

## THE WINE TASTING SHEET AS A LINGUISTIC GENRE AND ITS APPRAISAL THEORY BASED ANALYSIS

BOZENA WISLOCKA BREIT\*  
*Universidad Politécnica de Madrid*

**ABSTRACT.** *The goal of this study is twofold: verification that the wine tasting sheet may be considered “genre”, as it meets the definitional requirements determined by Swales (1990) and the adequacy of the Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) for the analysis of this genre within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. 110 English and Spanish tasting sheets were extracted from the Internet and grouped into four corpora created ad hoc for Spain, Australia, California and New Zealand. Subsequent analysis has demonstrated positive polarization of the texts and significant differences in the appraisal verbalization through the use of terms related to fruit (WordSmith Tools), oenological or adjectives; free and quasi literary style of English texts contrasts strongly with the sobriety of the Spanish notes.*

**KEY WORDS.** *Genre, tasting sheet, wine tasting note, SFL, Appraisal theory.*

**RESUMEN.** *El objetivo de este estudio es doble: verificar que la nota de cata de vino se puede considerar “un género”, puesto que reúne los requisitos de la definición formulada por Swales (1990) y la adecuación de la Teoría de la valoración (Martin y White 2005) para el análisis de este género dentro del marco de la Lingüística Sistemico-Funcional. 110 notas de cata se extrajeron de Internet y se agruparon en cuatro corpus creados a propósito para España, Australia, California y Nueva Zelanda. Los análisis posteriores han demostrado una polarización positiva de los textos, así como diferencias significativas de verbalización valorativa en los términos relacionados con la fruta (WordSmith Tools), los enológicos o los adjetivos; el estilo libre y casi literario de los textos en lengua inglesa contrasta enormemente con la sobriedad de las notas españolas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** *Género, nota de cata de vino, LSF, Teoría de la valoración.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Outstanding growth in quality wine consumption in the Western World has triggered the need for knowledge “about wine”, becoming a real social must for those considering

themselves at the social cutting edge. The ubiquity of *winespeak* in the media made it widespread and cryptic at the same time; the scale of the phenomenon, even limiting the scope of the research only to Spain, can be easily envisaged: Falcó (2004) and Ratti (2000) publish popularizing books; Spanish wine tasting lexicon becomes subject of lexical and historical studies by Ibáñez Rodríguez (2006) or Pivot (2007); Lerat (2006) analyses it as an example of a specialised language; its use in press has been examined by Armentia et al. (2005); Capanaga (2004) dives into intricacies of wine advertising in the Spanish press; Caballero and Suarez-Toste (2010) scrutinise winespeak's imagery; wine lexicon is being used in ESP and ESL by Goded (2008) and Labrador-Piquer and Morote Magán (2011); three *International congresses on wine culture and language* were organised by the University of Valladolid (2004, 2008, 2011). Conspicuous foreign linguists have also taken interest in this topic (Lehrer, 2007, 2009; Paradis, 2010).

Our aim is, in the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics and, more precisely, within the Theory of Appraisal, to show some of the specific features and linguistic and intercultural differences in wine tasting sheets written in English and Spanish.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Six red wine styles namely: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Tempranillo, Pinot Noir, Shiraz/Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon blended with Merlot were tasted and the results reflected in 110 wine tasting sheets drafted by their winemakers in English and Spanish. All texts were extracted from the Internet and distributed into four corpora created *ad hoc* corresponding to the Spanish D.O Somontano (24), California (30), Australia (30) and New Zealand (26). *Tasting comments*, i.e. the verbalization of wine tasting process' results performed by the cellar's winemaker or oenologist were subsequently analysed with the WordSmith Tools, and also manually, producing measurable data such as: use and frequency of specific oenological terms; words related to fruits and colours; and a certain number of unexpected or learned expressions. That data was subsequently examined in the frame of the Appraisal Theory.

### 2.1. *Basic features of a Tasting sheet*

Since the standard technical tasting sheet recommended by the OIV<sup>1</sup> is not mandatory, each winery/cellar tends to design one of its own, resulting in a number of fairly free variants. The information offered, both compulsory and/or discretionary, includes:

- name of the cellar /winery
- vintage
- grape variety /varietal
- date of the harvest
- vineyard's main characteristics
- description of the vinification process

- acidity (Ph), sugar contents (Brix) and alcohol
- proper *tasting comments*
- food pairing
- serving temperature
- peak drinking/ storing period

*Tasting comments* [/note] used to be a “must”, always included in the technical sheet, regardless of the medium; however I have detected recently (Wislocka Breit, forthcoming) that some Spanish wineries, following the New World style, start to obviate this section<sup>2</sup>. The two most significant features of the *Tasting comments*, the object of our study are, on the one hand, its virtual existence, i.e. Internet medium, and on the other the fact that the evaluation is always being performed by someone personally interested in the wine, be it an in-house or external oenologist, a winemaker owner of the winery, its commercial representative, or a copywriter: all of them aiming at the maximisation of the wine sales. This clarification is vital, as an evaluation effected by a professional wine critic is to be immune from any personal involvement or financial interest. The row corresponding to this specific class of the authors of the tasting notes has been shaded in Table 1 below, which itself provides a selection of tasting sheet variants encountered in the Spanish, Californian, Australian and New Zealand wineries’ websites. It is important to bear in mind that they cannot be considered exhaustive, or mutually exclusive, since constraints affecting the genre “tasting sheet” are not very strict.

