Taste of Wine or "Taste" of a Person: (Synesthetic) Metaphors in Wine Reviews

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Abstract

Within the figurative repertoire of the genre of wine reviews, anthropomorphic metaphor is the most recurring pattern in many languages. However, few studies studied the metaphors in wine reviews in the Chinese language nor focused on the synesthetic metaphors as well as the synesthetic directionality in the wine discourse. This study built a small corpus of wine reviews and annotated conceptual metaphors, synesthetic metaphors, and synesthetic directionality in Chinese. With various metaphorical units concerning a person's appearance and/or personality identified in our data, we confirmed the most frequent mapping of (TASTE OF) WINE IS A PERSON in Chinese wine reviews. In the meantime, VISION, which is considered a more abstract and less embodied sensory domain, however, provides the most vocabulary to describe the taste and smell of the wine. Although the finding seemingly violated the conventional mapping that more abstract concepts are comprehended via more concrete notions, we propose that the gustatory (and olfactory) sense is a "mutable" sensory domain in terms of its abstractness. Further, the evaluative similarity between the bodily experiences and the interactional communication may be the underlying cause of the reversibility of the TASTE and PERSONALITY as source domains in conceptual metaphor mappings.

1 Introduction

Metaphors are ubiquitous in wine reviews, and they play a pivotal role in describing the wine tasting experience. Existing literature demonstrated that metaphor is a frequent and significant feature of the wine discourse (Caballero, 2007; Creed, 2016; Creed & McIlveen, 2018; Paradis & Eeg-Olofsson, 2013; Suárez-Toste, 2007). "Without metaphor, wine would be hard to discuss" (Caballero et al., 2019, p. 72). The prevalence of metaphor use in the genre of wine discourse may be partly because of the scarce taste and smell vocabulary in languages such as English (Levinson & Majid, 2014), although taste and smell are the primary two sensory faculties that take part in wine tasting.

To facilitate depicting wine tasting experiences, conceptual metaphorical frames are applied. For example, wine as a product will be portrayed as LIVING ORGANISMS (e.g., WINES ARE PLANTS; WINES ARE ANIMALS; WINES ARE PEOPLE), THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARTIFACTS (e.g., WINES ARE BUILDINGS, WINES ARE TEXTILES), and DYNAMIC ARTIFACTS (e.g., through manner-of-motion verbs like *run, ride, come across*) (Caballero et al., 2019; Creed, 2016). Another critical feature in winespeak[1] is that professionals and reviewers will use an array of sensory lexicons to evaluate wine attributes because tasting wine involves the activation of sensory perceptions via VISION, TASTE, SMELL, and TOUCH (or mouthfeel). VISION detects color and

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[1] Winespeak refers to the specific terms or jargons that wine professionals use while discussing wine.

color depth, TASTE tells sweetness and acidity, SMELL distinguishes fruit intensity and oak presence, while TOUCH (or mouthfeel) evaluates the body, tannin, and carbonation of the wine (Old, 2014). These bodily sensations are closely intertwined and contribute to a holistic and integrated wine tasting experience. Linguistically speaking, meaning transfers across sensory domains are also considered a type of metaphor, namely, synesthetic metaphors. For example, in a phrase *sweet voice*, *sweet* is a concept originating in the taste sense while *voice* is a hearing concept—the auditory concept is thus depicted by the gustatory concept in this linguistic manifestation. Therefore, at least two perspectives can be offered in approaching the figurative device used in wine tasting discourse; one is through conceptual metaphors that associate wine with those more concrete or basic concepts, and the other is via synesthetic metaphors in which cross-mapping of sensory modalities is in pivotal interest.

