



Sommelier training – Dialogue seminars and repertory grid method in combination as a pedagogical tool



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ABSTRACT

Learning how to evaluate and communicate sensory experiences is crucial in the training of sommeliers and other restaurant personnel. Established sensory training methods are focused on analytical training when evaluating sensory experiences. Analogical methods, however, use analogies, metaphors and practical examples to describe and evaluate sensory experiences. This study aim to investigate whether practical analogical training in Dialogue seminars, involving reflection, verbalization and the exploration of concepts, could be used as an educational complement to analytical training. The result, when evaluating Dialogue seminar (DS) with the repertory grid method (RGM), was an increased consistency in the assessments of wine within a group of sommeliers. The content analysis also showed an increased use of familiar concepts and multi-sensational attributes after analogical training. It is therefore concluded that analogical training with DS, followed by analytical evaluation with RGM, can be successfully combined when training sommeliers.

Practical applications: This empirical framework introduces a new pedagogical tool when training restaurant personnel. Using contextual reflective tasting exercises in groups stimulates the awareness of personal references that can be helpful in developing a vocabulary of common definitions for sensory attributes. In addition to being a pedagogical tool, these exercises offer a counterpart to the well-established consensus technique when training sensory panels or performing sensory profile evaluation. It is, therefore, also concluded that this methodological approach can be used to better evaluate and communicate complex sensory experiences within a tasting group.

Introduction

To become a professional wine taster, it is necessary to utilize both theoretical and practical knowledge. There are several factors that influence the ability of wine tasters to experience, assess and express the attributes of wine consistently. Factors such as odor memory (Issanchou et al., 2002; Richardson and Zucco, 1989), thresholds and perceptual skills (Parr et al., 2002), verbalization and cognitive development (Hughson and Boakes, 2001), the effect of training (Zucco et al., 2011) and an academic degree in tasting (Tempere et al., 2011) have all been shown to be important. Previous studies have also shown that, when assessing the attributes of wine in sensory profiling methods, wine tasters have used different ways to express these attributes, which hampers effective communication in professional tasting contexts (Herdenstam et al., 2009). Important reasons for the inhibit communication showed to be that the wine tasters used same terminology but with different meanings, or in case, vice versa. For example, when the

wine tasters described their practical use of the term *cherry*, different meanings occurred within the tasting group. Some relating *cherry* to young fresh red fruit, others to dark sweet cherries and perfumed/matured fruit. Without knowledge about this phenomenon, the tasting group used different meanings to some of the common terms and thereby also made different assessments of the wine by doing so (Herdenstam et al., 2009).

For sensory profile evaluation, or when performing quantitative descriptive analysis (QDA®), the consensus technique is a well-established method in training sensory panels (Albert et al., 2011). However, when it comes to the assessment of complex sensory attributes like odors (Lawless, 1999) and textures (Albert et al., 2011), the adequacy of descriptive analysis has been called into question (Albert et al., 2011; Herdenstam et al., 2009; Lawless, 1999). Lawless (1999) pointed out the following problems in establishing consensus between tasters: (1) disagreement amongst experts over the most prominent odor notes of a single product and the factors related to individual differences; (2) a

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correspondence between similarity scaling and intensity scaling; (3) the substitution of applicability measures for intensity; (4) the usage and need of mid-tier, general attributes when profiling complex odors; (5) blending and integration effects (Lawless, 1999).

Sensory scientists should question the validity of descriptive data for such stimuli and avoid the simplistic mistake of equating data with perception. The use of simple and apparently independent intensity scales may produce the illusion that the odor experience is a collection of independent analyzable “notes” when it is not (Lawless, p. 325).

In an earlier study Herdenstam et al. (2009), when investigating communication and concept-building of wine tasters, through Dialogue seminar using practical examples and analogies, a meta-understanding of the concept-building process could be introduced amongst the participants. This finding demonstrates, the need for and usefulness of both analytical and analogical methods for wine tasters, in order to grasp and express complex sensory sensations experienced in different work contexts (Herdenstam et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that looking into real-life situations can be beneficial when investigating how attributes are constituted and communicated. Whilst analytical methods are more focused on the measurable parts of sensory experiences (for example, acidity and astringency in a wine), analogical methods are characterized by the analogical thinking of the assessor, starting from their own personal experience without making any attempt at analysis (Herdenstam, 2011).

Entering the analogical mode, the assessor is forced to use other communicative tools such as analogies and metaphors to communicate the wholeness of their experience. The importance for the sommelier of how to use these analogical tools is demonstrated in a variety of real-life working contexts, where analytical and analogical assessments are necessary to perform a given task (e.g., a purchase situation when selecting the right wine for certain market in regard to style and quality, a selling situation at a restaurant presenting the wholeness of the character of the wine to make a guest understanding).

