

# MULTIMODAL FEATURES OF DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS: CASE STUDY OF COFFEE BRANDS

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## ABSTRACT

The article considers descriptive texts of coffee brands as a multimodal ensemble composed of verbal, visual, and sensory modes. A visual modus is the shape of the beans and the color of the coffee roast. The sensory mode represents the perception of taste, aroma, and texture of the coffee. Verbal modus is the direct verbalization of the above-mentioned visual and sensory characteristics of the coffee. Coffee descriptors are verbalization of coffee flavors, aromas, textures, and other characteristics of coffee as a product. Coffee descriptors are divided into seven groups.

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**Introduction.** Descriptive texts is an assertive type of the text by functional and semantic purpose, which aims to characterize the natural phenomena, architectural structures, objects, actions, persons with a detailed list of their features, properties, characteristics [1]. Descriptive text is the text that lists the characteristics of something. Usually, the text refers to the attributes of a thing. The third-person pronoun forms are used. [2].

As linguistic objects, descriptive texts have been substantiated in the theory of functional and semantic types of speech, which is based on the logical basis of explication of the structures of the superphasal level [3]. Descriptive texts are the most common component of the monologue narrative. Each description has its micro-theme, which coverage is subordinated to all sentences [4].

The object of our research is the descriptive texts of coffee brands. Thus, in our study, we refer to the descriptive text (description) as a description of a brand (product, company) to provide a consumer with information about its characteristics. The description is a functionally focused explanation. The purpose of the descriptive text of a product is to verbally display the characteristics of the product (if possible only positive), without sheer advertising. That is, such text claims to be objective in presenting information, or the author tries to make such an impression of the text [5].

We believe that descriptive text is an analytical description in which the statement is constructed from the general characteristics of the object to its parts. In terms of brand language, descriptive text as well as tagline, slogan, and mission statement is a text of "a small form" [6]. It is utmost concise and informative, it gives a clear answer about the competitive advantage of a product (brand or company), and contains an interesting business offer. In comparison, a tagline is more abstract; it expresses the purpose of the brand and helps to create emotional communication with the target audience. Like taglines, descriptive texts are optional, and should only be used if they convey information that consumers need to know.

**Research results.** The descriptive text of a brand is an example of a multimodal ensemble that combines verbal, visual, and sensory modes. In terms of coffee brands, a visual modus is the shape of the beans and the color of the coffee roast, represented by an integral element of the description text – the visual representation of the product.

The sensory mode represents the perception of taste, aroma, and texture of the coffee. Verbal modus is the direct verbalization of the above-mentioned visual and sensory characteristics of the coffee. Although smells are omnipresent in our daily lives, people struggle with odor and flavor naming (i.e., the multisensory experience in the mouth including gustatory, olfactory, and somatosensory sensations) [7].

Descriptive texts of coffee brands function in most communication situations: on the company's web site, on the packaging, on leaflets, and advertising. Though each brand preserves its brand identity in the descriptive texts, each text of such kind has some universal structural and semantic features. Consider the example of the descriptive text of *Bird Rock coffee roaster*:

The descriptive text contains the following elements: 1) the name of the coffee: *Bird Rock blend*; 2) weight: *12 OZ.*; 3) the price: *\$ 15.00*; 4) description of coffee characteristics (descriptors): *100% direct trade. Fudge. Black pepper. Red apple. South America. Indonesia*; 5) visual representation of the product: *a picture of coffee or the coffee brand package*; 6) type of coffee: *Whole Bean* (Bird Rock coffee roaster).

The descriptors are worth special attention. The descriptors of coffee are indispensable elements of the descriptions of coffee brands, because coffee, like wine, cheese, and chocolate, is a product that is selected by consumers depending on its organoleptic properties. Different compositions of the product can make a significant difference in the characteristics of organoleptic properties, which requires the development of objective criteria for their identification. To identify the product, a complex property is detailed into a system of descriptors – individual sensory characteristics inherent to this product [8].