Metaphors in wine discourse have received increasing attention in recent years and have been researched widely in languages such as English (Caballero et al., 2019; Creed, 2016; Paradis & Eeg-Olofsson, 2013), French (Negro, 2012), Italian (Ţenescu, 2014), Polish (Zawisławska & Falkowska, 2019), Spanish (Arroyo & Roberts, 2016), to name a few. Yet, little is known in regards to the (synesthetic) metaphors in the Chinese wine discourse, despite the fact that China is the sixth leading wine consumer worldwide, just after the United States, France, and Italy (Mercer, 2022). Wang et al. (2020) automatically extracted English-Chinese bilingual wine reviews and found asymmetric alignment between English and Chinese wine terms. Some frequently used words in wine reviews in English could not find their corresponding translation equivalents. For instance, palate, nose, and aromas could only be translated into 風格 *fēnggé* 'style'/口味 *kǒuwèi* 'taste,' 香氣 *xiāngqì* 'scent'/鼻腔 *bíqiāng* 'nasal cavity,' and 芬芳 *fēnfāng* 'fragrance' in Chinese, respectively. This leads us to question cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in lexical choices in wine reviews may also be reflected in metaphorical expressions.

This paper explores conceptual metaphors and synesthetic metaphors in wine reviews in Chinese. In particular, we address four questions in this research:

1) What are the frequently used conceptual metaphors in wine reviews?
2) What are the frequent source domains mapped to wine in wine reviews?
3) What are the frequently used synesthetic metaphors in wine reviews?
4) What is the synesthetic directionality in wine reviews?

We will delineate the theoretical framework in section 2; section 3 is on the methodology; results are presented in section 4, followed by discussions and conclusions in the last section.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphor is seen as a type of figurative device that describes one thing in terms of something else that is conceptually very different (Holyoak & Stamenković, 2018). One of the most influential accounts of metaphorical directionality is proposed by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999), in which conventional metaphorical expressions (e.g., *a warm person*) usually project a more concrete concept (e.g., TEMPERATURE) to a more abstract notion (e.g., SOCIAL RELATIONS). This cross-mapping typically involves a set of systematic correspondences underlying a conceptual metaphor (e.g., AFFECTION IS WARMTH) between the two conceptual domains (e.g., TEMPERATURE and SOCIAL RELATIONS). CMT advocates further posited that people would primarily draw upon their embodied experiences to comprehend metaphors (Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs et al., 2004) and reason about abstraction (e.g., Jamrozik et al., 2016).

In the context of wine discourse, past literature demonstrates that conceptualizations of the target domain of WINE were frequently found to arise from the ontological source domains of THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARTIFACTS, LIVING ORGANISMS, and MANUFACTURED ENTITIES. Among these source domains, the most pervasive metaphorical schema, irrespective of genre and wine community, regards (TASTE OF) WINE as A PERSON (e.g., Caballero et al., 2019; Creed & McIlveen, 2018; Suárez-Toste, 2007). Suárez-Toste (2007) described that wine's *personality* is evaluated by means of adjectives prototypically used in the qualification of human beings (e.g., *brooding*, *friendly*, *sexy*, *voluptuous*, *boisterous*, *assertive*, *sensitive*, *demure*, *shy*, or

expressive). Creed (2016, p. 152) also found that there was a strong connection between human personality traits involving behavior and characteristics (e.g., *brooding, character, clever, generous, gentle, honest*, and *mellow*) and physical actions (e.g., *clamoring, demanding, promising, shows*, and *sings*).

In this sense, the source domain of PERSON or PERSONALITY in conceptualizing the target domain of TASTE and/or SMELL of the wine seems to violate the conventional mappings in conceptual metaphors, i.e., using more concrete ideas to facilitate understanding of more abstract concepts, given that flavor and odor are more concrete and more "embodied" than getting to know a person or evaluating a person's traits. Can we really understand a *sexy* or a *clever* taste? We will come back to this issue in the discussion section.

