

Wine Language

Insight into the mind of the taster

Or

reality is in the eye of the beholder.

Outline

Language types body, nonverbal, verbal

Functions: communication: things/concepts and their properties; emotional content; situational influence

Application to wine (appearance, taste, mouth-feel, olfactory)

Uniqueness of olfactory sense chemical nature, genetic basis, neuronal response, interpretation/memory, problems with identification

Categorization of odor terminology temporal, intensity, quality (holistic vs descriptive)

Language training : sample preparation; panel training and selection; enology students; consumers; caveat

Influences of expectation: instruction-based distortion; environmental distortion

Effectiveness of wine terminology

Ideal world

Take Home Story

Language

Body

Vocal

non-verbal

verbal

(emotive) (precise communication)

Functions

describe:objects

concepts

opinion

properties of above:

**time, location, color, gender, possession, motion
emotion**

entertainment

subliminal emotional content

situational influence

Subliminal Emotional Content

Quite off words also contain a subliminal emotion context.

Thus, the value of synonyms:

e.g., **tart** vs. **sharp** (+ve vs. -ve connotations re. wine acidity)

weak vs. **delicate** or **finesse** (-ve vs. +ve connotations re. wine fragrance)

austere vs. **hard** (+ve vs. -ve connotations re. wine astringency)

jammy vs. **fruity** (+ve vs. *less* +ve connotations re. red wine fragrance)

Entertainment Attribute

travelog :

the lovely trip to a sunny Tuscan vineyard

hyperbole :

contained hints of truffle, sweet jasmine, black cherry pits, apple core, hints of barnyard, earthy, saddle

alliteration :

“For many producers, as well as aficionados, wine is an art object, albeit a liquid one. All that attention to detail, striving for individuality, retention of attributes from sun, soil and scion, culminate in the moment it is poured into a glass, swirled, sipped, savored and swallowed. Then it fades into memory.”

Other Attributes

Sway Opinion : a specialty not restricted to politicians

Control and Direct: the superior skill of the demagog

Situational Influence

For example, how one views wine, depends on your perspective.

One could look it as an example of:

- a particular style (sherry, beaujolais, amarone, auslese)

- a geographic expression(Australian, Bench, German)

- a specific variety (Shiraz, Temparnillo , Viura)

- who is coming for dinner

- (friends, aficionados (snobs?), business types to influence)

- who is supplying the wine (me - can be honest; them - be prepared to lie)

- or simply as an art object(with people who really love wine)

Each use of terms would be different, but not the wines.

Specific Application to Wine Analysis

Appearance **Terms** (hardwired?)
Color (partially cultural)
Clarity (usurped)
Effervescence/Mousse (created)

Taste **Terms** (hardwired)
Sweet, Sour, Savory, Salty, Bitter, and
probably Fatty acids

Mouth-feel **Terms** (hardwired)
heat/cold, prickling, texture, pain, burning
(real and spicy), and the multiplicity of
astringent perceptions

Olfactory Terms
Trigeminal (hardwired ?)
pungent, putrid, acrid.

Olfactory (usurped, not hardwired)

Olfactory Sensations

Molecular nature: must be volatile, +/- fat soluble; thousands of; most natural objects release a mix of aromatics

Genetics: humans possess ~340 genes encoding specific receptor proteins (expression varies among individuals)

Response :

- transport across mucus coating

- 1 receptor gene expression/receptor

- each receptor protein has several distinct sites (respond to > 1 aromatic)

- an aromatic may activate > 1 receptor protein

- responses potential may vary

- spatially distribution across olfactory patches = directional temporal response pattern (ortho- vs retronasal)