It also should be borne in mind that this paper does not intend to analyse the strictly advertising idiom, which would radically dispense with excessively technical data, or many obscure oenological terms, and which is rooted in the stereotyped images:

*Así, Francia y sus vinos gozan y sufren a la vez de una imagen “elitista”, “ancestral”, “conservadora”. Australia evoca, en cuanto a ella, grandes espacios vírgenes, un espíritu pionero, una naturaleza respetada, un “otro lugar” que podría parecerse a “nuestro futuro más limpio”.* (Mora and Castaing 2006: 30) [Thus, France and her wines enjoy and simultaneously suffer from her image as “elitist,” “ancestral,” “conservative.” As respects Australia, she evokes great virgin spaces, a pioneering spirit, the undefiled nature, an “elsewhere” which might look like “our cleaner future.” - my translation BWB.]

Author	Channel / Medium	Goal	Sections	Credibility	Milieu
Cellar's / winery's winemaker	Professional publications and / or statistical	Strictly professional information	Purely technical	Very high	Health and Food Authorities; winemakers' professional circles.
	Winery's internal tasting sheets; Internet	Information provided to the clients	Information about the vineyard, harvest & vinification; details of tasting phases: colour, nose and palate	Medium / High	Professional circles, possible buyers and wine enthusiasts
Professional & traditional wine critics / gurus/	Specialized magazines, general press, web pages	Professional & general public information	Details of tasting: Colour, nose, palate, food matching	Medium / High	Directly proportional to the critic's local or universal authority
Modern critics using new technologies	Internet including video recordings	Non-standard information provided through a non standard channel	Colour, nose, palate; everything is optional	As granted by the audience	Significant in their habitual <i>milieu</i> , limited or nonexistent in the rest
Wine enthusiasts	Internet's forums, web pages, individual's blogs	Sharing information & achieving certain celebrity & prestige	Colour, nose, palate	Low / Medium	Usually limited to The Internet

Table 1. "Tasting sheet" genre and its variations.

### 3. WINE TASTING SHEET AS A LINGUISTIC GENRE

According to Swales' (1990) typology, the genre "*tasting sheet*" seems to fulfil the definition of a communicative event, whose format is structured but flexible, which is used in the context of a particular discourse community and whose full control and transgressions are reserved to experts. Its complementary features, following Lakoff's (1990) criteria can be described as follows:

- Formal – it has to meet certain characteristics predetermined by the community it is written for;
- Non reciprocal, hence monologic – as it is a one-way discourse whose author remains anonymous or, even if a name is provided, they do not expect to be questioned about the message. In the New World, due to the tasting note being directly integrated into the website, there has always been a factual possibility of contact between the writer of the note and its reader; however, although the Spanish

traditionally anonymous comments used to ignore any possibility of interaction, presently such contact is becoming possible, due to its internet medium.

- Non spontaneous – as it is either written to order, or it is one of the obligations inherent to the job performed;
- Public – the objective of the tasting sheets is to be universally accessible, with the sole exception of the New World’s websites requirement of having reached the minimum age established for alcohol consumption;
- And finally aimed at a specific purpose – the most evident being to inform; the second, less explicit, but equally important, to persuade the prospective buyer into the acquisition of the wine, and the third one, the least obvious, almost subliminal, yet very significant, to generate a feeling of membership of an elitist oenological community.

Table 2 below, when first elaborated in 2010, reflected the most significant differences perceived among the analysed corpora which, in my opinion, had been due mostly to cultural, i.e. traditional, and partially to technological aspects. Yet only two years later, in 2012, the outcome looked significantly different. Some of the most outstanding changes observed in a number of Somontano tasting notes are listed below, following the order of Table 2:

- loss of anonymity of the author of the comments sometimes reinforced by a winemaker’s photo, or a family’s history<sup>3</sup>
- details of the estate, harvest and vinification process start to become as important as the sensory analysis itself<sup>4</sup>
- classical oenological lexicon and style are counterbalanced by a more personal and literary manner: “*Un trago de pasión, una pizca de paraíso auténtico. Blanco Somontano conseguirá que tu alma entre en calor. Una sonrisa larga, nunca amarga.*”<sup>5</sup> [A gulp of passion, a dash of true paradise. White Somontano will make your soul feel warmth. A long, never bitter, smile. BWB]
- wine’s name becomes imaginative and has a story to it, e.g. “*Vicious*”<sup>6</sup>, “*Chesa*”<sup>7</sup>, “*Monte Ondina*”<sup>8</sup>
- much more detailed food pairing is provided<sup>9</sup>
- option to buy wines online, unavailable until then<sup>10</sup>
- spider web graph<sup>11</sup> as a completely new presentation of the wine tasting sheet
- winery as a place for social events<sup>12</sup>
- detailed number of the bottles produced<sup>13</sup>

This remarkable amplification of the Spanish tasting notes traditional attributes satisfies the requirement of the genre evolution without losing its integrity (Bhatia 2004: 112), yet the purpose of providing the number of the bottles produced might not be self-evident at first sight. One plausible explanation could be an imitation of the New World’s tasting note style, another, which I personally find more convincing, is the already mentioned “feeling of membership of an elitist oenological community” which probably is the true reason of offering it in the first place. The third could be what Bhatia calls ‘invasion of territorial integrity’:

[...] it is often the case that informative functions are more likely to be colonized by promotional functions than any other [...] A number of such instances of mixed genres are getting established and are being given innovative names, as in the case of *infomercial*, *infotainment* or *advertorial* (Bhatia 2004: 89).

However, Table 2 below reflects the situation in Somontano wineries, in relation to Australia, California and New Zealand, as it was in 2010.