2.2 Synesthetic Metaphors and their Directionality

Synesthetic metaphors specifically refer to cross-sensory metaphors that involve two sensory domains, i.e., VISION, HEARING, TASTE, SMELL, and TOUCH. Similar to the typical transfer pattern in the CMT, i.e., from a more concrete concept to a more abstract concept, synesthetic directionality from this metaphoric point of view likewise follows a particular directional pattern, from a "lower," or a "more embodied" sense (e.g., TOUCH) to a "higher," or a "less embodied" sense (e.g., HEARING) (see Strik Lievers et al., 2021 for a summary). The differentiation of "lower" and "higher" senses primarily lies in their degrees of embodiment, more specifically, the involvement and closeness of bodily contact (Shen, 1997; Shen & Aisenman, 2008) as well as with reference to subjective and/or objective information (Popova, 2005). For instance, tactile (and gustatory) senses appearing at initial mapping points to other senses (visual and auditory senses) can be explained by their substantial involvement of bodily contact and references to subjective feelings rather than objective information perceived by visual and auditory senses. Linguistic synesthesia is thus conventionally approached as a type of conceptual metaphor (Shen, 1997; Strik Lievers, 2017; Yu, 2003; Zhao et al., 2019a) and lexical items concerning meaning transfers are termed "synesthetic metaphors."

Suárez-Toste (2017) presented a case in point regarding the acidity in wine. He found that the directionality of synesthetic metaphors in discussing the acidity violated Ullmann's (1957) or Williams' (1976) synesthetic hierarchy in which TASTE is always found transferring to VISION. He identified a wealth of visual terms, especially related to light, such as *bright, beam, shine, shimmering, vivid, clarity, streak, laser, flashlight,* etc., were employed to describe the acidity in wine. This finding surprisingly echoes the mapping directionality in conceptual metaphors, as mentioned in the above section. Does it suggest that TASTE and SMELL are more abstract and less "embodied" than VISION? More discussions on this point can be found in the discussion after we present the findings of this study.

3 Methods

3.1 Data

The data used in this paper were collected from Decanter China, www.decanterchina.com. The data source consists of 50 wine reviews for wines that have been awarded the 2021 Decanter World Wine Award (DWWA). A sample of the review is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *A sample of the wine review in Chinese*

As shown in Figure 1, a wine review usually includes a technical introduction listing the wine name, vintage year, country/region/sub-region of origin, type of grapes, producer, and concentration of alcohol. The descriptions underneath typically start with a general introduction and evaluation of the wine, followed by important attributes centered on the wine, including color, aroma, flavor, body,

and tannin, and ends with the wine reviewer's overall appraisal.

Since we are only interested in the metaphor used in the reviews, we thus only extracted the descriptions for each review. The facts and information about the wine were discarded in this paper. After cleaning the data, we have compiled a small wine review corpus with 9,477 Chinese characters for the 50 wines.

3.2 Procedure

Two coders with trained linguistic background were involved in the following procedures of identifying metaphorical units, source and target domains coding, as well as sensory lexicon categorizations. All the questionable cases were discussed and resolved between the coders.

3.2.1 Metaphor Identification

We mainly resorted to a bottom-up approach and annotated the data manually, i.e., without previous automatic pre-detection of keywords (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2006). This is because we would like to observe the data in a more exploratory way.

First, we adopted the Metaphor Identification Procedure VU University Amsterdam (MIPVU; Pragglejaz, 2007; Steen et al., 2010) to identify conceptual metaphors. More specifically:

  a. To read the entire text and to get a general understanding of the meaning;
  b. Determine the lexical unit;
  c. Establish the contextual meaning of each lexical unit
  d. Determine if the word has a more basic meaning (more concrete, more bodily-related, more precise, and more historically older) in other contexts than the one in the given context;
  e. If the lexical unit has a more basic meaning in other contexts than the given context, to decide if the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it;
  f. If yes, mark the lexical unit as a metaphor-related word.

(Pragglejaz, 2007, p. 3; Steen et al., 2010, pp. 5-6)

Three lexical tools were used to determine the word meanings in Chinese, *Chinese WordNet 2.0* (CWN, Huang et al., 2010) [2] and two reference dictionaries, *Handian*,[3] and *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, Dictionary Editing Office, 2016). The three lexical tools will complement each other in determining the contextual and more basic meaning of the word we concern with. We generally followed the identification criteria for the Chinese data in Lu and Wang (2017) and Tay (2015). First, we only considered the basic meaning of the entire compound rather than that for the single character. For example, we treated the compound word 細膩 *xìnì* as one lexical unit with the meaning of '*fine and smooth*' instead of analyzing the basic meaning of the two characters 細 *xì* 'thin' and 膩 *nì* 'greasy; excessively (flavored).' Secondly, we included similes, idioms, colloquialisms, and proverbs that involve metaphorical meanings. Lastly, we took metonymy into account.

