Towards a positive cross-cultural lexicography: Enriching our emotional landscape through 216 'untranslatable' words pertaining to wellbeing

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Abstract

Although much attention has been paid to culture-specific psychopathologies, there have been no comparable attempts to chart positive mental states that may be particular to certain cultures. This paper outlines the beginnings of a positive cross-cultural lexicography of 'untranslatable' words pertaining to wellbeing, culled from across the world's languages. A quasi-systematic search uncovered 216 such terms. Using grounded theory, these words were organised into three categories: feelings (comprising positive and complex feelings); relationships (comprising intimacy and pro-sociality); and character (comprising personal resources and spirituality). The paper has two main aims. First, it aims to provide a window onto cultural differences in constructions of wellbeing, thereby enriching our understanding of wellbeing. Second, a more ambitious aim is that this lexicon may help expand the emotional vocabulary of English speakers (and indeed speakers of all languages), and consequently enrich their experiences of wellbeing. The paper concludes by setting out a research agenda to pursue these aims further.

Keywords: cross-cultural; linguistics; lexicography; wellbeing; happiness

Note: To view and/or contribute to the evolving lexicography, please visit www.drtimlomas.com/lexicography

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Introduction

Critical theorists have often accused positive psychology (PP) of developing a culturally-specific understanding of wellbeing (Becker & Marecek, 2008). That is, since much of the empirical work in PP has taken place in Western countries, it is suggested that the concepts developed within the field tend to reflect a bias towards 'Western' ways of thinking. For instance, Izquierdo (2005) argues that PP has been strongly influenced by a North American tradition of 'expressive individualism' (defined by Pope (1991, p.384) as the 'unmitigated reference to the value of the individual self'). However, PP has not been unmindful of these critiques, and indeed has developed a greater level of cross-cultural sensitivity than its critics give it credit for. This emergent sensitivity is reflected in studies exploring variation in the way different cultures relate to wellbeing, including in how it is defined (Joshanloo, 2014), experienced (Uchida & Ogihara, 2012) and reported (Oishi, 2010).

In the interests of adding to this burgeoning cross-cultural sensitivity, this paper follows one particular line of enquiry that has not yet been explored in depth: the significance of so-called 'untranslatable' words. Such words exert great fascination, not only in specialised fields like linguistics or anthropology (Wierzbicka, 1999), but also in popular culture. Part of the fascination seems to derive from the notion that such words offer 'windows' into other cultures, and thus potentially into new ways of being in the world. As Wierzbicka (1997, p.5) puts it, 'words with special, culture-specific meanings reflect and pass on not only ways of living characteristic of a given society, but also ways of thinking.' Thus, 'untranslatable' words are not only of interest to translators; after all, many such professionals argue that it can be difficult to find exact translations for *most* words, and that

nearly all terms lose some specificity or nuance when rendered in another tongue (Hatim & Munday, 2004). Rather, 'untranslatability' reflects the notion that such words identify *phenomena* that have only been recognised by specific cultures. Perhaps the most famous example is *Schadenfreude,* a German term describing pleasure at the misfortunes of others. Such words are not literally untranslatable, of course, since their meaning can be conveyed in a sentence. Rather, they are deemed 'untranslatable' to the extent that other languages lack a single word/phrase for the phenomenon.

The significance of such words is much debated. A dominant theoretical notion here is 'linguistic relativity' (Hussein, 2012). First formulated by the German philosophers Herder (1744-1803) and Humboldt (1767-1835), it came to prominence with the linguist Sapir (1929) and his student Whorf (1940). Their so-called 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' holds that language plays a constitutive role in the way that people experience, understand, and even perceive the world. As Whorf (1956, pp. 213-214) put it, 'We dissect nature along lines laid out by our native languages… The world is presented as a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized… largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.' This hypothesis comes in various strengths. Its stronger form is linguistic determinism, where language inextricably constitutes and constrains thought. For instance, Whorf argued that the Hopi people had a different experience of time due to particularities in their grammar, such that they lacked a linear sense of past, present and future. This strong determinism has been criticised, e.g., by Pinker (1995), who argued that the Hopi experience of time was not particularly different to that of Western cultures. However, the milder form of the hypothesis, linguistic relativism, simply holds that language shapes thought and experience. This milder hypothesis is generally accepted by most anthropologists and other such scholars (Perlovsky, 2009).

