

A sweet nose of earth, smoke, cassis and cherries

Descriptions of sensory perceptions in wine tasting notes

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The tasting note is a type of text in which the wine critic describes and evaluates wines. Tasting notes are typically written according to a very strict schema (Silverstein 2003, Caballero 2007, Paradis 2009, Hommerberg forthcoming). Most notes consist of three parts, starting with production facts and ending with an assessment and a recommendation of prime drinking time. The middle of the text, which is the most important part, is devoted to an iconic description of the wine tasting procedure from the taster's inspection of the wine's visual appearance through smelling, tasting and feeling its texture, i.e. from VISION through SMELL, TASTE and MOUTHFEEL (TOUCH).

- (1) This great St.-Estephe estate has turned out a succession of brilliant wines. The 2005, a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40% Merlot, has put on weight over the last year. An opaque ruby/purple hue is accompanied by a sweet nose of earth, smoke, cassis, and cherries as well as a textured, full-bodied mouthfeel. While the tannin is high, there is beautifully sweet fruit underlying the wine's structure. It will require 8-10 years of cellaring after release, and should drink well for three decades. (*Wine Advocate* 170, April 2007)

In (1), the visual appearance of the wine is described in terms of clarity and colour (*opaque ruby/purple*). The olfactory perceptions are primarily described as concrete objects (*earth, smoke, cassis and cherries*), but also in terms of a gustatory property (*sweet*), while taste and mouthfeel are rendered through various gustatory and tactile properties (*high (tannin)*, *sweet (fruit)*, *textured, full-bodied*). The absence of words for SMELL and the ontological cross-over of sensory modalities are taken to be symptoms of real synaesthesia in the wine tasting event (Morrot et al. 2001).

While activations of sensorial experiences are considered to be of crucial importance for symbolization generally (Oakley 2009:125), they play an absolutely crucial role in descriptions of wine in tasting notes (Caballero 2007, 2009, Suárez 2007, Lehrer 2009, Paradis forthcoming, Goded submitted). It has been shown in the literature, that descriptions of perceptions are characterized by synaesthesia from lower to higher modalities. In his pioneering work on synaesthesia in poetry, Ullman (1957) proposes a hierarchy and a directional principle of sensory perceptions in metaphors from lower to higher sense modalities, from TOUCH > TASTE > SMELL to SOUND and VISION. His proposal has been confirmed and developed in different areas of research by a number of scholars, e.g. Williams (1976), Lehrer (1978), Viberg (1984), Sweetser (1990), Shen (1997), Popova (2003, 2005), Plümacher and Holz (2007), Shen & Gadir (forthcoming). On the basis of Ullman's proposed hierarchy and directional principle, Shen & Gadir (forthcoming) formulate a *Conceptual Preference Principle* according to which the preferred direction of mappings in synaesthetic metaphorization is from the lower modalities of TOUCH and TASTE, which require direct contact with the perceiver, to the higher modalities of VISION and SOUND, which do not require direct contact, e.g. *soft light* and *caressing music* involve mappings from the lower source domain of TOUCH to the target domains of VISION and SOUND, respectively.

In addition, to these semantic characteristics of descriptions of sensory perceptions, there is also a pragmatic angle to this, related to speakers' assessment of the reliability of the evidence of sensory perception in communication. The *Reliability Hierarchy of Evidentiality* states that in contrast to the relatively objective and stable nature of visual elements in the world, the perceptions of smell, taste and touch are highly subjective and variable across human beings (Chafe & Nichols 1986, Viberg 1984, Dubois 2007). This state of affairs affects the extent to which language users can agree on the meanings of such expressions. The reliability of the linguistic representations of the perceptual evidence evoked by words and expressions of sensory perceptions form a hierarchy from more intersubjectively reliable evidence based on VISION to less intersubjectively reliable, inferred meanings in the perception modalities of SMELL, TASTE and TOUCH.

What the semantic Conceptual Preference Principle and the pragmatic Reliability Hierarchy of Evidentiality have in common is that they are construed according to a continuum from more intersubjectively verifiable meanings to meanings which are intersubjectively non-verifiable. However, the different orientations of the two hierarchies highlight the problem in the analysis of what is 'concrete' or 'salient' and for whom. While the Conceptual Preference Principle promotes the lower sense modalities to the more concrete and immediate representations, the Hierarchy of Evidentiality regards them as less reliable because of their status of being non-verifiable and based on inferences of the immediate speaker perceptions. The reasons for this discrepancy are related to the fact that the Conceptual Preference Principle is speaker-oriented and concerned with the semantic organization in language, while the Reliability hierarchy of Evidentiality takes the perspective of the addressees and their assessment of reliability of knowledge.

Using data from a corpus of tasting notes from Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate*, this paper sets out to give a principled account of the descriptions of sensory perceptions in the tasting notes. Couched in a framework of Cognitive Semantics (Paradis 2004/2010, 2005), it capitalizes on wine descriptors in the four perceptual domains of MOUTHFEEL (TOUCH), TASTE, SMELL and VISION. Wine descriptions are excellent sources of information about sensorial perceptions in discourse, since they almost always involve all these four sensory modalities. The aims are (i) to describe how the wine terminology is structured according to different properties and objects pertaining to each perceptual modality, (ii) to analyze the sensory descriptions of wine in tasting notes with reference to the Conceptual Preference Principle and (iii) to relate the outcome of that analysis to the Reliability Hierarchy where the most reliable information is visual, while inferred meanings based on the other modalities are less reliable, and, finally, (iv) to expound on the lack of words for SMELL and the dependence on descriptors from other modalities, e.g. VISION (*earth, smoke, cassis, cherries*) and TASTE (*sweet nose*), as shown in (1). This is an important case in point since it contradicts the directionality of the Conceptual Preference Principle in that the source domains of the descriptors are of both the higher modality of VISION and the lower modality of TASTE, which points up the question of what the differences might be between expressions construed through synaesthetic metonymization (*earth, smoke, cassis, cherries*) and synaesthetic metaphorization (*sweet nose*).

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