Coffee is one of the most chemically complex things we consume, with subtleties of aroma, texture, and flavor that are not achieved by almost any other food. Every flavor, every aroma, every texture originates in a set of chemicals, which in turn are determined by the seed's genes, by how and where the coffee was grown, and by everything it has experienced since leaving the tree (processing, drying, milling, storage, transport, roasting, brewing and so on). [9].

Coffee descriptors are an example of verbalization in terms of a multimodal ensemble. Therefore, coffee descriptors are a lexicon of coffee flavors, aromas, and textures that are defined by sensory experts and the leaders of the coffee industry, a universal language for the sensory qualities of coffee. The sensory qualities of coffee: aroma, acidity, bitterness, body, flavour, health and grain quality, are the most important aspects in the acceptance and definition of coffee quality [10].

Coffee descriptors do not have categories for “good” and “bad” attributes, nor do they allow for ranking coffee quality. It is purely a descriptive tool, which allows saying what coffee tastes or smells like [9]. Unlike taglines or slogans, they do not compare the qualities of one type (brand) with another as well. They are purely descriptive, clearly indicating the taste, aromatic and textural qualities of a particular coffee and are universal, i.e. can be used in the description of any coffee brand.

Brands (coffee makers) use descriptors to show how one type of coffee differs from another or to emphasize how changing the roasting profile of coffee affects, for example, the expression of nut or chocolate flavors. Consumers prefer top-quality coffee that has a good aroma and taste and take into account that its consumption does not affect their health. Consequently, coffee lovers are guided by descriptors to find characteristics that satisfy their taste and product requirements.

We divide these verbal elements into groups according to the characteristics of the coffee they describe. The first group is the descriptors of flavors and aromas. In this group, we operate in such categories as *fragrance* (smell of freshly ground but not brewed coffee), *aroma* (smell of freshly brewed coffee), *flavor*, *acidity*, *bitterness*, *body*, *sweetness*, and *aftertaste*.

This group of descriptors is a specific meta-vocabulary of the coffee language, organized into a special *Coffee Taster's Flavor Wheel*. Developed by the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), it is a verbal visualizer of sensory qualities of coffee. It is a kind of multimodal tool where resources of different semiotic nature (verbal - words and visual - colors) are combined to describe a third semiotic resource – sensory [11].

The descriptors of coffee flavors and aromas are represented by nominations: nouns, mostly by the names of fruits, berries, nuts, spices or flowers with pronounced flavors, such as *pomegranate*, *cherry*, *peanut*, *cinnamon*, *rose*; taste adjectives – *sweet*, *sour*, taste adjectives derived from nouns – *nutty*, *winey*, *fruity*, adjective + noun constructs – *brown sugar*, and adjective + adjective constructions – *green vegetable*.

Each coffee brand, in describing its product, selects descriptors that match its taste and aroma. For example, *Barefoof coffee roasters* brand has the following description: *Sweet caramel and hazelnut mingle with mild citrus to form a creamy body. A light milk chocolate finish rounds out this approachable espresso*

(Barefoot coffee roasters). *Bulletproof* brand describes its *The original blend* as follows: *Distinct notes of cinnamon, plum, and orange with a cocoa hazelnut finish* (Bulletproof), and the *Little wolf* brand creatively describes the taste of *El Truinfo* coffee: *incredibly sweet and incredibly clean with predominate brown sugar/honey notes but there is a lovely apple-like acidity and white grape juiciness* (Little wolf).

