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 (\(+ve\ vs. \ y\)'s connotations re. wine acidity)

weak vs. delicate or finesse (\(-ve\ vs. +ve\)'s connotations re. wine fragrance)

austere vs. hard (\(+ve\ vs. \ y\)'s connotations re. wine astringency)

jammy vs. fruity (\(+ve\ vs. less +ve\)'s 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 demagogue
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, Temparamillo, Viura)
- who is coming for dinner (friends, afficionados (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 (usurped)
  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
VISION

V1 ← V2 ← V4
Inferior temporal visual cortex

TASTE
Taste Receptors
Nucleus of the solitary tract
Thalamus VPMpc nucleus
Frontal operculum/Insula (Primary Taste Cortex)
Amygdala
Striatum
Lateral Hypothalamus
Gate function
Hunger neuron controlled by e.g. glucose utilization, stomach distension or body weight
Behavior
Autonomic responses

OLFACTION
Olfactory Bulb
Olfactory (Pyriform) Cortex

TOUCH
Insula
Thalamus VPL
Primary somatosensory cortex (1.2.3)
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
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 (microbiology
lab, farm)

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 (côtes 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