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Of synaesthetic wine metaphors, discourse communities, addressers and addressees: the specialised language of wine descriptors

La métaphore synesthésique dans le discours spécialisé des notes de dégustation : à propos de communautés discursives, destinataires et destinataires

Shaeda Isani

- 1 Besides its acknowledged status as a global sector of economic and consumer activity today and despite the existence of a sea of wine-related glossaries, dictionaries, handbooks, tutorials, courses, diplomas, institutions, academic research groups and projects, research related to wine has yet to become a significant area of ESP studies, as evidenced by the comparatively few publications on the subject in ESP research journals.¹ This relative absence of interest for wine-related studies as an object of academic ESP research is no doubt largely explained by the predominantly 'service' perception of ESP in academic or continuous learning/teaching settings and the subsequent sidelining of specialisms peripheral to mainstream academic disciplines.
- 2 This paper studies the specialised language and discourse of New World wine descriptors from the somewhat uncommon stance of an ESP specialist who uses the theoretical tools and methodology of her own subject-domain specialism to investigate a specialised domain of which she is, at best, an 'informed enthusiast'. Based on empirical findings and existing corpus research by specialists in wine-related language studies in English, this paper hypothesises that if it can be safely posited that wine descriptors are a form of specialised discourse, questions nevertheless arise regarding the members of the discourse community – the addressers and addressees – for whom it really is a form of shared discourse.

- 3 After a brief overview of the extensive nature of the wine industry and its multiple stakeholders, the paper discusses the specialised language of wine descriptors, its general characteristics and highly metaphoric discourse. It then goes on to discuss the question of discourse community in the Swalesian perspective of the term as applied to LSP studies and endeavours to identify the target addressees of this particular form of specialised discourse. Finally, it discusses additional language-related factors which help explain why the discourse of wine descriptors is an obstacle to comprehension as far as the perceived target public is concerned.

Introduction: the wine industry and its multiple stakeholders

- 4 Given the objective of this study – identifying the target addressees of the specialised language and discourse of wine descriptors – we first need to establish some idea of the boundaries of the specialised domain and the people involved.
- 5 Wine as an economic sector of activity is composed of a host of related but often autonomous sub-sectors involving a heterogeneous lot of professionals ranging from the winery owner and/or grower to the wine tour coach driver with a number of other categories in between. To this effect, in a course document entitled *The Winery Group – Stakeholders and Risks*, the UC Berkeley School of Information provides a helpful classification of stakeholders as related to the wine industry (Winery Group: undated). Departing from the traditional classification of stakeholders into primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the document proposes five categories more appropriate to the wine industry which we have adopted and adapted to professionals working in and around this sector according to the three major activities the wine industry generates, i.e., producing, retailing and regulating (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Summary typology of stakeholders in the wine industry

1	Key stakeholders	Winery owners (Power stakeholders) Winery shareholders (Power stakeholders) Creditors (Power stakeholders) Winery managers (Power stakeholders) Employees (viticulturists, cellar masters, vineyard technical support)
2	Third party stakeholders (businesses in non-core sectors of activity)	Suppliers of wine-related goods and services Marketing specialists Vintners (wine merchants)
3	End-user stakeholders	Wine drinkers

4	Insider stakeholders (peripheral fringe)	National or regional regulatory wine boards Wine-tasters and critics Sommeliers Oenologists Wine tourism industry professionals Specialised journalists and publishers Specialised translators Wine education industry professionals
5	Out-of-scope stakeholders (i.e., not related to the industry but “influencers” nevertheless)	National and local governments Law enforcement authorities Local communities

Adapted from Winery Group (undated)

- 6 Viewed in the perspective of a “vine-to-wine” continuum, the wine industry represents a broad spectrum of stakeholders with different areas of specialisation. This naturally results in a fragmentation of specialised domains, each with its corresponding language, discourse and culture which often have little in common with each other. The language of wine growers, for example, differs from that of wine producers and that of wine producers is, in turn, different from that of wine retailers and wine critics, as summed up by Bruce:

What makes this particular field interesting is the sheer variety of the discourses of wine that have emerged, and the complex social hierarchies, systems of classifications, and compendious descriptive vocabulary that have evolved in those discourse communities concerned with the production, marketing, chemical analysis, reviewing and general appreciation of wine. (1999: 150)

- 7 Although the different viti- and vinicultural sectors all possess their own specialised language and culture, it is plainly the specialised genre of wine descriptors – the terms used by tasters to qualitatively describe the aromas and flavours of the wine – that has attracted most academic attention, principally owing to its characteristically flamboyant use of synaesthetic metaphors.

