



# The spectrum of positive affect: A cross-cultural lexical analysis

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**Abstract:** Although wellbeing tends to be associated with positive affect, the phenomenological terrain in this regard is often poorly differentiated. In the interest of bringing further granularity to this area, an enquiry was conducted into relevant concepts found across the world's cultures, focusing specifically on so-called untranslatable words. Through a quasi-systematic search of academic and grey literature, together with conceptual snowballing, 134 relevant terms have been located so far (with the process of enquiry ongoing). Through a process of grounded theory analysis, seven main themes were identified: peace/calm; contentment/satisfaction; cosiness/homeliness; savouring/appreciation; revelry/fun; joy/euphoria; and bliss *nirvāṇa*. The analysis highlights the need for a more expansive and granular conceptualisation of positive affect, one that recognises the depth and breadth of the subjective terrain that it covers.

**Keywords:** positive emotion, wellbeing, cross-cultural, language, lexicography

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Positive affect

Affect is commonly conceptualised in terms of valence. This occurs, for instance, in the two dominant naturalistic models of emotions: the circumplex (Russell, 1980) and basic emotion (Ekman, 1999) theories. The former holds that affective states are generated by the interaction of two independent neurophysiological systems: valence (i.e., pleasant-unpleasant) and arousal (i.e., active-passive). Conversely, the latter holds that a "discrete and independent neural system subserves every emotion," and that these emotions differ in terms of valence, as well as factors including antecedent events, physiology, appraisal, and probable behavioural response (Posner, Russell, & Peterson, 2005, p. 715). For instance, Ekman identifies one positively-valenced basic emotion (enjoyment), and four negatively valenced ones (sadness, anger, disgust, and fear). Drawing on such models, theories of wellbeing generally depict positively-valenced emotions as reflective of wellbeing, and negatively-valenced ones as antithetical to it. For example, the concept of subjective (or hedonic) wellbeing has been theorised as comprising two main dimensions (Diener, 2000): cognitive (judgements of life satisfaction) and affective (the ratio of positive to negative affect). Thus, in the affective component, positively-valenced emotions cumulatively contribute to wellbeing, while negatively-valenced emotions detract from it.

However, positive affect covers a considerable amount of ground. As such, efforts have been made to delineate this territory with greater detail. For instance, Delle Fave et al. (2016) undertook a comprehensive cross-cultural analysis of lay perceptions of happiness, involving 2,799 adults across 12 countries in five continents. The researchers obtained 7,551 definitions of happiness, of which around 44% were psychological definitions, with the remainder split



between 10 different contextual definitions (of which the highest ranking were family and interpersonal relationships, health, daily life, standard of living, and work). Within psychological definitions were 13 subcategories. The dominant one was “harmony” – accounting for nearly 30% of the definitions – which comprised four components: (a) inner peace (including peace of mind, emotional stability, detachment, tranquillity, and serenity); (b) balance (including inner balance, inner harmony, acceptance of life, being attuned with the universe, and balance between wishes and achievements); (c) contentment (in general and with oneself); and (d) psychophysical wellbeing (a single-item component). The second subcategory was satisfaction, encompassing attainment of life goals, realisation of dreams and expectations, and satisfaction with life and oneself. Third was positive emotions, which predominantly featured high arousal positive affect (HAP) feelings such as joy and elation, plus a lower percentage of low arousal positive affect (LAP) feelings like comfort. Fourth was positive states, referring to a general state wellbeing, plus more specific experiences such as flow. The remaining subcategories were optimism, meaning, absence of negative feelings, awareness, engagement/growth, purpose, mastery, and autonomy. Interesting cross-cultural differences were also observed. For instance, to an extent, the findings corroborated the notion that people in Western nations have a greater tendency towards emphasising HAP, and East Asians towards LAP (Lee, Lin, Huang, & Fredrickson, 2013).

Granularity of a somewhat different sort is provided by Ekman’s recent Atlas of Emotions project ([www.paulekman.com](http://www.paulekman.com)), although the website doesn’t provide detail as to how this granularity was arrived at. Methodological uncertainty aside, though, Ekman usefully deconstructs enjoyment according to a spectrum of intensity: sensory pleasure; rejoicing; compassion/joy; amusement; *Schadenfreude* (German: “enjoyment of the misfortunes of another person”); relief; pride; *fiero* (Italian: “enjoyment felt when you have met a challenge that stretched your capabilities”); *naches* (Yiddish: “pride in the accomplishments, or sometimes just the existence of, your actual [or mentored] offspring”); wonder; excitement; and ecstasy. It is unclear how these types were identified, and whether they have been empirically analysed. Nevertheless, it is an intriguing attempt to delineate the range of emotions encompassed within the broad notion of “enjoyment.” Of particular interest here is that three terms are from other languages, and could be regarded as “untranslatable” (since if they were perfectly translatable, presumably Ekman would have deployed the equivalent English term). In that respect, it is possible that there may be other relevant untranslatable terms which may bring further differentiation to the realm of positive emotions.

### 1.2 Untranslatable words

This paper on draws Lomas’ (2016) evolving lexicography of untranslatable words pertaining to wellbeing. While untranslatability is a contested construct, it essentially describes a word that lacks an exact equivalent in a given other language. The interest in such words is manifold. First, they offer insights into other cultures (Wierzbicka, 1997). The general theoretical context here is the linguistic-relativity hypothesis (LRH) – sometimes also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in recognition of the pioneering work of Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1940) – which holds that language influences how people experience and understand the world. The stronger version of this hypothesis is linguistic determinism, whereby language inextricably constitutes thought, whereas its milder version simply asserts that language shapes thought and experience (Perlovsky, 2009). In relation to untranslatable words, the stronger view holds that only people enmeshed within the culture that produced a word can truly understand or experience the phenomenon it signifies (Taylor, 1985). However, the milder perspective contends that such

words are, to an extent, accessible to people outside the culture, holding some universal relevance (Wierzbicka, 1997).

