

## **The organicist-animist metaphor in Italian wine media discourse**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to analyze the main aspects of the organicist-animist metaphor in Italian wine tasting discourse and to identify its main characteristics in the specialized media discourse. Commencing from an approach whose overall view is guided by conceptual metaphor theory, we will analyze and classify the main elements of the metaphorical schema associated with the organicist-animist metaphor related to wine and wine tasting. We will illustrate this category by examples taken from a corpus of excerpts of Italian media discourse.

Tackling the issue of perception and description of wine in Italian media discourse allows us an orientation of the research by multiple approaches of the semantics of winespeak: the recognition of essential aspects of wine imaginary, with a focus on the organicist-animist metaphor in our research corpus; the analysis of sensory impressions and representations in winespeak.

Our main aim is to organize conceptualizations of wine tasting notes into a main category – the organicist-animist metaphor – , following the model inspired by the research of Lakoff and Johnson (*Metaphors we live by*, 1980).

**Keywords:** conceptual metaphors, description, Italian media discourse, organicist-animist metaphor, perception, senses, wine, winespeak.

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## 1 Introduction

The conceptual metaphor theory, as it was conceived by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, allows an extension of the use of the concept of metaphor outside the literary domain. The two authors assert that, far from being a simple figure of speech aimed to convey vivid poetic images, which represents only an aspect of this concept, the metaphor's dimension is different. Their assertion is supported by the exemplification with current expressions, certainly metaphorical, but which, by continuous use have become routine and have lost the novelty that characterizes metaphors in literary context, and are not anymore perceived as such by the speaker or by the reader. On the basis of these examples, it is possible for us to reconstruct a "pattern" of thinking, situated at the origin of these expressions, everything being integrated into a coherent structure. The two authors emphasize, as important feature of the metaphor, its coherent and systematic character. Thus, metaphor turns into a verbal materialization of certain mental processes, of mechanisms of thinking that allow the representation, the acquisition, the understanding, the expression, the memorization and the organization of abstract cognitive contents. Thus, this non-literary dimension of metaphor, which is called by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) conventional metaphor, and which is materialized at the level of speech, is a projection of the way in which the speaker can operate with abstract concepts, hardly cognoscible, by comparison to the empiric world, through direct experience. The new dimension of the metaphor, once underlined, reveals the coherent and systematic way in which our knowledge is organized according to a *pattern* known a priori and expressed metaphorically.

In their attempt to describe and explain the metaphor from a cognitive perspective, the two authors point out the existence of several metaphorical structures or schematas. These are complementary elements, endowed with distinctive features and carrying out different functions depending on the context. These interact and they are encompassed within a system of relationships that allow the realization of a coherent and logic system of representation of knowledge within a conceptual framework.

The corpus chosen for the study of figurative language used by wine specialists in Italian media discourse is analyzed starting from an approach whose perspective is directed by conceptual metaphor theory. The main objective is to analyze the main aspects of the organicist-animist metaphor in Italian wine tasting discourse and to identify its main characteristics in the specialized media discourse. We will illustrate this category by examples taken from a corpus of

excerpts of Italian media discourse such as: [www.lavinium.com](http://www.lavinium.com) (an online review on wine and culture), [www.civiltadelbere.com](http://www.civiltadelbere.com) (literally meaning “Drinking culture”, the Italian review of wine and gastronomic culture), [www.igrandivini.com](http://www.igrandivini.com) (an online oenological review), [www.euposia.it](http://www.euposia.it) (an online review on wines, territories, cultures and itineraries)<sup>2</sup>.

Tackling the issue of perception and description of wine in Italian media discourse allows us an orientation of the research by several approaches of the semantics of winespeak: the identification of essential aspects of wine imaginary, with a focus on the organicist-animist metaphor in our research corpus; the analysis of sensory impressions and representations in winespeak.

Several authors and researchers (Caballero, Diaz-Vera: 2013; Suárez-Toste: 2007; Caballero and Suárez-Toste: 2010, 2008, Lehrer: 2009, Paradis, Egg-Olofsson: 2013) have contended that conceptual metaphors are pervasive in wine media discourse and in wine tasting discourse. In order to explain the wide range of sensations and perceptions in wine tasting, several metaphorical extensions are used and these depend on different source domains such as human beings or organisms, plants, objects and so on. Since it has been argued that the organicist-animist metaphor is the most conspicuous, we will check whether or not the conceptual frame WINE IS A LIVING BEING/HUMAN BEING is a recurrent schema in Italian wine media discourse and analyze the main subdivisions of the organicist-animist metaphorical schema.

