

Synesthesia and translation in the 21st century

**CFP What does synesthesia mean to you, to us?**

**June 9, 2026**, Rouen University, Mont-Saint-Aignan, Faculty of Literature and Social Sciences, Room A 600

**Organising committee:** Daphné Cousin-Martin, Laura Cacheiro Quintas and José Vicente Lozano

This one-day conference aims to highlight new research perspectives on synesthesia, and to consider its contemporary expressions, how they contribute to a variety of genres, languages and metalinguistic approaches, as well as how they translate. This scholarly meeting is the first in a series of scientific events planned for 2026 and 2027.

Synesthesia has been a key notion since the 19<sup>th</sup> century for French and Belgian poets, but also for aesthetics and poetics with I.A Richards (1924), in Henri Morier (1961) with his renowned *Dictionnaire de poétique et rhétorique* in Switzerland, and in Preminger & Brogan in the USA with their canonical *Princeton Guide to Poetry & Poetics* (1993). It is thought-provoking and calls on us to use our senses to sense the world, forcing us into the act of perceiving. Thanks to it, we react to and appreciate the arts. But what about synesthesia in philosophy? In medicine? Is synesthesia a gift, innate or a neurological phenomenon? Julia Simner places this question at the heart of her *Oxford Handbook of Synesthesia* (2013) edited with Edward Hubbard, and of her *Very Short Introduction to Synesthesia* (2019) in which she expands the prevalent definition of synesthesia as a merging of the senses. *Weak synesthesia* (Lawrence E. Marks in Simner & Hubbard, eds. 2013: 761-789), conscious and intentional, enables a distinction from the medical meaning of *strong synesthesia*, unconscious and unintentional. According to cognitive psychologists, synesthesia is both universal and culturally specific. Rare as it may be, it nonetheless appears in all cultures and languages. As early as 1996, Sean Day started analysing the most frequent synesthetic metaphors, taking non-synesthetes into account, and his work serves as the basis for more recent studies such as that by L. E. Marks.

The term synesthesia comes from the Greek *sunaisthêsis*, «to perceive simultaneously», itself made up of «*sun*», «with», and *aisthêsis*, «sense perception», and it has mostly been studied in relation to the medical condition and 19th poetry. However, Charles Nodier (in Genette, 1976) and I. A. Richards (1924), at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century respectively, were already studying the workings of synesthesia in language and literature. Thus, the concept is essential to arts and literature, especially to poets, but not only: it is essential to humans, to their sensations and perceptions more generally. Synesthesia belongs to life, not merely to books.

Synesthesia is so ubiquitous and perplexing that these past fifteen years have seen it popularised, and increasingly studied, despite its prevailing medical dimension (Simner & Hubbard, 2013). In the meantime, literary studies, linguistics and translation studies have taken a renewed interest in synesthesia in light of more recent research (Digonnet, 2018, for “sensory linguistics”; Cousin-Martin, 2024 for “Tartan Noir”).

Every field needs to come up with a definition and a way to tackle, analyse and assimilate synesthesia. Beyond research fields, considering synesthesia with regard to cultures and languages appears necessary, bearing in mind French, English, Spanish and other official languages or minority languages in some countries. To begin with, we could think of Spain with Spanish and other official languages, India with Bengali, Hindi and English, and Scotland with English, Scots and Gaelic, etc.

This is a hybrid conference day, taking place both online and at Rouen University, Mont-Saint-Aignan campus, Faculty of Literature and Social Sciences, room A600.

Papers may be delivered in English, French or Spanish; speakers should aim for a 20-minute-long presentation.

Please send proposals (title, a 250-word abstract, and a short biography) **by March 10, 2026** to:

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Notification and provisional programme will be sent by the organising committee on March, 23, 2026.