This latter point highlights a key point of interest: beyond being informative vis-à-vis the creating culture, such words can enrich *other* lexicons. The phenomenon of “borrowing” words is central to language development (Durkin, 2014). Of the some 600,000 lexemes in the Oxford English Dictionary, the percentage of these “loanwords,” i.e., those not part of the original West-Germanic Anglo-Saxon language (Lehmann, 1962), may be as high as 41% (Tadmor, 2009). Of particular interest here is *why* words are borrowed. Haspelmath (2009) identifies two main reasons: “core” versus “cultural” borrowings. The former is when a loanword replicates an existing word, which tends to happen for sociolinguistic reasons, such as the cultural capital associated with using foreign words (Blank, 1999). While this type of borrowing is not of concern here, the second is central. Haspelmath refers to these as “loanwords by necessity,” where the recipient language lacks its own word for a particular referent. In Lehrer’s (1974, p. 105) terminology, such words fill “semantic gaps,” i.e., “the lack of a convenient word to express what [one] wants to speak about.” It is this notion of a semantic gap that makes a given word untranslatable, indicating phenomena that have been overlooked or undervalued by, say, English-speaking cultures, but which another culture has identified.

Thus, the lexicography is founded upon the idea that such words can enrich a recipient language, and moreover augment the nomological network in psychology. Such augmentation is desirable for numerous reasons, not least because academic psychology tends to be Western-centric (Becker & Marecek, 2008). Much of its empirical work has been conducted with participants described by Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) as WEIRD, belonging to societies that are Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (Lomas, 2015). Moreover, many scholars themselves are situated within such contexts, which influences their appraisal of the world. Thus, the nomological network in psychology is arguably somewhat provincial, being largely founded upon concepts that happen to have been identified in English. The lexicography thus aims to augment this network with constructs which have not yet been identified in psychology, as signalled by an untranslatable word. To narrow its focus to a manageable area of enquiry, its concern is wellbeing specifically. A key aspect of this is positive emotions, which constitutes one of the six core thematic categories in the lexicography. (The other five are spirituality (Lomas, in press a), love (Lomas, in press b), ambivalent emotions (Lomas, in press c), prosociality, and character development.) Thus, this paper aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this aspect of wellbeing through the study of relevant untranslatable words.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Initial data collection and analysis

In the original paper establishing the lexicography, Lomas (2016) identified 216 words pertaining to wellbeing, located through a “quasi-systematic” review of academic and grey literature (*quasi* in that there was insufficient material in academic psychology journals to permit a true systematic review, utilising conventional academic databases). These words were analysed using a variation of grounded theory (GT), a qualitative methodology which allows theory to emerge inductively from the data, via three main coding stages (open, axial, and selective) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In a process of open coding, the data (i.e., the words and their definitions) were examined for emergent themes. Then, axial coding involved aggregating the themes into categories based on conceptual similarity. Six main categories were produced, as noted above, which in turn were paired into three meta-categories: emotions (positive and ambivalent),

relationships (love and pro-sociality), and development (flourishing and spirituality). Finally, selective coding saw the identification of a single “core” category, i.e., wellbeing.

## 2.2 Subsequent data collection and analysis

Subsequent to the publication of this initial paper, the lexicography has expanded to nearly 1,000 words currently (the project is a work-in-progress, with new terms being continually identified and added, and the explanations of existing ones being refined and updated). However, these additional words have not altered the overall thematic structure of the lexicography; it has been possible to accommodate these within the existing framework of meta-categories and categories, although some new themes have been added within the categories. That is the case with respect to positive emotions – the focus of this paper – where the original schema of five themes has now expanded to seven (as explained below). The new words added to the lexicography arrived partly through contributions to a website created to host the evolving project ([www.drtilomas.com/lexicography](http://www.drtilomas.com/lexicography)) and partly through follow-up enquiries into the categories via “conceptual snowballing.” Roughly speaking, of the nearly 800 words collected since the initial paper, 500 have been provided by website visitors, and 300 through conceptual snowballing. The term “snowballing” derives from research recruitment, whereby participants facilitate the participation of additional people, particularly those who may be “hard to reach” (Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010). Similarly, “conceptual snowballing” refers to the process by which enquiries into a particular concept – in this case a given untranslatable word – leads researchers to encounter related concepts. For instance, although nearly 120 different languages are currently represented in the lexicography – a tiny subset of the some 7,000 languages in existence – many words hail from a select group of languages that are particularly well-studied in psychologically-oriented literature, consisting of Chinese, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Pāli, and Sanskrit. Thus, an enquiry into a word from one of these languages would often lead researchers to an academic text, in which related words are discussed. An enquiry into the Sanskrit term *nirvāṇa*, for example – discussed below – leads to texts in which a host of other interlinked concepts are also mentioned, from *karma* (a theory of causality with respect to ethics) to *samsāra* (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, from which *nirvāṇa* constitutes an “escape”).