A similar debate pertains specifically to 'untranslatable' words. A strong deterministic view argues that unless a person is enmeshed within the culture that produced a given word, he or she would be unable to understand or experience the phenomenon that the word refers to. Such a view is associated with the philosopher Charles Taylor (1985), who argued that there is no way out of the 'hermeneutic circle,' in which concepts can only be understood with reference to other concepts within that language. As Taylor put it, 'We can often experience what it is like to be on the outside [of the circle] when we encounter the feeling, action, and experiential meaning language of another civilization. Here there is no translation, no way of explaining in other, more accessible concepts' (p.23-24). However, articulating a milder relativistic view, Wierzbicka (1999) suggests we can indeed escape the hermeneutic circle and get a feel for what 'untranslatable' words refer to. Wierzbicka does acknowledge that people not emic to a particular culture may not appreciate the full nuanced richness of a term compared to people who are 'inside' the culture. As she puts it, 'verbal explanations of such concepts cannot replace experiential familiarity with them and with their functioning in the local "stream of life,"' (p.8), to use Wittgenstein's (1990) telling phrase. However, Wierzbicka argues that 'it is not true that no verbal explanations illuminating to outsiders are possible at all,' since most culture-specific concepts are complex constructs that can be de-composed into simpler elements that are universally understood (p.8).

If Wierzbicka's perspective is correct, then encountering 'untranslatable' words has the potential to enrich one's conceptual vocabulary. (Of course, if incorrect, such an exercise would still have the valuable outcome of increasing one's understanding of other cultures.) If applied to wellbeing specifically, as in this paper, such an exercise may enrich our emotional landscape, as suggested by Perlovsky's (2009) 'emotional Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.' The existence of 'untranslatable' words pertaining to wellbeing implies that there are positive emotional states which have hitherto only been explicitly recognised by particular cultures.

However, this does not mean that people in other cultures may not have had a comparable experience. Yet, lacking a specific term for it, such people have arguably not had the opportunity to specifically identify that particular state, which instead thus becomes just another un-conceptualised ripple in the on-going flux of subjective experience. As Ferguson (2003, p.10) says, it is possible that 'entire feelings, entire concepts went unexpressed, simply because no word had ever been coined to capture them.' However, the value of exploring 'untranslatable' words is that, if people *are* introduced to a foreign term, this may then be used to give voice to these hitherto unlabelled states. We see this when foreign words are imported into other languages, like *Schadenfreude.* In such cases, although one's language lacks an equivalent term, the phenomenon it refers to has been experienced, or does at least make sense. Consequently, given the lack of a native term, the foreign word is simply imported and used. Indeed, as De Boinod (2007, p.5) puts it, 'The English language has a long-established and voracious tendency to naturalize the best foreign words.'

So, with the aim of enriching the emotional vocabulary of the English language, this paper offers a quasi-systematic review of 'untranslatable' words pertaining to wellbeing. It is *quasi*-systematic since there was insufficient source material in academic journals, meaning that a true systematic review, utilising conventional academic databases, was not possible. It is notable that, while much attention has been paid to culture-specific psychopathologies by fields like psychiatry and medical anthropology (Thakker & Ward, 1998), there have been no comparable attempts to chart positive mental states, hence the value of the current paper.