1. Wine descriptors as a specialised genre

1.1. General discursive characteristics

- 8 Wine reviews and the characteristic specialised discourse of wine descriptors are widely present through a number of paper and online supports, ranging from the specialised (online reviews and guides like Robert Parker’s *Wine Advocate* or *Decanter*), to the more general such as wine sections or columns in quality newspapers (especially their weekend supplements), wine blogs and, finally, bottle labels themselves, the front label generally displaying factual information (winery name, grape variety, vintage year, alcohol content, etc.) and the back label a description of the aroma, taste, etc., expressed in the typical style and register identified with wine descriptors.²
- 9 Wine reviews are a highly codified genre regarding content, format and language – “almost like a cooking recipe” according to Paradis (2010) – as outlined by Creed:

This specialized genre is organized around a short text of usually one paragraph. A technical introduction at the start establishes the wine by name, year of production and producer, grape variety or vineyard locality, price, etc. The middle of the text is devoted to describing the wine under evaluation from the taster's perspective. This reflects and conveys sensorial impression experienced as the wine is being tasted by the wine writer, through descriptive and evaluative language targeting and evoking the senses of sight, taste/smell and touch. A comment or recommendation [...] may complete the wine tasting note. (2013: 14)

- 10 The following review³ of an Italian wine, published by the winery itself, represents a prototypical version of the genre (see Figure 2).⁴

Fig. 2. Review of an Italian wine

<div>Divino Parolo dei Falciani</div> <div>D.O.C.G.</div>	
Grape varieties:	Prugnolo Gentile 80%; Canaiolo 15%; Mammolo 5%.
Soil Composition:	Being an extremely large production area, there are many different soil types; medium texture for the Sangiovese areas, and sandy/tufaceous layers, with a small presence of clay in other areas.
Cultivation system:	Guyot and spurred codon.
Density:	3.360/4.500 plants x hectare.
Production per hectare:	65 QL per hectare.
Altitude:	250-500m. <u>above sea level.</u>
Microclimate:	The area's climatic conditions are favourable to the cultivation of vines, thanks to the year-round mild temperatures. Over the last few years, July and August have had some excessively hot periods.
Vinification:	Stainless steel vats – fermentation temperature of 28-30° C. – temperature control using a surface water flow system – hot-blast pipe exchanger – the period of fermentation and maceration lasts for 15-20 days – oenological operations to increase the extraction of substances from the grape skins – pumping over last 4 times-a-day alongside manual punching-down during the final phase of full vat maceration – full malolactic fermentation – ageing in Slavonian oak barrels for 2 years.
Tasting notes:	An intense ruby-red colour, fragrances of red berries with hints of violets. To the taste, it is full, lightly tannic, round and quite harmonious. It should be served at a temperature between 16 and 18°C. It is particularly suited to tasty first courses dishes and <u>mature cheeses.</u>

<www.paolofalciani.com/page9.htm>. 3/2/2017

- 11 As the example clearly shows, the text comprises two distinct types of specialised language, technical language related to the different viti- and vinicultural operations of wine growing and production and tasting notes expressed in terms of metaphors, thus confirming Paradis when she states:
- wine descriptions can be said to range along a continuum from scientific vocabularies to idiosyncratic and esoteric wordings i.e., from normed, analytical vocabularies used by oenologist and professional tasters to highly creative, synthetic descriptions with ambitions to be entertaining and enticing. (2010: 8)
- 12 According to Caballero and Suárez-Toste (2010: 268), wine reviews are generally comprised of a 20 to 200-word text which is expected to fulfil four basic functions: provide an idea of the quality/price ratio; describe and evaluate the aromatic profiles of specific wines, placing them in context with their 'peers'; describe the wines' mouthfeel (which subsumes both the wines' flavours and texture); and provide an ideal drinking 'window' for the wines to be consumed at their best. The following wine

review by Parker, cited in Paradis (2010: 1), illustrates the 3-phase discursive architecture of the genre:

(1) This unfiltered blend of 65% Tempranillo, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Merlot saw malolactic in barrel, and aging in French as well as American oak for 16 months. (2) Bordeaux-like, it exhibits a dense ruby/purple color in addition to a bouquet of sweet tobacco, black currants, and leathery aromas, medium to full body, terrific purity, an enduring texture, and a long finish revealing moderate but ripe tannin. (3) This beauty should drink well for 10-12 years. (Our numbering)

- 13 As the two examples above show, if the underlying overall aim of the text is clearly self-promotional, each one of the three phases is a self-contained discursive entity, marked by the characteristics of its own specialised language. The one that interests us in the context of this study is that of wine descriptors (2), also referred to as “wine tasting notes”, “wine notes” or “tasting notes”, whose function is to evaluate the aroma, taste, texture and balance of a wine.

1.2. Specialised language of wine descriptors: synaesthetic metaphoricality

- 14 In stark contrast to the dry technicity which so typifies ESP genres – including a number of specialised domains within the wine sector itself as illustrated above –, the outstanding and most prototypical characteristic of wine descriptors is the metaphoricality of its expression, rendering it “one of the most representative and popular genres in wine discourse, as well as a key instrument in the process of wine acculturation” (Caballero 2009: 75).

