216 untranslatable words

One criticism levelled at positive psychology is that it takes an overly Western-centric view of the lighter side of human experience. Addressing that problem, Tim Lomas at the University of East London has begun a deep investigation into all the non-English words for positive emotions and concepts that don't have a direct translation in English.

Publishing his initial findings in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, Lomas's hope is not only that we might learn more about the positive psychology of other cultures, but that hearing of these words might enrich our own emotional lives. Of course there is a long-running debate about how much words influence our thoughts and emotions. Few people these days would advocate the idea that you can't feel an emotion if you don't have a word for it. But Lomas argues that at a minimum, if you don't have a way of identifying a specific emotion or feeling, it 'becomes just another unconceptualised ripple in the ongoing flux of subjective experience'.

Lomas's method was to trawl websites devoted to 'untranslatable words' (i.e. words that don't have a single corresponding word in English), then to do some Googling and finally to consult colleagues and students. This way he ended up with a list of 216 untranslatable words for positive emotional states and concepts. To find approximate English definitions of the words he used online dictionaries and academic references. Here are some examples of the untranslatable positive words that Lomas has organised into three main categories:

Words relating to feelings, including the subcategories of positive and complex feelings (definitions are taken from Lomas's paper):

Gula – Spanish for the desire to eat simply for the taste
Sobremesa – Spanish for when the food has finished but the conversation is still flowing
Mbukimvuki – Bantu for 'to shuck off one's clothes in order to dance'
Schnapsidee – German for coming up with an ingenious plan when drunk
Volta – Greek for leisurely strolling the streets
Gokotta – Swedish for waking up early to listen to bird song
Suaimhneas croi – Gaelic for the happiness that comes from finishing a task
Iktsuarpok – Inuit for the anticipation felt when waiting for someone
Vacilando – Spanish for the idea of wandering, where the act of travelling is more important than the destination
Gumusservi – Turkish for the glimmer that moonlight makes on water

Words relating to relationships, including the subcategories of intimacy and more general prosociality:

Nakama – Japanese for friends who one considers like family
Kanyininpa – Aboriginal Pintupi for a relationship between holder and held, akin to the deep nurturing feelings experienced by a parent for their child
Gigil – Philippine Tagalog for the irresistible urge to pinch or squeeze someone because you love them so much
Kilig – Tagalog for the butterflies in the stomach you get when interacting with someone you find attractive
Sarang – Korean for when you wish to be with someone until death
Myotahapea – Finnish for vicarious embarrassment
Mudita – Sanskrit for revelling in someone else's joy
Karma – the well known Buddhist term for when ethical actions lead to future positive states
Firgun – Hebrew for saying nice things to someone simply to make them feel good
Asabiyyah – Arabic for a sense of community spirit

Words relating to character, including the subcategories of resources and spirituality:

Sitzfleisch – German for the ability to persevere through hard or boring tasks (literally 'sit meat')
Baraka – Arabic for a gift of spiritual energy that can be passed from one person to another
Jugaad – Hindi for the ability to get by or make do
Desenrascanco – Portuguese for the ability to artfully disentangle oneself from a troublesome situation
Sprezzatura – Italian for when all art and effort are concealed beneath a 'studied carelessness'
Pihentagyu – Hungarian for quick-witted people who come up with sophisticated jokes and solutions (literally 'with a relaxed brain')
Kao pu – Chinese for someone who is reliable and responsible and gets things done without causing problems for others
Prajna – Sanskrit for intellectual wisdom and experiential insight
Wu-wei – Chinese for 'do nothing' (literally) but meaning that one's actions are entirely natural and effortless [left, and see the recent *Psychologist* article on this concept]
Bodhi – Sanskrit for when one has gained complete insight into nature

Lomas is continually updating his list online and he welcomes any suggestions. He says compiling the list is just the start of this project – as a next step he suggests that each word now deserves its own paper 'explicating and analysing them in rich detail'. CJ | There will be more to come from Lomas in a future issue.

In *Journal of Positive Psychology*

Working memory training could help beat anxiety

In *Biological Psychology*

One thing anxiety does is to upset your brain's balance between focus and vigilance. Your control over what you pay attention to is sacrificed at the expense of worrisome thoughts and a rapid response to any potential danger.

If this account is true, basic attention training should help, putting you back in charge of your own mind. A key component of attentional control is working memory – our ability to juggle task-relevant information in mind over short-periods of time. In a new paper in *Biological Psychology* a team led by Nazanin Derakshan at Birkbeck, University of London, has tested whether computer-based working memory training can reduce anxiety.

