

Squeezing the joy out of ketchup

Adapted from an article by Rob Lyons



- 1 When we talk about tomato ketchup, we really mean Heinz Tomato Ketchup. It is far and away the biggest-selling brand, with 60 per cent of the US market. Yet now, Heinz has announced a change to its long-standing recipe, though this particular change will only affect the US version of the ketchup. It plans to reduce the sodium – that is, the amount of salt – in its US ketchup by 15 per cent.
- 2 A spokesperson for Heinz in the US, Jessica Jackson, told the *New York Post* that the decision ‘came from the changing needs of our consumers and our commitment to health and wellness’ – which is garbled public-relations speak for ‘the government was leaning on us to do this and we finally gave in’. As the *New York Post* article notes, the change to tomato ketchup’s ingredients was not demanded by consumers. The recipe has remained unchanged for 40 years. Heinz is hopeful that ketchup-crazy consumers might not notice the difference. Jackson told the *Post*: ‘We conducted extensive testing with a broad cross-section of consumers across the country to ensure there wasn’t a distinguishable difference between the current and new recipes.’
- 3 However, this is bad news for consumers. As one New York mum told me: ‘I’m apprehensive. My son only eats two vegetables. And Heinz ketchup is one of them. Actually, the other one is smothered in Heinz ketchup so I’m not sure it really counts. I’m not exaggerating when I say this could mean the end of vegetables for him.’ Her son is not alone in his love of ketchup. Ketchup gives young fussy eaters the ability to control what their food tastes like at an age when they are practically allergic to trying new foodstuffs. She added: ‘I’m also puzzled about why they’re doing this now. Why not just bring out lower-sodium ketchup for people who want it? It’s true my son goes through Heinz by the barrel, but who else over the age of five consumes that much? And how many kids have problems with their blood pressure?’
- 4 Ketchup is the result of decades of tinkering to produce the perfect sauce. As was noted in 2004 by M. Gladwell, ketchup brings together the ‘five known fundamental tastes in the human palate: salty, sweet, sour, bitter and ‘umami’. Umami is the ‘proteiny, full-bodied taste of chicken soup, or cured meat, or fish stock, or aged cheese, or mother’s milk, or soy sauce, or mushrooms, or seaweed, or cooked tomato.’ A little by accident, a little by design, Henry J. Heinz brought together all these tastes to create his ketchup.

- 5 Heinz's decision to change the formula was actually taken under pressure. It is the latest example of the authorities deciding that they know best, forcing food manufacturers to change their recipes – to 'reformulate' as they say in the trade – in order to fit in with health concerns. Another example was reported last year. McVitie's changed the recipe for Digestive biscuits to reduce the amount of saturated fat. What was once the nation's favourite biscuit has morphed into a rather pathetic, pale imitation of itself. The Digestive that sustained, nourished and comforted a generation through two world wars and played its part in keeping the home fires burning is no more. The callous tick of a ballpoint pen of some joyless functionary has managed to finish off the biscuit that even Hitler failed to crush.
- 6 This might not be *so bad* if the tinkering with ingredients really did have a beneficial effect on health. But actually, ketchup is already a surprisingly healthy product. According to the US Department of Agriculture food database, 100g of ketchup contains 97 calories, barely any fat and about one gram of sodium. But it also contains a fair proportion of an adult's requirements of vitamin C and vitamin A, while providing plenty of lycopene, a natural pigment that has been suggested as a possible protection against cancer (though such claims need to be treated with substantial scepticism).
- 7 There is a much-mythologised tale that the US government under President Reagan considered redefining tomato ketchup as a fruit/vegetable. In terms of its nutritional content, tomato ketchup – which, after all, contains lots of concentrated tomato – stacks up pretty well. And what about all that salt? It's almost certainly harmless. Unless you have pre-existing high blood pressure, there is little evidence that cutting salt intake improves health. Besides, pound-for-pound, ketchup contains three times as much vitamin C as apples. If an 'apple a day' is sound advice, why not a squirt of ketchup?
- 8 Still, there's something entirely appropriate about the way that our political leaders are trying to save us from ourselves because the food we're being forced to eat is, like them, increasingly bland.

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Tekst 7 Squeezing the joy out of ketchup

- 1p 31 What becomes clear from paragraph 1?
- A Altering the formula of Heinz's tomato ketchup may boost its sales worldwide.
 - B Heinz believes the market is ready for a new variety of tomato ketchup.
 - C Heinz is going to cut back on one of the components of its tomato ketchup.
 - D Other tomato ketchup manufacturers are trying to take over Heinz's leading position.
- 1p 32 Why does Rob Lyons characterise Jessica Jackson's statement as "garbled public-relations speak" (paragraph 2)?
- A He does not understand the statement.
 - B He is praising the statement.
 - C He is ridiculing the statement.
- 1p 33 What is the main function of paragraph 3?
- A To explain why changing the recipe of tomato ketchup worries some people.
 - B To make clear why Heinz tomato ketchup is especially popular with children.
 - C To show that tomato ketchup has become a part of American food culture.
 - D To stress the fact that eating a lot of tomato ketchup is not at all advisable.
- 1p 34 What becomes clear about Heinz tomato ketchup in paragraph 4?
- A An outsider first analysed its contents some 10 years ago.
 - B Its rich taste is partly the result of some unforeseen luck.
 - C It was scientifically tested before it was marketed.
 - D The exact ingredients are kept secret by the company.
- 1p 35 What is the function of the example of McVitie's Digestive biscuits in paragraph 5?
- To make clear that
- A civil servants can ruin a product.
 - B consumers tend to make unhealthy choices.
 - C governments focus too much on people's salt intake.
 - D taste preferences change through time.

- 1p 36 What does Rob Lyons claim in paragraphs 6 and 7?
- A Changing the recipe for tomato ketchup can cause health problems.
 - B Reducing the amount of salt in tomato ketchup is of vital importance.
 - C The nutritious value of tomato ketchup is often overrated.
 - D Tomato ketchup is in fact a rather wholesome product.
- 1p 37 Welke van de volgende stijlmiddelen gebruikt de schrijver in alinea 8 om zijn betoog af te ronden?
- A opsomming
 - B overdrijving
 - C tegenstelling
 - D vergelijking

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.