

The people who 'see' foreign languages: How synaesthesia can help language learning

Katherine Latham



Serenity Strull/ BBC/ Getty Images

1 **Synaesthesia is a neurological condition found to enhance**
2 **memory and learning. Now, scientists say seeing in colour could**
3 **help when it comes to learning a second language.**

4 My mother's name is the colour of milk. The strings of an acoustic
5 guitar, when strummed, play the warm yellow of honeycomb. The
6 sound is flat, hard and smooth. And Monday is pink. These sensations
7 are always the same, and always present. This is synaesthesia – in my
8 case grapheme-colour synaesthesia, sound-colour
9 synaesthesia and sound-texture synaesthesia.

10 Like many synaesthetes, I discovered at a young age I had a flair for
11 both music and languages. In music, it wasn't the physical act of
12 performing I excelled at, but composition. I went on to become a
13 composer for short films and dance theatre, and a sound editor for
14 television. Writing music felt a lot like a language to me, as I "saw"
15 the colours of the sounds in a similar way. I also studied French,
16 German, Spanish and linguistics – the colour of language helping me
17 to remember words as well as the patterns of grammar.

18 Synaesthesia is a neurological phenomenon that causes an
19 estimated 4.4% of people to experience the world as a cacophony of
20 sensations. Around 60 different types of synaesthesia have been
21 identified. (...)

22 The condition is thought to be caused by genetically inherited
23 traits that affect the structural and functional development of the
24 brain. Increased communication between sensory regions in the
25 brain means, for example, words can stimulate taste, sequences of
26 numbers may be perceived in spatial arrangements, or the feel
27 of textures might conjure emotions.

28 Synaesthesia is not considered to be a neurological disorder and –
29 although it has been linked to neurodevelopmental and mental health
30 conditions including autism, anxiety and schizophrenia – it is
31 described as an "alternative perceptual reality" and -----.

32 "When I was younger I knew I saw the world in a different way, and
33 my way of describing that to others was 'colourful'," says Smadar
34 Frisch, who has grapheme-colour synaesthesia, sound-colour
35 synaesthesia and lexical- gustatory synaesthesia – where words have
36 taste – and explores the world of senses through her
37 podcast, Chromatic Minds. (...) She developed a colour coding
38 system to help her learn new languages fluently and quickly. Studying
39 languages no longer felt confusing but "organised", she says. "And it
40 worked! My whole world changed. I went on to learn the thing my
41 brain was meant to excel in: languages."

42 Frisch says she was able to learn French and Spanish fluently in just
43 two months. Today she can speak seven languages fluently – and says
44 she can learn any language she wants "with no difficulty, in a short
45 matter of time".

46 Julia Simner is director of the Multisense Synaesthesia
47 Research laboratory at the University of Sussex in the UK. She and
48 her team tested around 6,000 children who were six to 10 years old. "
49 (...) The study found that the children with synaesthesia were better
50 in a number of skills than the children without – skills which,
51 according to Simner, would "certainly help both first and second
52 language learning". (...)

53 Take 11-year-old me, put on the spot in my first week of secondary
54 school. "How do you say 'work'?" demands my French teacher. The
55 class is silent. I know the word is blue. Then it comes to me. "Travail,"
56 I answer. Sometimes I can't remember a word – but I can remember
57 the colour. This can be frustrating because no one can help me if I say
58 "it's pink", as the colours are unique to my own mind. On the other
59 hand, colour acts as an extra reminder, a bonus cue I can put to use
60 when learning languages.

61 (...) Whether helpful or not to the synaesthete, research into
62 synaesthesia can help us to understand cognitive processes of
63 language and perception. "Synaesthesia is an intriguing phenomenon
64 in itself," says Bouvet. "But recent research suggests that it is part of
65 a broader, specific cognitive profile. Identifying this unique cognitive
66 profile may be key to gaining a deeper understanding of
67 synaesthesia."

68 For me, living life with a mishmash of sensations brings joy. Listening
69 to music is a fully immersive experience. I sink into an ocean of
70 texture, as if I'm under a soft duvet or submersed in cool water. The
71 words of a book are not just inert ink on a page, ----- . And
72 language fills the air in a kaleidoscope of colour.

