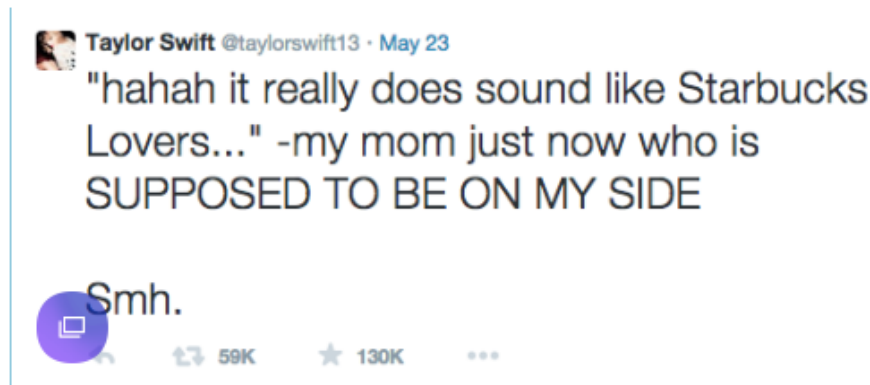


Even Taylor Swift's Mom Got That 'Blank Space' Lyric Wrong — Here's Why

Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" has been on heavy radio rotation since late last year, and you probably know the lyrics by heart — you just might know the wrong lyrics. Some Swift fans think the song's line "got a long list of ex-lovers" is actually "all the lonely Starbucks lovers" including, apparently, her mom. Over the weekend, the pop star tweeted the following:



In the "lonely Starbucks lovers" camp? There's a scientific reason behind it. Researchers from Germany's [University of Tübingen](#) found that our expectations and prior knowledge can strongly influence how we perceive things — including song lyrics. It's a phenomenon called "mondegreens," and it happens all the time.

When you hear a song like "Blank Space," you're getting an input signal that is muddled with background music, rhythms, and syllabification, explains Mark Liberman, PhD, professor of linguistics and director of the Linguistic Data Consortium at the University of Pennsylvania, making it hard for your brain to interpret everything at once.

"When the signal is more ambiguous...then more of our perceptions are likely to be invented," he tells Yahoo Health. And mondegreens are nothing new. Liberman points to another famous one: The famous lyrics to Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze," "...scuse me while I kiss the sky" are often misinterpreted as "...scuse me while I kiss this guy."

David Gow, PhD, a clinical instructor in neurology at Harvard Medical School who researches spoken language processing, says trying to decipher song lyrics is similar to our ability to understand someone with an accent — it's difficult and kind of

amazing that we can do it in the first place. “The question is why speech ever works because you’re always trying to recognize a moving target,” he tells Yahoo Health.

Gow’s research has determined that our brains tend to go into guessing game mode when we hear something, especially if we didn’t hear it well. For the first two tenths of a second, we just try to make sense of a sound, he explains. Then, we try to guess words. Once we have a guess, it actually affects the way we hear and interpret the sound because we may miss out on other verbal cues.

“You’re always hammering stuff into a shape that works, and your brain is always scrambling,” Gow says. While he points out that we don’t always guess right, he says we usually guess “right enough.”

Of course, there are other factors that can influence our ability to hear something correctly. One is the way in which you hear it. If you’re standing next to a person, you’re more likely to process what they’re saying correctly because you can actually see them mouth the words, says Gow. Another is how closely you’re able to pay attention. If you’re listening to music while driving or working out, you’re probably not paying as much attention to a song as you would if you were listening to it while sitting at home.

Unfortunately, once you experience a mondegreen, you’re more likely to be a repeat offender, says Liberman. Basically, if you hear “Starbucks lovers,” you’ll probably hear it every time the song plays since you’ve already created a linguistic pattern for it in your mind.