We selected the media genre of online wine reviewing as primary source of information about sensory perceptions related to wine tasting and wine drinking since almost all the excerpts of Italian reviews in our corpus provide descriptions of all sensory experiences - that is taste, vision, smell and touch, which permit holistic remarks on the understanding and perception of the experience of wine on the basis of all four.

## 2 Wine metaphors in Italian media discourse

Particular conceptual metaphors have been recognized as characteristic of specialized discourses. Starting from the primary categories of conceptual metaphors identified by Caballero and Suárez-Toste (2008) in the language of

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<sup>2</sup>Within the corpus of examples we will use the following abbreviations: LV for [lavinium.com](http://lavinium.com), CDB for [civiltadelbere.it](http://civiltadelbere.it), IGV for [igrandivini.com](http://igrandivini.com), and EP for [euposia.it](http://euposia.it).

wine reviewing and wine tasting in English – 1) WINES ARE LIVING BEINGS, 2) WINES ARE CLOTHES, 3) WINES ARE THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARTIFACTS, 4) WINES ARE BUILDINGS, 5) WINES ARE SHAPEABLE PIECES OF WOOD OR METAL BUILDING MATERIALS – our corpus-based research aims to check whether or not evidence is given of the main category of conceptual metaphor related to wine (the organicist-animist metaphor) in Italian media discourse.

The metaphorical expressions in Italian are not to be considered as mere figures of speech, but rather as terms with a referential function, terms which belong to a specialized language and vocabulary. This lexicon is reflected in specialized magazines and websites whose target-public is represented by wine professionals, as well as wine drinkers. That is why our data sources are represented by wine reviews and articles and wine tasting notes published in Italian online magazines and reviews. Most of the metaphorical expressions in our corpus are conveyed by verbal collocations and adjectives followed by nouns.

The organicist-animist metaphor WINE IS A HUMAN BEING is reflected in our corpus by a wide range of instantiations:

1. “PODERE FORTUNA – MCDLXV, Pinot nero Igt Toscana 2009 -In bocca è *corposo, levigato*, tondo, ma un po’ molle con un finale amarotico”. (CDB)
2. “Cembali 2007: *robusto, caldo, sapido e deciso*” (IGV)
3. “Cergem 97: vino abbastanza *equilibrato/equilibrato*” (LV)
4. “Come sempre, in occasione del vernissage, sarà possibile assaporare i vini della “Tenuta Tenaglia”: il Piemonte Chardonnay DOC, fresco e profumato, l’“EdenRose” il vino dal piacevole color della rosa, e il Grignolino del Monferrato Casalese Doc, dal particolare colore cerasuolo e il più *strutturato* e vellutato “Bricco Crea”, Barbera d’Asti Docg” (EP)
5. “Pinot Nero case Via 1999: La bocca è *sensuale, fresca*, immediata nella sua piacevolezza, i tannini sono molto fini e misurati, il corpo quasi *femminile, morbido*”. (LV)
6. “Combination 2002: Un vino, dunque, da provare senza esitazioni e da prendere per quello che è: *moderno, sensuale, ben fatto*, da bersi al tavolo con gli amici accompagnato”. (LV)
7. “Poggio di Sotto. *Elegante e austero*, con sentori di erbe officinali”. (IGV)
8. “Brico di Treiso 2009: In tutto sono 10 ettari, e per produrre questa

etichetta utilizziamo esclusivamente le uve migliori e solo nelle annate eccellenti con l'obiettivo di ottenere un Barbaresco un po' diverso, sempre *ricco* di complessità, concentrazione e rotondità". (CDB)

9. "Vino di Fiano di Avellino: [...] il vino che se ne ricava è sicuramente quello che presenta il più *ricco* corredo di profumi ed aromi, è il più elegante ed ha una vita lunghissima". (LV)
10. "Recioto della Valpolicella Classico 2001: Potresti definirlo un liquido *carnoso* o una *bevanda mangiabile*" (LV)
11. "Juvé y Camps, Reserva Cinta Purpura DO Cava Brut: Al naso profumi di crema pasticciera e mela golden; il palato è *complesso*, fresco, con note citrine su un finale nuovamente cremoso". (EP)

