

Chapter 8

A Phenomenological Model For Generating the Tasting Description of Japanese Sake

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author proposes a multifaceted representation model for the sensory domain of taste, especially the taste of sake. The author aims to bridge the domain of taste and the domain of words and, on the basis of the findings of the first-person-singular study, proposes that the pictorial description, together with the verbal description, can achieve the aim. As the results of the study, the author finds the difference between the manner of description of the PTG (primary taste group for sake: sweetness, umami, and acidity) and the STG (stimulus taste group: astringency and dryness). The PTG tends to be described in curvy shapes; in contrast, the STG tends to be represented in linear patterns.

INTRODUCTION

The description process (typically by sommeliers) of tastes and odors is widely thought to involve the following assumptions:

1. The wine has some flavors,
2. The taster detects the flavors via olfactory receptors,
3. The taster selects one of the flavors,
4. The taster identifies the exact word for the flavor.

This can be called “a binomial model of the sense and the expressions,” which leads to a myth: There would be a “right perception” and a “right expression.” However, in actual situations, our perceptual representations of taste or smell are often vague, and a set of verbal expressions is not given. In this paper, we adopt a phenomenological model that claims that the taste of the *sake* does not exist in the

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sake itself: It *appears* or *arises* between *sake* and the subject (taster) as a personal image. In other words, the object (in this case, the taste of *sake* in the real world) cannot exist independently of the subject (the taster). In this paper, the author tries to deal with not the object itself, but the “experienced representation of the object” from a first-person point of view, which highlights “my tasting experiences” as “I taste something.” This paper seeks to develop a multi-faceted model for generating tasting representations.

BACKGROUND

The studies of the narrative are expanding toward various neighboring domains. shows the expanding structure of the narratology as “A comprehensive framework for research in narrative generation.” In the framework, Ogata classifies the research into four phases; the Narrative generation systems, Interdisciplinary narratology, Narratological approaches to various fields, and Related studies in the broadest sense.

This study is an attempt and an illustration of the analyzation of the multi-faceted narratological description of the sensory information. More specifically, the aim of this study is to show the relationships between the two modes of description – the verbal description and the pictorial description – of the sense of taste. This study would be classified into the “Narratological approaches to various fields” in the Ogata’s framework.

Among the inter-disciplinal domain of narratology, one of the most living areas would be the cognitive narratology. A series of cognitive scientific studies by Kanai et al. (Kanai & Kodama, 2010; Kanai & Ogata, 2004a, 2004b) has tried to reveal the relationships among story, non-story, or discourse, especially in films.

The author’s study can be lined up in these cognitive narratological studies. Yet, the study presented in this chapter deals with rather lower – sensory level– cognition.

A natural language is generally an audiovisual-dominant symbol system. It categorizes the world into words: Cats are differentiated from dogs, which, in turn, are differentiated from wolves. Cats, dogs, and wolves are grouped together as a category of animals, which is different from fruit, which includes apples and oranges. Thus, a language operates according to the principle of differentiation. The principle works strongly or weakly in different domains because each domain has its intrinsic discriminable power. The discriminability of the sensory perception of taste is considerably weak, and thus, the number of words that name tastes directly is limited to not more than 10 words in the case of Japanese; these are the words for the *five basic tastes*, *astringency*, and *dryness*, plus a few words for complex tastes like *roku* (or ‘rich taste’).

It can be said that producing the representations of taste has two difficulties: the lack of discriminability or differentiation and the lack of expressions for the domain of taste. However, the door to the verbal expression of the taste is not completely shut.

Majid and Burenhult (2014) did a study with speakers of Jahai (a language spoken by hunter-gatherers in the Malay Peninsula) and suggested that the long-held assumption that people are bad at naming smells is not universally true. Jahai has a dozen different words to describe smells of different qualities. In a comparative study, Majid and Burenhult found that Jahai speakers were better able to name odors differentially and concisely than their English-speaking counterparts. On the basis of the results, they claim that odors are expressible in language, as long as one “speaks the right language.” What is, then, “the right language” to describe the sensory perception of taste?

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