Methods

The quasi-systematic review undertaken in this paper proceeded in a number of stages. The first stage involved searching for relevant 'untranslatable' words. This stage featured three main search strategies. First, I examined 20 websites and blogs devoted to 'untranslatable words.' These were located by entering the phrase "untranslatable words" into google, and

picking the first 20 such websites and/or blogs. Examining these websites/blogs, I selected any word pertaining roughly to wellbeing, using wellbeing in an expansive sense to incorporate positive emotions, valued qualities, beneficial relationships, physical health, and psychospiritual development. This search strategy generated 131 words. Second, I searched google one language at a time. This involved entering "_____ concept of" and "wellbeing" into the search engine, with a different language in the underlined space each time. I would proceed through the first ten pages for each search, looking for references to emotions or qualities relating to wellbeing that were presented as being unique to a particular culture. This strategy generated a further 77 words. Third, I canvassed staff and students at my institution, as well as friends and acquaintances, which yielded another 8 words. As a result, 216 relevant terms were located. These words and their descriptions were checked for accuracy by consulting online dictionaries, as well as peer-reviewed academic sources (if such were available for a given word). Thus, I based my analysis on the definitions provided by dictionaries and academic sources (rather than the original websites/blogs where I first located some terms). Since this study was undertaken by me alone, it must be acknowledged that there may be some subjective bias in my analysis. However, this paper is just the first step towards the development of a positive cross-cultural lexicography. As such, it is hoped that any inaccuracies or bias may be corrected in future by the involvement of other scholars in this project.

Having compiled a list of words, I analysed these using a qualitative methodology known as grounded theory (GT) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In GT, the aim is to allow theory to 'emerge' inductively from the data. GT involves three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. First, open coding involves examining the data – which in this study was the list of 216 words – for emergent themes. Thus, I looked for words which appeared to share a common theme, and then I grouped these words together under that

theme. For instance, I found five words (*philotimo* [φιλότιμο], *cariño*, *confianza, nakama* [仲間] and *ah-un* [阿吽]) which pertained to friendship. I therefore grouped these words together under the label 'friendship.' The next stage was axial coding, in which the themes themselves are clustered together into meta-themes. For example, I took the themes of 'friendship,' 'affection,' 'desire,' and 'love,' and grouped these into a meta-theme of 'intimacy.' Still within the stage of axial coding, meta-themes are in turn grouped into overarching categories. For instance, 'intimacy' and 'pro-sociality' together created a category of 'relationships.' The resulting three main categories were: feelings, relationships, and character. The final GT stage is selective coding, in which a single 'core' category is identified, which in this case was wellbeing. Attempts are then made to elucidate how the main categories relate to this core category, thus telling a 'narrative' which makes sense of the data. The three main categories are analysed in turn in the sections below.

Feelings

The first category is feelings, an umbrella term encompassing affect, emotions, moods, and sensations. Words here can be differentiated into two categories: positively qualified feelings, and more complex ambivalent feelings. These are considered in turn.

Positive feelings

This section includes a spectrum of words pertaining to positive affect. Perhaps the dominant state in this regard is happiness, for which most languages have a translative equivalent. Interestingly, many of these derive etymologically from terms pertaining to luck (McMahon, 2004), including *heureux* (French), *onni* (Finnish), *Gluck* (German), and *felicità* (Italian). Indeed, the English term derives from the old Norse *happ*, which alludes to fate, as in 'happenstance.' McMahon suggests this close intertwining between happiness and luck derives from earlier generations experiencing a relative lack of control over their lives, with a resulting sense that happy people are those 'blessed' with good fortune.

However, happiness is a complex, polyvalent term, encompassing a multitude of positive feelings. Most languages not only possess terms that are translated as happiness, but moreover have numerous such terms, each of which captures different nuances. Urdu for example has at least 16 words that might be translated as happiness, including terms that articulate: merriment, such as *kayf* (کیف) and *xurramii* (خرمی); pleasure, like *suwaad* (سواد) and *shaadmaanii* (شادمانی); gladness and good cheer, like *dilshaadgii* (دل شادگی); prosperity and fecility, like *sazaadat* (سعادت) and *xushii* (خوشی); more 'elevated' forms like joy and delight, such as *masarrat* (مَسَرَّت) and *farhat* (فَرَحَت); and even stronger forms such as bliss, e.g., *aanand* (آنَند) and *sarshaarii* (سرشاری). Thus, happiness functions as an overarching label, enfolding a spectrum of positive feelings. As such, this section aims to get 'under the hood' of happiness, looking for words that tease apart its components and nuances.