- 15 The complex metaphoric construct of wine descriptors derives from the wine writer’s dilemma of having to transform the ephemeral sensorial perceptions of sight, smell, taste and touch into words or, as Caballero (*ibid.*: 73) puts it, of having to find adequate “verbal translations of organoleptic experiences [...]”. Metaphors fulfil this function since they are essentially born of the need to convey the abstract through the concrete. In the context of wine tasting, this need is heightened by the well-documented paucity of linguistic terms specific to the description of sensorial impressions. Emile Peynaud, a world authority on wine, pointed out as such in his milestone publication, *Le goût du vin* (1980) in which the section devoted to “Wine tasting vocabulary” begins with a sub-section entitled “The inadequacy of words”,⁵ a fact which Creed confirms as pertinent to English as well:

Metaphor in wine tasting notes is often invoked by the wine critic/writer to address gaps in terminology, at times referred to as a poverty of language. This comes to the fore when one reflects upon the limited number of smell (e.g. fresh, scented or pungent) and taste words (e.g. sweet, sour, bitter and umami⁶) that do not simply rely on similarity. (2013: 13)

- 16 Although metaphors are widely used in specialised genres (see Resche 2013, for economics and Fries 2016, for nanotechnology), the salient characteristic of the specialised discourse of wine descriptors may be defined in terms of its exceptionally heavy reliance on synaesthetic metaphors, a cross-sensory process by which one sense modality is described or characterised in terms of another. In this respect, Keats’ evocation of wine as “Tasting of Flora and the country green, Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth” in *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819) is surely one of the most

emblematic examples of wine-related synaesthetic metaphoricity. Similar poetry may be found in the three more contemporary tasting notes below:

An undoubtedly full-bodied wine, with a peacock's tail display of blackberry fruit, dark chocolate and vanillin oak, and with impeccable balance and line, the finish subtle. (Cited in Creed 2013: 10)

Fabulous purity of crushed fruit – strawberries and raspberries, with hints of fresh roses. Full-bodied, with an amazing concentration and a palate that goes on and on. Ultra-ripe tannins. Terrific balance and richness. (*Wine Spectator*, July 31, 2004 cited in Bach 2008: 104–105)

Medium red with a hint of amber. Ethereal aromas of red currant, dried rose, violet, tobacco, marzipan and white truffle. A wine of great penetration and thrust, with fruit of steel and powerful structure. Wonderfully floral in the mouth and on the gripping aftertaste. (Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar*, Nov/Dec. 2004, cited in Bach 2008: 104–105)⁷

- 17 Wine tasting metaphors are a complex construct from the outset. Firstly because wine tasting is not a question of isolating one particular sensorial perception at a time but of describing a cross-modal experience, as wine linguist Lehrer explains when she says, “we talk about the *taste* of wine, in fact what we perceive is a fusion of taste, smell, and texture (tactile sensations)” (2009: 6), or what Peynaud inimitably refers to as “*stéréodégustation*” (1980: 157). This complexity is further enhanced by the fact that wine metaphors are embedded in a double-layer of subjectivity since both the memory-dependent sensorial perceptions and the language descriptors used to describe them are highly subjective. How does one translate idiosyncratically perceived and ideolectally expressed sensations into language that persons not involved in the experience can comprehend? Wine descriptors related to visual perceptions provide a measure of the difficulty in that, although visual perceptions of wine tend to be rather straightforward, they too remain open to ideolectal interpretation as, for example, in deciding on the nuance of *amber* or how black *cherry black* is, or even to incongruence as illustrated by the classic question as to why a wine which is distinctly yellow in colour is called white.
- 18 The charismatic nature of metaphors present in wine discourse has naturally attracted academic and non-academic attention and there exists today a rich body of research in this area from all over the world including several proposals to classify aromas in a more consumer-friendly fashion.⁸ In the academic field, the well-referenced work co-authored by Rosario Caballero (a specialist in metaphor studies) and Ernesto Suárez-Toste (a wine specialist and critic)⁹ is of significant interest. In a 2010 article, the “expert plus non-expert” tandem as they describe themselves, analyses and classifies metaphors gleaned from a 12,000-text corpus of tasting notes from seven authoritative specialised wine reviews. In spite of the hugely diversified repertoire of metaphoric references that wine critics deploy, Caballero and Suárez-Toste, drawing on their corpus, subsume wine metaphors into three major recurrent source domains which we summarise in the form of a table below.

Fig. 3. Recurrent source domains of wine metaphors

Summarised from Caballero & Suárez-Toste (2010)¹⁰

- 19 The creative and innovative nature of synaesthetic wine metaphors that typifies the specialised language of wine descriptors makes it a *sui generis* form of discourse rendered unusually complex by an often exuberant ideolectal rendering of subjective sensory perceptions. In view of this, the question naturally arises as to who the target addressee of this form of specialised discourse may be.

2. Wine consumers as a discourse community: the sum of many heteroclite parts

- 20 Although the concept of discourse community was prevalent before, Swales' 1990 definition of the concept in terms of groups that have common goals and purposes and use a specific form of communication to achieve them is the most cited in LSP studies. In the context of this study, we now analyse to what extent wine consumers may be considered as forming a discourse community united by a shared form of specialised discourse.
- 21 The difficulty of grouping wine consumers together as a single umbrella discourse community was foreshown by Peynaud when he concurred with a taxonomy of wine drinkers proposed by Pierre Coste, a Bordeaux vintner, who classified wine drinkers into four categories: drinkers who drink on a daily basis and are indifferent to quality, "label drinkers", urban drinkers and finally, "*l'amateur éclairé, le gourmet privilégié, le gastronome érudit*"¹¹ (1980: 80–81).
- 22 In a more contemporary approach, a survey carried out on American and Canadian wine consumers, *The Project Genome, The Evolution of the Wine Consumer* (Penn 2014), confirms the multiple and protean nature of wine consumers whom it divides into six categories classified according to habits and attitudes: Price Driven (21%), Everyday Loyals (20%), Overwhelmed (19%), Image Seekers (18%), Engaged Newcomers (12%) and, finally, Enthusiasts (10%).
- 23 Although they can admittedly be said to have common goals as purchasers and drinkers of wine, the fact that wine consumers range from the trained professional and knowledgeable connoisseur on one end of the spectrum, to the uninformed supermarket-buyer-of-plonk or "cork dork" (Bosker 2017) on the other, introduces variation gaps regarding both the objectives and the linguistic and discorsal

conventions used to attain them. This raises questions as to whether it is possible to embrace such a disparate body of consumers within the Swalesian folds of an LSP discourse community defined in terms of a communicative framework of “common goals, participatory mechanisms, information exchange, community-specific genres, a highly specialized terminology, and a high level of expertise” (1990: 29).

