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White aromas and subtle oak spices

From sensory experiences to language through conceptual spaces

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This paper makes use of a large database of wine reviews from the American magazine, *The Wine Advocate*, for the investigation of how experiences of sensory perceptions in the domains of VISION, SMELL, TASTE and TOUCH are recontextualized and recast into text and discourse. In spite of all the challenges involved in describing perceptions, we expect professional wine reviewers to be able to give a persuasive and understandable account of their experiences of the wines, and to frame the descriptions so that they appeal to readers' sensoria.

The paper explores the reviews with focus on the different types of descriptors and the way their meanings are construed. It gives an account of the use of property expressions, such as *hard, sweet, dry* and of some common types of imagery, e.g. [*the wine*] *caresses the palate, smells like an old hippy haven*. It pays particular attention to the cross-modal use of descriptors, such as *white aromas and subtle oak spices*, and argues that the ontological cross-over of sensory modalities are to be considered as symptoms of 'synesthesia' in the wine tasting event and monosemy at the conceptual level. In contrast to the standard view of the meanings of words for sensory perceptions, the contention of this paper is that it is not the case that, for instance, *sharp* in *sharp smell* primarily evokes a notion of touch; rather *sharp* spans the experiences of sharpness in all the sensory perceptions of VISION, SMELL, TASTE and TOUCH. The lexical syncretism is grounded in how the conceptualization of our sensorium functions. Under normal circumstances, we cannot taste something without smelling something and we cannot taste something without feeling something and over and above everything is the sight of this something.