To begin with, there are words capturing specific flavours of pleasure and enjoyment. Some pertain to satiating appetites: Spanish uses *gula* for the desire to eat simply for the taste, while *shemomedjamo* (Georgian) describes eating past the point of satiety due to sheer gustatory enjoyment. Many cultures acknowledge the importance of sharing such pleasures with friends; e.g., Spanish has *sobremesa* for when the food has finished but the conversation is still flowing. Relationships are one of our three main categories, and are considered at length below. Nevertheless, here we can situate words given to socialising around food and drink – each with their own cultural nuances – including *fika* (Swedish), *borrel* (Dutch), *sahar* (سهر ; Arabic), and *parea* (Παρέα; Greek). Further forms of merrymaking include: *mbuki-mvuki* (Bantu), to 'shuck off one's clothes in order to dance' (Rheingold, 2000, p.28); *utepils* (Norwegian), i.e., drinking beer outside on a hot day; and *Schnapsidee* (German), an ingenious plan one hatches while drunk. This whole area of revelry is encapsulated by the Balinese *ramé*, namely something at once chaotic and joyful. We might also mention: *desbundar,* Portuguese for shedding one's inhibitions in having fun; the neglected English

verb *deliciate,* which refers to luxuriating in pleasure; Thai *sabsung*, which signifies being revitalised through something that livens up one's life; German *Feierabend*, which articulates the festive mood that can arrive at the end of a working day; and the multipurpose Dutch adjective *lekker*, which can mean anything from relaxed and comfortable to pleasurable and sexy.

A slightly more complex class of words also pertains to pleasure, yet encompasses feelings of safety. Perhaps on account of their cold climes, Northern European cultures have terms for 'cosiness' that are highly valued, going beyond mere physical comfort to express emotional and even existential warmth and intimacy (van Nes et al., 2010). These include *koselig* (Norwegian), *mysa* (Swedish), *hygge* (Danish), *gezellig* (Dutch), and both *Gemütlich* and *Heimlich* in German. (That said, as Freud (1955) pointed out, the latter has ambivalent nuances. In signifying 'homely,' it can also allude to that which is concealed from outsiders, and in requiring secrecy in this way, becomes 'uncanny' and frightening.) Related to these are terms articulating contentment, including: *tilfreds* (Danish), meaning satisfied and 'at peace'; *Geborgenheit* (German), expressing the feeling of being protected and safe from harm; Swedish *trygghet,* embodying 'security, safety, confidence, certainty and trust' (Andersson-Segesten, 1991, p.43); and the Welsh *cwtch*, meaning to hug, but also a safe, welcoming place.

In contrast, cultures in more temperate climates have fashioned words for more expansive and outgoing experiences of savouring. Such savouring includes leisurely strolling the streets, captured by the French verb *flâner* and the Greek *volta* (βόλτα). These not only refer to taking in the sights and conversing with passers-by, but in their lack of destination, also a sense of freedom and possibility. Emphasising fresh air and health, the Dutch *uitwaaien* means to walk in the wind for fun. Also with an appreciation of nature, Japanese *shinrin-yoku* (森林浴) is the relaxation gained from 'bathing' in the forest (figuratively and/or

literally), while Swedish *gökotta* means waking up early with the purpose of going outside to hear the first birds sing.

Then we find words expressing stronger states of happiness. Some pertain to joy, like: *simcha* (Hebrew); *me yia* (με γεια; Greek), which is a blessing of good health for others; and *suaimhneas croi* (Gaelic), depicting a state of happiness encountered specifically after a task has been finished. Others surpass even joy, including: *njuta* (Swedish), a profound experience of appreciation, verging on bliss; *tarab* (طرب Arabic), a 'musically-induced state of ecstasy [or] enchantment' (Racy, 2004, p.6); *Herrliches Gefühle* (German), made famous by Goethe, described as 'glorious feelings' (Wierzbicka, 1999, p.18); and *eudaimonia* (ευδαιμονία; Greek). The latter is used in PP to depict a sense of fulfilment and flourishing (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008), but in its original context refers to being infused with the grace of the divine.