The current paper focuses specifically on positive emotions. It was an a priori decision to focus on this category (out of the six that currently constitute the lexicography as whole). This meant that the analysis selectively focused on the words in the lexicography which have been assigned to this category. This comprises 134 words at present, hailing from 35 languages: German ( $n = 14$ ), Spanish (12), Chinese, French (both 11), Greek (9), Dutch, Japanese (both 8), Sanskrit/Pāli (7), Italian, Swedish (both 6), Norwegian (5), Danish (4), Arabic, Latin (both 3), Basque, Finnish, Gaelic Irish, Hawaiian, Icelandic, Welsh (all 2), Balinese, Creole, Croatian, Georgian, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Inuktitut, Māori, Ngarluma, Polish, Portuguese, Swahili, Thai, and Yiddish (all 1). It should be noted that this category excludes words that pertain to love, since this constitutes an entire category in itself, and has its own separate analysis (Lomas, in press b). It should further be noted that although most of these words signify emotions or qualia more broadly, some are not emotions or qualia per se, but rather are phenomena associated with them. The words were again analysed using the variation of GT developed in the original paper. In the first stage of open coding, words were examined for thematic content, and grouped together based on thematic similarity, with seven broad themes identified. These seven themes build upon and refine the analysis in the original paper. There only five themes were identified – cosiness, revelry, savouring, joy/bliss, and *nirvāṇa* – on the basis of just 35 words. With the list having expanded to 134 words pertaining to positive feelings, two additional themes

were identified (peace and calm, and contentment and satisfaction), while the other five were slightly adjusted (for instance, joy is now paired with euphoria rather than bliss, with bliss joining *nirvāṇa* in an expanded theme), as elucidated below.

### 3. Results and discussion

The words analysed fell into seven broad themes: peace/calm; contentment/satisfaction; cosiness/homeliness; savouring/appreciation; revelry/fun; joy/euphoria; and bliss/*nirvāṇa*. As per Ekman's analysis, to an extent these can be regarded as unfolding along a spectrum of intensity (from least to most intense or highly-charged). They are briefly discussed in turn, featuring a selection of relevant words.

#### 3.1 Peace/calm

At the tranquil lower end of the arousal spectrum are various words alluding to calmness and peacefulness. Perhaps pre-eminent in this respect is the Sanskrit term *smṛti*, arguably more widely known by its Pāli cognate *sati*. Its significance relates to it being the basis – as a loan translation, i.e., semantic borrowing (Durkin, 2014) – for “mindfulness,” which has become somewhat ubiquitous in the West. Technically, *smṛti* does not signify an emotion per se, but rather – in many conceptualisations of it – a state of attentiveness, as captured in Kabat-Zinn's (2003, p. 145) definition of mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” Nevertheless, it can describe a form of calm abiding, with the practice of mindfulness associated with outcomes such as equanimity and imperturbability (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). Much more could be said about *smṛti*. For instance, in its original Buddhist context, the term included ethical and spiritual dimensions which are not necessarily retained in contemporary conceptualisations of mindfulness (Lomas, 2017). Indeed, most terms here easily justify in-depth treatments, exploring their nuances at length. However, to achieve the comparative analysis aimed for here, a trade-off between depth and breadth is necessary.

Qualities of mind evoked by *smṛti* are found in other terms, including some that have also been developed in Buddhism, albeit in different cultural contexts (i.e., where Buddhism has been transmitted to), such as *zanshin* and *seijaku* in Japanese. As per its use of ideograms, Japanese is agglutinative, where lexemes can be easily combined to form more complex words. *Zanshin* combines *zan*, which can be translated as “remnants” and/or “that which endures,” with *shin*, meaning “heart-mind” (Sanchez, 2013, p. 54). Together, they suggest the idea of a “remaining mind,” which can denote relaxed mental alertness, especially in the face of danger or stress, which is relevant in the context of martial arts, for instance. Similarly, *seijaku* combines *sei*, translatable as “quiet,” with *jaku*, which can connote “tranquillity;” thus together they refer to silence, calm, and serenity, especially amidst activity or chaos.

Of course, words pertaining to peace and calm are not only found within Buddhism. For instance, Taoism – a philosophy and way of being indigenous to China – features various terms that tease out further nuances in this arena. These include *tīngtīānyōumìng*, literally meaning to “listen to life,” with an implication of submitting or trusting to fate or the “will of heaven,” and *xīnrúzhǐshuǐ*, which describes a mind being as tranquil as still water, suggesting that one is at peace with oneself. Chinese also features *xīnpíngqìhé*, implying the composure of an even and harmonious heart, and *zìrán zìzài*, which connotes an effortless grace and ease. Then, away from Asia, Classical Greece used *ataraxia* to describe a robust and lucid tranquillity, an almost unshakable peace of mind (with parallels with *smṛti* in implying decentring or detachment). The

quality was particularly valued by Stoic thinkers, who, to an extent, regarded wellbeing as a function of the will, attainable by eradicating desire (McMahon, 2006). For instance, Epictetus (50-138 CE) wrote that “The man who rids his mind of desire and avers things only within his sphere of choice has virtue and an untroubled mind.”

### 3.2 Contentment/satisfaction

Closely related to feelings of peace/calm are ones that fall under the banner of contentment and satisfaction. To an extent, this overlaps with peace/calm, in that contentment can involve being “at peace.” Thus, some of the terms above could also fit into this category. For instance, *ataraxia* was viewed by Stoics as the pathway to contentment, and indeed as contentment in itself (McMahon, 2006). However, contentment/satisfaction appears to differ from peace/calm in being slightly more positively qualified, subjectively “warmer.”

