough calories in the blood”

# Food as information (not energy): Body as operating system (not machine)

- “Metabolism is not a math problem. It’s a hormonal problem. Food is not just energy. It’s information. It’s instructions that turn on or off different switches in your body that regulate hunger and metabolism. Obesity is not about how much you eat. It’s about what you eat. If you just focus on quality, not calories, then the quantity takes care of itself.”
  - (Dr. Mark Hyman, Director of the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine)

Ice bath analogy (Fever: Obesity::Ice bath:  
Starvation)



# Propane heater analogy



# Turnstile analogy



# Implications of Alternative/Insulin hypothesis

- Food quality matters, esp. quality of fat (grass-fed, organic)
- Sleep quality matters
- Stress level matters (hormone cortisol)
- Physical environment matters (soil, water, air quality)
- Gut flora matters
  - Artificial sweeteners
  - Prescription medicine
  - Exposure to chemicals

# Conclusion

- “One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase into the dustbin where it belongs.”

--George Orwell