Synesthesia and visual thinking in autism

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Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments in social interaction and communication, as well as restrictive and repetitive behaviors and sensory atypicalities. Visual thinking, defined as the predominant reliance on visual mental representations, has frequently been associated with autism. This cognitive style is thought to arise from enhanced perceptual abilities, which often coexist with linguistic divergences. The prevalence of synesthesia has been reported to be higher in autism than in the general population, and shared mechanisms have been identified between the two conditions, including sensory hypersensitivity, heightened attention to detail, and genetic overlaps. In this presentation, we will show how synesthesia can be integrated into this particular cognitive framework of visual thinking in autism. We will present experimental and phenomenological data supporting this hypothesis illustrating the interaction between visual thinking and synesthesia in autism. Finally, we will discuss the implications with regard to language acquisition in autism.