A particularly interesting term in this respect is the Danish concept of *hygge* (which is also used in Norwegian). This is frequently hailed as the epitome of an untranslatable word, representing a state of being that is said to be archetypically Danish (or perhaps more broadly Scandinavian), yet highly difficult to adequately capture in English. Indeed, 2016 actually saw nine popular books published about *hygge*, invariably depicting it as the “secret” to the high levels of happiness in Denmark (Orange, 2016). It is thought to derive from the Old Norse *hugga*, which can mean “to comfort” (and may be the basis for the English “hug”). Thus, to an extent, *hygge* denotes feeling safe, protected and cared for, and in that respect could also be situated here under the next theme of cosiness/homeliness. And yet, Danes also reportedly use it to depict such pleasures as chatting with a friend or cycling in the sunshine. Thus, whatever *hygge* signifies, it is not *only* cosiness. Or perhaps, as some bloggers suggest (e.g., [www.afroginthefjord.com](http://www.afroginthefjord.com)), it speaks to feeling cosy “in one’s heart,” regardless of whether one’s material environment is actually “cosy.”

One might argue that *hygge* is not an emotion per se, but rather a judgement on phenomena that engender contentment. However, this is fine, since this enquiry is also interested in words related to positive emotions. That said, some words do refer directly to feelings of contentment. For instance, Danish also has *morgenfrisk* to describe feeling rested after a good night’s sleep, and *arbejdsglæde* – literally work (*arbejde*) happiness/gladness (*glæde*) – denoting the satisfaction/pleasure gained from one’s occupation. Similarly, *fiero* features in Ekman’s Atlas of Emotions as “the enjoyment felt when you have met a challenge that stretched your capabilities.” Or consider the Hebrew *osher*, often described as a state of contented happiness, but also involving joy, making it more strongly qualified than contentment per se. Finally, indicating the kind of happy relief one might experience after successfully navigating challenging times, there is *kǔqùgānlái* in Chinese, which literally means to go from pain and come towards sweetness. Having charted some interesting territory around contentment, we can now return to the cosiness and homeliness implied by *hygge*, which constitute an interesting theme in their own right.

### 3.3 Cosiness/homeliness

Overlapping with contentment/satisfaction is an intriguing class of words pertaining to cosiness and homeliness. I already noted that *hygge* can be used to denote such feelings, and further mentioned its etymological roots in the verb “to comfort” or “hug.” In that respect, it has parallels with the Welsh *cwtch*, which as a verb means “to hug/cuddle,” and (intransitively) “to get cosy,” while as a noun refers to a hug/cuddle (Coupland, 2014). However, as per *hygge*, it also evokes cosiness and safety, and describes places that engender such feelings.

The analysis uncovered various words which evoke these experiences. Many hailed from colder countries, which perhaps indicates an intersection between geography, culture and language, whereby these qualities are particularly valued in relatively cold and inhospitable climates (Brits, 2016). I have already touched upon the significance of *hygge* in that respect, although, as noted, this cannot be rendered *merely* as cosiness. Moreover, even when it does connote this, the English “cosy/cosiness” does not do justice to its significance in Nordic culture. Beyond merely denoting warm and comfortable environs, it seems to speak to an almost existential sense of safety and belonging. Revealingly, its antonym (*uhygge*) is not uncomfortable, but frightening or sinister (Orange, 2016). That said, I wonder if the foregoing remarks do injustice to the English term “cosy.” Personally, the term also has these existential connotations for me, and it strikes me that the construct has not received the attention in psychology that it merits.

Other words bring further nuance to this area. German, in particular, has numerous relevant terms. *Geborgenheit* describes being protected and safe from harm, and perhaps also, more benignly, “snugginess.” (It combines *geborgen* – a verb and adjective which can mean “safe or sheltered,” as well as “hidden” (Hachmeister, 2002, p. 66) – with *heit*, which changes an adjective into an abstract noun.) Another term often translated as “cosy” is the adjective *gemütlich* (*Gemütlichkeit* as an abstract noun). However, again, “cosy” is not quite right here. The root *Gemüt* is described by Cassin, Apter, Lezra, and Wood (2014) as the epitome of an untranslatable word, used by philosophers like Kant to cover mind, mood, heart and soul, without being reducible to any one of these. Indeed, von Uexküll (1987, p. 175) suggests it has been widely used in German philosophy and mysticism to denote “the whole inner world of man.” Thus, *gemütlich* conveys friendliness, soulfulness, even mindfulness (as in peace of mind), and is often used to depict a warm social atmosphere (Whiteoak, 2008). Finally, there is the adjective *heimlich*, often rendered as “homely.” However, it is perhaps slightly more complex. According to Freud (1955), it also alludes to that which is or must be concealed from outsiders. As such, in requiring secrecy, the term can imply that something is “uncanny” and even “frightening,” and therefore paradoxically has similar meanings to its antonym *unheimlich* (Parsons, 2014), although this is perhaps a rather esoteric interpretation, limited to select contexts like psychoanalysis.

### 3.4 Savouring/appreciation

As with most themes here, the previous one overlaps with this one, since in deeming a place cosy/homely, one might certainly be appreciating or savouring it. However, these latter concepts warrant addressing in their own right, with a rich vein of words relating to these. A quick note on the English concepts that serve as the overarching labels for this theme. These two are sometimes treated as synonymous. For instance, Lin, Chen, and Wang (2011, p. 166) define “savouring” as “the appreciation of enjoyable life experiences.” However, savouring is perhaps more active, involving the deliberate enacting of strategies that *facilitate* appreciation. Some words pertain more to savouring/appreciation itself, whereas others bring specificity to the *phenomena* that are its focus.

Relating to the state of appreciation is the Icelandic adjective *hugfanginn*, which translates as “mind-captured,” alluding to being enthralled, fascinated or charmed. Its etymology also implies that this experience may not be entirely voluntary; as per modular theories of attention (Posner & Petersen, 1990), one’s focus can easily be “captured” by phenomena that seem compelling or urgent. Then there are terms denoting particularly deep or profound forms of appreciation, like the Swedish verb *njuta*, which brings greater intensity than the English terms that are often offered as rough translations, such as “enjoy.” Of similar potency is the Hawaiian noun and

stative verb *mahalo*, which encompasses admiration, respect, esteem, and regard (Pukui & Elbert, 1986, p. 218). However, its etymology also conveys a notion of “divine presence,” such that it is used as an expression of deep gratitude and/or spiritual blessing (Becker, 2016, p. 386).