3.2.2 Source-Target Domains Coding

Three steps in the verification of source domains were adopted (Ahrens & Jiang, 2020; Zeng et al., 2021):

  a. To propose a potential source domain based on educated and native speakers' judgment, accompanied by the co-text and context of the metaphorical word appears;
  b. To verify the source domain proposed in the first step by checking if the categories and meanings of the metaphorical words provided in CWN, two dictionaries mentioned above, and two ontological knowledge networks (i.e., *E-HowNet* (Ma & Shih, 2018) and *SUMO* (Suggested Upper Merged Ontology) (Niles & Pease, 2001)) relate to the proposed source domain;
  c. If no evidence can be found in (b), the collocation searches of the keywords in the *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al., 2014) will be checked to examine if there are any

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[2] CWN is a platform provides an ontological network of semantic meanings of a word coupled with their semantic relations, including hypernyms, hyponyms, synonyms, among others. Accessed at http://lope.linguistics.ntu.edu.tw/cwn2/.

[3] An online Chinese dictionary; accessed at https://www.zdic.net/.

frequent collocations of the keywords related to the proposed source domains.[4]

As for the target domains, we mainly read through the whole sentence and analyze the target issues that the metaphorical words relate to.

3.2.3 Synesthetic Metaphors Coding

The boundary of sensory domains can be fuzzy. For example, the sensory adjective 清爽 *qīngshuǎng* 'refreshing' can be used to denote auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile feelings, although its original meaning is more pertinent to the visual sense. The classification of the sensory vocabulary mainly follows the method of categorizing sensory words in Zhong and Huang (2020) and Zhong et al. (2022a):

a. The sensory domain that the etymology of the word is pertinent to (cf. Zhao et al., 2019b);

b. The dominant sensory domain that the word belongs to (cf. Chen et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2022b);

c. Other words not listed in a or b will be traced in Shuowenjiezi (Xu, 1963) for their original connotations or their frequent usages in a general corpus data in the Sketch Engine, e.g., Chinese Web 2017 (zhTenTen11).

4 Results

After reviewing all the 50 wine reviews written of the awarded wine in DWWA 2021 and applying the above coding methods, we have identified a total of 345 metaphorical instances that contained metaphorical keywords. 151 of them (which takes 43.8%) are synesthetic metaphors, while the remaining 194 expressions (accounts for 56.2%) are conceptual metaphors. We will explicate the findings in the following two sections.

4.1 Conceptual Metaphors in Wine Reviews

On metaphors in general (excluding synesthetic metaphors), the most frequent metaphorical words include 優雅 *yōuyǎ* 'elegant' (4.06%), 充沛 *chōngpèi* 'abundant' (3.19%), and 內斂 *nèiliǎn* 'introverted' (2.61%). Table 1 demonstrates the top

10 metaphorical keywords identified in wine reviews.

Metaphorical Keywords	Frequency (Percentage)
優雅 *yōuyǎ* 'elegant'	14 (4.06%)
充沛 *chōngpèi* 'abundant'	11 (3.19%)
內斂 *nèiliǎn* 'introverted'	9 (2.61%)
活潑 *huópō* 'lively'	8 (2.32%)
迷人 *mírén* 'charming'	8 (2.32%)
年輕 *niánqīng* 'young'	7 (2.03%)
個性 *gèxìng* 'personality'	6 (1.74%)
層次 *céngcì* 'layer'	6 (1.74%)
和諧 *héxié* 'harmonious'	5 (1.45%)
輕盈 *qīngyíng* 'light'	5 (1.45%)

Table 1. *Top 10 most frequent metaphorical keywords in wine reviews*

Most of the source domains lie in PERSON (76.8%), BUILDING (9.7%), FORCE (4.1%), WATER (4.1%), ATMOSPHERE (2.5%), and STORM (1%). While the target domains mainly involve the TASTE of the wine (57.2%), the wine *per se* (26.2%), the SMELL of the wine (15.4%), and the COLOR of the wine (1%). We can therefore establish the frequent conceptual metaphorical mapping in wine reviews is (TASTE OF) WINE IS A PERSON.

