

THE BEAUTY OF LANGUAGE:

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Language is an incredibly beautiful thing. However, the beauty of any language is often in the unique culture and concepts that it seeks to express. What makes sense for the Spanish speaker may be confusing for the person speaking American English. What sounds pleasant – like a musical melody – in Italian may become a maze of messy syllables in German. For March, let's look at some *wonderfully unique and highly expressive vocabulary* from around the world. And then in April, we will focus on the same thing for vocabulary originating in English.

Note: There are many Internet webpages that take up this theme; I am using the *Rocket Languages Blog* as my source, to which I am adding my own comments.

<https://www.rocketlanguages.com/blog/20-of-the-worlds-most-beautiful-untranslatable-words>

Waldeinsamkeit (German) The German word *waldeinsamkeit* consists of two words joined together. *Wald* means forest, and *einsamkeit* means loneliness or solitude. It hints at both the feeling of being alone in the woods and also at a peaceful oneness with nature. *An interesting aspect here is that the English word loneliness tends to mean sadness, whereas solitude is usually a positive feeling. Another question is: can I feel waldeinsamkeit on a quiet Sunday afternoon when I am at home all alone?*

Iktsuarpok (Inuit) *Iktsuarpok* describes the feeling of anticipation when you're expecting someone and waiting for them to arrive. It refers to the impatient excitement that makes you constantly check to see if they are arriving. *Part of this may be that one can see guests from a long way off in the Inuit world – which explains the idea of checking to see if guest are arriving. But we can still have the same feeling, without the action of checking.*

木漏れ日 (Japanese) *木漏れ日 (komorebi)* is a Japanese word that refers to the sunlight that filters through the leaves of trees. The word consists of three kanji (and a hiragana particle). The first kanji means "tree" or "trees," the second kanji refers to "escape," and the third kanji means "light" or "sun."

In Japanese, there is a word; in English, it becomes a descriptive sentence: 'oh, you mean the

sunlight filtering through the leaves of a tree.'

Sobremesa (Spanish) *Sobremesa* refers to the time spent after lunch or dinner socializing with the people you shared the meal with. Meals are a very important part of Spanish culture and the Spanish people value the time spent relaxing and chatting after finishing eating. *An interesting aspect here is the difference between cultural practices of chatting before the meal, chatting during the meal, and chatting after the meal – maybe by the time the meal is over, everyone has had enough chatting. Another question is whether this is an everyday idea – including Monday through Friday when we are sometimes a bit busy, or more of a weekend or holiday practice ... when we free time.*

Kilig (Tagalog) The Tagalog noun *kilig* is from Philippine culture. It refers to the feeling of butterflies in your stomach you get when something romantic happens. *Kilig* is also used as an adjective to describe the exhilaration of an exciting romantic experience. *The explanation in English uses the phrase 'butterflies in your stomach.' I think this is accurate, but in English 'butterflies in your stomach' can extend to things that are not romantic as well: first day at a new job, the moments before a big test; watching a friend or family member in some performance.*

Mamihlapinatapai (Yaghan) The word *mamihlapinatapai* comes from the Yaghan language of Tierra del Fuego of southern South America. It refers to the wordless, meaningful look shared by two people who both have responsibility to take care of something, but are both also reluctant to do so. It captures the feeling that from just this look, each person knows the other understands the tension of the situation. *I suppose this is the look between two people when it is time to take out the trash. Both are 'responsible;' either can 'do it;' but neither wants to ..., so they mamihlapinatapai exchanges glances, and ...*

Flâner (French) Perhaps one of the most Parisian, or Paris-like, of all French words, the verb *flâner* originated in the 19th century. It refers to strolling the streets of Paris in a leisurely way. The word implies no goal or destination, and means you have no-where you have to go and nothing but free time to spend. This is the simple pleasure of soaking up the city's beauty. *I have heard the term dotebura (土手ブラ) to refer to walking up and down Dotemachi in Hirosaki City. Same thing?*

Utepils (Norwegian) *Utepils* is a Norwegian word that literally translates to "outdoor lager." It is common among beer drinkers in Scandinavian cultures. It refers to the act of sitting outside on a sunny day enjoying a beer. It may also be used to emphasize the first beer you drink outside on a warm, sunny spring day, and is the name of a brewing company. *I think this idea is unique to snowy areas and would have little meaning to places that don't have long, cold, and snowy winters. The cherry blossom festival is delightful with its beautiful blossoms; but it is also nice to sit outside in the warm spring sunshine and enjoy something refreshing to drink.*

פִּירְגֻן (Hebrew) Pronounced *Firgun*, this is a modern, informal Hebrew term used in Israeli culture. It refers to the feeling of joy that something good has happened, or might happen, to someone else. It also describes genuine, unselfish delight or pride in someone else's accomplishment. It represents a true generosity of spirit. *Firgun is a feeling that many educators experience year-after-year, as their students graduate and move onto the next step of life. One hopes that the Russian people can discover something in their lives that can provide them a sense of firgun.*

Gezelligheid (Dutch) *Gezelligheid* refers to a convivial, cozy, or warm atmosphere. This can be the

warmth of being with loved ones, or the feeling of seeing a friend after a long absence. It suggests a general togetherness that provides a feeling of warmth. Many consider it the word that most closely represents the heart of Dutch culture. *Gezelligheid as an idea has a wide expanse – from family to friends and a feeling of warmth. Does Japanese have such an expansive word? Does English?*

So, which of these Cultural Expressions catch your interest? Which represent something that you might think about or feel? Thinking about these words, what does this mean to you about translating vocabulary from one language to another? Can ‘anything and everything’ be translated perfectly and efficiently? Or are these some expressions that demand a transition from a single word to a sentence that explains? Would you go so far as to say that there are some ideas that are *not-translatable* ... concepts that cannot be put into any language other than the one they originated in? Perhaps the title

of this month’s REAL ENGLISH should have been the *Mystery of Language*.

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