Tasting sheet Sections	Somontano	Australia	California	New Zealand
<b>Disclosure of the winemaker's identity</b>	Habitually anonymous	Full name, photo and biodata are often provided	Full name, photo and biodata are often provided	Full name, picture and biodata are often provided
<b>Detailed information about the winery, its history, tasting room, other details</b>	Hardly if ever	Profuse details regarding winery's history, awards, owner's family, etc.	Details, such as virtual tasting room visit, social events organised, etc.	Winery's history, awards, previous vintages
<b>Tasting sheet style</b>	Always impersonal	1st person plural appears sometimes	1st person plural appears sometimes	Usually impersonal
<b>Technical data provided in a "laboratory" style</b>	Always at the beginning	Usually at the end, small fonts	Usually at the end, small fonts	Not always provided
<b>Traditional oenological lexicon</b>	Exclusively	Traditional, but also literary figures and style	Oenological lexicon, but free or fairly literary style	Oenological lexicon, but free or fairly everyday language
<b>Metaphors and other literary figures</b>	Only those proper of oenological lexicon	Poetical and descriptive phrases	e.g.: "...it is a testament to both vintage and the vineyard..."	Full liberty: "...exò skeleton of fine tannin..."
<b>Absence of "negatively" marked terms</b>	Total absence	Total absence	freely admitted: e.g.: "feral fox"	freely admitted e.g.: "a hint of hedge-pig nest"
<b>Details regarding harvesting, vinification, etc.</b>	Unusual in small wineries, more frequent in the big ones	Usually very complete, often a specific section of a website	Exhaustive	No fixed model, but often with number of details.
<b>Aging in a bottle / best for drinking</b>	Very seldom, mostly for <i>reserva</i> wines	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Food pairing and serving temperature</b>	Classical: reds with meats and cheeses, white with fish and poultry	Specific dishes suggested, e.g. <i>roast lamb</i>	Not always	Specific dishes suggested: <i>ossobuco and daube, with red fleshed game</i>
<b>Wine purchase directly from the website</b>	Not possible	Always	Frequently	Always

Table 2. Main differences observed among the wine tasting sheet corpora.

Genre flexibility requirement (Swales 1990) linked with the constant marketwise policy of taking advantage of all available resources, have resulted in wide adoption of digital media, and while this stage has been achieved since long by the New World cellars, for many Somontano wineries it is yet under process. While this evolution might have been forced by foreign market's requirements, compelling conventional Spanish internet pages to become more complex interactive websites, nothing yet of the kind of live audiovisual performances such as Gary Vaynerchuk's show<sup>14</sup> has been achieved. The closest to his sessions are certain presentations offered on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)<sup>15</sup> but none of them even comes close to his popularity, as his daily show has produced more than 800 episodes with hundreds of comments each<sup>16</sup>.

These multimodal and multimedia wine tasting comments, undoubtedly confirm the ability of the genre to transform itself including 'hybridization' or 'mixing' (Bhatia 2004: 88).

#### 4. WINE TASTING SHEET WITHIN THE FRAME OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

The three metafunctions defined in Halliday's (Halliday, 1989; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics, in whose frame J. R. Martin (Martin and White, 2005) has subsequently developed his Theory of Appraisal, namely: ideational, interpersonal and textual surprisingly match with the three already mentioned essential functions of a tasting note:

- to inform
- to allure
- to confirm the membership of a specific and exclusive discourse community.

Even though only the first one is explicit, the second is essential to the winery's commercial success; meanwhile the goal of the third one is subliminal and aimed directly at the consumer. A condition *sine qua non* for these communication objectives to be accomplished is that the winemaker writing the message and the reader receiving it share, at least partially, previous sensory experiences. Simultaneously, if the terms used by the author of the evaluation are excessively eccentric, the communication will be hindered and eventually might become abstruse:

The important point about such associations is that they communicate best in the context of what is already familiar. In such contexts words, on their own, carry no meanings; it is the experience that gives them the desired effect. [...] The innovation, the creativity or the exploitation becomes effective only in the context of the already available and familiar. (Bhatia, 2004:188)

Even the neologisms, those trendy words so frequent in *winespeak*, appear only in the contexts where their interpretation is fairly obvious (Lehrer 2003: 369). Their use is determined not so much by a true need to make up for a lexical void, but rather to reinforce the feeling of the membership of a specific discourse community.

#### 4.1. *SFL metafunctions and their counterparts in wine tasting sheets*

It seems unquestionable that sensory experiences are determined by the social *milieu* and that their imprint becomes crucial in setting the mode of interaction between the individuals who communicate with each other. Shared environment produces common experiences and understanding. The three metafunctions differentiated in Systemic Functional Linguistics: ideational, interpersonal and textual reflect correspondingly the accumulated by any individual knowledge, their interpersonal communication skills, and finally the manner in which a message needs to be elaborated and transmitted in order to fulfil its goal.

##### 4.1.1. Interpersonal metafunction

The type of interaction taking place between two communicating individuals is called by Martin (Martin and White 2005: 33-34) “negotiation”, as it implies existence of a power hierarchy between the two. Five different tasting sheet variants have been listed in Table 1 with four clearly differentiated author categories; hence it appears that practically anybody is able to make public their own comments about wine. The intrinsic weight of these comments, however, and even the manner in which they are expressed, are subordinated to the author’s position within their discourse community. Only those whose authority is either recognized beforehand, or assigned by default, may require responses or actions:

And as language –as expression and action– is simultaneously the construal and the construction of reality, these system networks reflect, in their limited way, the conception of reality of each interlocutor and the system of social values that motivate their speech behaviour (Bartlett 2004: 72).

As it can be inferred from Table 1, the hierarchical position of wine critics depends not only on their authority in the domain, with the *gurus* like Robert J. Parker, Jancis Robinson, or James Halliday outstanding in the field, but also on the discourse community within which the tasting note is delivered. An evaluation published by a winery on paper, without mentioning the author’s identity and labelled as “sensory” or “organoleptic” analysis, appears to acquire the status of an unquestionable scientific truth; conversely, if the tasting note is signed by a specific winemaker and published on the Internet, although it still enjoys an authoritative status, it becomes susceptible of and even forced to admit different evaluations.