A study by Herdenstam (2011) showed that analogical tools, such as metaphors, analogies and practical examples, were essential for the sommelier when communicating complex taste sensations. Additionally, the key role and impact of the metaphor in communication has also been argued for in neurocognitive studies investigating how conceptual thoughts and language work in the human brain in real-life situations (Lakoff, 2014). Since the basis of understanding metaphors and analogies is analogical thinking, these neurocognitive studies underscore its importance when communicating the wholeness of a sensory experience. It also shows the potential need for analogical training in order to improve sensory communication in different tasting contexts. Hence, this study posits the need for an approach using both analogical and analytical methods together, to assist wine tasters in improving their craft (see Fig. 1). When performing a practice such as wine tasting, it is initially considered to be implicit knowledge, since the experience of taste cannot fully be articulated. The “double grip”, described by Herdenstam (2011), illustrates how wine tasters must submit to analytical as well as analogical thinking in order to fully experience and communicate the sensation of a wine. This study showed that, depending on the purpose and aim of the tasting, the ability to switch between analytical and analogical approaches during the tasting, was crucial in order to get a *full understanding* of a wine’s character. The importance of this ability was foremost shown in tastings situation, solving a common professional task, that involved both making an assessment of separate attributes (like acidity and astringency) and making an overall judgment (like assessment of style and quality) (Herdenstam, 2011).

The analogical perspective applied to wine

When performing analogical training or adapting an analogical perspective, the main question becomes ‘what does the wine awaken in

you?’. This is an analogical ‘flow’, rather than the more traditional analytical perspective of what can be identified as being ‘awake in the wine’. In cognitive science, this kind of experience (described as *flow experience*) has been investigated by studying the effect of the implicit skill-based knowledge, e.g., knowledge that is grounded in a practice that cannot directly be verbalized (Dietrich, 2004). The flow state is the period during which a highly practiced skill, such as wine tasting, is implemented without interference from the explicit system, e.g. knowledge that can be articulated in direct words, but instead is represented in the implicit system’s knowledge base. It is proposed that ‘flow’ is a necessary prerequisite state that enables temporary suppression of the analytical and meta-conscious capacities, which is comparable to writing and free-jazz improvisation (Dietrich, 2004). The analogical approach is also well represented in literature when it comes to describing complex emotional sensations. For example, the classical French author Marcel Proust frequently used analogies that he presented in a flow, in order to grasp the *wholeness* of a reality (Kasell, 1980). Another phenomenon that encompasses both odor memory and the art of Marcel Proust is known as the *Proust phenomenon*. This phenomenon provides an argument in favor of analogical training and how it stimulates the flow experience, as it describes how early odor memories tend to be very influential in tasting situations (Chu and Downes, 2000).

Dialogue seminar

The Dialogue seminar (DS) method argues that inter-subjective norms can be developed to reach a basis for mutual understanding. The general idea behind adopting this approach is that language develops by defining how words and concepts are used in different contexts, which is the methodological approach formulated by Wittgenstein in his later work (Wittgenstein, 1968). The method was originally developed at The Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden (KTH) by B. Göransson and M. Hammarén with the aim of investigating experienced-based knowledge and concept-building in groups of professionals within different fields (Göransson and Hammarén, 2006). The Dialogue seminars, as a methodological approach, has later been widely used in different research contexts in order to facilitate reflection and verbalization of complex experiences within different professions, e.g., engineers, mathematicians, meteorologists, musicians, actors, nuclear power workers, etc. (Ratkić et al., 2006; Ratkić, 2009). The common methodological element in these studies has been the reading of classic texts from the history of science and philosophy, such as Descartes, Leibniz, Diderot, D’Alembert, Gadamer, Galileo and Darwin. The other main features involve dialogue and reflection on practice inspired by these texts (Ratkić, 2009). One crucial idea in this method is the argument that theory and practice have been divided with no room left for reflection. In the following quotation, Ratkić formulated this idea in regard to Göransson’s philosophical approach:

This approach does not pay attention to the fact that practice has its own mode of reasoning which is not deductive or inductive but analogical, resembling the reasoning used in artistic and aesthetic contexts. It also disregards the fact that scientists can be seen as reflective practitioners (Ratkić, p. 100).

The scientific perspective is a prerequisite in analytical thinking when investigating complex sensory attributes; it is done by asking deductive questions and performing analysis to measure verbalized attributes. From an aesthetic perspective, analogical methods are necessary when trying to grasp wholeness and tacit dimensions of complex experiences, since no single analytical attribute can hold the same communicative content. Metaphors, analogies and examples (both theoretical and practical) therefore become the tools that embodies this skill on a practical level (Herdenstam et al., 2009). Nevertheless, even though each kind of thinking is represented within a certain kind of skill, they are all integrated when performing a craft (Wittgenstein,

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