

# TOEFL Listening Lesson 14

**Setting:** A college-level *Anthropology* class.

## Questions

**1. What is the main topic of the discussion?**

- A. How to raise livestock in different climates
- B. The relationship between religion and political laws
- C. The significance of food taboos in different cultures
- D. The globalization of fast food culture

**2. What example of a food taboo does the professor mention in relation to Hinduism?**

- A. Avoiding seafood
- B. Not eating pork
- C. Avoiding meat during pregnancy
- D. Not eating beef

**3. What does the professor say about food taboos and social consequences?**

- A. There are no consequences for breaking them
- B. People are fined for breaking food taboos
- C. Breaking a food taboo can lead to social judgment
- D. They are only reinforced by legal systems

**4. Why does the professor mention insects being eaten in some cultures?**

- A. To explain how dangerous insects can be as food
- B. To criticize the practice of eating insects
- C. To show how food preferences are based on nutrition
- D. To illustrate that ideas about food are culturally dependent

**5. Why does the professor ask students about the impact of food taboos on globalization?**

- A. To change the subject to international trade
- B. To highlight how food customs can create social tensions when people migrate
- C. To discourage students from eating unfamiliar foods
- D. To explain why food taboos have disappeared in modern society

## **Script**

### **Professor:**

All right, everyone. Today's topic is food taboos—social or cultural prohibitions against consuming certain foods. These taboos exist in virtually every culture, and they can tell us a lot about values, religion, identity, and even environmental adaptations. Let's start broadly: can anyone give me an example of a food taboo they're familiar with?

### **Male Student:**

In India, many Hindus consider cows sacred, so eating beef is taboo there.

### **Professor:**

Exactly. That's a classic example. The cow plays a significant religious and cultural role in Hinduism, and that affects food practices. Now, is that prohibition purely religious?

### **Female Student:**

Not entirely—there are also social and even legal aspects, right? Like, there are laws in some Indian states that ban the sale of beef.

### **Professor:**

Correct. Food taboos often operate at multiple levels—individual, social, religious, and political. Let's contrast that with another region. Anyone know of a food taboo in a different part of the world?

### **Male Student 2:**

In Jewish and Islamic traditions, pork is forbidden.

**Professor:**

Yes, pork is considered unclean in both religions. Anthropologist Marvin Harris argued that this taboo had ecological roots too—raising pigs in arid regions was inefficient, since pigs compete with humans for food and don't provide other resources like milk or wool. But that's just one theory.

Now let's think about how these taboos are maintained. What are some social consequences of breaking a food taboo?

**Female Student 2:**

People might be shunned or looked down on by their community?

**Professor:**

Absolutely. Social pressure helps reinforce these boundaries. Food taboos can create in-groups and out-groups. They help define identity—what it means to be part of a community. Can anyone give an example of a food taboo that might be more cultural than religious?

**Male Student 3:**

I visited South Korea, and I noticed people were uncomfortable talking about eating dogs, even though I'd read that dog meat used to be more common there.

**Professor:**

Very good. That's a great example of a shifting food taboo—one that is being redefined as cultural norms change. Taboos aren't fixed; they evolve over time. Another example: in Western countries, eating insects

is often considered disgusting, but in many other cultures, it's normal. What does that tell us?

**Female Student 3:**

That what counts as food really depends on the culture?

**Professor:**

Exactly. Food taboos are culturally constructed. What's "gross" to one culture might be "delicious" to another. And sometimes, taboos serve practical purposes. For instance, during pregnancy, some cultures have rules against eating certain foods, believing they could harm the baby.

Okay, before we wrap up, think about this: how do food taboos affect globalization? What happens when people migrate and bring their food customs to new places?

**Male Student 4:**

They might face judgment or misunderstanding.

**Professor:**

Right. Or they might adapt their eating habits to fit in. Or they might influence local food culture over time. So, as anthropologists, it's important to approach food taboos not just as strange customs, but as complex systems full of meaning.

All right, that's it for today. Next time, we'll dive into ritual and symbolic uses of food in religious ceremonies. Don't forget to post your reflections online by Friday.

## Answers

1. What is the main topic of the discussion?

**Correct Answer:** C. The significance of food taboos in different cultures

2. What example of a food taboo does the professor mention in relation to Hinduism?

**Correct Answer:** D. Not eating beef

3. What does the professor say about food taboos and social consequences?

**Correct Answer:** C. Breaking a food taboo can lead to social judgment

4. Why does the professor mention insects being eaten in some cultures?

**Correct Answer:** D. To illustrate that ideas about food are culturally dependent

5. Why does the professor ask students about the impact of food taboos on globalization?

**Correct Answer:** B. To highlight how food customs can create social tensions when people migrate