

Chapter 4

Defining the Verbs for “Understanding and Interpretation” of Japanese Sake

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author attempts to define the verbs in the description of Japanese sake taste by employing 1) a usage-based approach, 2) “encyclopedic semantics” rather than a “dictionary view,” and 3) sense-making theory, drawing on data from a “sake tasting description corpus” (approximately 120,000 words). The chapter selects eight verbs of high frequency (e.g., hirogaru ‘spread’) and defines their sense(s) in a bottom-up and abductive fashion, based on a score indicating the strength of co-occurrence between terms. In this study, the authors deal with the verbs for “Understanding” or “Interpretation”; it means, verbs that contribute to narrating the personal, individual story (contents) of the tasters. This study suggests the verbs for understanding have senses related to [Timeline] and [Space]. On the other hand, verbs do not tend to collocate with [Movement] and interestingly, the [Structure], as same as the tendency of adjectival-nouns.

INTRODUCTION

In this study, the author attempts to give encyclopaedic definitions to the verbs in a Sake corpus based on Sake tasting related terminology. This study is in a series of Sake terminology studies. In the previous study (Fukushima 2020b), the author tried to give encyclopaedic definitions to adjectives and adjectival-nouns. In this terminology series, the author emphasizes the importance of predicates (verbs, adjectives, and adjectival nouns). They are the starting point of our cognition of taste or flavor as an “event”.

As is often the case with wine sommeliers, the expression or description in Sake tasting tends to be regarded as a reductional ‘flavor-finding’ process. However, in this study series, the author respect Sake tasting expressions as the fruits of the dynamic event construction and sense-making process.

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There are some Japanese linguistic studies on Sake taste terms (e.g., (Matsuura, 1992; Otsuka, Suwa, & Yamaguchi, 2015; Utsunomiya, Isogai, Iwata, & Nakano, 2006), but the investigation is in its infancy, largely because of the historical context of the Sake brewing industry.

As the flavors of Sake have expanded, more expressions have been required. However, the study of the development of verbal expressions for Sake has been neglected. Technical terms for brewing and descriptive terms used to indicate some of the off-flavors of a *Sake* are emphasized, leaving terms to describe appealing flavors unstudied. In response, Fukushima (2014) compiled a small encyclopedia listing Sake taste words. Considered epoch-making in the Sake industry,¹ this work has inspired other work, leading to the development of a method of defining Sake taste terms.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Background

The author regards cognitive content generation of taste as a kind of aesthetic appreciation process. Sake, wine, coffee, cigarettes or other items have communities of lovers, from professional tasters to amateur enthusiasts. They express differences in taste or flavor by brands and vintage years, and many comment-supporting tools have been proposed. One typical example is “flavor wheels”.

The process of aesthetic appreciation of these items is as follows:

Aesthetic experience ® reflection ® expression (primarily by language)

For this process, the phenomenological background theory, from the aesthetic experience to the reflection and explanation (“emergence-motivated event construction”), is explained in Fukushima (2020a, 2020b).

Sense-making theory

To define the aesthetic Sake taste terms, I draw on “sense-making theory”(Fukaya & Tanaka, 1996; Tanaka & Fukaya, 1998), arguing that the meaning of a word is determined through various levels of interaction. The interaction includes the relationships among words (i.e., co-occurrence), between words and sentence or context, and even between people (i.e., communication level). Fukaya and Tanaka claim the sense of a single word cannot be determined a priori; rather, the sense is cooperatively “made” during the communication process. This chapter concurs with sense-making theory on this dynamic aspect of word sense.

Emergence-motivated event construction

The author proposes to define Sake taste by focusing on adjectivals and verbs, as an alternative to a dominantly used method focusing on nouns. The author calls this latter way of verbalization an “object-motivated event construction” where the experiencer primarily uses nouns to describe the event of tasting. This is commonly found in English tasting comments by wine sommeliers, as in “I feel a note of black cherry, cassis, and the rich flavor of the oak,” where the sommelier detects the elements of the flavor and verbalizes them, perhaps selecting the terms from his or her list of tasting words.

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