Augmenting these mental states are terms that pertain more to the *act* of appreciation. For instance, reflecting once again the intersection of climate, culture and language, many temperate cultures have coined words articulating the pleasures of strolling outside, such as the French verb *flâner* (and its noun *flâneur*, denoting one who engages in the activity), the Italian noun *passeggiata*, and the Greek noun *volta*. One might counter that “strolling” conveys something similar. However, this lacks the significance these terms have in their respective cultures, where they are much celebrated *activities* – and even rituals – rather than simply a generic verb. For instance, in her ethnography of an Italian village, Del Negro (2005, p. 16) describes the *passeggiata* as a vital “cultural performance.” Similarly, Benjamin (1983) highlights the significance of the *flâneur* in French culture, coming to prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a distinct and enviable type of person (i.e., the “man of leisure”). This latter example also shows how many words can take on complex associations with factors such as wealth and class.

Such terms are joined by words conveying an appreciation of nature. There is the Japanese noun *shinrin-yoku* – literally forest (*shinrin*) bathing (*yoku*) – for the restorative feeling of “soaking up” the tranquillity of natural environments. The value to wellbeing of nature generally has been explored in the West, for instance, with Gesler’s (1992) work on therapeutic landscapes; however, Japanese scholars have studied the health benefits of *shinrin-yoku* specifically, deeming it an example of “forest medicine” (Park, Tsunetsugu, Kasetani, Kagawa, & Miyazaki, 2010). A similar notion is expressed by the Finnish verb *maadoittuminen*, which translates as “earthing” or “grounding,” and describes the act of going into a forest (or nature more generally) to ground oneself in the natural world (Ober, Sinatra, & Zucker, 2010). Finally, there are terms pertaining to a general appreciation of life itself. French is particularly rich in that respect, from *joie de vivre* (a “love of living”) to *bon vivant* (“one who lives well”), a trend which is commended as being indicative of a vibrant cultural character (Harrow & Unwin, 2009). With these latter terms, savouring/appreciation overlaps with the next theme, revelry/fun.

### 3.5 Revelry/fun

The final three themes broach more strongly qualified positive feelings. However, the nuanced diversity of terms – as in all themes here – shows the limitations of simply referring to these as “positive affect,” highlighting the value of introducing greater granularity into our lexicon. This fifth theme pertains to revelry and “fun,” covering more sensual and/or light-hearted forms of pleasure. Or, to deploy a term approaching the status of a loanword, the words here relate to the Gaelic noun *craic*, which captures a general sense of revelry and “good times” (Grantham, 2009). Incidentally, that I felt compelled to put “fun” in quotation marks above is indicative of the fact that, despite being a culturally valued experience, the topic has not attracted much academic attention (Reis, O’Keefe, & Lane, 2016).

To begin with, there are words denoting pleasure relating to revelry/fun. Of course, many languages have terms directly translated as “pleasure.” What makes a word of interest here is that it brings additional nuances not found in the English word. For instance, the Chinese verb *guòyǐn* suggests craving and satiety, as revealed by its components (with *guò* meaning “to pass through” or “go across,” and *yǐn* referring to addiction, craving or habit). Thus, it embeds shades of both compulsion *and* satisfaction that are not found in English terms like “pleasure” (which fixes only on the benign outcome), “craving” (which omits reference to any such successful outcome), or “satiety” (which does not especially carry tones of positive affect).



Articulating a sense of abandon is the Portuguese transitive verb *desbundar*. Denoting a sense of exceeding the/one's limits, this can be used colloquially to refer to experiences of shedding one's inhibitions in making merry (Wafer, 2010). Somewhat similarly, in the Bantu group of languages in Africa, the verb *mbuki-mvuki* has been described as the act of taking off clothes in order to dance (i.e., in a more uninhibited way) (Holloway, 2005). Likewise, the Greek term *kefi* has come to describe a culturally-valued "emotional state heightened by alcohol," usually evoked by social occasions featuring music and dance (Riak, 2007, p. 42). Then, pertaining to music and dancing themselves, there are literally thousands of untranslatable words – some of which are already loanwords – capturing specific styles and genres. For instance, the Caribbean region alone has produced hundreds of styles/genres (Manuel, Bilby, & Largey, 2012). Finally, a wealth of terms denotes the social occasions that cultures have developed to *enable* fun/revelry. For instance, the Balinese *ramé* can be used to describe parties that are particularly festive, tumultuous and lively (as well as signifying boisterous social occasions more generally) (Geertz, 1973, p. 446). Somewhat similarly, the Chinese adjective *rènào* describes something as lively, boisterous, and bustling with noise and excitement. On a potentially gentler and more light-hearted note, Chinese also has *sànxīn*, which literally means "to loosen the heart," and carries suggestions of easing up, being carefree, enjoying a diversion, and driving away one's cares. Such examples could be multiplied at length, but are sufficient to allude to the diversity of terms pertaining to fun and revelry. We now move on to even more positively qualified experiences of pleasure.

### 3.6 Joy/euphoria

These final two themes cover truly elevated levels of positive feelings. If considered in terms of the circumplex model, they would be at the high end of either the valence spectrum (intensely pleasant) or the arousal spectrum (highly active), and, in some cases, both. This penultimate theme addresses feelings pertaining to euphoria, ecstasy, and joy.