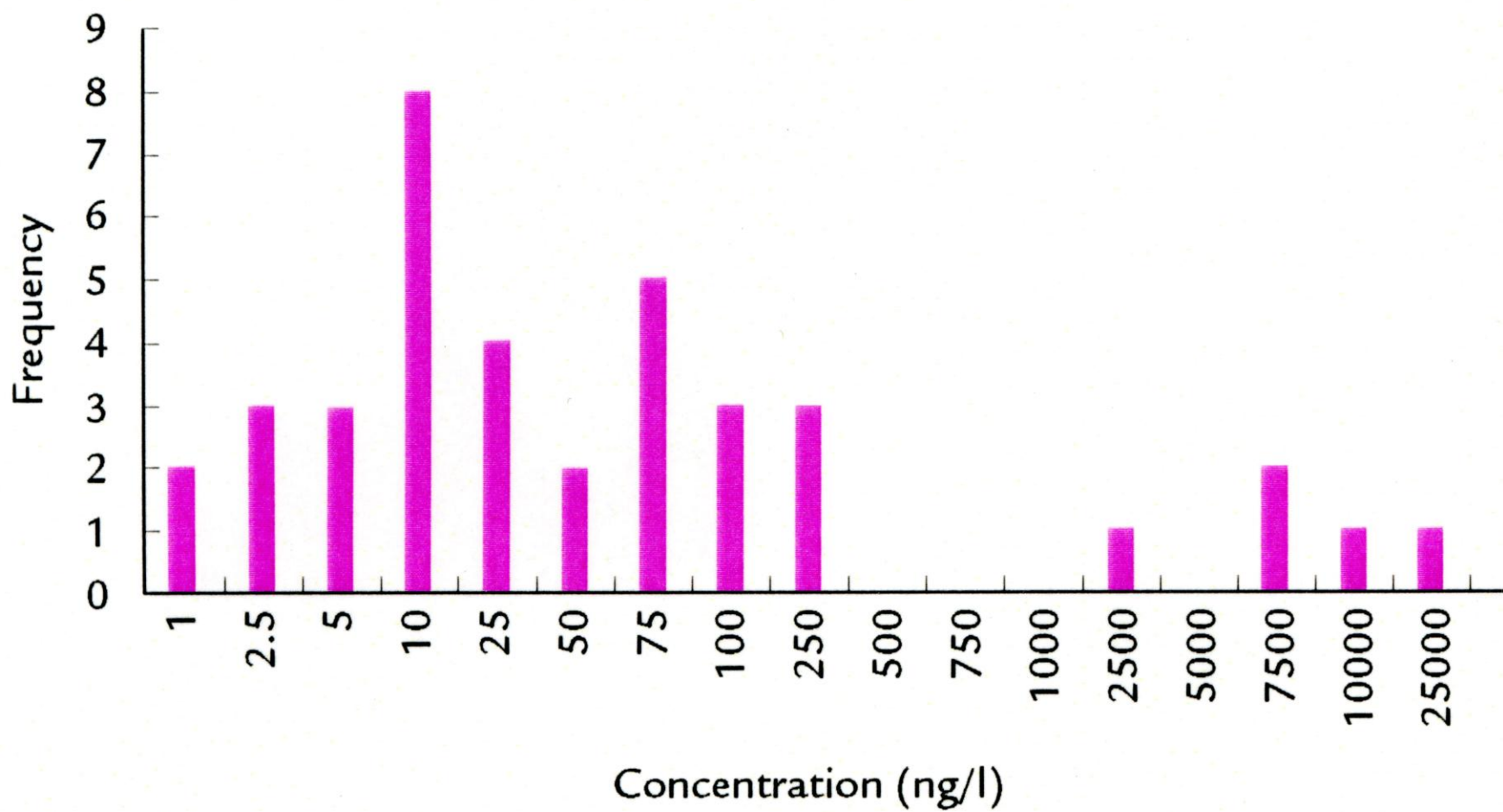
Cerebral Interpretation

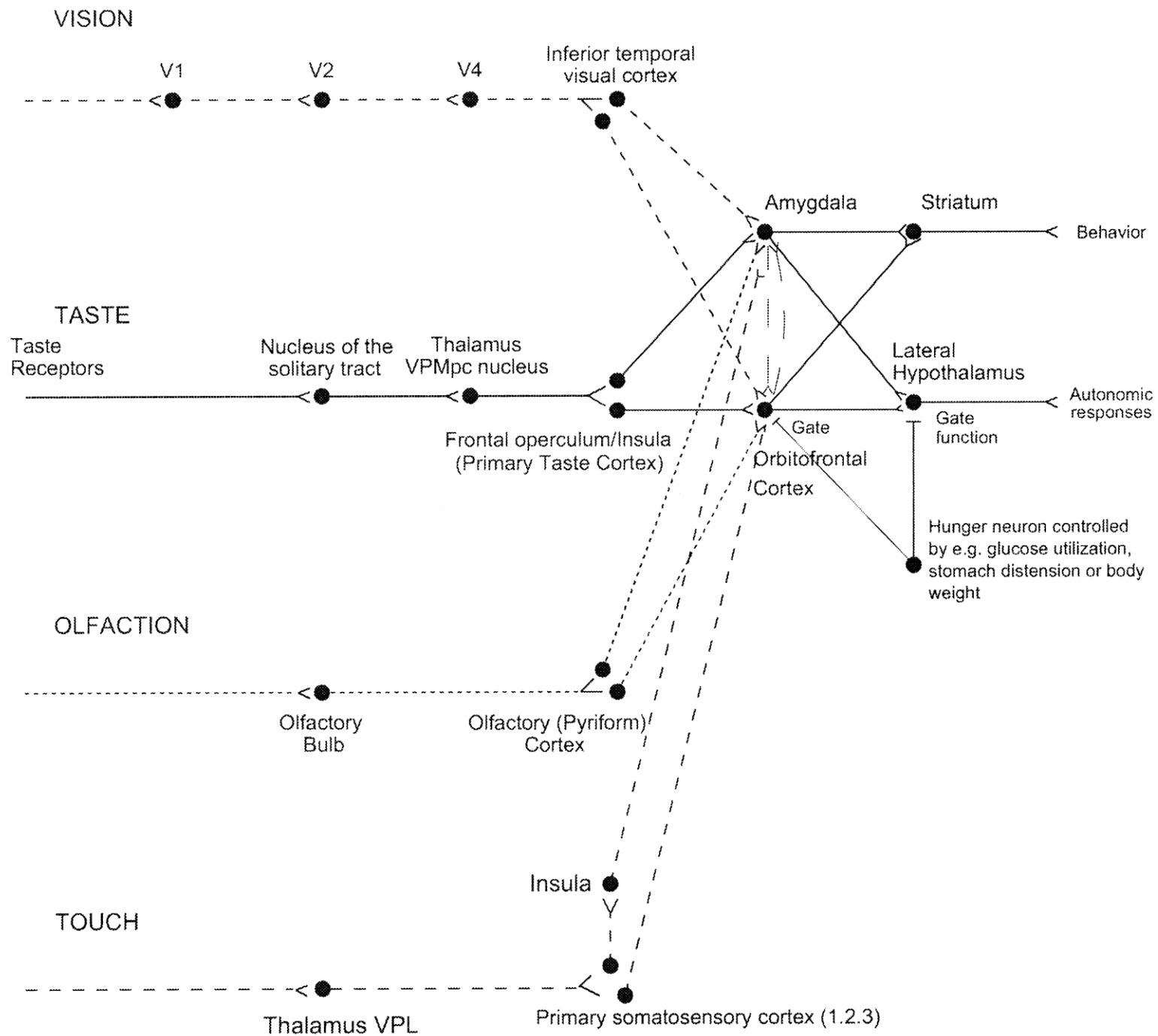
- via amygdala (direct emotional connection) and integration in orbitofrontal cortex

- sensory hierarchy

- memory (*gestalt*/context-based)

- transmission to verbal area of brain





Memory Pattern

Factors affecting:

Strength = emotional impact, repetition, conscious attention

Potency of odorant

strong (memory triggered by odor alone)

(Christmas tree, toast, frying bacon)

weak (memory largely dependent on other context stimuli - shape, color, texture)

