

We don't just sit down at the table and dig in. Good manners require that we speak to one another before we start to eat. We wish each other – in the Western world, at least – a “bon appetit.” That's a nice custom, and besides, appetite is a nice word. It has to do with desire and craving, and if a meal doesn't inspire any sense of desire, then something's clearly wrong.

The Romansh people used to exchange an even better wish before they started a meal. In the old days, before the international “bon appetit” took hold by them as well, they wished each other “bumperfatscha.” Hiding in this word is the Latin “bonum per faciem”: May the meal be so good that it shows on your face! The faces of the people eating should become a mirror for the love, the care, indeed the art of those who prepared the food. With the first bite – if it was good, of course – the faces of everyone present lit up. The meal was a joyful event, and everyone could see that from the faces around the table.

The Romansh still like to eat well. In that they're no different from other cultures' gastronomes. But, unfortunately, the word “bumperfatscha” has fallen completely out of fashion among them. Young Romansh speakers don't even understand it anymore.

Wouldn't it be nice if anyone who goes to the trouble of serving up the best possible food for their guests could see not just hunger, desire and craving on their faces, but also the radiant message, “bumperfatscha”: Your cooking is magnificent, just look at the delight on my face!