- 24 Besides the 1990 definition, the question is also worth examining in the light of Swales’ more recent additions to the concept of discourse community, i.e., a “focal discourse community” relative to “associations [...] that reach across a region, a nation, and internationally” or a “folocal discourse community”¹² referring to “hybrid communities whose members have a double – and sometimes split – allegiance, as they are confronted by internal and external challenges and pressures” (2016: 13). With regard to the average wine consumer, adhesion to either community runs aground of the two overriding criteria Swales maintains for the cohesion of the discourse community, that of “some specialised lexis” and “a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise” (2016: 16). This raises the question of the elephant in the room: to what extent can ‘ordinary’ wine consumers, lacking in both content and discursual expertise, be considered members of this specialised discourse community?

2.1. The elephant in the room: ‘ordinary’ wine consumers and wine descriptors

- 25 As mentioned earlier, wine descriptors, contrary to other forms of specialised discourse, are omnipresent in newspapers and supermarkets, making for a rather paradoxical situation in that specialised discourse usually exists as a form of discourse available in and for restricted circles. What then does this omnipresence infer in terms of target addressees and the corollary notions of discourse community and shared discourse?
- 26 Several researchers consider that wine descriptors target all wine consumers in general for whom they serve as helpful guides in deciding about wines. Creed, for example, views wine descriptors in a broad perspective as “useful and persuasive consumer guides” (2013: 13), as do both Lehrer who affirms that “[such metaphors] are used by people who write wine books and columns for consumers who want to know what is good and what to buy” (2009: 76) and Paradis for whom winespeak is aimed at “professionals and connoisseurs as well as at the general public” (2010: 2). In a similar vein, Breit points to the “public” nature of wine notes and their vocation to be “universally accessible” (2014: 102) or again Bratož for whom “tasting notes are evaluative texts aimed at the promotion of wine for a general audience” (2013: 28).
- 27 Given their hallmark rhetorical creativity, it is nonetheless far from certain that wine descriptors fulfil the function of helping wine consumers *urbi et orbi* make an informed wine purchase. Though certain wine terms are evaluative per se – *sour*, *bland*, *cloying*, *common*, *empty*, *overripe*, *smooth*, *balanced*, *complex*, for example – others, notably the hyper-idiosyncratic ones, caught up as they are in the dynamics of metaphoric hyperbole, fail to serve as rational criteria which would help the amateur wine drinker choose from a similarly priced range of bottles. Amateur wine drinkers often express their frustration with wine metaphors, as echoed by Colin Bower (2007: online):¹³

Wine is always described as being like something else. [...]. If a chardonnay tastes a bit like a peach, what then does the peach taste like? A chardonnay? And if so, what does either taste like? If you must describe the Van Loveren 2001 limited edition Merlot as being “chocolately”, does it mean that chocolate tastes like the Van Loveren Merlot? And if we like the Merlot on account of its tasting like chocolate, why don’t we eat chocolate instead of drinking wine?

- 28 In view of such gripes, studies carried out on groups of average drinkers unsurprisingly confirm their inability to interpret the metaphoric discourse of descriptors, as reported by Bosker (2015):

A 2007 study published in *The Journal of Wine Economics* gave amateur drinkers two different glasses of Bordeaux along with a professional critic’s tasting notes, and asked them to match each review with the correct glass. An “unctuous” 2000 Clos du Marquis supposedly evoked “crème de cassis, vanilla, and cherry”; the 2000 Château Talbot had flavors of “licorice, herb, earth, and leather.” The subjects performed no better at identifying each wine than if they’d guessed at random. Read any wine review or bottle label today and you will likely empathize with their confusion.

- 29 Similarly, Lehrer, working on a sample of “ordinary wine drinkers”, undertook to find out whether:

wine drinkers agreed on the descriptions for each of the wines they were tasting. In other words, I was looking for consensus (or lack thereof). [...] What I found was that there is little consensus among ordinary wine drinkers. When asked to match three perceptually different white wines or red wines with a partner who is describing the same wines, nonexpert tasters did no better than chance. Experts often showed more consensus, but only on those wines on which they were carefully trained. [...] I conducted one further experiment later, to see whether wine tasters could reidentify their own descriptions. They couldn’t. (2009: x)