Finally, there are terms depicting states of happiness which, while intense, are yet stable and lasting, less dependent on specific situations, such as the Chinese *xìngfú* (幸福) and Sanskrit *sukha* (सुख). In Buddhism, *sukha* is used to mean 'genuine' happiness, in contrast to the more fleeting hedonic forms captured by *anand* (आनन्द) or *khushii* (खुशी). However, *sukha* does not generally refer to positive feelings that one 'happens' to experience, but is a state of flourishing rooted in ethical and spiritual maturation (Wallace, 2007). Indeed, traditions such as Buddhism are replete with even more positively qualified mental states, like *nirvāna* (निर्वाण; Sanskrit), an 'ultimate' form of happiness, involving complete and lasting freedom from suffering (Kang & Whittingham, 2010). We shall touch further on the idea of pursuing 'deeper' forms of happiness through spiritual practices in the third section below.

Complex feelings

Not all feelings pertaining to wellbeing are strictly positive per se. Here we consider a class of states that are more complex and ambivalent, but are nevertheless highly culturally valued. Some appear ostensibly negative, but there is a sense that these are somehow integral to life,

as if one would not be living fully without being able to experience these. Indeed, all capture the notion that flourishing is dialectical, a complex blend of light and dark elements (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015), as reflected in the Chinese symbol y*in-yang* (陰陽). Separately, *yin* means cloudy/overcast, and yang 'in the sun' (i.e., shone upon), and together these imply the two sides of a mountain (one sunlit, one in shadow). This image is thus used to articulate the idea of 'holistic duality,' i.e., that reality comprises co-dependent opposites (Fang, 2012). In their various ways then, the feelings here are a dialectical blend of positive and negative states of mind, together producing a rich and complex sensibility.

Some of these feelings concern hope and anticipation. As Lazarus (2003) pointed out, these heightened emotions are 'co-valenced,' a tantalising blend of savouring the future combined with fear that it will not come to pass. There is *magari* (Italian), roughly meaning 'maybe,' but which also encompasses 'in my dreams' and 'if only,' articulating both a hopeful wish and wistful regret. Similarly, Indonesian *belum* means 'not yet,' but with an optimistic tint that an event might yet happen. In Inuit, *iktsuarpok* refers to the anticipation one feels when waiting for someone, whereby one keeps going outside to check if they have arrived. In German, *Vorfreude* is the intense, joyful anticipation derived from imagining future pleasures, although this does depend on a strong likelihood of attainment. Rather more melancholic is the Korean *han* (한), a culturally important term expressing sorrow and regret, yet also a quiet sense of waiting patiently in the hope that the adversity causing the sadness will eventually be righted.

Related to *han* are words pertaining to longing and yearning that are often at the heart of their respective cultures. In Portuguese, *saudade* is a melancholic longing/nostalgia for a person, place or thing that is far away – either spatially or in time – a vague, dreaming wistfulness for phenomena that may not even exist (Silva, 2012). Similarly, *toska* (тоска; Russian) and *hiraeth* (Welsh) articulate a complex mix of nostalgia, wistfulness, and longing

for one's homeland (Wierzbicka, 1999). In Japanese, *natsukashii* (懐かしい) is a nostalgic longing for the past, with happiness for the fond memory, yet sadness that it is no longer. The German *Sehnsucht* translates as 'life longings,' i.e., an 'intense desire for alternative states and realizations of life,' even (or especially) if these are unlikely to be attained (Scheibe, Freund, & Baltes, 2007, p.778).

Related to terms of longing are those expressing a desire for freedom. These include *Fernweh* in German, described as the 'call of faraway places,' or a homesickness for a place one has never been to (Gabriel, 2004, p.155), and the well-known *Wanderlust*. Similarly, in Spanish, *vacilando* depicts the idea of wandering, where the act of travelling is valued more than the destination. In Russian, *prostor* (простор) captures a desire for spaciousness, roaming free in limitless expanses, not only physically, but creatively and spiritually (Pesmen, 2000, p.67). Finally, German *Waldeinsamkeit* articulates the feeling of solitude when alone in the woods, a mysterious state described by Schwartz (2007, p.201) as the 'pseudo-magical pull of the untamed wilderness; a place of living nightmares caught between the dreamscape and Fairyland.'