The second group of descriptors is adjectives, nouns, and nominal constructions that feature the degree of roasting of coffee beans. The descriptors of this group are the specific English terms of the coffee industry that have been formed throughout the history of coffee and are related to the tradition of roasting coffee in different countries. There is a so-called *Coffee Color Scale* designed for coffee experts and connoisseurs, which presents these terms in correlation with the coffee bean roast colors. For example, the *unroasted* segment is dark yellow, the *light roast* is light brown, *medium roast* – brown, and *dark/full roast* is dark brown. Some special coffee industry terms *cinnamon roast*, *New England roast*, *American roast*, *full city roast*, *Vienna roast*, *French roast*, *Italian roast*, and *Spanish roast* signal the difference in the degree of roast [12].

Brands use these descriptors to inform consumers about the degree of roasting of their coffee. For example, *We selected the finest tasting coffee beans with the highest consistent natural caffeine content and flash roasted them to a rich city roast* (Perk up coffee), or the *Wicked Joe* brand describes the blend of *Wicked French*: *Intense and bold, our Italian roast is a little less smoky than our Wicked French, but packs a punch!* (Wicked Joe)

The third group of descriptors is the coffee industry markers used to specify the market segment targeted by a particular coffee: *traditional or regular coffee*, *premium or specialty coffee*, and *gourmet coffee*.

The fourth group of descriptors is nominative combinations that describe the origin of coffee. These are *coffee blends*: *Our Epiphany House Blend is a seasonally changing blend made up of fresh crop coffees, sourced directly at origin* (Case coffee roasters), *single-origin coffee*, *one-estate coffee*: *Up your coffee game with the only single-origin of premium Arabica coffee beans from Vietnam* (Chest brew, Moon bear whole bean coffee) and geographical names (country/continent of coffee origin): *Kopi Luwak Gold Label beans are sourced from the Bengkulu plantations in Southwest Sumatra, Indonesia* (Cluwak, Kopi Luwak Gold Label).

The fifth Group represents Certification or type of coffee production: *sustainable and organic* (social content coffees), *bird-friendly coffee*, *a member of the rainforest alliance* coffee brand, *a fair trade coffee brand*, and more. An example is: *A triple-certified product, Kia-Ora is grown with organic, bird-friendly, inter-cropping techniques to produce the finest fair trade coffee on the market* (Christopher bean coffee, Kenia Kia Ora blend). The polysemiotic nature of this group of descriptors is that they are creolized verbal-visual texts. Each brand also illustrates the verbal description with a visual logo of the corresponding certificate.

The sixth group is coffee content descriptors. They are *flavored coffee*: *Just like the very best candy canes, this fine flavor is infused with aromatic peppermint and has a sweet, creamy character that warms the heart!* (Mystic monk coffee, Candy cane), *Caramel Hideaway Flavored Coffee. Smooth and creamy* (Caribou coffee) and *decaffeinated coffee*: *Innocently indulgent, Mommee Coffee Decaf coffee has 99.9% caffeine-free due to water processing (not with chemicals like common decaffeination methods)* (Mommee coffee, Decaf).

The seventh group distinguishes the species of coffee. These are two terms: *Arabica* – Coffee arabica and *Robusta* – Coffee canephora, the names of two existing species of coffee: *Copper Moon Coffee Bean Me Up Premium Coffee Blend will prepare you to be “beaned” up into outer space with this lightly roasted blend of Arabica coffee that’s truly out of this world* (Copper moon coffee, Bean me up), or their varieties: *Blend of Bourbon, Catuai, and Ethiopian heirloom varieties* (Wrecking ball coffee roasters, Pillow fight espresso), *Black Insomnia coffee: Biohazard is made with Robusta beans for a dark organic roast* (Biohazard coffee).

**Conclusions.** 1. The descriptive text of coffee brands is a multimodal ensemble composed of verbal, visual, and sensory modes.

2. Coffee descriptors are a pronounced example of verbalization of visual (coffee colours), sensory (taste, flavor, and texture of coffee), and coffee characteristics as a product.

3. Coffee descriptors do not have categories for “good” and “bad” attributes; no do they compare the qualities of one brand with another. They are purely descriptive and universal, that is, can be used in the descriptive text of any coffee brand.

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