##### 4.1.2. Textual metafunction

The goal of the textual metafunction in wine tasting domain is the cohesion of the information provided by the tasting entwined with Martin’s “negotiation of power”; it is the proof of a wine critic’s authority, even if the style of their tasting observations needs to be tailored to the discourse community to which it is addressed. Although Spanish



consumers are used to the traditional style authoritative remarks about wine, in the English speaking New World a clear need to mitigate the dominant position exercised by the in-home wine evaluator has resulted in a significant change in the attitude and style of a tasting note. The, until then, unquestionable opinion has transformed itself into an informed and skilled observation yearning to be also shared by the reader and wine consumer. Suddenly it is not only the wine itself which is worth supplying profuse details, but also the long road travelled to elaborate it, hence a considerable portion of the tasting sheet deals with the soil characteristics, cultivation, harvesting and vinification processes, and the total length of these sections is considerably greater than that of the tasting observations themselves. However, this desired proximity, action generating reaction, close contact between the “author” and the “reader” can only be immediate if they really remain in touch, as within the Internet, and if the sensory experiences described are truly shared. The message contained in the tasting comments should remain within the possibilities considered usual:

A field of human experience is composed of recurrent sequences of activities. Because they are recurrent, any sequence is to some extent predictable within a field, so that variations from such sequences are counter expectant. (Martin and Rose 2003: 101).

#### 4.1.3. Ideational metafunction

The largest part of the oenological lexicon is made up of olfactory and gustatory terms, unfortunately, these cannot be truly shared in the same way it is done with what is seen or heard. Due to the individualistic, even eccentric use of the terms applied to describe the wine’s aroma or bouquet, wine-tasting language is sometimes derogatively described as “winespeak”. Extremely unusual references and observations referred to wine seem to exceed expectations of an ordinary consumer, generating rejection and mockery, as it is often reflected in press commentaries:

They are seeking readers’ favourite examples of “ridiculous wordspeak” when it comes to wine. Here are some examples so far: “Describing it in terms of musk or pine or peat? I don’t know, it sounds like something you’d find on a forest floor rather than in a glass,” wrote dbcurrie. “I still think discussing wine’s legs is silly sounding,” wrote reader byte-myfoot (Parker 2008).

Habitually uncultivated senses of smell and taste either preclude good perception of specific odours or, at least, diminish the faculty of their recognition. This lack of comprehension on the one side, and seemingly capricious use of such terms on the other, have led to a suspicion that wine tasting is completely arbitrary and, should it be really so, tasting notes could be as well produced by a computer, just like the two examples below:

- “Premature almost second-rate Syrah. Throws out green tea, structured spice and forceful peach. Drink now through 2005.”

- “Tightly woven almost french-oaked Sparkler. Drops bing-cherry, soggy pineapple and atomic traces of marmalade. Drink now through April.”<sup>17</sup>

However, greater familiarity with the semi-technical and technical oenological terms will lead to a better understanding of a tasting note and, eventually, sensory experiences thus described can be shared and considered common to both wine critics and wine enthusiasts.

## 5. TASTING SHEET WITHIN THE FRAME OF THE APPRAISAL THEORY

The Appraisal Theory, first addressed by Iedema et al. (1994) and Eggins and Slade (1997), was further developed by Martin and White (2005). The concept of “appraisal” has been defined as follows:

The term ‘Appraisal’ is used as a cover-all term to encompass all evaluative uses of language, including those by which speakers/writers adopt particular value positions or stances and by which they negotiate these stances with either actual or potential respondents. (Martin 2001)<sup>18</sup>

A few years later the above definition was amplified and rewritten by Adendorff as:

In particular it seeks to provide an account of how language construes the interpersonal relationships of solidarity and power. It encompasses aspects of grammar which, in other contexts, have been grouped variously under headings such as modality, hedging, evidentiality, attitude and stance. Appraisal is mainly realized lexically although it can also be realized by whole clauses. (Adendorff 2004: 206).

Martin divides the appraisal resources existing in a language into three broad semantic domains: engagement, attitude and the graduation:

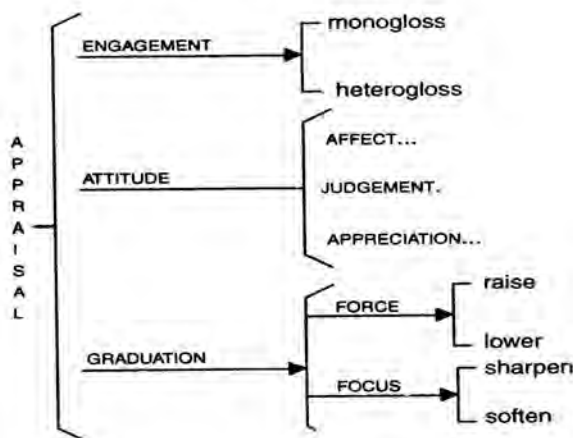


Figure 1. An overview of appraisal resources (Martin and White 2005: 38).

### 5.1. *Wine tasting and “engagement”*

“Engagement” and “attitude” are particularly important for tasting notes, as they reflect the winemaker’s position towards the elaborated wine and the winemaking process. Their professional and commercial obligation of emitting not only a favourable, but a truly enticing judgement must remain undisclosed, yet this is precisely the second goal of a tasting note: to allure and convince. This hidden aim can be achieved through two differentiated options: in the first one, “monoglossic”, winemaker’s authority is placed well above the reader’s, as is usual in “Spanish style” unquestionable assessments. Meanwhile, in the second one, considered “heteroglossic”, the intrinsic and previous acceptance of divergent voices reduces the rejection usually produced by an imposed evaluation, and the winemaker’s/ oenologist’s opinion seems to remain on the same level of authority as the wine consumer’s.