These three are themselves loanwords, the former two borrowed from Greek (via Latin), the latter from Latin (via French) (Bühler, 2005). Both "euphoria" and "ecstasy" have undergone an intriguing process of semantic change over the centuries, thus highlighting the malleability of language. In its original Greek context, "euphoria" combined *eu* (a prefix denoting "good") and *pherin* (the verb "to bear" or "carry"), thus implying a person was healthy or of "good bearing." While usually referring simply to physical health, it could also be deployed in a moral or developmental sense. For instance, Aristotle used it as a near synonym of *eudaimonia*, presenting it as the desirable outcome of a virtuous life (Raftari, 2015). However, by the time the word entered into English around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was mainly in a medical context, describing a condition of feeling well and comfortable, perhaps due to the effective operation of medicine. It was possibly this association with positive mental states, often arising from psychoactive substances, that gave rise to modern uses of the term, namely, as an intense feeling of wellbeing (Bühler, 2005).

"Ecstasy," likewise, has evolved. In its original context, it combined *ek* ("outside/beyond") and *stasis* ("standing/stature"). It thus connoted a person "standing outside" themselves in some way, from the relatively benign (e.g., being astonished or entranced) to the more troubling (e.g., insanity or spiritual possession) (Michaelsen, 1989). It entered English around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and became mainly deployed in religious contexts, depicting an exalted state of "rapture" that could arise from the contemplation of the divine (McGinn, 1987). More recently, it has tended to simply denote intense pleasure. However, in some contexts – like modern psychiatry – both "euphoria" and "ecstasy" can carry pejorative connotations of being *too* intense, i.e., artificial

and/or socially inappropriate (Wilmot, 1985). Conversely, “joy” has invariably been characterised through the centuries as wholly benign and even morally worthy. (It entered English around the 13<sup>th</sup> century, from the French *joie* – meaning “delight” or “bliss” – which itself derived from the Latin *gaudere*, meaning “rejoice.”) For instance, it has long been used in religious contexts to characterise the just psychological rewards of great faith and devotion (Ehrenreich, 2007).

Notions of joy, ecstasy and euphoria are augmented by words covering similar territory. Some align more with the less complicated benign purity captured by joy, such as the Māori noun/adjective *harikoa*, which encompasses “joyful,” “euphoric,” “delighted,” “exuberant,” “elated,” and “jubilant” (Štekauer, Valera, & Körtvélyessy, 2012). Somewhat more complex is the French noun *jouissance*, deriving from *joissant*, meaning “to take pleasure/delight in.” However, it has also come to have sexual connotations, particularly coital ecstasy (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006). In that latter respect, it has become a term of interest in psychoanalytic theory, especially in the work of Jacques Lacan (2006). For instance, Lacan dwelt upon its complex dynamics, suggesting that people have a limit to the amount of pleasure they can bear – possibly because at this zenith there is always the painful realisation of the inevitable come-down – and so beyond this limit, pleasure can become painful. Thus, for Lacan, *jouissance* represents the crossing of these limits (Fink, 1997). Relatedly, the Chinese term *lèjīshēngbēi* implies that the zenith of joy necessarily begets sadness, in that peaks of happiness are generally followed by some descent into unhappiness (since it is not usually feasible to remain at these peaks for an extended duration). Such terms thus intersect with another of the main categories in the lexicography, that of ambivalent emotions (Lomas, in press c). More generally, they also align with the emergent paradigm of “second wave” positive psychology, which argues that wellbeing does not only involve positively-valenced emotional states, but also more ambivalent, “dialectical” ones (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016).

Overlapping with *jouissance* are terms around ardour and passion. As per *jouissance* – and, indeed, euphoria and ecstasy – these are somewhat ambiguous, in that while intensely “positive,” they are yet potentially problematic, perhaps being excessive or unstable in some way. For instance, the Russian noun *azart* describes excitement and fervour, but is also associated with recklessness and risk-taking. This brings to mind Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) metaphorical model of cognition, whereby subjective states that are characterised using notions around heat are invariably unstable and beyond one’s control to an extent. Another complex term is the Spanish noun *duende*, which in an artistic context refers to a heightened state of emotion, spirit and passion, as seen particularly with the performance (or even just the appreciation) of art forms like the flamenco (Miller, 2012). The term itself derives from an elf-like creature in Spanish mythology, which perhaps indicates the capricious and non-rational state expressed by the term. Thus, like *azart*, *duende* reflects the tempestuous dynamics of strong feelings like euphoria/ecstasy. However, a final class of positive emotions, while perhaps no less intense, are rather more stable, as the next section explores.

### 3.7 Bliss/nirvāṇa

Feelings around euphoria/ecstasy can, for all that they are intensely positive in valence, be rather unstable, i.e., subject to swift dissipation. This stands in contrast to a range of elevated feelings that are more lasting and even relatively permanent. Interestingly, these generally hail from spiritual contexts, implying that these usually may not be attained unless a person has some kind of spiritual practice. Spirituality constitutes an entire category in the lexicography, with in-depth analysis in itself devoted to it (Lomas, in press a). However, it would be remiss to not at least

touch upon some relevant terms here, as these represent some of the most potent positive states that human beings appear capable of experiencing (Wilber, Engler, Brown, & Chirban, 1986).