- 30 Other researchers go further by pointing out that, unlike most consumer purchases, choosing a bottle of wine is never a mundane act for the amateur wine consumer. At best, winespeak merely creates “a strong feeling [...] that the words are silly or don’t mean anything at all” (Lehrer 2009: 77). Still others, however, regard it as an anxiogenic leap of faith involving emotional stakes and the risk of losing face, as for example, the site *academicwino* for which “a wine bottle purchase is associated with some perception of risk. With a wine bottle purchase, there comes often a sense of fear, of regret or skepticism, and when it’s a bottle purchase for special occasions, the fear increases.” In the same vein, the opacity of winespeak may even cause stress and a feeling of inferiority, as underlined by Creed when she asserts that “[f]or many people the mystique of wine coupled with the choice of language used to talk about it induces anxiety and uncertainty that restrains people’s discovery, experience and enjoyment of wine” (2014). This underlying sense of inferiority induced by ignorance regarding wine is further confirmed by a survey carried out in the UK which found that “many of the survey’s participants admitted reluctance to ask for advice – often because of the snobbery and mystique that [...] surround wine drinking” (*The Economist* 2016: 68).

- 31 In view of these observations, it appears quite clearly that the specialised language of wine descriptors is not a form of shared discourse for average wine consumers. It does not function perfectly amongst wine-related professionals either since lack of consensus as to interpretation also occurs amongst members of this category as reported by Peynaud who recorded significantly varying descriptions of an identical wine by six wine-related professionals: technician, winery cellar master, wine broker, sommelier, food columnist, and amateur consumer (in Rossi 2015: 57).

- 32 These studies point to the elephant in the room, i.e., the somewhat paradoxical situation that for a large number of wine consumers, ultimately the most central stakeholders of the wine community and, as such, the putative target addressees of winespeak, the construal of winespeak remains patently problematic. As such, the specialised language and discourse of wine descriptors cannot be said to represent a form of shared discourse for the mass of average wine consumers, who cannot, therefore, be considered members of a same discourse community.

2.2. Target addressees of the specialised discourse of wine descriptors

- 33 Since wine consumers as a whole cannot be said to be members of a discourse community for whom the specialised language and discourse of wine descriptors constitutes shared discourse, the question naturally arises as to who is.
- 34 Viewed in terms of an addresser/addressee scrutiny, it is easy to identify the addressers as the trained wine tasters-critics-writers who produce the discourse (albeit the fact that, as has been demonstrated, even they fail at times to agree amongst themselves).
- 35 Identifying the target addressee is more complicated given the varied categories into which wine consumers may be classified. Cabarello and Suárez-Toste (2010: 266), however, point us in an interesting direction when they define the target addressee as “a presumably knowledgeable audience”, an indication which may be construed in terms of the select coterie of non-professionals composed of Peynaud’s “*l’amateur éclairé, le gourmet privilégié, le gastronome érudit*” (1980: 80–81) mentioned earlier. According to the *Genome Project on the Evolution of the Wine Consumer* discussed above, of the six categories classified, only three (“Image seekers”, “Engaged Newcomers” and “Enthusiasts”), representing 40% of the respondents may be considered as “highly knowledgeable about wine” and qualify as members of this discourse community (Penn 2014).
- 36 In other words, in spite of its uncharacteristically high visibility and availability, the addressers and addressees of the specialised language and discourse of wine descriptors are in fact a very restricted community of connoisseurs situated at the very top of the pyramid of the global mass of wine consumers. For this select few, the metaphors of wine descriptors do indeed represent a shared and meaningful form of specialised discourse and terms like *violet, cut grass, chocolate, tree moss, rotten egg* and *kerosene* used in relation to the aroma and taste of wine are clearly denoted signifiers.
- 37 Given the socially valorising nature of fine wine consumption, the question also arises as to winespeak being the hallmark of a certain social selectivity which serves “to generate a feeling of membership of an elitist oenological community” (Breit 2014: 102). Viewed as such, it fulfils the Bourdieusian gatekeeping function not uncharacteristic of other forms of specialised language, discourse and culture, that of keeping the initiated happy few of this “prestigious culture” (Lehrer 2009: 235) in, and the uninitiated hoi polloi out.

3. Wine descriptor metaphoricity as an obstacle to comprehension: other language-related factors

- 38 Wine being a complex entity and the linguistic economy inherent to metaphor construction requiring intricate decoding, it is not really surprising that average wine consumers experience difficulty relating to winespeak. In this respect, it has been suggested that if wine critics used similes rather than metaphors and declared that a wine's aroma "reminds me of", "brings to mind", or "smells like" blackberries, bananas, roses or tobacco, the grammatical subtleties of phraseology would perhaps succeed in inducing a degree of critical distance between perception and representation. However, other factors besides the construction of metaphors also play a part in contributing to the challenge of interpreting wine descriptors.

3.1. Words from English for General Purposes

- 39 As indicated by Lanzán (2008), one significant linguistic factor which explains why wine consumers have trouble understanding the lavish metaphoric prose of wine descriptors stems from the fact that a great number of the metaphors used in winespeak are based on words present in the context of everyday unmarked situations of communication. Consequently, far from being immediately identifiable as alien specialty lexicon, for the uninitiated they remain words which continue to be firmly anchored to the reassuringly familiar repertoire of daily conversation.
- 40 What is lost to the lay public here is that most of these familiar words have been submitted to a process called terminologisation, by which a general-language word or expression undergoes a shift in meaning as it is transformed into a *term* belonging to a specialised language. As such, ordinary words, once transposed to the marked context of winespeak, are no longer ordinary figures of speech but "semi-technical oenological terms" (Breit 2014: 107) with a referential function that conforms to a specialised language (Rossi 2015: 56; Lehrer 2009: 103). Hence, *blackcurrant*, *violets*, *tobacco* and *cut grass* on the one hand, or *cat pee*, *old band aid* or *kerosene* on the other, cease to function as the words they were in the unmarked context and become specialised *terms* whose significance may sometimes be far removed from the original word – a state of quasi diglossia which understandably confuses the uninitiated.