Finally, there are words capturing the complex aesthetic feelings evoked through contemplation of the world. Both Swedish and Turkish have terms for the glimmering that moonlight makes on water, *mangata* and *gumusservi* respectively, and there are words for the sound of wind rustling through trees (*psithúrism*; ψιθύρισμ; Greek), falling leaves (*listopad*; листопад; Russian), and sunlight filtering through leaves (*koromebi*; 木漏れ日; Japanese). Then there are words that articulate the act of appreciation itself. Japanese is particularly rich in these. *Aware* (哀れ) is the bittersweetness of a brief, fading moment of transcendent beauty, while *mono no aware* (物の哀れ) is the pathos of understanding that the world and its beauty are transient in this way. Similarly, *ukiyo* (浮世絵), literally 'floating world,' expresses a sense

of living in these moments of fleeting beauty, detached from the pains of life. *Wabi* (侘) refers to imperfect beauty, and *sabi* (寂) to aged beauty, and as a compound (*wabi-sabi*) articulate a potent sense of 'dark, desolate sublimity' (Prusinski, 2013, p.25). Finally, *yūgen* (幽玄) is described as the most 'ineffable' of aesthetic concepts (Suzuki, 1959, pp.220-221); both *yū* and *gen* mean 'cloudy impenetrability,' and together express 'unknowability' and 'mystery,' a feeling of being moved to one's core by the impenetrable depths of existence.

Relationships

While feelings inevitably constitute a large portion of the words pertaining to wellbeing, there are a wealth of terms that serve to emphasise that wellbeing is not *only* about feelings. As this section elucidates, many of these words pertain to relationships, suggesting that perhaps chief among our sources of positive feelings are the bonds we form. These fall into two categories: intimacies with select people, and pro-sociality more broadly.

Intimacy

Here, intimacy covers close relationships of varying strengths, from friendship to the most intense feelings of love. With friendship, I highlighted above the pleasures of socialising with friends. Added to these words are terms that speak to the value of close friendship. In Greek *philotimo* (φιλότιμο), translated as 'friend-honour,' is a culture-defining characteristic of respecting and honouring one's friends. For even more intense friendships, there are words for friends who one effectively considers family and has developed deep platonic love for, including *nakama* (仲間) in Japanese, and both *cariño* and *confianza* in Spanish, while the Japanese *ah-un* (阿吽) describes the unspoken communication one has with such friends.

Beyond friendship, there is a rich lexicon of words depicting forms of love, from the familial to the passionate. In the Aboriginal Pintupi language, *kanyininpa* refers to 'an intimate and active relationship between a "holder" and that which is "held,"' capturing the

deep feeling of nurturance and protection a parent feels for a child (Myers, 1991, p.146). Some words are rather playful. For instance, in the Philippine Tagalog language, *gigil* refers to the irresistible urge to pinch someone because they are loved or cherished. Then there are words articulating desire, including the Tagalog *kilig* (the feeling of butterflies in the stomach arising from interacting with someone one loves or finds attractive), and *mamihlapinatapei* from the Chilean Yagán language (a look between people that expresses unspoken but mutual desire). Other words capturing romantic affection include: *cafune* in Portuguese, i.e., tenderly running one's fingers through a loved one's hair; *questing* (Dutch), meaning to allow a lover access to one's bed for chitchat; and *retrouvailles* (French), expressing the joy people feel after meeting loved ones again after a long time apart.