Relevant words can be found across numerous traditions, from West to East. For instance, Christianity has developed terms like *béatitude* and *charis* to denote more lasting states of bliss. These have parallels with *eudaimonia* – a loanword in positive psychology – which, in its original Greek context, articulated a sense of being graced with a divine spirit (Cary, 2008). Both *béatitude* and *charis* carry connotations of being blessed, and in receipt of God’s grace, and have been borrowed in that respect (with the latter itself the root of the term grace). *Béatitude* arrived from French in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and ultimately derives from the Latin *beātitudō*, conveying an ultimate or perfect happiness (McMahon, 2006). With *charis*, in its original Greek context, it covered similar territory to *eudaimonia*, conveying a range of valorised qualities, from kindness and grace to beauty and nobility. Indeed, in mythology, a *charis* was the singular form for the goddesses of these qualities, known collectively as the *charities* (MacLachlan, 2014). The term was translated into French as *grâce* – itself adapted from the Latin *gratia* – which implies favour, mercy, or thanks. Subsequently, the term began to be deployed in religious contexts to describe being blessed, favoured or otherwise supported by God. In this sense it overlaps with *beatitude*, since within Christian teachings, true (i.e., deep, lasting) happiness is regarded as ultimately only possible through God’s grace (Tillich, 1967). This type of feeling has recently been recognised in psychology by Wong (2016), who terms it “chaironic” happiness – thus drawing on the etymology of *charis* – defining it as a “blessing, joy, or gift of happiness of a spiritual nature, which is relatively independent of positive situations or our own happiness-enhancing efforts” (para 2).

A related perspective on the possibility of “ultimate” happiness is found in Eastern traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. These have developed highly sophisticated lexicons relating to wellbeing, which highlights the depth of insight in their teachings. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to elucidate even a fraction of their relevant terms, it is worth at least touching upon some of the states described in these traditions, to appreciate the highest dimensions of the spectrum of positive feelings. In that respect, I will mention just two Sanskrit terms, *ânanda* – and *nirvāna*.

*Ananda* is frequently translated simply as “bliss;” however, in Hindu and Buddhist contexts it is usually imbued with spiritual qualities not present in the English word. Thus, teachings usually contrast it with *sukha*, which implies satisfaction/contentment (while its antonym *duḥkha* translates as dissatisfaction or suffering). However, as desirable as *sukha* may be, Hindu and Buddhist teachings tend to portray *ânanda* as far more elevated and worthy. For instance, Iyengar (2010, p. 153) suggests there is a “vast difference”: while *sukha* tends to mean merely “ease,” “comfort,” or “sensual pleasure,” *ânanda* has a “spiritual quality.” *Sukha* is often seen as dependent on circumstances, i.e., the extent to which one’s life is currently conducive to ease/comfort. It is therefore conditional, and is thus depicted as a “worldly” form of happiness (Singh, 2012). In contrast, *ânanda* is regarded as unconditional, independent of vicissitudes of circumstance. Rather, it arises when a person has developed sufficient detachment – usually through spiritual practices – that they may enjoy feelings of bliss that are relatively imperturbable and therefore durable.

As strongly-qualified as *ânanda* is, though, even this is arguably superseded by *nirvāna*. In Buddhist teachings, this does not merely connote an enduring wellbeing, but a permanent cessation of suffering (Harvey, 2012). Within Buddhist cosmology, it signifies that a person has exited the cycle of birth, death, and re-birth – known as *saṃsāra* – that characterises existence (and which is pervaded by *duḥkha*). This sense of finality and liberation is reflected in the word’s

etymology, which means to extinguish (e.g., as a flame). It thus has similarities with the Hindu notion of *mokṣa*. However, Hinduism generally retains the concept of an individual “soul” or “inner self” – known as *ātman*, and also translatable as “breath” or “spirit” – that can be thus liberated. Conversely, most schools of Buddhism hold that no individual traces of personhood are preserved in this way, a principle known as *anātman* (Epstein, 1988). As noted above, spirituality constitutes its own category in the lexicography, and so merits an analysis to itself. Nevertheless, the terms included here indicate the far-reaching emotional states that may be possible, exceeding those denoted by such conventional English terms as “pleasure” or “satisfaction,” and even more intensely-qualified notions like “euphoria” and “ecstasy.”

#### 4. Conclusion

The analysis has revealed a wealth of positively valenced feelings, covering seven broad overlapping themes. These were each labelled using two broad conceptually-similar English constructs that roughly encompass the terrain in question: (1) peace and calm, (2) contentment and satisfaction, (3) cosiness and homeliness, (4) savouring and appreciation, (5) revelry and fun, (6) joy and euphoria, and (7) bliss and *nirvāṇa*. These seven themes were deconstructed into finer-grained elements through the analysis of relevant words. In many instances, the terms delineate a smaller, more precise phenomenological region than that covered by the English thematic labels. For instance, *jouissance* constitutes a quite specific instance of euphoria, one often connected to sexual activity. Conversely, in a few cases, the untranslatable word perhaps occupies a *larger* phenomenological region; for instance, *smṛti* was noted as having a great range of meanings, including but not limited to peace and calm. In general, the sheer range of words encompassed by this category highlights the limitations of referring generically to “positive affect,” and points towards the value of developing a more fine-grained appreciation of the nuances in this area.

Indeed, the paper builds upon existing theory and research which has likewise sought to identify nuances in experiences and appraisals of happiness. For instance, in terms of the lay psychological definitions of happiness analysed by Delle Fave et al. (2016), the first theme here of peace/calm is linked to their dominant category of harmony, and particularly its first two components (inner peace and balance). Conversely, its third component, contentment, aligns more with the second theme here (contentment and satisfaction). This second theme also overlaps with the second subcategory of Delle Fave et al., satisfaction, as well as the LAP elements of positive emotions (their third subcategory), while the HAP elements align more with the final three themes here. The last theme, bliss/*nirvāṇa* also resonates with Wong’s (2011; 2016) concept of chaironic happiness. To an extent, this theme also reflects Dambrun et al.’s (2012) category of authentic-durable happiness, and also Wong’s (2017) idea of “mature happiness” – characterised by “peace, contentment, meaning, acceptance, and the feeling of being connected with God” (para. 6) – as does the first theme of peace/calm. The concept of mature happiness draws on Frankl’s (1963) notion of “tragic optimism,” which alludes to the transformative capacity of the individual to flourish even amidst life’s challenges. Wong depicts this type of equipoise as arising when people cease looking to the vagaries of circumstance to furnish them with happiness, and instead cultivate the kind of inner peace characterised by *ataraxia* above.