3.2. Synonymy

- 41 Synonymy is another factor which obscures the specialised discourse of wine descriptors in that there may be a proliferation of terms from the same semantic field with a low level of discrimination. Caballero and Suárez-Toste (2010: 280–281) identify one such "grey area" with regard to *silky*, *satiny* and *velvety*, pointing out that though *silky* and *velvety* may be discriminately used for white and red wines respectively, they are not. For Rossi (2015: 58), synonymy is particularly plethoric with regard to anthropomorphic metaphors, a semantic field Lehrer chooses to illustrate with reference to the term *heavy* and such synonymous descriptors as *brawny*, *muscular* and *big-boned*, concluding with the remark that "a wine writer might be able to construct subtle definitions for these words but I doubt whether any experts could consistently and consensually distinguish a brawny wine from a muscular one" (2009: 272).

- 42 Partially in response to the density of synonyms in wine-tasting discourse, the need to reduce and harmonize the aroma palette has long been addressed, one example of which is the creation of The Aroma Wheel in 1984 by sensory scientist Anne Noble using descriptors designed in three relatively simplified concentric circles proceeding from the general to the particular (fruit 🍌 citrus 🍊 orange). In a similar move, *The Economist* (2016) reports that for a British technology firm interested in designing a wine-blending machine for individual wine drinkers, the principal objective was to replace “the arch language of connoisseurs: ‘raspberry notes’, ‘elderflower aftertastes’, ‘prune flourishes’ and so on” with a more limited range of seven basic adjectives the survey participants most related to: ‘light’, ‘full-bodied’, ‘dry’ ‘mellow’ ‘sweet’, ‘sharp’ and ‘fiery’.

3.2. Hyper-idiosyncratic metaphoric creativity

- 43 Winespeak being awash in highly diversified metaphors of varying degrees of complexity, for the purposes of this study, and at an admitted risk of oversimplification, we divide the metaphors of wine descriptors into two basic categories: on the one hand, there are the relatively accessible and self-elucidating close-association metaphors such as some of the “wine words” Lehrer (2009) suggests: *balanced, cloying, corky, dry, fruity, full-bodied, robust, smooth*, or again, on a more complex interpretative scale, *austere, green, maderized, metallic, mineral, oaky, off, overripe, puckery, woody*, etc. On the other hand, there are the hard-to-interpret distant-association metaphors as, for example, those cited on the site *winefolly.com* in a text entitled “33 of the most bizarre wine flavours”, amongst which figure *baby diaper, new plastic, old saddle leather, pencil lead, petrol, diesel, sweaty socks and wet dog*.
- 44 One explanation for such hyper-idiosyncratic metaphor creation comes from the fact that metaphors from long established semantic fields lose their metaphoricity and end up as dead metaphors. Wine critics do not want to get stuck in a metaphoric rut, as Jefford (2015) explains:
- Conservative, restrained wine descriptions are tedious, repetitive and soporific, and utterly fail to evoke the excitement of smelling and tasting wine. [...] The writing of descriptive [...] wine notes is a specialized form of wine entertainment, and is quickly seen as such by users.
- 45 Consequently, since metaphoric excess is an expected feature of the genre, wine writers give free rein to mood and imagination, to the extent that, as Rossi (2015: 60) points out, “very often, the language of wine notes uses approximate and purely descriptive terms [...] which in no way represent precise concepts related to organoleptic analyses but are metonymies reflecting the mood of the wine taster.”¹⁴ In this context, Jefford (2015) evokes the discursive one-upmanship which ensues as a battle of metaphors, “as if [...] each contender is trying to outdo the other, and bludgeon their rivals to death by adjectival force of arms.” Wine critics thus choose their metaphors from increasingly audacious semantic domains, as demonstrated by Klein, the title of whose book, *WineSpeak: A Vinous Thesaurus of (Gasp!) 36,975 Bizarre, Erotic, Funny, Outrageous, Poetic, Silly and Ugly Wine Tasting Descriptors* (2009), speaks for itself:
- [...] wines could introduce you to angel pee, citronella, eastern European fruit soup, Godzilla, iodine, ladies’ underwear, mustard gas, old running shoes, rawhide, hot

tar roads, bubblegum, sweaty saddles, crushed ants, kitchen drains, or even turpentine. (2009: back cover)

- 46 If inventive metaphors make for the vibrant prose expected of the genre, it inevitably leads to compromising interpretation, as Caballero and Suárez-Toste underline with regard to their corpus:

[... many tasting notes] reveal an author and a style, and pride of authorship occasionally intrudes and hinders effective communication. That is why, every now and then we have found expressions where there can be little doubt that we are facing figurative language and yet nothing meaningful emerges from the analysis: we miss the point and suspect few, if any, readers would get it. (2010: 281)

- 47 Another example of far-fetched metaphors present in their corpus concerns metaphors from the field of sexual semantics. Metaphors such as *seductive* or related terms are fairly easy to activate in the context of wine. Others, however, are more fanciful as reported by a wine critic who identifies himself as the Wine Snark (2015):

You know nothing pops my cork quite like sexy metaphors. Wine critics seem to possess an inexhaustible supply of libidinal metaphors and their reviews can stimulate more than your taste buds. Who could resist a voluptuous Viognier, a seductive Chardonnay, or a hedonistic Hermitage? What's not to like about a sinuous, full-bodied wine that is supple and fleshy, with long legs, a luscious attack, and a lengthy, succulent finish? These sexy reviews have been known to confuse and excite some winemakers, leading them to premature inoculation.