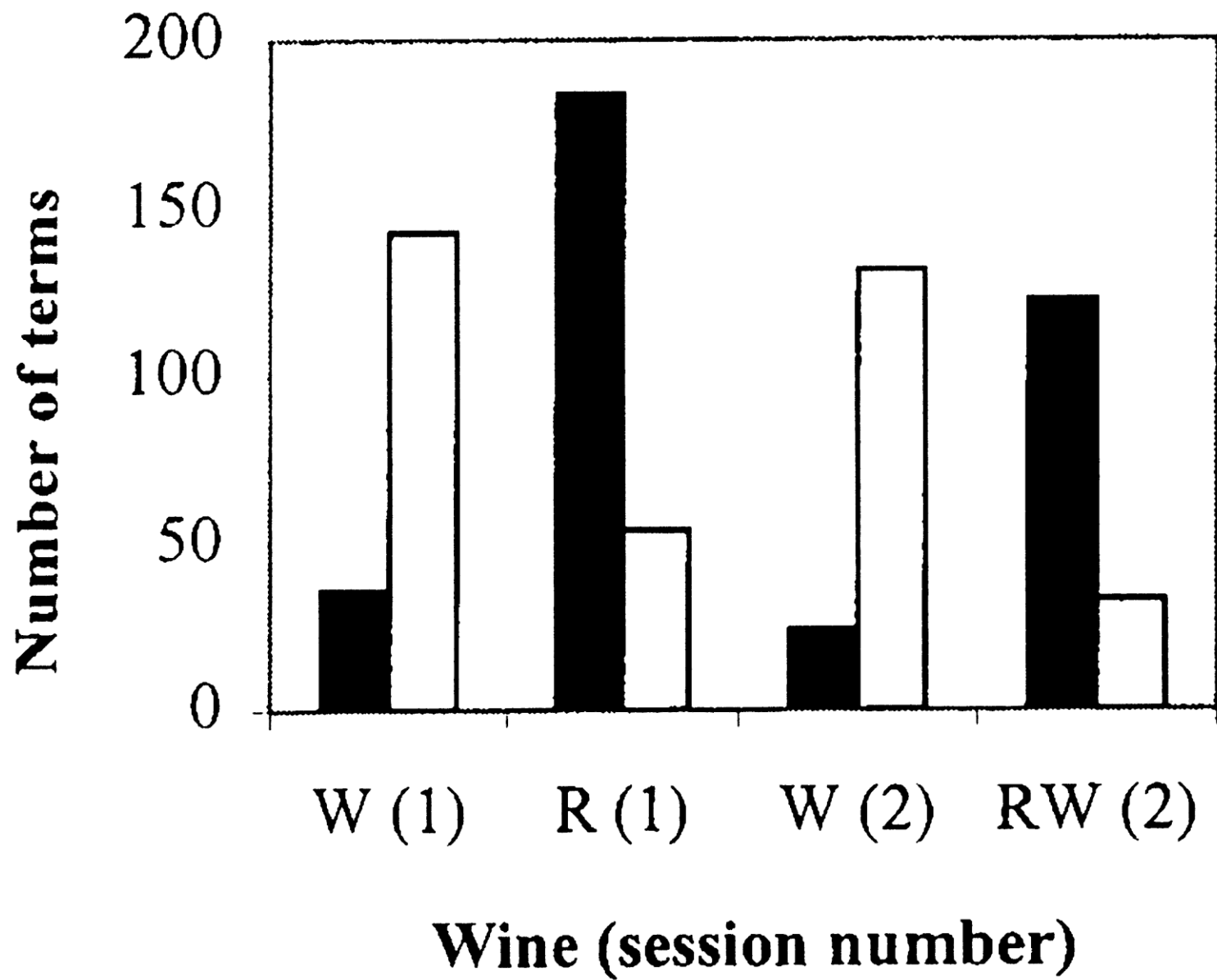
(cherries, peaches, irises)