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20250224-the-people-who-see-foreign-languages-how-synaesthesia-can-help-language-learning>

QUESTÕES

- De acordo com as informações lidas, o que levou a autora a trabalhar com a música?

- a) Ter a sensação visual de que os sons têm cor.
- b) Ter herdado da mãe o talento artístico para a guitarra.
- c) Compor música para filmes de televisão desde criança.
- d) Escrever música como se as palavras falassem.
- e) Enxergar as notas em movimento na partitura.

- O que NÃO é afirmado no texto?

- a) A sinestesia é um distúrbio surgido na época atual.
- b) Já foram identificados múltiplos tipos de sinestesia.
- c) O cérebro sinestésico tem mais comunicação entre regiões sensoriais.
- d) A condição tem relação com a herança genética.
- e) A sinestesia pode melhorar a memória e o aprendizado.

- Abaixo há afirmações verdadeiras (V) e falsas (F) sobre o tema. Segundo o que é dito no artigo, qual alternativa apresenta a ordem correta?

- I- É possível que os sinestésicos sintam sons com texturas.
- II- As palavras podem apresentar sempre a mesma cor.
- III- Para algumas pessoas as palavras podem ter sabor.
- IV- Sinestésicos podem perceber pessoas como sons.

- a) V - V - V - F
- b) V - F - F - F
- c) F - V - F - V
- d) F - F - V - F
- e) V - V - F - V

- Conforme a leitura realizada, a sinestesia

- a) consiste em uma forma de se perceber o mundo.
- b) causa ansiedade em pessoas que não a experimentam.
- c) é associada apenas a algumas síndromes.
- d) faz parte de um distúrbio no desenvolvimento neurológico.
- e) propicia serenidade ao evocar emoções.

- Qual é a frase que completa o pontilhado da linha 31?

- a) generally thought to be beneficial.
- b) often described in ancient times.
- c) always considered a real danger.
- d) usually misunderstood by family members.
- e) never hidden from the outside world.

- Observe as afirmações abaixo. Quais delas condizem com o que está escrito no artigo a respeito de Smadar Frisch?

- I- Ela divulga regularmente informações a respeito da sinestesia em periódicos científicos.**
- II- Ligar cores a grafemas e cores a sons lhe permitiu criar um sistema para aprender línguas.**
- III- No referente a idiomas, ela tem um desenvolvimento além do comum.**
- IV- Sentir que o mundo é desorganizado provocou nela uma sensação de angústia.**

a) II e III.

b) I e III.

c) II, III e IV.

d) II e IV.

e) I, II, III e IV.

- A partir do que é dito no texto, o que concluiu a pesquisa levada a cabo no Reino Unido?

a) A sinestesia infantil desempenha grande papel no desenvolvimento linguístico.

b) Nenhuma criança deveria ser obrigada a fazer testes cognitivos.

c) O estudo sobre a linguagem infantil apontou resultados surpreendentes.

d) Poucas crianças continuarão sendo sinestésicas na idade adulta.

e) Um grande número de habilidades foi detectado nos adolescentes.

- A autora do artigo, Katherine Latham, ao se comparar com os resultados das pesquisas, conclui que

a) a cor da palavra a auxiliava a aprender línguas na infância.

b) pronunciar a cor da palavra permitia que lembrasse da ortografia.

c) se sentia frustrada quando não conseguia ver a cor dos termos.

d) todos os sinestésicos compartilham as mesmas sensações.

e) não saber vocabulário a impedia de aprender francês com fluência.

- Conforme a leitura realizada, por que motivo os cientistas se interessam pela sinestesia?

- a) Auxilia a entender processos cognitivos diferentes.**
- b) Elucida fenômenos parapsicológicos raros.
- c) Ajuda a resolver problemas na percepção do mundo.
- d) Provoca reações interessantes entre o público leigo.
- e) Impede que processos da linguagem sejam analisados.

- Aponte a frase que completa o pontilhado da linha 71.

- a) but bring the story to life as they swirl around me.**
- b) because they scare me with their aspect.
- c) even if I can't understand them many times.
- d) even if no one can know my secret feelings.
- e) but I can pay attention to every meaning.