

Mmmm... That spicy chicken sure is pointy

Synaesthetes experience unusual combination of the senses

by Long Nguyen
The McGill Daily
(McGill University)

MONTREAL (CUP) -- Have you ever tasted something sweet after hearing a certain pitch, seen ordinarily black letters in distinct colours, or felt spicy chicken as pointy?

Between one out of 200 and one out of 2,000 people are synaesthetes, people whose sense perceptions are intermingled in a specific way. For a synaesthete, external stimuli can elicit a response from a sense not commonly associated with the stimuli presented. These associations are both consistent and automatic. A certain pitch, for instance, is always the same distinct taste, or a certain letter is always a specific colour.

Interestingly, females are six times more likely to have synaesthesia than males, and it tends to run in families. This suggests a genetic basis to synaesthesia. However, it has yet to be discovered where the relevant genes are located and how they are passed to subsequent generations.

Researchers from the University

of Waterloo and McMaster University studied a pair of identical twins, one who was a synaesthete and the other who was not. Studies of identical twins are popular because the twins are already matched as closely as possible in genetic and environmental background.

The study found that "discordance in synaesthesia may be due to either an epigenetic event, X chromosome inactivation, or a mutation of a synaesthesia gene."

Within the area of visual perception, grapheme is a type of colour synaesthesia in which plain text is viewed in colour. During synaesthetic episodes, called photisms, the sensation of colour or light is associated with a sensation of hearing, touch, smell, or taste.

Non-synaesthetes can have synaesthetic experiences with the use of LSD, magic mushrooms, and other related drugs. True synaesthetes, however, have synaesthetic experiences ceaselessly, without the accompaniment of any drugs. Synaesthetes have often been accused of using drugs, but research has proven this not to be the case.

"Cognitive research, brain imaging, and even genetics all attest to the reality of synaesthesia," says a University of Waterloo study by Mike Dixon, Daniel Smilek, and Phillip Merikle.

Synaesthesia can increase memory capabilities enormously. One Waterloo student, a synaesthete,

says that her photisms help her remember digits by associating them with colours. When four lists of nine digits were announced in class, this subject was capable of reciting the four lists at the end of the lecture and after two months.

"[She] experiences photisms whenever she sees, hears, or even thinks of a digit," says one of the Waterloo studies.

The brains of synaesthetes may differ significantly from non-synaesthete brains. These structural differences are a potential cause of synaesthesia, though it is still under debate. One theory suggests that synaesthetes have more nerve connections in the brain, connecting parts that are not usually connected and thus associating senses that aren't ordinarily intertwined, such as taste with hearing, or touch with taste.

The opposing theory, however, states that all humans have these nerve connections, but most are incapable of using them. Synaesthetes, on the other hand, actively use these nerve connections.

Whatever the cause, most synaesthetes do not find this so-called condition a hindrance on their lives. In fact, some consider it a gift and could not imagine life without it. Research could possibly develop a method of activation or inactivation of a synaesthesia gene. Someday perhaps everyone will all experience these extraordinary sensual associations...without having to resort to psychedelics.

Estimating rates

NB Power may be estimating rates every three months for parts of the province.



Michèle Legendre/The Brunswickan

from NB Power page 1

In fact, the media spokesperson didn't even know that the article had been posted.

"What article are you referring to? That's not familiar to me," said Pamela MacKay of NB Power.

The article, called 'January power bills causing rate shock,' actually cites Pamela MacKay.

In the end, though, finding answers proved more difficult than it sounds.

"It's a lot of information, and it's better if I can send it to you than me try to explain it. I'll send it off to you this afternoon. I'll send it off this afternoon."

There, she said it - twice. Six days of phone tag later, *The Brunswickan* was finally contacted. The official statement MacKay sent includes:

"As of October 1, 2005, NB Power commenced a trial program of estimating meters for residential customers. This program was put in place to minimize our costs and reduce upward pressure on rates. At the present, we plan to estimate meters once every three months and may move to estimating meters once every other

month depending on the results of the trial."

It appears that aside from phones, NB Power also has a lack of employees who can read the meters for the power they supply. A province-wide move towards estimation could, however, cut costs by one million dollars - for NB Power.