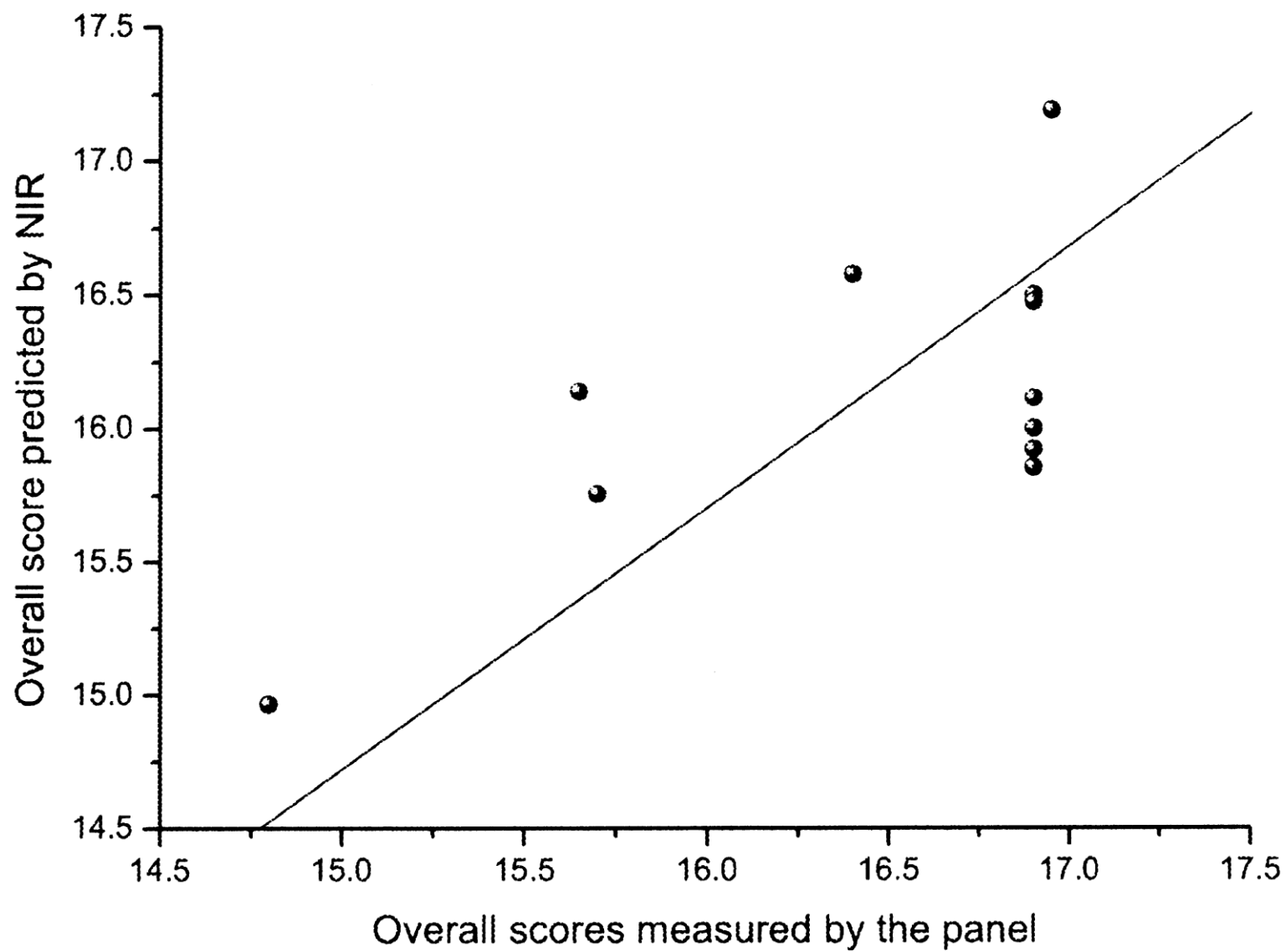
exception to rule: apple (addition to shampoo)

A Source of perceptual bias (often subliminal)

e.g. color on type and quality perception

aromatics giving perception of sweetness









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Inherent Problems

“ *Tip-of-the-nose* ” phenomenon (not trained as child and little practical need for humans)

Idiosyncratic usage

contextual term usage often tells more about a persons life experiences than the wine describe

Origins

Cultural upbringing

Food (spice, condiments, preparation techniques)

Geographic experiences (truffles, Durian)

Language (Germanic vs Latin)

e.g. taste vs. *sentir le goût de*

sour vs. *vert*

sweet vs. *doux*

connoisseur vs. *amateur de vin*

Individual life experiences

lab, farm) (microbiology

Wine experiences

(white/red/aged terms)

Odor Terminology while Tasting (3D)

Temporal (development, duration e.g., *opening* , *fading*)

Intensity (weak, marked)

Quality (descriptor terms)

Holistic/integrative/idiotypic/illusionary

stylistic/varietal/geographic

general (balance/harmony)

weight (heavy, light, watery)

power (robust, weak, lively)

size/shape (big, round)

metamorphic (heavenly, seraphic)

anthropomorphic (feminine, fat, aggressive)

Descriptive (typically mostly olfactory):

general (spicy, fruity, smoky, jammy)

specific (iris, rose, peach, apple, cherry)

Language Training

Sample Preparation

Purpose:

Panel selection (bioanalytic instrument)

training in descriptor use

reduce idiosyncratic term use

(eliminate those who do not conform)

facilitates statistical data analysis

generate “objective” data

Spider diagrams (2D vs. 3D)