### 5.2. *Wine tasting and “appreciation”*

Of the three concepts belonging to the domain of “attitude”: “affect”, “judgement” and “appreciation”, only the third one is significant in the wine tasting linguistic analysis. As regards “affect”, wine tasting for professional reasons does not evoke any true emotions, except, may be the overall pleasure generated by its quality, nevertheless this feeling is being experimented by the drinker as a beneficiary of the process. “Judgement”, according to Martin, implies social or moral evaluation, grade of fulfilment or achievement of the established social norms and goals, therefore it has no application to wine tasting. Due to the above, only the concept of “appreciation”, which can be further differentiated into the notions of “reaction”, “composition” and “valuation”, will fall into the scope of our study.

As signalled by Martin (Martin and White 2005), these last three terms are related to mental processes. “Reaction” is linked with emotion: “[wine] youthful, lively and *alluring*”<sup>19</sup>; “composition” is related to perception: “highly *structured tannic core*”<sup>20</sup>; “all *framed by chalky, drying and faintly bony tannins*”<sup>21</sup>; and finally the “valuation” proper, i.e. the definite and complete outcome of the wine-tasting. [*My italics – BWB.*]. All these concepts will be further developed in the following section.

## 6. CASE STUDY

According to Moskovich (1982), even a small sample can be representative if a specific tendency is thus properly reflected. The representativeness of the study was ensured through the selection, in the four analysed regions, of the same six types of red wine already listed, namely: cabernet sauvignon; cabernet sauvignon blended with merlot; merlot; pinot noir, shiraz/syrah and tempranillo. Knowledge of the kind of grape and the vinification process it was submitted to, allows the wine critic to forecast many of the wine characteristics with certain accuracy, therefore the most significant

divergences in its evaluation had to be caused by cultural differences and, only to a lesser extent, by the wine itself.

### 6.1. *Heteroglossic and monoglossic engagement*

The specific use of verbs in English tasting notes has already been a subject of investigation (Caballero 2007) nevertheless their use in Spanish wine comments is, or used to be, significantly different. It is not their presence, but the absence which is striking, those scarce which appear are used in attributive function reflecting static situations, “*presenta un sorprendente color*”<sup>22</sup> [*presents a surprising colour*], “*aparecen los tostados*”<sup>23</sup> [*toasty nuances appear*], “*tiene un final largo y persistente*”<sup>24</sup> [*has a long and lingering finish*] [*my translation and italics – BWB.*]. Wine is not the “agent” but the “beneficiary” and the description of the transformation processes resembles a scientific report. The lack of personal commitment by the oenologist /winemaker seems absolute, their opinion loses any personal nuance coming close to a quasi-objective statement, nonetheless it must be remembered that this style has been perpetuated in Spain throughout the wine-growing history. Only one instance of personal commitment, in the form of possessive pronoun “*nos*”<sup>25</sup>, was used in the Spanish corpus, but even then it was an “all inclusive form” and not truly first person plural. [This rather radical affirmation has had to be nuanced recently, since foreign market requirements, and the oenological lexicon used there, have significantly influenced and modified traditional Spanish tasting note, moving it closer to the New World style.]

English notes, on the contrary, show a completely different approach: wine and aromas act on their own: “Pinot Noir *leaps* from *your* glass”<sup>26</sup>, “spicy prune nuances *amalgamate* to produce”<sup>27</sup>, “a rich, ripe entry *taunts* the mouth”<sup>28</sup>, “its layers *unfold* to reveal”<sup>29</sup>. This dynamic style and personification of wine constitute an extreme opposite of the Spanish tasting note, so distant and self-restrained. Additionally, due to the winemaker’s or oenologist’s name appearing explicitly on the sheet, wine evaluation is personal and committed, which turns out to be an advantage and a drawback at the same time: on the one hand the wine’s quality can be credited to a specific person, but on the other the status of unquestionability traditionally enjoyed by their Spanish counterparts is irretrievably lost. New World style personal involvement brings about frequent personal forms such as: “*we* find in *our* vineyards”<sup>30</sup> or “*we* believe it will develop”<sup>31</sup>.

### 6.2. *Appreciation*

According to Martin’s terminology, evaluation can be inscribed, i.e. expressed explicitly, or evocative, through induced feelings. Both interact in the tasting note, since intrinsically positive terms like “ripe”, “rich”, “savoury”, “wonderfully fresh” appear in parallel to words invoking youth and childhood: “marshmallow”<sup>32</sup>, “Life Savers

confectionery”<sup>33</sup>, “Manuka Honey”<sup>34</sup>, or metaphors of freedom and wilderness: “fur of an animal”<sup>35</sup>, “like a briar growing through straw mulch after recent rain”<sup>36</sup>. However, the poetically inspired author needs to keep in mind that an excessively imaginative tasting note may result hilarious or pretentious to a “non-initiated. It did happen with the just mentioned expression of “a briar growing...”<sup>37</sup>

A third possibility, signalled by Addendorff: “Appraisal is mainly realized lexically although it can also be realized by whole clauses” (op.cit.) appears when words which, by themselves, do not convey intrinsically positive connotations, e.g. “long”, “structure”, “complex”, “layer” become positively marked due to their oenological collocations: “long finish”, “powerful structure”, “complex amalgam”, “rich layers” or even: “intense dark fruit core”, “luscious in character and sporting silky, rather than harsh, tannins”<sup>38</sup>. Obviously, this technique is also present in Spanish tasting notes, and even though there are no youth or childhood invocations, no wilderness or nature, the sought after sensation of “exclusivity” is also obtained through their specific style resulting from the accumulation of oenological terms and seemingly exotic fruits like “cassis”, “*grosella negra*” [blackcurrants], “*frutos del bosque*” [forest fruits] or “*frutos negros*” [dark/black fruits].