The training involved a kind of task that often features in 'brain training' games, where it's marketed as a way to become cleverer or more successful. In psychology it's known as the established dual n-back task, and the researchers used a version that got progressively harder as participants improved.

Specifically, 13 young, anxious student participants had to listen to streams of letters and simultaneously look at a changing grid of squares, and press a key whenever the current letter or highlighted square was the same as the one that occurred a certain number of items earlier in the stream. The difficulty of the task was intensified by requiring the participant to compare the current square and letter with items further back. They completed of 30 minutes of this training each day for 15 days. A control group of 13 anxious students spent the same time on an easy version of the task that didn't vary in difficulty as they improved, so it was unlikely to boost their working memory abilities.

Before and after the training, all the students completed a series of measures of their anxiety and their ability to perform under stress.

The working memory training group showed improvements (not only on the n-back task) but also in their performance during 'safe' and stressful trials of what's known as the flanker task – this involves responding to the direction of a target arrow while ignoring distracter arrows pointing the other way. During stressful trials the researchers blasted the participants with white noise. The control group only showed improvements during the safe trials, not the more difficult stressful trials.

The training group, but not the control group, also showed changes to their brain waves (recorded via electroencephalography) – specifically they exhibited a reduced ratio of theta to beta frequency waves while they were resting. This is a neural sign that they were more relaxed. In the training group, those who showed the biggest improvements in working memory performance also showed greater reductions in their self-reported anxiety symptoms post-training. There was one null result – on an eye movement test (a version of the 'anti-saccade task'), the training group did not show any post-training benefits compared with the control group.

Caution is in order because there were so few participants and we don't know how long the apparent benefits of working memory training will last. The researchers characterise their results as a 'proof of principle', and it's certainly exciting to think that a simple computerised task could help people become less anxious, simply by improving their basic memory skills.

Writing on her university's research blog, Professor Derakshan says 'the implications of improving attentional control are enormous in education and clinical science. Targeting and training working memory...holds the potential to protect against longer term under-achievement in anxious pupils. It can also protect against the development of clinical anxiety which can be debilitative to the individual.' **CJ**

How the home crowd affects football referees' decisions

In *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*

One of the most thorough investigations into referee bias has found that they tend to apply harsher foul punishments against the away team. The new results, published in the *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, suggest that experienced referees are just as prone to this bias as their less experienced colleagues.

Andrés Picazo-Tadeo and his team analysed data from 2651 matches played in the First Division of La Liga, the Spanish Football League, between the 2002/3 and 2009/10 seasons, inclusive. Unlike previous research, they were careful to consider the referees' foul decisions separately from the awarding of penalty cards (given as punishment for serious fouls). It's been shown before that referees tend to award more free kicks and cards in favour of the home team, but this is not strong evidence for a home team bias because it's possible that away teams simply tend to commit more fouls. The new research specifically looks not just at the distribution of referees' foul decisions between home and away teams, but it also examines separately how harshly referees punish any fouls.

In fact, the research uncovered no difference in the number of fouls that referees attributed to home and away teams. But after a foul, referees tended to punish away teams more harshly with more yellow and red cards, and this was especially the case when the home crowd was larger. The presence of a running track between the pitch and the crowd made no difference, and, as mentioned, neither did referee experience. The basic result complements a recent lab study that also found that simulated crowd noise influenced referees to punish fouls more severely.

Picazo-Tadeo and his colleagues speculate that perhaps referees' initial foul decisions are made relatively automatically, in the heat of unfolding play, thus making them immune to social pressure from the home crowd. In contrast, after play has halted, the referee has time to decide on the severity of the infringement and here the noise of the crowd may sway their thinking – indeed, they may even, without realising they are doing it, use the noise of the crowd as a cue for the seriousness of the foul. This would inevitably bias their decisions against the away team because of the noisy protests of the larger home crowd whenever one of their players was the victim of a foul.

An important caveat is that although the study took account of the number of fouls made by each team, the researchers don't have any objective measure (beyond the referees' card decisions) of the actual seriousness of the fouls committed. It's possible that away teams tend to commit more serious fouls than home teams, which if true would undermine the results.

Notwithstanding this possibility, the researchers said their results suggest that local supporters can influence referee decisions after a foul has been called. 'One recommendation for supporters is that they should exert more social pressure in the moments immediately after a referee indicates that the away team has committed a foul,' they said. Meanwhile, they recommended that referee training incorporate lessons on how to ignore irrelevant cues, such as crowd noise. **CJ**

Here's a really simple trick that could help you enjoy more lucid dreams

In *Psychosis*

As you're reading this silently to yourself, do you hear an inner voice speaking the words in your head? A new paper published in *Psychosis* suggests that most people do hear an internal voice when they're reading. But as this is one of the first ever investigations into the question, and it used an unconventional methodology, it's fair to say the results are far from conclusive.