4.2 Synesthetic Metaphors in Wine Reviews

Concerning synesthetic metaphors in wine reviews, most of the source domains lie in VISION (60.9%), TOUCH (25.1%), and HEARING (9.9%). According to Table 2, the most frequent synesthetic metaphors include 柔和 *róuhé* 'soft' (5.22%)，清新 *qīngxīn* 'fresh' (4.06%), and 純淨 *chúnjìng* 'pure' (4.06%).

Synesthetic Metaphors	Frequency (Percentage)
柔和 *róuhé* 'soft'	18 (5.22%)
清新 *qīngxīn* 'fresh'	14 (4.06%)
純淨 *chúnjìng* 'pure'	14 (4.06%)
細膩 *xìnì* 'fine and smooth'	14 (4.06%)
深沉 *shēnchén* 'deep'	15 (4.35%)
清爽 *qīngshuǎng* 'refreshing'	10 (2.80%)
柔滑 *róuhuá* 'silky'	5 (1.45%)
深邃 *shēnsuì* 'deep'	5 (1.45%)
豐美 *fēngměi* 'plump'	5 (1.45%)

乾淨 *gānjìng* 'clean'	3 (0.870%)

Table 2. *Top 10 most frequent synesthetic metaphors in wine reviews*

On top of the synesthetic metaphors, we further summarized the synesthetic directionality in wine reviews, as presented in Figure 2. The synesthetic metaphors follow a particular direction, in which unidirectional is most seen, while the bidirectional transfer is only found between TASTE and SMELL. Taking visual items to describe the TASTE is the most often among the mapping to the taste of the wine, which takes 57.4%. It is also observable that TOUCH is also often used in describing TASTE, as it takes 32.4%. HEARING is the rarest sense used to describe the TASTE (7.4%). When the SMELL of the wine is the target, VISION is likewise the most frequent sensory modality mapped to the SMELL (72%), followed by TOUCH to SMELL (12%) and HEARING to SMELL (4%). Last but not least, only the auditory terms are found to modify the VISION, more specifically, the color of the wine.
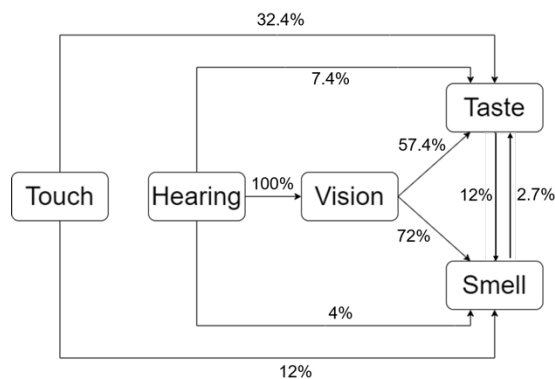

Figure 2. *Synesthetic directionality in wine reviews*

5 Discussion

The conceptual metaphors and synesthetic metaphors in wine reviews in Chinese exhibit an analogous pattern to those found in other languages. Personification, or anthropomorphic metaphors, predominate the wine discourse; and VISION, deemed a less "embodied" sense, is the most frequent sensory domain that transfers its meaning to TASTE as well as SMELL in wine reviews. The reversibility of the source and target domains in both the conceptual metaphorical mappings and synesthetic metaphors left us with the question of the "abstractness" of the gustatory and the olfactory sensory domains—can we really understand what is

the "taste" or "smell" of a *sexy* or a *clever* person? Does it suggest that TASTE and SMELL are more abstract and less "embodied" than VISION?

