

# Linguistic conceptualizations of auditory perception: a text-based study of Latin

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**Keywords:** Latin, sensory experiences, auditory perception, literal and metaphorical expression

Sensory experiences are central in human life. Our senses constitute the first contact with the world around us, the source of knowledge, and the basis of all cognitive processes. By virtue of its ontological centrality, the issue of sensory perception has been explored within several fields of study, such as arts, philosophy, anthropology, cognitive sciences, psychology, and linguistics.

One of the most interesting aspects of the linguistic encoding of perception is the nature of the expressions we use to talk about sensory experiences: on the one hand, we resort to "synesthetic" linguistic units, which apply to different sensory modalities (e.g. *soft taste*, *soft fragrance*, *soft sound*); on the other hand, we rely on other conceptual domains, such as space and motion to depict such experiences (e.g. *the note is high/low*).

In the light of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), perception can function as both a source domain and a target domain for metaphorical transfers. Among all the sensory modalities, vision has received the greatest attention in linguistic studies (Ma & Kevitt 2005; Slobin 2008; San Roque *et al.* 2015). Despite some recent research on the expression of sounds (Cance & Dubois 2015) and musical pitch (Dolscheid *et al.* 2013), a systematic analysis of the linguistic encoding of auditory perception based on textual resources is still lacking.

Situated in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and Cognitive Historical Semantics (Bettini 2008; Short 2009; Mocciaro & Short 2019), this paper aims to examine the literal and metaphorical expression of auditory perception in a corpus of Latin texts, namely two novels from the imperial age, i.e. Petronius' *Satyricon* (1<sup>st</sup> century), and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (2<sup>nd</sup> century). All utterances directly or symbolically related to auditory perception have been extracted from the texts and included in the working corpus. The following Latin example shows the type of constructions at issue:

(1) *Nullus sonus unquam acidior percussit aures meas*

‘No sharper sound ever pierced my ears’ (*Petr.* 68.5)

In this utterance, two kinds of lexemes participate in the encoding of auditory perception, namely literal expressions, i.e. *sonus* ‘sound’, *auris* ‘ear’, and metaphorical expressions related to a different sensory modality or to a different conceptual domain, i.e. *acidus* lit. ‘sour’, *percutio* ‘hit’.

The questions we explore in this paper are the following: what are the lexical and constructional encoding strategies of auditory perception in Latin? Does auditory modality function more often as a source domain or as a target domain for metaphorical transfers? Which other sensory modalities (i.e. vision, touch, taste, smell) are conceptually associated to auditory perception? What are the other conceptual domains (e.g. space) that play a role in the linguistic representation of auditory perception? And finally, how does the relation between different types of perception relate to the “hierarchy of the senses” (Majid *et al.* 2018; Winter 2009), according to which some senses (e.g. vision) are cognitively, and thus linguistically, more accessible than others (e.g. smell)?

By combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, we provide a systematic account of the linguistic tools used in Latin to refer to auditory perception and their metaphorical extensions, in order to give a new insight into the semantic structure of this conceptual domain.

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