Enology students

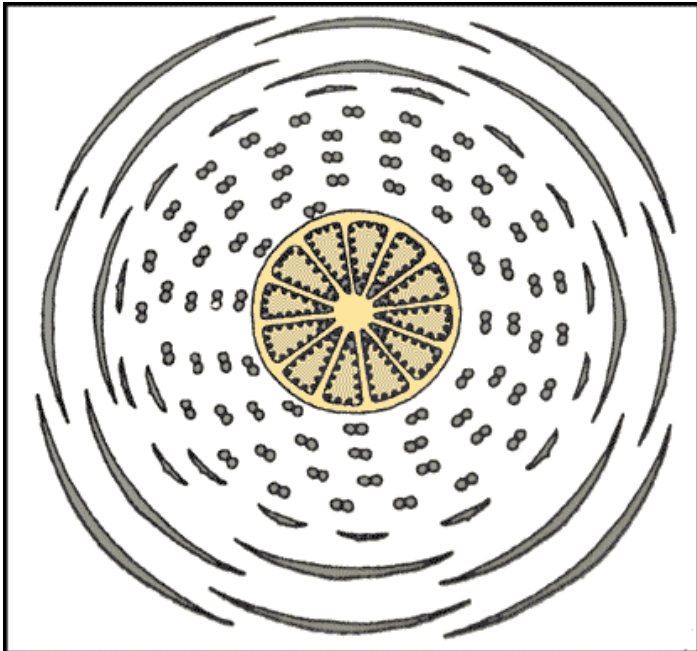
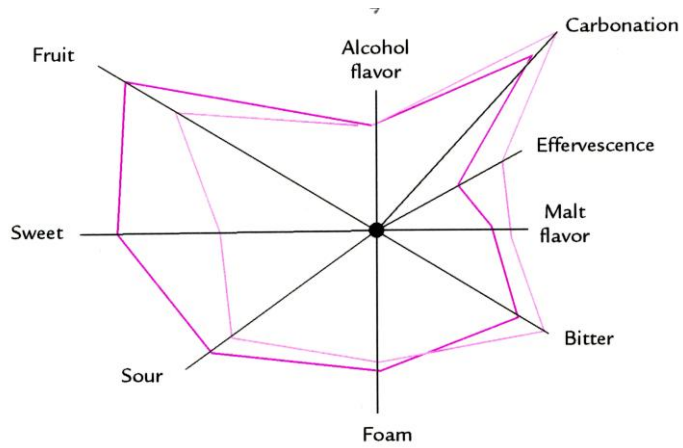
fault recognition

varietal/stylistic/geographic ideotypes

improve communication with staff

Wine Appreciation courses

Caveat : training changes perception
intentional focus (e.g. faults)
influence neuronal sensitivity
develops subliminal bias (e.g., color/quality)



Influence of Expectation

Instructional distortion

term usage changes relative to directions:

check for faults (can be +/-)

assess for a varietal character (can be +/-)

Environmental distortion

term usage changes relative to expectation:

color of wine

vision of bottle (crû classé vs plonk)

comments from “authorities”

Effectiveness of Wine Description

General rule

term use **seldom effective** in recognizing wines min. later
especially with neophytes but also with professionals

Odor recognition to Cain:

commonality
prolonged odor/name association
supplemental clues

may be aided by sequential focus on patterns recalled
deductively
inductively

This is aided (or abetted) when the varietal, stylistic, geographic, or other attribute of the wine is suspected or known.

Ideal World

Consumers should (but will not) **forget** verbal descriptors, except for focus training in wine appreciation courses (leave descriptors for tech. wine analysis)

concentrate on *gestalt* (ideotype) memory
varietal characteristics
stylistic attributes
provenance
age related changes
dynamic changes with time

Descriptor terms should reflect reality, as taxonomy aims to reflect phylogeny

e.g., similar impact aromatics in:
litchi nut & Gewürztraminer
bell pepper & Cab. Sauvignon
black pepper & Shiraz
vanillin & oak

Poetic licence

fine if known as such - to express emotional response
unacceptable as smoke screen for arrogance

Take-Home Story

For the consumer : what is important is the pleasure derived in the search, in the same sense as the comment of Robert Louis Stevenson re travel:

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake .

For the professional :

- be aware of biasing factors

- doubt your perceptions (question their validity)

- remember perceived reality may not be reality

Caveat

Description of pleasure can decrease remembered pleasure