To kill two birds with one stone, we would like to corroborate the hypothesis that the gustatory (and olfactory) category, although bodily experienced, is conceptually abstract (Zhong & Huang, 2018, 2020; Zhong et al., 2022a). Based on the analysis of online food reviews on desserts, Zhong and Huang (2018, 2020) suggested that the "mouthfeel" of desserts is also conceptualized as an individual's personality since the adjectives stemming from impressions of personalities gained through social interactional contact were found modifying the taste as well as the "mouthfeel" of desserts in Chinese, such as 調皮 *tiáopí* 'naughty,' 浮誇 *fúkuā* 'superficial,' and 硬朗 *yìnglǎng* 'robust.' In Zhong et al.'s (2022a) examination of the adjectives collocated with the gustatory/olfactory word 味道 *wèidào* 'taste; smell' using the corpus data, they found that visual-related adjectives, especially those related to simplicity, purity, and elegance (e.g., 純 *chún* 'pure,' 淡雅 *dànyǎ* 'simple and elegant,' and 精緻 *jīngzhì* 'delicate'), can be used to modify 味道 *wèidào* 'taste; smell' in Chinese. They further hypothesized that when the focus is on the quality of sensation, i.e., the desirability and pleasantness of taste, it is reasonable to use more conceptual terms to modify the target items.

The high consistency in conceptualizing TASTE and SMELL through personification shows that this phenomenon is not exclusively unique in the genre of wine reviews. It is neither because wine is anthropomorphic nor bears humanlike characteristics by nature (Creed & McIlveen, 2018). We hypothesize that the mutability of the TASTE and SMELL on the concrete-abstract continuum might be the underlying reason that drives the arising of the PERSON or PERSONALITY to be the most common source domain in the wine discourse. Further, personality-related lexical items carry evaluative appraisal through interactional contact with the people, which is tantamount to the evaluative function of gustatory and/or olfactory terms used to describe personal experiences with the things (Winter, 2016). This also helps explain why TASTE and SMELL will drift towards a more abstract end when the appraisal of the quality is the primary concern. Overall speaking, we propose that the "preexisting similarity" between the two

experiences (Kövecses, 2002) grounds the projection of the "taste" of a person to the taste of the wine.

6 Conclusion

Describing the taste and smell of the wine often requires costly and creative endeavors from wine professionals because people generally have difficulties in naming flavors and odors, especially in Western cultures (Croijmans & Majid, 2015; Croijmans et al., 2021; Levinson & Majid, 2014). However, studies also showed that wine experts did not demonstrate much difference in using linguistic strategies to communicate smells and flavors (Croijmans & Majid, 2016), although they will employ more metaphorical descriptions to describe wine (Paradis & Eeg-Olofsson, 2013). This study thus looks at how conceptual metaphors and synesthetic metaphors are used in wine reviews in Chinese. Our findings echo the past literature on the metaphorical expressions in wine discourse in other languages. First, a variety of metaphorical units concerning a person's appearance or a person's personality are identified, which further gives rise to the most frequent mapping of (TASTE OF) WINE IS A PERSON in the winespeak. Secondly, VISION, which is considered a more abstract and less embodied sensory domain in conventional linguistic synesthesia, provides the most vocabulary to describe the taste and smell of the wine.

The findings in the genre of wine reviews somewhat share a remarkable similarity with taste/smell descriptors in a general sense. We hypothesize that the gustatory (and olfactory) sense is a "mutable" sensory domain in terms of its abstractness. Especially, the conceptual abstractness of the TASTE (and SMELL) is activated when the quality of bodily sensation is the focus. Further, the evaluative similarity between the bodily experiences and the interactional communication may be the underlying cause of the reversibility of the TASTE and PERSONALITY as source domains in conceptual metaphor mappings.

Due to space limitations, we did not elaborate on other source domains and/or metaphorical mappings, such as (TASTE OF) WINE IS A BUILDING. The small size of the corpus may also limit our findings of other possible yet novel or creative metaphor usages in Chinese. Future studies may use experimental methods to test the acceptability of different aspects and features related to a person in discussing taste and smell—for example, if a person's psychological attribute is more acceptable than their physical features in winespeak. With the consistent patterns identified in metaphor use, it is also worthwhile to resort to computational models to predict the figurative language in wine discourse.

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