The customer, however, could suffer from the choice. The warm weather in January caused many customers to be overbilled because the algorithm used to calculate their bills was not correctly altered.

Though customers already on a 12-month equalized payment plan will not be affected, other users, including students, can suffer from this type of estimation.

Other power companies in New Brunswick haven't even considered estimation for years. Saint John Energy, for instance, hasn't estimated power costs for customers since 1979.

"It's better customer service," says Stew Gilbert, Supervisor of Meter-Reading for Saint John Energy. "As long as we have access to the meter, we will read it. Cost should be based on what the customer uses."

Enbridge Inc. provides power to the Fredericton area through natural gas. Trent Broad is the Manager of Customer Care, and stands by monthly reading as well.

"We go out and make an attempt every month to read our meters," he explains. "There might be a handful of customers we might not be able to read, because maybe they changed the lock on their chained fence to get to the meter."

"But as a rule of thumb, we read every meter. We don't estimate our customers." He stresses that NB Power should have noticed the warmer weather, and done something about it before it affected their customers.

Despite the problems, Pamela MacKay stresses that if customers do need to express concern, they can contact a customer service agent at 1-800-663-6272.

"Our customer service agents are empowered to deal with any discrepancies and make adjustments. When the meter is read the next month the account should balance out."

Sounds like a promise. Maybe she'll even help you out this afternoon. Maybe she'll even help you out this afternoon. Maybe she'll even help you out this afternoon.

PSE needs help from feds

from PSE page 1

sation for graduates who stay in the province once it reaches maturity in 15 years, as the solution for crippling debt. Creighton's feeling is that "the government needs to address the systemic problems and not just keep pointing to what it's

done as though it's fixed the problem. The problems are not fixed. They're getting worse, and there is money in their program that could be reallocated and have a much greater impact."

"They need to strike a better balance," she said.

Carr has expressed the hope

that the upcoming commission will be an opportunity "to pull the stakeholders together and keep working to understand each others' concerns and issues and challenges and tackle them so that New Brunswick is the best place to learn in North America, and an even better place to work."

EUROPE IS WAITING!

GREAT SPRING AIRFARES TO EUROPE FROM HALIFAX:

LONDON	RT \$328
GLASGOW	RT \$358
FRANKFURT	RT \$449

Taxes and surcharges not included. Prices valid at time of advertising deadline and may vary depending on availability, eligibility and departure dates.
Travel CUTS is owned and operated by the Canadian Federation of Students.

Main Floor, UNB, SUB
472-2887
1-888-FLY-CUTS

TRAVEL CUTS
See the world your way
www.travelcuts.com

Dr. Richard E. Lee
Optometrist
406A Regent St. 458-1580
(2 buildings past Harvey's Hamburgers)
New Patients Welcome

Correction

In the last issue of *The Brunswickan*, an article called "Budget cuts at UNB Saint John: rumors and myths busted" reported that \$500,000 would be cut from each UNB Fredericton faculty. In actual fact, \$500,000 will be cut from all faculty budgets combined. *The Brunswickan* regrets the error.

2007 Grads
Ready for Bay Street?
Put your finance and investment knowledge to the test.

futures
ATLANTIC SYMPOSIUM

- Hear keynote presentations from Canada's leading financial experts
- Visit various financial firm exhibits
- Interview with recruiters
- Learn about the CFA and other financial designations
- Network with like-minded students and financial industry practitioners

Register now to participate in Bay Street's Atlantic Canadian one-stop talent search.

September 14 and 15, 2006
Wu Conference Centre
University of New Brunswick,
Fredericton campus

For further information call
(506) 453-4895
or email sboyce@unb.ca

TD Securities **UNB**
UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

@theplayhouse
Strum, Pick & Grin series presents...

Charlie A'Court and Matt Anderson
Sunday, March 26, 8 p.m.

Atlantic Canada's two "Young Guns" of the blues! A'Court and Andersen each showcase their unique blues sounds in a very special double-billed concert.

Reserved Seating Available at the Playhouse Box Office or call 458-8344

FREDERICTON **here**

OUTREACH **99.5 The Daily Gleaner**
DOWNTOWN FREDERICTON **canadaeast.com** CBCtelevision

www.theplayhouse.ca