The organicist-animist metaphor activates an elaborate metaphorical schema which underlines different aspects of wine, such as personal qualities: *abbastanza equilibrato/equilibrato* (*sufficiently balanced/balanced*), *sapido* (*spirited, spiritual*), *deciso* (*decided, resolute*) and physical qualities: *di corpo* (*full-bodied*), *strutturato* (*structured*), *robusto* (*robust*), *sensuale* (*sensual, sexy*), *carnoso* (*fleshy*).

The organicist-animist metaphor can be subdivided into a five-patterned design<sup>3</sup> which highlights olfactory, visual, tactile and gustatory facets of wine:

Metaphorical design	Wine element	Linguistic metaphor
Age within human lifecycle	Wine's evolutive state	<i>maturo</i> ( <i>mature</i> ), <i>giovanissimo</i> ( <i>very young</i> )
Physical traits/anatomy	Structure	<i>carnoso</i> ( <i>fleshy</i> ), <i>liquido carnoso</i> ( <i>fleshy liquid</i> ), <i>bevanda mangiabile</i> ( <i>edible drink</i> ), <i>morbido</i> ( <i>soft</i> )

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<sup>3</sup> Also consult Bratož's (2013: 28-30) case study comparing the realization of anthropomorphic metaphor in Slovene and English winespeak and the four-element metaphor schema profiled by Isabel Negro (2012:5-8). Negro highlights the importance of the metaphorical schema built around the wine's body.

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	Body and balance	and	<i>di corpo (full-bodied), strutturato (structured), robusto (robust), sensuale (sensual, sexy), femminile (effeminate), pieno (full, full-bodied), femminile (feminine), maschile (masculine)</i>
	Alcohol level		<i>caldo (warm), corposo (corpulent)</i>
Personality and temperament features	Balance, alcohol and aroma/flavour	and	<i>sapido (sapid, savoury, full-bodied, powerful, full-flavoured, tasty, tangy, spiritual, spirited), deciso (decided, resolute, settled), abbastanza equilibrato/equilibrato (sufficiently balanced/balanced), ben fatto (well done, well worked)</i>
	Intensity of flavours	of	<i>austero (austere), complesso (complex)</i>
Economic status	Wine wealth		<i>ricco (rich), ricco (corredo) (rich trousseau)</i>
General appearance	General appearance		<i>levigato(refined), moderno (modern), elegante (elegant), complesso (complex)</i>

If we take a close look at the subdivisions in the metaphorical schema - physical appearance and personality - temperament, we can assert that at the core of them we come upon a large number of metaphors describing wine ingredients bearing upon two senses – smell and vision *austero (austere)*, accompanied by the intensity of flavours (taste) *austero (austere), complesso (complex)*, which is defined in correlation with alcohol and tannin level (*caldo (warm), corposo (corpulent)*), balance and general appearance: (*abbastanza equilibrato/equilibrato (sufficiently balanced/balanced), elegante (elegant)*). Wine balance is metaphorically portrayed by physical strength (*di corpo (full-bodied), strutturato (structured), robusto (robust)*), physical attractiveness (*sensuale (sensual, sexy)*), as well as by an inner quality – that is distinction in terms of style and behaviour (*levigato (refined), moderno (modern), elegante (elegant)*).



Source: <http://www.civiltadelbere.com/sapido/>

What is strikingly interesting is that a commonly-used adjective in Italian winespeak such as “sàpido” is associated with a wide range of connotations, depending on the context in which it is employed. Its particular meanings allow us to framework it within one subdivision of the metaphorical schema WINE IS A HUMAN BEING within personality and temperament features: *sapid*, *savoury*, *full-bodied*, *powerful*, *full-flavoured*, *tasty*, *tangy*, *spiritual*, *spirited*. Originating from the Latin term “sapidus” (i.e. present active infinitive of *sapio* (“I taste; or I am wise”), the specialized dictionaries convey its primary meaning: “ricco di sapere” (rich in flavour, richly-flavoured), but nowadays, in specialized wine reviews and wine media discourse, we discover that it covers several meanings as the ones already mentioned above: *full-bodied*, *powerful*, *tangy*, *spiritual*, *spirited*.