These are augmented by words for deeper or more intense forms of love. Some refer specifically to falling in love, such as *forelsket* in Norwegian; drawing on notions of fate, Japanese *koi no yukan* (恋の予感) refers to the feeling on meeting someone that falling in love will be inevitable; and Chinese *yuán fèn* (緣分) describes a 'binding force' that impels a relationship ordained by destiny. Some words capture the bittersweet feeling of love fading. These include *onsra* in the Boro language of India, which means 'To love for the last time,' used by those who know their love won't last (Abley, 2005, p.124), and *razljubít* (разлюбить) in Russian, articulating the feeling a person has for someone they once loved. Then there are words for lifelong feelings of love, like the Korean *sarang* (사랑), which expresses the wish to be with someone until death. Similarly, in Arabic, *ya'burnee* (يا قبرني) means 'you bury me,' indicating that one would rather die (first) than be without one's loved one. Similarly, *ishq* (عشق) is a 'true' love that is all-consuming, as reflected in the saying that '*ishq* is a fire that burns down everything but the object of desire' (Faruqi, 1999, p.8). Finally, in Urdu, *naz* (ناز) is the assurance and pride one can feel in knowing that the other's love is unconditional and unshakable.

Pro-sociality

Beyond words that express intimacies with select others, the world's languages are rich in terms articulating the value of pro-sociality for people 'in general.' With these, wellbeing is recognised as not simply an individual concern, a self-contained state attained without regard for others. Rather, wellbeing is seen also as a social phenomenon, arising out of harmonious connections with others and the world around. This conceptualisation of wellbeing is sometimes seen as lacking in more 'individualistic' cultures, e.g., North America. As such, given the bias in PP towards such cultures, as alluded to in the introduction, the field has tended to somewhat overlook these social dimensions of flourishing (Lomas, 2015).

For a start, there is a rich lexicon of prosocial feelings around kindness. In Nguni Bantu, *ubuntu* refers to the culturally valued notion of being kind to others on account of one's common humanity. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it, 'It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness; it speaks about compassion' (cited in Bowen, 2014, p.83). Kindness is similarly valorised in words such as *pittiarniq* (Inuit), *maitrī* (मैत्री; Sanskrit), and *gemilut hasadim* (Yiddish), all of which refer specifically to the potent compound 'loving-kindness' (Blumberg, 2006, p.724). Closely related to these words is the Sanskrit *ahimsa* (अहिंसा); although being negatively formulated (*himsā* means harm, with 'a' being a negative prefix), it retains positive overtones of love which are not preserved if translated into simply English as non-harm (Ostergaard, 1977).

Related to kindness are a swathe of words articulating the value of empathy and compassion, such as *karuna* (करुणा) in Sanskrit, and *koev halev* in Hebrew. These both refer to identifying with the suffering of others so closely that one's own heart aches in sympathy. Similarly, there are terms for 'vicarious embarrassment,' in which one shares in sympathy the shame of others, including *myötähäpeä* (Finnish), *Fremdschämen* (German), and *pena ajena*

(Spanish). In Thai, *kreng-jai* translates as 'deferential heart,' and articulates the wish to not trouble someone by burdening them with a request that might cause them hassle. More positively, there are words revelling in the joys of others, including *muditā* (मुदिता; Sanskrit), which translates as sympathetic joy, and *k'velen* (Hebrew) and *fargin* (Yiddish), which mean to glow with pride and happiness at the successes of others (often family members). Finally, *gunnen* (Dutch) means to allow someone to have a positive experience, especially if that means one won't have it oneself.

In addition to expressions of kindness and empathy are words pertaining to morality more generally, valorising the development of ethical sensibilities. For instance, in Pashto, *imandari* (الإستقامة) expresses a culturally valued ideal of 'righteousness,' of cultivating good words and deeds. Likewise, *tarbiya* (تربیه علم) refers to on-going moral/ethical and spiritual education and development. Indeed, many cultures view ethical and spiritual growth as intertwined, so this section intersects with that of spirituality below. For instance, in Buddhism, a key concept is *karma* (कर्म; Sanskrit), a theory of causality with respect to ethical behaviour, wherein ethical actions lead to future positive states, and unethical actions have adverse consequences (Jones, 2012). Indeed, *karma* is an excellent example of a foreign term being adopted wholesale in English. Related to *karma* are other Sanskrit words concerning the importance of ethical development, including as a vehicle for spiritual growth. For instance, *apramāda* (अप्रमाद) articulates a sense of 'moral watchfulness' (Rao, 2007, p.69), i.e., being aware of the ethical implications of one's actions.

