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Robot Tongue Tastes Better Than People

Frank Bruni will be replaced as Times food critic by Sam Sifton starting this October. But could he have been replaced instead by a robot? Wired reports that a new artificial tongue is better at detecting subtle differences in sweet flavors than the human licker.

About the size of a business card, the sweetness sensor can tell the difference between natural and artificial sweeteners in beverages, cakes, cookies, and chewing gum. It has identified 14 kinds of natural and artificial sweeteners with 100 percent accuracy in 80 different trials, and could eventually replace human tasters in the food industry.

But could the robot tongue take over for people in other tasting jobs, such as restaurant critiquing? It's not likely. Chemist Kenneth Suslick of the University of Illinois says the sensor could be used “for routine quality control.” So, Sifton and others are safe. For now.

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