This analysis also augments Ekman’s deconstruction of enjoyment in his Atlas of Emotions. As per Barrett, Gross, Christensen, & Benvenuto’s (2001) concept of emotional granularity/differentiation, the words analysed here bring additional detail to this spectrum. Although I had only seven main types of positive feelings (compared to Ekman’s 12), each was further segmented into more fine-grained forms, with the lexicography currently featuring 134

relevant terms, each of which brings its own nuances to the realm of positive feelings. For instance, one of Ekman's 12 types is *fiero*, which is just one of numerous terms subsumed within contentment/satisfaction here. Moreover, the seven themes here include feelings not in Ekman's list, including peace/calm, contentment/satisfaction, cosiness/homeliness, and bliss/*nirvāṇa*. Conversely, I have not included *Schadenfreude*, since, although technically a form of pleasure, it is a malicious kind that is ultimately detrimental to wellbeing (McNamee, 2007), and so does not warrant inclusion here. Finally, my analysis does not include terms relating to love, which constitutes its own entire category and analysis in the lexicography (Lomas, in press b), and which encompasses some positive feelings that Ekman has situated within "enjoyment," such as compassion and *naches*.

Overall then, the analysis above, to an extent, aligns with emergent schemas and constructs pertaining to positive affect – identified by the likes of Delle Fave et al. (2016), Wong (2011; 2016; 2017), and Ekman (1999) – while also differing in subtle ways. However, that does not necessarily mean that one schema is more correct or accurate than the others. There may be many valid and viable ways of delineating the experiential territory of positive affect (and indeed any realm of experience). Many contemporary theories of emotion subtly blend elements of naturalism (i.e., the idea that humans access a relatively universal and stable set of affective responses) and constructivism (i.e., the idea that human experience is socially constructed and culturally-variable). For instance, Feldman Barrett's (2006) conceptual-act model proposes that discrete emotions emerge from a conceptual analysis of a "momentary state of core affect" (p. 49). While core affect is somewhat naturalistic, its "ebb and flow" is filtered through culturally-acquired linguistic-conceptual schemas that calibrate how these emotions are felt, interpreted, and reacted to. In the case of the varied schemas of positive affect mentioned above, it may be that different researchers – guided by their own preconceptions, agendas, and general cultural situatedness – have developed subtly different frameworks, which are all nevertheless valid on their own terms.

Indeed, it would have been possible for the thematic structure here to have been configured differently. For instance, within the theme of joy/euphoria was the concept of *lèjìshēngbēi*, alluding to the way that peaks of happiness inevitably precipitate a comedown towards sadness. The concept is therefore inherently ambivalent, presenting a dialectical interaction of positively- and negatively-valenced feelings. As such, the thematic structure above could have potentially been expanded to accommodate an eighth theme featuring these kinds of unstable, complex, ambivalent feelings. However, there is an entire category within the lexicography pertaining to such ambivalent feelings (Lomas, in press c). Therefore, rather than introducing an additional theme here, it was felt more parsimonious to situate *lèjìshēngbēi* within joy/euphoria, and then to view it as a bridging term that intersects the categories of positive affect and ambivalent feelings. This kind of coding dilemma is common in qualitative and conceptual analysis. Ultimately, there is no right or wrong way to classify phenomena such as emotions; different schemas can simply be more or less plausible, and it was felt that the framework presented here was the optimal configuration. Other scholars may well approach the situation differently, however, which would also of course be totally acceptable.

Besides the contingent and somewhat subjective nature of the conceptual classification, the analysis also has various limitations. First, my treatment of the included words has been inevitably restricted, limited by attempting to convey an overarching comparative analysis (i.e., rather than focusing on a small number of terms) within the constraints of a short article. Moreover, given that translation is such a problematic exercise, it will not have been possible to arrive at descriptions that would satisfy all speakers of the languages to which the words belong. As with any translation, one aims "to catch the spirit" of the original word (McClaren, 1998, p.

128). However, given the fluidity and complexity of language use, there will always be many possible ways of defining and interpreting a given word. Thus, the descriptions of the untranslatable words here are merely one possible way of elucidating these terms, and ultimately are based on my own selective and biased reading and interpretation of the source material. That said, I have consulted dictionaries, scholarly sources, and speakers of various languages in the aim of at least arriving at viable and valid – albeit partial or improvable – descriptions of all the words.

In addition to issues around translation and hermeneutics, the analysis, and the lexicography itself, are by no means exhaustive. For instance, the lexicography only currently features around 120 languages, out of potentially more than 7,000 currently in existence. The lexicography, and its analysis, must be seen as works-in-progress. There are likely to be many relevant terms that are included neither in the analysis above, nor the lexicography as it currently stands. Moreover, some cultures have been considered in more depth than others (particularly Eastern ones), which reflects my personal interests, which drove the process of conceptual snowballing in particular directions. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the analysis may still offer a useful cross-cultural appraisal of positive emotions, limited and partial as it may be. Future research may then be able to build on this, developing an even more comprehensive and nuanced cross-cultural conception of this vital dimension of wellbeing.

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