Ruvanee Vilhauer at New York University took advantage of questions about the phenomenon posted on Yahoo! Answers, the largest English language Q&A website in the world (where people post questions and members of the community chip in with their answers). She found 24 relevant questions posed between 2006 and 2014, and 136 answers in which people described their own experiences when reading.

Vilhauer analysed all the relevant content and looked for recurring themes and insights. Overall, the vast majority (82.5 per cent) of contributors said that they did hear an inner voice when reading to themselves, 10.6 per cent said they didn't, and the status of the remaining contributors was unclear. Of those who said they heard an inner voice, 13 per cent said they did so only sometimes, with various factors tending to increase the likelihood of this happening, such as their interest in the text.

Among the contributors with an internal reading voice, another key theme was whether or not they only ever heard the same voice (this was true for about half of them) or a range of different voices. For those who heard different inner voices, these tended to vary based on the voice of the character who was speaking in a story, or if it was a text message or email, on the voice of the sender. For people who only ever heard the same internal reading voice, this was usually their own voice, but it was often different in some way from their speaking voice, for example in terms of pitch or emotional tone. Some contributors described or implied that their inner reading voice was just the same as the inner voice they used for thoughts.

Nearly all those who said they had an inner reading voice or voices referred to it being 'audible' in some way, for example they spoke of its volume or depth or accent. Another issue that came up was the controllability of the inner reading voice. Some contributors spoke of the voice as distracting or even scary, while others said they deliberately chose the voice they used. You can see why this paper was published in the journal *Psychosis*. Indeed, Vilhauer said that the insights from her analysis provided some support for theories that say auditory hallucinations are inner voices that are incorrectly identified as not belonging to the self.

Why has this topic been largely overlooked before now (although there is 2011 research from Ruth Filik and others, and Charles Fernyhough's forthcoming book *The Voices Within*)? Vilhauer's study hints at an answer because she found that many people assumed that their inner experiences when reading were shared by everyone. This worked both ways, so some of the people who had an inner reading voice were convinced of its normality: 'We all hear our voices in our heads at times – even those of others we know – especially while reading,' said one Yahoo contributor. Yet others who claimed to have no inner voice felt they were the normal ones. For example, in response to a question posted on the site about whether anyone else hears an inner voice while reading, one responder said 'Nooo. You should get that checked out' and another wrote, in capitals: 'NO, I'M NOT A FREAK'.

Vilhauer speculates that perhaps psychologists have failed to study this question because they've simply assumed, like many of the Yahoo contributors, that there's no variability in this and everyone has the same reading experience as they do. **CJ**

LINK FEAST

All in the Brain?
British psychologist Richard Bentall has written an open letter to Stephen Fry, asking him to stop describing his mental illness as a purely biomedical problem when speaking about it to the public. Peter Kinderman directed one at the BBC.
https://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/discursive/all-in-the-brain
http://peterkinderman.blogspot.co.uk/2016/02/open-letter-about-bbc-coverage-of.html

Psychology's Replication Crisis Has a Silver Lining
Harvard psychologist Paul Bloom argues at The Atlantic that it's an opportunity for the field to lead.
tinyurl.com/htlj85a

Angela Duckworth on Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance
The US psychologist appeared on the latest episode of The Psychology Podcast with Scott Barry Kaufman.
tinyurl.com/zegeuyg

How Do You Keep Mentally Strong?
As part of the BBC's 'In the Mind' series, people have been sharing their tips for coping with mental ill health.
www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-35594301

Why Your Brain Actually Works Better in Winter
Over at New York's Science of Us, the editor of our Research Digest looked at some new and old research findings that seem to debunk the myth of the winter blues.
http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2016/02/debunking-the-myth-of-the-winter-blues.html

Altered Tastes
Can the new science of neurogastronomy – and one very creative chef – convince us that healthy food is delicious? Maria Konnikova at the New Republic meets Heston Blumenthal.
https://newrepublic.com/article/128899/man-will-transform-eat

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Psychologists have looked into the importance of the pre-interview chitchat

In *Journal of Applied Psychology*

As a fan of fair job assessment, I'm bugged by the freeform chatter that kicks off most interviews – it allows influential first impressions to be formed in a yak about the traffic or some other trivial topic that has nothing to with the job. It's true that interview structures have become more standardised over the years, but a new study suggests this isn't enough to counter the effect of early rapport. The research goes to the heart of my concern: Do first impressions actually provide important information, or simply introduce unfair bias?

