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27

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THE TASTE
OF SUSTAINABILITY

*A corpus-assisted comparative ESP
analysis of promotional tasting notes
for conventional and alternative wines*

PAOLO 
LOFFREDO

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To Amalinze

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PREFACE

This book was conceived during my research period at the University of Sussex as a Visiting Research Fellow following a two-year sabbatical from academic activity. This break was not induced by global challenges such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather by a deeply personal experience: the loss of my father. This bereavement cast a shadow over my way of being, profoundly undermining, not to say nullifying, any ability I had to focus on the developing trajectory of my academic career. At the moment, as I write this preface with a very partial conception of its final form, I am enjoying (as far as possible) the feeling of having regained focus on my studies.

The preface to this book dwells on its origin and the encounters that were instrumental in its birth. I must mention two separate encounters, which took place in 2022: one with natural winemaker Raffaello Annicchiarico – henceforth Raffaello – and one with Professor Arran Stibbe. Both encounters profoundly transformed my perception of the ecosystem, offering a unique and enlightening perspective from the point of view of a human being inhabiting the earth and, subsequently, as a linguist.

During my first meeting with Raffaello, I had the privilege of touring the vineyard, listening to his fascinating stories about living in harmony with the ecosystem, and tasting some of his natural wines; amongst them, the encounter with his white wine is etched on my mind. At first sight, it appeared to me as a cloudy, greenish water containing suspended sedimentary particles. I was struck by the stark contrast between this wine and the transparent white wines to which I was accustomed. Before meeting Raffaello, I believed that the quality of a wine was inexorably linked to its degree of transparency; that is, the clearer, the better. However, thanks to Raffaello's explanation, the first sips transcended the boundaries of a mere tasting experience and helped me to understand a term that Raffaello insisted on during our meeting: 'symbiosis'. He used this term with reference to different types of relationships: between the vineyard and the human being, between the vineyard and the soil, and amongst the vineyard and the surrounding mountains, the wind, the local flora, and the fauna; in other words, the vineyard and the entire ecosystem. Looking at the dictionary definition, it is clear how the concept aligned perfectly with the innate naturalness of his wines: "[A] close connection between different types of organisms in which they live together and benefit from each other"

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(*Cambridge Dictionary* n.d.: online). Raffaello's passion has profoundly influenced my view of nature and the environment, making me aware of how it is possible to change the perception of nature as a resource that belongs to humankind, and which is subject to limitless exploitation, degradation, and subjugation, even in a case such as his, of a person working in direct contact with and making a living from the produce of nature. It is clear from Raffaello's words that we are inextricably linked to the earth and, as an inseparable component of its intricate web, we cannot grant ourselves the right to exploit it simply because we have attributes such as bipedalism, advanced encephalisation, the development of an articulate language, and the creation of culture. If the result of these supposed advances is the current state of disconnection from the symbiosis with the natural world, something has gone wrong in the history of humans on this planet. This topic played a crucial role in the context of writing this book, if not that of a prerequisite. However, returning to the main topic, wine discourse, following my meeting with Raffaello, it is impossible for me to taste a glass of wine without inevitably recalling his words, which resonate in my mind and with my taste buds.

However, not being a linguist, Raffaello could not influence my research approach in the strict sense. Given my previous studies of the language of wine tasting, I had already considered delving into the discursive dynamics of online wine sales. Nonetheless, I was unclear about the approach to addressing the subject. During my research period in Brighton at the University of Sussex, the second crucial encounter that I mentioned took place, which had a profound impact on my research approach. Thanks to my colleague and friend Marina Niceforo, I had the privilege of attending a lecture by Arran Stibbe, a distinguished scholar of ecolinguistics, at the University of Gloucester. Stibbe's presentation, which included an analysis of the translation of Studio Ghibli's animated film *My Neighbour Totoro* (Miyazaki 1988) from the original Japanese into English, was as enlightening as were Raffaello's words. Stibbe clearly explained how certain themes were backgrounded when transitioning from one cultural context to another while giving salience to thematic elements that were not included in the original. An example of this was a scene in the Japanese version of the film in which a little girl grabs a damaged bucket and wonders: "What can I do with this bucket?". However, in the English translation, the question was turned into a statement containing a derogatory adjective: "What a stupid bucket!" In the translated version, the addition of a negative connotation to the bucket stands in stark contrast to the neutral tone of the original text, bringing the

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Western tendency to evaluate an object based solely on its usefulness to the fore. Stibbe's lecture was not limited to the field of film translation, but extended to the world of haiku; this form of typical Japanese poetry, which is based on thematic and syllabic precision, reinforced the focus on the interaction between language and the environment that I was craving.

Synthesising the insights that crystallised during the meetings with Raffaello Annicchiarico and Arran Stibbe, I was finally convinced that attention should be paid to examining the language of wine tasting by adopting an ecolinguistic approach.

And here it is.