### 6.2.1. Fruit taxonomy

The three components of “appreciation”: “reaction”, “composition” and “valuation” present a striking parallel with the three tasting stages: “visual”, “olfactory” and “taste” proper. Spanish tasting notes generally include all of them; therefore visually we might have “*un profundo color cereza*” [a deep cherry colour], from the olfactory point of view: “*nariz sugestiva y compleja*” [a complex and insinuating nose] and regarding taste: “*paladar suave y redondo*” [soft and round palate]. Conspicuous accumulation of terms referring to fruit such as those already mentioned above: “cassis”, “blackcurrants” or “forest fruits” isn’t truly meant to evoke factual sensory experiences, since very few Spaniards know their real taste, but rather to arouse alluring and exotic sensations. English “deeply scented Black Forest cherries”<sup>39</sup>, “wafts of toasted marshmallows”<sup>40</sup>, “nicoise black olive tapenade”<sup>41</sup> pursue the same goal significantly increasing positive connotations thus produced; comprehension and use of exotic and literary terms additionally confirm the membership of an exclusive discourse hence social community.

Purely statistical data obtained with the WordSmith Tools programme regarding “fruit class” show that these terms build up an average of 4.1% of a tasting note’s contents in Spanish, 4.6% for California, 6.0% for New Zealand and 6.3% for Australia. If Spanish wines were to be exported to Australia, the self-restrained style of their tasting notes, together with the small variety of fruits mentioned, would probably clash negatively with the extremely rich scope of Australian fruit options<sup>42</sup>.

## 6.2.2. Adjectives

The most striking characteristic of tasting notes is probably the complete absence of negatively marked terms, tasted wines, seemingly, do not ever have any objectionable features. The majority of the encountered adjectives bring positive connotations intrinsically, other acquire them through the context: “*gran*” [great], “*sabroso*,” [savoury], “*intenso*” [intense], “*carnoso*” [fleshy/meaty], “*maduro*” [ripe/mature], “*prolongado*” [lingering/lasting] go along with “rich”, “ripe”, “smooth”, “long” or “balanced”. Meanwhile “*Complejo*” or “complex”, which could be negative in another context, are always positive in the wine lexical domain (Lehrer 2009: 15), as well as “*persistente*” / “persistent”, “*profundo*”/ “deep”, etc.

Adjectives expressing colour of the wine are especially important in Spanish notes, different shades of “red” are usually further modified and complemented: “rojo *granate* bien cubierto” [deep garnet red], “rojo *granate* de gran intensidad” [exceedingly intense garnet red], “rojo *rubí* con tonos *teja* de gran intensidad” [*ruby* red with intense *tile* red nuances], “rojo *guinda* con tonos violetas” [*morello cherry* red with violet nuances], “intenso rojo [...] *picota* [intense *cherry* red]”. Yet even these references do not easily find correspondence in English, as in this language the principal wine colour reference, if used, is not “ruby” or “bigarreau / morello cherry”, but “crimson”, “rich plum with crimson hues”, “glistening purple”, “opaque black red colour” even “deep garnet hue with its cusp of purple”.

Complete lack of any colour /visual references in California tasting notes results rather atypical, especially taking into account that in the three remaining wine-growing regions this is the first stage of tasting, never omitted. This culturally marked omission might be explained by local norms, obliging the winemaker to identify on the label the specific varietal or the heritage of grapes –in Europe called *coupage*– used to produce the wine inside the bottle, implying therefore its colour (red, white or rosé). The importance of the information about the colour, considered superfluous in California and exceptionally important elsewhere, is not due to the objective, scientifically measured data regarding red colour light frequency, but to the stylistically marked terms used to describe it. Conspicuous accumulation of words with highly positive connotations like: “garnet”, “ruby”, “crimson” or “purple” contributes to creation of the overwhelmingly select and desired setting.

The remarkable absence of chromatic terms in tasting notes seems to exert a notable influence on countries importing New World wines and who have scarce oenological tradition themselves; over the span of last 10 years none of the tasting notes published in a Polish specialized bimonthly “*Magazyn Wino*” had any mention of colour terms, even though the original Australian, New Zealand or Spanish producers had provided such information.<sup>43</sup>

### 6.2.3. Specialized oenological terms

“Textured tannins”, “matured in oak”, “medium bodied”, “mid-palate”, these terms reinforce the semi-conscious feeling of belonging to an exclusive discourse community within which their use is natural, necessary and expected by the reader. From the viewpoint of the Theory of Appraisal their function seems rather neutral, and their use could be compared to the invisible basic structure of a building giving support to its visible furnishings: here a literary style wine description. It should be borne in mind that wine, together with its oenological terminology, has always been present in Spanish culture and history, accompanying equally the wealthy and the poor, therefore even highly specialized words like “*aromas primarios*” [primary aromas], “*estructura tánica*” [tannin structure] or “*un retrogusto fino*” [fine aftertaste], are not considered really learned. Conversely, in English *winespeak* has become familiar among ordinary people only recently and “tight-grain French oak barrels”, “medium weight palate” or “a palate of gravely tannins” still do not belong to everyday expressions and are tilted as professional or snobbish jargon. The only truly erudite oenological term encountered in the analysed Spanish corpus was “*empironeumático*”<sup>44</sup> meaning “smelling burnt”.

### 6.2.4. Rare and unusual terms

Table 3 below provides a selection of most unusual, in our opinion, English oenological terms extracted from the compiled corpora. The acronyms can be easily identified as: CS-Cabernet Sauvignon; PN-Pinot Noir; Shi-Shiraz; M-Merlot; CSM-Cab. Sauvignon blended with Merlot; T-Tempranillo. A corresponds to Australia; C to California; NZ to New Zealand; numbers identify specific wines from the corpora whose tasting notes had been analysed.