Bryan Swider at Scheller College of Business at the Georgia Institute of Technology and his colleagues analysed the outcomes of mock interviews involving 163 accountancy students, who were rated by interviewers on their answers to 12 standardised questions. However, before the formal questioning period, the interviews began with a few minutes of rapport building, after which the interviewers noted down their first impressions. Did these preliminaries influence the overall interview scores?

They did. The overall scores given by the interviewers differed from those given by a separate set of expert reviewers, who were given video access only to the main Q&A phase, and whose ratings were therefore uncontaminated by informal first impressions. The discrepancy between this expert baseline and the interviewer scores was partly explained by taking interviewer first impression ratings into account – those students who made a good initial impression tended to receive more favourable scores from the interviewers for their answers to the formal questions, especially the first few, with the effect tailing off as the interview gathered pace.

What explains the influence of those first impressions? The expert raters also produced an 'image score' for each interviewee based on their physical appearance, voice and body language. Participants who scored higher for image were especially likely to receive inflated scores from the interviewers, suggesting that at least one of the influences of those first impressions was to do with good image management: suave candidates make better impressions.

But this wasn't the whole story – something non-image related was also going on.

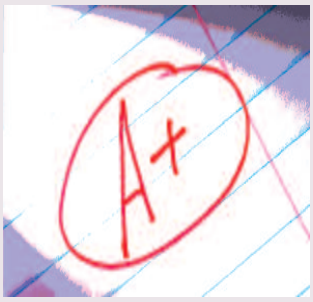
Past work by Swider and one of his co-authors, Murray Barrick, shows that positive first impressions are associated with candidate verbal skill and extraversion, two features that may be legitimately useful to the job. Consistent with this, in the current study the interviewers' first impression scores correlated with the expert raters' overall scores (which remember were based purely on the formal Q&A part of the interviews), suggesting that the early rapport gave a genuine preview into how the candidates would fare with the meat of the interview. All in all, the influence of interview first impressions may be partly unfair and superficial, but also communicate information that's genuinely informative.

If we want to reduce the impact of first impressions, the authors suggest buffering the main part of the interview from the rapport phase with a few un-scored questions that soak up the effect. Explicitly rating the first impressions on criteria that can be tied back to the job (eloquence, flexibility) also makes things fairer. Beyond that, the researchers argue it is difficult to do away with early chitchat – it's expected by both parties and a good way to ease in to what is a stressful social situation. Looking at the mixed nature of first impressions, perhaps it's best to make peace with informal interview chat rather than trying to fight it. **AF**

DIGEST DIGESTED

Full reports are available at **www.bps.org.uk/digest**

Teenagers with a history of offending were found to be unusually skilled at spotting when their peers were lying. However, the cue they said they used – eye movements – was not actually related to lying, suggesting that the offenders' deception-detection skill is intuitive. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*



A twin study has raised doubts about the relevance of the personality trait of 'grit' to school students' success in exams. Grit accounted for just 0.5 per cent of the variation in GCSE exam performance once the participants' Big Five personality trait scores were taken into account. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*

Participants looking at LEGO scenes were especially good at spotting any changes to the scenes that involved LEGO people, as opposed to other LEGO elements. This is similar to the attentional advantage previously demonstrated for animals and humans in real-life scenes, suggesting that on some level we automatically process LEGO people as if they are alive. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* (See also a 'LEGO special' in The Psychologist app!)

It's natural to try to persuade people using facts, but often this approach backfires making the target of your persuasion even more committed to their original views. A new study suggests this is especially likely to happen when the person's views are tied to their sense of identity, which makes them see your facts as a threat. *Discourse Processes*

A comparison of believers in psychic powers and sceptics has found that both groups have the same level of memory skills, but that the former have weaker analytical skills. The finding could help explain why belief in psychic powers remains so common in the absence of scientific evidence. *Memory and Cognition*

We're often told that we could improve our negotiation skills by feigning anger and other emotions. However, a new study finds that feigning anger can have longer-term costs for relationships, which the researchers describe as a 'blowback effect'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*

A systematic review has looked at all the available data on the personality differences between university students studying different subjects. There are reliable differences, including the finding that psychology students are often more neurotic and more open-minded than students studying other subjects. *Personality and Individual Differences*