- 48 Even though wine and women – whores, courtesans, harlots, tarts and strumpets – have been collocated as the twin evils to beset man since Biblical times, idiosyncratic metaphoric creativity still has use for such associations as illustrated by the example of a descriptor proposed by none other than Parker himself (in Caballero & Suárez-Toste *ibid.*) which describes a 2001 Batard-Montrachet as “a street-walker of a wine.”
- 49 In the same vein, in a chapter entitled “An Ecstasy of Erotica”, Klein (2009: 38–41) presents a 4-page double column list of sexual metaphors used in wine descriptors, ranging from the suggestive (*as soft as a kiss, a red wine with cleavage, tart with a heart, orgasm in a bottle*) to the downright crude (*long and firm in the mouth like a penis, penis wine, a leg spread, herpes-infected prostitute*). In this context, he raises the predictable and all-important issue of whether recourse to such unbridled metaphoric creation does not derive primarily from a not-so-hidden promotional agenda designed to hook readers and/or buyers through the persuasive metaphoricity of words-that-shock at the expense of helpful but prosaic guidelines – a form of genre hybridization described by Bhatia (2004: 89) when discussing the increasing colonization of informative functions by covert promotional ones.

3.4. Cross-cultural (mis)comprehension

- 50 Given, as Creed says, that “wine today is made, marketed, sold, evaluated, described and consumed [...] across the globe” (2014), interrogations arise as to what extent Eurocentric winespeak is accessible to the community of wine consumers in its global entirety.
- 51 Like other disciplines where English reigns as the lingua franca which unites the linguistically and culturally heterogeneous members of a discourse community within the realm of their specialisation, new market forces have made English the lingua franca of the global wine world as well. The increasing globalisation of wine markets

and the correlated diversity of wine consumers begs the question of how specialised discourse embedded in a Eurocentric worldview resonates with wine consumers of distant-culture countries. The obvious case in point is naturally Asia with China, the world's fifth-largest wine-consuming country according to the OIV (2016), consuming up to 6.4% of the world's wine production:¹⁵ how are the different stakeholders of the Chinese wine community expected to relate to lexis steeped in European agrarian, linguistic and literary cultural values? If Asian wine specialists have made attempts to develop wine descriptors based on Asian sensorial perceptions – Hong Kong-based Korean-American wine critic Jeannie Cho Lee's *Mastering Wine for the Asian Palate* (2011), for example –, Westerners present on the Chinese wine market have also understood the importance of adapting Eurocentric wine discourse to the target consumer's linguistic and cultural ethos, as illustrated by *The Chinese Lexicon Project* (2014) carried out by the University of South Australia's Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing:

The research that inevitably attracts attention is the Chinese Lexicon project—the first scientific approach anywhere in the world designed to understand how regular drinkers of imported wine in China actually describe what they buy and taste. The rationale is simple: there's no point in describing a wine as 'showing hints of blackberry' to someone who doesn't know what a blackberry tastes like. 'Chinese consumers grow up with different foods to Western consumers, so while it might be handy for us to say that a wine tastes of strawberry, blackberry preserve, peach, or melon, it might be just as easy for Chinese consumers to say that a wine tastes of yangmei, dried Chinese hawthorn, saturn peach or cantaloupe,' says Dr Corsi. 'And we should not forget about more generic descriptors, such as astringent, sour, mellow or lingering, as Chinese consumers use these terms three times more often than other specific descriptors'. (Carne 2014)

- 52 Bridging the cross-cultural gap between Eurocentric wine discourse and the Asian wine consumer's sensorial and linguistic sensibilities heralds the difficulties that lie ahead as other distant-culture countries show nascent interest in wine consumption as, for example, Namibia and Nigeria (0.20% each), Morocco (0.16%) and South Korea (0.14%) (Carne 2014).
- 53 In light of these elements, it is easy to understand why wine ratings defined in terms of mathematical scores such as the ones proposed by Parker are popular: for the mass of non-expert consumers who find themselves lost in front of rows and rows of bottles in the supermarket or in the commercial 'vino babble' of their labels and vendors, the only form of shared discourse is the Parker 90+ rating.¹⁶

Conclusion

- 54 The aim of this paper was to explore the paradoxical status of the specialised language and discourse of wine descriptors whose omnipresence in public media and consumer outlets would seem to designate the average wine consumer as the target addressee whereas the beautiful but bafflingly metaphoric prose which characterises the genre is an obstacle to comprehension for the very same public. Though the intriguing question as to the wide dissemination of this restricted form of discourse remains unanswered, this study leads to the conclusion that the true members of the discourse community for whom wine descriptors are a meaningful means of communication are the small but nevertheless active group of wine connoisseurs for whom blackcurrant has little to do with Ribena and all to do with Cabernet Sauvignon.

