
Kate: Hello and welcome to this week's 6 Minute English. Joining me again today is Rebecca. Hi Rebecca. Now a little test for you to start the programme with ...could you name the five senses for me?

Rebecca: Well, there's sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.

Kate: That's right. Well, today we're talking about **synesthesia**. This is the name we give a condition that some people have where their senses are mixed up or confused.

Rebecca: Yes, I've heard of that – I think the most examples are when people strongly feel a sense of colour when they hear music or taste something. eg. the taste of lemon gives someone the strong sense of the colour blue.

Kate: Exactly. Some other examples are seeing or feeling the colours, sexes, and personalities of letters or numbers and smelling colours and sounds.

Rebecca: Sounds bizarre but I'm looking forward to finding out a little bit more....

Kate: First to my question for this week: is synesthesia more common in men or women?

Rebecca: answers

Kate: We'll find out the answer at the end of the programme but first to our speaker for this week, James Wannerton who has the condition, synesthesia. He's going to explain some more details about what it is and how it affects him.

Extract 1

We all have five senses, sight, sound, hearing and touch and smell and they all operate independently of one another, it's just that in certain individuals those two senses are combined. I mean, for example, someone with synesthesia may smell a shape or they might hear a touch or in my particular case I actually taste sound.

Rebecca: Wow – he says he can taste sound! I've never heard of that combination before. Let's find out more:

Extract 2

I've had this since I can remember since I was 4 or 5 and it's been exactly the same. Every single sound has maintained and kept exactly the same taste.

Rebecca: So he's had the condition since he was 4 or 5 years old and every sound has kept the same taste. That's interesting.... so what happens if it's a bad word with bad or negative meaning, something like **coffin** (which in a box in which we bury the dead). What kind of taste does he get from this?

Extract 3

It's totally arbitrary – coffin for example tastes like a sweet, a hard-boiled sweet.

Kate: **Arbitrary** means without reason or something that is based on chance. To him the word **coffin** tastes like boiled sweets!

Rebecca: So there must be a few problems having this condition, interesting though it might be. I can imagine it must be quite lonely in a way – trying to explain to other people or **articulate** what he is experiencing. **Articulate** means to be able to express something clearly in words.

Kate: Let's listen to the next extract – he also mentions **foodstuffs**. This is a general term which refers to any substance used as food or used to make food. **Texture** is how something feels so the degree to which something is rough or smooth, soft or hard. Often tastes and texture are closely related in how we experience something when we eat it.

Extract 4

I get a lot of tastes that I can't **articulate** as **foodstuffs**. I'm getting this fairly complex mixture of tastes and **textures** on my tongue. It feels very real to me. The difficulty is articulating this into a food taste that somebody else can understand.

Rebecca: So he has a problem identifying how something tastes himself.

Kate: Yes that must be frustrating. I wonder what other problems he also has? In the next extract, you'll hear the expressions **taste sensations** and **distracting**. Can you explain what these mean?

Rebecca: Sure **taste sensation** is the feeling you get when you taste the flavour of something and **distracting** means that something is making it difficult for you to give it your full attention. Let's listen: what else does he find difficult about having the condition?

Extract 5

I have a problem with people who speak slowly. It's just the more words that go in, the more taste sensations I get – it's one after another. It's very distracting ... it's quite difficult to try and take in what someone's saying when you're getting the taste of jelly and chocolate and stuff all the time.

Kate: He said that when people slowly are clearly, it fills his head with some many **taste sensations** that he can't listen to what they're actually saying. All he can think about are the tastes he's experiencing – in his case, jelly and chocolate!

We're nearly out of time, so let's have a quick run through some of the vocabulary we've met today:

synesthesia - this is the name we give a neurological condition that some people have where two or more of these senses are mixed up

coffin a box in which we bury the dead

arbitrary means without reason or something based on chance

articulate is to be able to express something clearly in words

foodstuffs - this is a general term which refers to any substance used as food or used in making food

texture is how something feels so the degree to which something is rough or smooth, or soft or hard

taste sensation is the feeling you get when you taste the flavour of something

distracting means something is making it difficult for you to give your full attention

Kate: And finally to the question I asked earlier. Is the condition more common in men or in women?

Rebecca: I guessed it was more common in men.

Kate: I'm afraid you were wrong – it's actually much more common in women. According to studies in the US 75% more women have it than men and in the UK, it's 89%.

Rebecca: That's quite a difference!

Kate: Well, that's all we've got time for today. Thanks for joining us and until next time. Goodbye!