On our research corpus, we notice that the metaphorical expressions construed around the wine’s body and its balance refer to a human being’s physical structure and gender role. Gender metaphors assign a sexual role to wines as well as male or female properties as in the examples below:

1. “Vintage de le Tenute La Montina di Monticelli Brusati: Questo secondo Vintage è un vino dal lungo affinamento sui lieviti che trova il proprio compimento nella versione Extra Brut, la più naturale, *maschile* e classica del Franciacorta. Composto da 45% Pinot nero e 55% Chardonnay,

matura lentamente in bottiglia per almeno 60 mesi sui lieviti”. (EP)

2. „E proprio il Piemonte Chardonnay Doc. E stato il primo vino della serata, un vino *femminile*, molto floreale che ricorda i tanti fiori di campo presenti in uno dei quadri capolavoro dell’artista: “*Coscialunga di Crea*”. Su un caldo tappeto rosso, in primo piano il profumato calice di vino, le sinuose figure della Venere osservano i filari d’uva, mentre sullo sfondo quale contorno imprescindibile, la cupola del Santuario di Serralunga di Crea e la rossa casa che fu un tempo di Giorgio Tenaglia, il governatore della vicina Moncalvo”. (EP)

We observe that, by comparison with one of our previous researches on Romanian and English wine media discourses, there is in Italian a frequent use of the adjective “femmineo”, which is not encountered on the specialized Romanian and English discourse, and which makes it rather hard for a wine review reader to imagine and grasp the specificity of such a wine’s body (see example number 5 in our research corpus).

Lastly, wine evolutive states overlap human lifecycle. A wine can pass through different human life stages: youth (*giovannissimo (very young)*), maturity (*maturo (mature)*), old age. The major stages in a wine’s lifecycle are thus youth, maturity and ageing.

1. “Gewürztraminer: All’olfatto appare chiara la tipica nota di Botrytis, si sente anche l’apporto del legno, ancora piuttosto marcato, ma il vino è *giovannissimo*”. (LV)
2. „Quadra Collezione Quvée no 1: Si percepisce già dal colore giallo oro e dal naso *maturo*, con note tostate e di pasticceria; *pieno e morbido* in bocca, pur essendo non dosato”. (CDB)

We can notice that with the organicist-anthropomorphic metaphor WINE IS AN INDIVIDUAL, linguistic terms related to wine’s anatomy and wine’s age are, in general, descriptive, whereas terms referring to the domains personality and temperament and general appearance are evaluative and highly subjective.

What is surprising is that amongst these anthropomorphic metaphors in Italian winespeak we discover strange mappings associating wine with pejoratively connoted terms whose meaning is diverted and paradoxically turned positive such as the term “puttanella”, meaning “slutty, tart”. Derived from “puttana” (“prostitute”), “puttanella” is a denomination for certain varieties of grapes from Italy. “Puttanella” was also a name given in the past at Montepulciano in Italy to a

flasket for wine, covered by fine straw, and of a certain height (the term, claim some dictionaries, is an alteration of “pulci(a)nella” which makes a humorous allusion to the effects that the contents of flasket has on its drinkers).

Although a term like “puttarella”, usually conveys a negative connotation, in winespeak, it is paradoxically used as a positive assessment term in reference to wine sugar content and flavour bringing about its personality traits.

### 3 Conclusions

In conclusion, we contend that the organicist-animist metaphor illustrated in Italian wine media discourse does not only unveil the way wine specialists (oenologist engineers and professional wine experts/tasters) and specialized drinkers and tasters conceptualize wine, but that it also functions as an effective means for rendering the intricate sensory experience of tasting and drinking wine to others (readers or navigators on the Internet). This research provides a systematic corpus analysis of the range and occurrences of organicist-animist metaphor associated with wine and wine tasting in Italian media discourse. The analysis reveals the lexical richness in Italian and it also makes us aware that the metaphoric configuration of wines in Italian reviews underlines the high frequency and centrality of the organicist-anthropomorphic metaphor, without excluding other mental images of wine. Wine media discourse constructs and reconstructs emotional and sensory experiences through the richness of the metaphorical thought built around the conceptualization of wine and wine tasting.

### Sources

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