Common terms employed in an unusual way together with the truly rare references are particularly interesting from the viewpoint of the Theory of Appraisal, even despite their contradictoriness with the previously cited principle: “variations from such sequences are counterexpectant” (Martin, op. cit.). They foster certain aura of exoticism, attraction and poetry, “weaves a tapestry of flavors centered on a concentrated core of currant, black cherry”<sup>45</sup>; “Manuka Honey complexity”<sup>46</sup>; “flirting strawberry creamy yogurt and freshly cut rhubarb aromatics unwittingly entice...”<sup>47</sup>. Purely technical oenological terms, like those mentioned in the previous section, seem too “dry” to create a sensation of something exceptional, exotic and highly desired. These qualities do not need to be accurately defined; it is precisely their indefiniteness, which makes the wine so desirable.

CALIFORNIA	AUSTRALIA	NEW ZEALAND
contribution weaves a tapestry of flavour centered on a concentrated core of currant, black cherry, blackberry and sweet cigar smoke... (CSM-CA-3)	Flirting strawberry yoghurt creamy and freshly cut rhubarb aromatics unwittingly entice (Shi-A-1)	greet the nose and fuse with wafts of toasted marshmallow (PN-NZ-2)
infused with brambly blackberry fruit... (CSM-CA-5)	reminiscent of Life Savers confectionary (PN-A-1)	savoury thorny understory like a briar growing through straw mulch after recent rain (PN-NZ-2)
on your patio, or a hearty pasta dish enjoyed by the fire (Shi-CA-2)	mineral acidity and fine lacy tannins (CSM-A-1)	sweet fleshy grilled crimson plums on a bed of grated roast beetroot (PN-NZ-2)
unmistakable richness or decadence (M-CA-5)	a slight gaminess (PN-A-3)	Manuka honey complexity (PN-NZ-2)
darkness of tea leaf, humid forest, and a feral quality, like the fur of an animal or the nape of a neck (PN-CA-4)	the meaty element gives way to a very fragrant musk, lavender and talcum powder note. (PN-A-1)	run through the palate as smoothly as a Humvee over judder bars on an ocean boulevard (PN-NZ-2)
a splash of bacon fat (PN-CA-5)	...even coating of talc-like tannins (CS-A-4)	the wine has the intensity of a babbling brook (PN-NZ-2)
nicoise black olive tapenade (Shi-CA-5)		
Chinese camphor (Shi-CA-1)	a barrel-fermented vapour net entraps (Shi-A-1)	flavours are marshalled into clean, well defined lines by a stern palate edge (PN-NZ-2)
hibiscus tea (T-CA-4)		
dusty spice (T-CA-4)		
smoked butcher block (Shi-CA-1)	...developing a sooty mineral edge (CS-A-5)	florals arrive and evaporate into kind of strawberry transparency (PN-NZ-5)
boar sausage, cured meat (Shi-CA-5)		
western aspect of Madder Lake (T-CA-2)	edgy acidity and fine gritty mineral tannins (T-A-1)	

Table 3. *Unusual English references.*

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have tried to show that “wine tasting sheet” can be rightfully considered “genre” as it fully complies with the linguistic requirements listed by e.g. Swales and Bhatia.

The Systemic Functional Linguistics’ approach has resulted particularly suitable for analysing texts with specific communication goals, such as tasting notes. SFL’s three



metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal and textual coincide to a great extent with the three goals of a wine tasting sheet: to inform, to allure and to make one feel being a member of an exclusive group of people knowledgeable about wine. While certain measurable data provided explicitly within a tasting sheet contribute to its technically objective appearance, the main goal of a tasting note remains subliminal: to convince the prospective reader into buying this specific bottle of wine.

Since sheer advertising would entail diminishing the established semi technical appearance of a tasting note offering neutral, measurable information, subtle yet effective words, charged with positive connotations, are to be chosen. Differentiated means include:

- evoked sensory sensations,
- reminiscences from childhood and youth,
- exotic and alluring effects,
- savoury local and exotic fruits,
- enthralling flavours,
- variety of intrinsically positive adjectives,
- positive contamination of substantially neutral terms,
- accumulation of oenological terms,
- unusual and attractive references.

Any genre whose intention is to stimulate a factual or emotional response from the receiver and, very specially, the wine tasting sheet, may, and should be, analysed in the Appraisal Theory frame, as defined by Martin (Martin and White 2005). In spite of the seemingly mostly technical information contained in such a text, intrinsic cultural differences, existent even within the same language, here English, require a careful sociolinguistic grounding before any translation to a different language is attempted. Simultaneously, since marketwise commercial policies generally act outside any linguistic constraints, mutual permeability, although biased in favour of the New World tasting comments style, is swiftly streaming all idiosyncratic features into the common characteristics, shared by all producers and consumers. Wine tasting lexis, and even the bare structure of the genre *wine tasting note*, seem susceptible of being influenced and “contaminated” through translations. This phenomenon appears to become even more substantial and noticeable in languages and countries deprived of proper oenological tradition and lexis which are now building them up using translations as “building blocks”. The research I have already initiated is signalling that certain subliminal evaluative features of “winespeak” tend to disappear due to the translator’s insufficient skills or, to the contrary, are unintentionally and unconsciously created because of the very same reason.

## NOTES

\* Corresponding author: BOZENA WISLOCKA BREIT. Departamento Lingüística Aplicada a la Ciencia y a la Tecnología. E.U. de Informática, UPM. Campus Sur Carretera de Valencia, Km 7 28031 Madrid. bozena.wislocka@upm.es

<sup>1</sup> International Organization of Vine and Wine [www.oiv.org](http://www.oiv.org) (09.03.12).