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NOTES

1. One notable exception being this journal itself and the publication of an article on wine discourse by Nigel Bruce in 1999.
2. Undoubtedly the most widely disseminated support, notably with regard to the general public, wine bottle labels have now become an object of study as a genre as evinced by the following links: <<http://www.academicowino.com/2011/07/whats-in-label-importance-of-back-label.html/>>. 2/2/2017. <<http://isaacjamesbaker.blogspot.fr/2014/01/poetry-of-wine-label.html>>. 2/2/2017. <<http://ottawacitizen.com/life/food/flavour-descriptors-move-to-wine-bottles-in-front-labels>>. 2/2/2017.
3. Obvious typographical errors in the original version have been corrected.
4. <www.paolofalciani.com/page9.htm>. 3/2/2017.
5. A somewhat disappointing translation of the original French: *Le dégustateur devant l'impuissance des mots*.
6. Umami (/u'mɑ:mi/) is one of the five basic tastes (together with sweetness, sourness, bitterness, and saltiness). A loanword from the Japanese (うま味), umami can be translated as "pleasant savory taste". <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umami>>. 2/2/2017.
7. Descriptions 3 and 4 are, incidentally, of the same wine: a 2000 Bruno Giacosa Barolo Le Rocche del Faletto Riserva.
8. See, for example, Jancis Robinson's classification into twelve domains: animal, burnt, chemical, earthy, floral, fruity, microbiological, nutty, spicy, sweet, vegetal and woody. <<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/learn/vocabulary/aromas>>. 5/2/2017.

9. Both hail from Castilla-La Mancha in Spain, the largest wine-growing region in the world in terms of acreage.
 10. Wine as living organisms (plants, animals or living beings): Classified elsewhere as “anthropomorphic metaphors”, this category is, according to Rossi (2015: 58), the most historic and transcultural. It is also, according to the same source, more present in the discourse of specialists as opposed to that of amateurs.
Anatomy: In this context, see Klein (2009: 37): “It’s hard not to notice just how many body parts and their effluvia are in your glass of vino. [...] Seems that wine conjures up all manner of physical similes from fists to wrists, from lips to hips, from nose to toes, from chin to skin. Plus a whole lot of nice stuff and nasty bits in between.”
 11. “The enlightened amateur, the privileged gourmet and the knowledgeable food lover”. Our translation.
 12. Neologism coined by Swales to combine “focus” and “local”.
 13. However, Bower’s subsequent attempt at “describing the experience of drinking a bottle of wine using facts alone” turns out to be a self-acknowledged failure.
 14. Our translation. Original text: “*Dans bien des cas, le langage des comptes rendus utilise des termes approximatifs, purement descriptifs [...] qui ne représente aucunement des concepts précis liés à l’analyse organoleptique, mais plutôt des métonymies renvoyant à l’état d’âme du dégustateur*”.
 15. Statistics published by The Wine Institute of California (2015) regarding percentage of world consumption of wine per country.
 16. Robert Parker’s scoring system: < 65 = to be avoided; 65-74 = below average; 75-79 = average; 80-89 = above average; 90-95 = outstanding; 96-100 = extraordinary.
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ABSTRACTS

Although wine is a widely published area of study, ESP studies have shown relatively little interest for this specialised domain as evinced by the paucity of articles on the subject in mainstream ESP journals. Of the many different varieties of specialised language and discourse related to the different sectors of the vine-to-wine industry, this paper focuses on wine descriptors, i.e., the highly metaphoric language used notably by New World wine cultures to describe the aromas of wine. After a brief study of the synaesthetic metaphors which characterise this specialised language, the discussion looks at the question of discourse community and addresses the paradoxical issue that winespeak fails as a form of shared discourse with regard to the principal putative target addressee, the average wine consumer. After discussing the true addressee, the study finally presents other language-related factors which inhibit comprehension with respect to the global wine consumer.

Bien que le vin soit un domaine d’étude bien exploré, les chercheurs en anglais de spécialité ont montré relativement peu d’intérêt pour ce domaine spécialisé comme en témoigne le nombre réduit de publications à ce sujet dans les revues spécialisées en langues et cultures de spécialité. Parmi les nombreuses variétés d’anglais spécialisé appartenant aux différents domaines spécialisés liés au vin, cet article porte sur le discours spécialisé hautement métaphorique des notes de dégustation du vin caractéristique des producteurs du Nouveau Monde. Dans cette perspective, l’auteur s’interroge sur la possibilité d’appréhender ce discours spécialisé en tant que discours commun à une communauté discursive englobant l’ensemble des consommateurs de

vin. Après avoir souligné l'échec de cette forme de discours auprès de ce public, l'auteur tente d'identifier les membres réels de la communauté discursive pour qui cette variété spécialisée de l'anglais est un discours partagé. Enfin, elle propose d'autres éléments langagiers qui constituent un obstacle à la compréhension par le destinataire cible putatif.

INDEX

Keywords: discourse community, synaesthetic metaphor, wine descriptor, winespeak

Mots-clés: communauté discursive, métaphore synesthésique, note de dégustation oenologique

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