- <sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.bodegapirineos.net/?ids=641> (09.03.2012). This paper was originally written in 2010; two years have elapsed since and certain characteristics, of a tasting note writing style have evolved making Spanish notes appear more like the New World ones. (BWB, March 2012).
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.bodega-ottobestue.com/english/index.htm> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.bodegairius.com/productos.html> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.bodegasabinasa.com/> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>6</sup> [http://www.bodegasestada.com/vinos\\_autor/index.htm](http://www.bodegasestada.com/vinos_autor/index.htm) (12.03.2012).
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.bodegaschesa.com/> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.monteodina.com/esp/sender.asp> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.bodegasmeler.com/vistas/producto/MELER-CHARDONNAY.aspx> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.alodia.es/?mod=tienda>; <http://www.bodegaslaus.com/tienda.php?idioma=ESP> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.bodegapirineos.net/download.php?id=986> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.bodegaslalanne.es/bodas-en-lalanne.html> (12.03.2012); [http://www.bodegasabinasa.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=22:abinasa-detalles-para-bodas&catid=1](http://www.bodegasabinasa.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=22:abinasa-detalles-para-bodas&catid=1) (12.03.2012).
- <sup>13</sup> <http://www.bodegassers.es/> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>14</sup> <http://garyvaynerchuk.com> (09.03.12).
- <sup>15</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=cata+de+vinos&oq=cata+&aq=5&aqi=g10&aql=1&gs\\_sm=1&gs\\_upl=27591341510118294151010101851356151510](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cata+de+vinos&oq=cata+&aq=5&aqi=g10&aql=1&gs_sm=1&gs_upl=27591341510118294151010101851356151510) (09.03.2012).
- <sup>16</sup> <http://tv.winelibrary.com/index.php?s=Episode+%23900> (10.03.2012).
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.gmon.com/tech/output.shtml> (05.03.2012).
- <sup>18</sup> <http://grammatics.com/appraisal/AppraisalGuide/AppraisalGuideWPFiles.html> (09.03.2012).
- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.grangeforsale.com/forsale.php?Grange=1389> (09.03.2012).
- <sup>20</sup> <http://www.bravantevineyards.com/index.cfm?method=products.productDrilldown&productID=df4f8c57-1cc4-81ae-753d-dc82512afb91&pageID=7be0a8e0-082a-9916-533e-47840b2b4352&sortBy=DisplayOrder&> (09.03.12).
- <sup>21</sup> <http://www.chwine.com/wine/evergreen/2005meritage/> (02.08.09, actually nonexistent).
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.vinasdelvero.es> (22.02.09).
- <sup>23</sup> <http://www.vinasdelvero.es> (22.02.09).
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www.sibaritia.com/vinos/leonor-lalanne-merlot-crianza-p-194.html> (29.03.10).
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.vinasdelvero.es> (22.02.09).
- <sup>26</sup> <http://assets3.casellawines.com.au/assets/RlaSPZCLH8Pw2C1/yt-pn.pdf> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.okahuestate.co.nz/site/index.php> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>28</sup> 2004 Reserve Merlot Chateau St Jean (29.03.10).
- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.gallosonoma.com/varietals/sonoma-reserve-pinot-noir.asp> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>30</sup> <http://www.kenswineguide.com/wine.php?wine=4063> (12.03.12).
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.grovemill.co.nz/wines/view/1040> (29.03.2010), actually nonexistent.
- <sup>32</sup> <http://www.margrainvineyard.co.nz/tastings/index.html#riversedgepinotnoir> (22.03.09, actually nonexistent).
- <sup>33</sup> [http://www.darenberg.com.au/sites/default/files/TastingNotes/2007\\_The\\_Feral\\_Fox\\_Pinot\\_Noir.pdf](http://www.darenberg.com.au/sites/default/files/TastingNotes/2007_The_Feral_Fox_Pinot_Noir.pdf) (12.03.2012).
- <sup>34</sup> <http://www.margrainvineyard.co.nz/tastings/index.html#riversedgepinotnoir> (22.03.09, actually nonexistent).
- <sup>35</sup> <http://www.wine.com/V6/Hanzell-Pinot-Noir-2006/wine/102114/detail.aspx> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>36</sup> <http://www.margrainvineyard.co.nz/tastings/index.html#riversedgepinotnoir> (22.03.09, actually nonexistent).
- <sup>37</sup> <http://www.goseewrite.com/2010/02/funny-wine-tasting-notes/> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>38</sup> [http://www.atasteofmonterey.com/assets/files/newsletters/newsletter\\_03\\_2011.pdf](http://www.atasteofmonterey.com/assets/files/newsletters/newsletter_03_2011.pdf) (12.03.2012) Cimacollina wines.
- <sup>39</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/food-wine/533498/Putting-wines-into-words> (12.03.2012) This is a quote, the original webpage was consulted on 29.03.2009.
- <sup>40</sup> <http://www.margrainvineyard.co.nz/tastings/index.html#riversedgepinotnoir> (29.03.10 actually nonexistent).
- <sup>41</sup> [http://www.peayvineyards.com/archive\\_syrah.shtml](http://www.peayvineyards.com/archive_syrah.shtml) (12.03.12).
- <sup>42</sup> Obviously this observation has been invalidated by the on-going changes in the Spanish tasting notes style; see the footnote nr <sup>15</sup> above.
- <sup>43</sup> *Magazyn Wino*. Warszawa; founded in 2002, [www.magazynwino.pl](http://www.magazynwino.pl) (12.03.2012).
- <sup>44</sup> <http://www.bodegasserradeguara.es/htm/es/prod2/control?zone=pub&sec=prod2&pag=ver&id=3&loc=es> (12.03.2012).
- <sup>45</sup> <http://www.chwine.com/wine/lot/55> (12.03.2012)
- <sup>46</sup> <http://www.chwine.com/wine/evergreen/2005meritage/> (02.08.09, actually nonexistent).
- <sup>47</sup> <http://www.margrainvineyard.co.nz/repn.html> (12.03.2012) <http://www.margrainvineyard.co.nz/tastings/index.html#riversedgepinotnoir> (22.03.09, actually nonexistent).

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