Ideals of ethics also find their expression in words which capture more specifically what ethical behaviour consists of. For instance, numerous cultures have forged words to extol the virtues of hospitality. In Pashto, *melmastia* (ملمستیا) encapsulates the sense of moral obligation and honour in offering sanctuary and respect to all visitors, without expectation of recompense, and is seen as a defining attribute of the culture (Ambreen &

Mohyuddin, 2013). Similar themes are expressed by *xenia* (ξενία; Greek), and the Yiddish terms *hachnasat orchim* ('welcoming the stranger') and *tzedaka* ('required righteous giving') (Blumberg, 2006, p.724). Then there are related words pertaining to social decorum in interaction, such as the complex Farsi term *ta'ârof* (تعارف); although often translated as politeness, this incorporates much nuance, such as in relation to receiving and offering hospitality and gifts. Finally, there are concepts that express the building up of good social 'karma,' i.e., when one does good deeds and might reasonably expect favours in return, such as *bitmoun* (بتمون) in Arabic and *guān xì* (關係) in Chinese.

Words pertaining to relationships include terms for positive or skilful communication. There are terms which express appreciation and recognition for others and their efforts, like *xīn kǔ* (辛苦) in Chinese. Somewhat similarly, in Hebrew, *hirgun* is the act of saying nice things to another simply to make them feel good. Then there are terms pertaining to getting along, such as: the Catalan *enraonar*, namely to discuss in a civilised, reasoned manner; the French reflexive verb *s'entendre*, literally meaning to hear each other, but which refers to understanding between people; and the Fijian Hindi *talanoa*, which describes the way apparently purposeless idle talk functions as a 'social adhesive' (Rheingold, 2000, p.66). There are terms capturing the emotive power of story-telling, like the Italian *commuovere*, which translates as 'heartwarming' but refers to a story that has moved one to affectionate tears. There are also words for non-verbal communication skills, like Korean *nunchi* (눈치), which literally means 'eye-measure,' and captures the ability to 'read' emotions and situations and to respond skilfully. Finally, the Australian aboriginal term *dadirri* describes a deep, spiritual act of reflective and respectful listening.

Words pertaining to pro-sociality culminate in terms articulating a valued sense of social communality. The Arabic *asabiyyah* (عصبية) describes a sense of 'community spirit,' as does *tuko pamoja* (Swahili), translated as 'we are together,' and *piliriqatigiinniq* (Inuit).

All these terms denote a shared sense of purpose and working together for the common good. More specifically, Scandinavian languages have words for collectively pursuing a given task, e.g., *talkoot* (Finnish), *dugnad* (Norwegian), and *talko* (Swedish), as does Indonesian with *rojong*. Communality is also reflected in the Dutch word *janteloven*, i.e., a set of rules which discourages individualism in communities. Lastly, there are words describing harmony and congruence in life, a sense of 'resonance between cosmic harmony, intellectual and aesthetic correctness, and cooperative family relationships' (Rheingold, 2000, p.37). These include: *friluftsliv* (Norwegian), articulating a sense of living in tune with nature; *simpatía* (Spanish), describing accord within relationships and society generally; and *tjotjog* (Javanese), which literally means 'to fit, as a key does in a lock' (Geertz, 1973, p.129).

Character

This final category reflects the notion, shared among many cultures, that wellbeing is not just about positive feelings and nourishing relationships, but also involves the development of what we might call 'character.' Words here fall into two meta-themes. First, resources, which refers to qualities and skills that help a person live well. Second, spirituality, featuring terms which imply that the deepest forms of wellbeing are found through psychospiritual development.

Resources

With resources, to begin with are words valorising character attributes of perseverance or grit. In Arabic, *sumud* (صمود), translated as steadfastness, describes a determined struggle to persist, a quality that has been particularly valorised in the context of oppression in the Middle East (Nassar, 2011). Similarly, Finnish exhorts *sisu*, characterised as extraordinary determination in the face of adversity. Somewhat relatedly, there are terms capturing the ability or willingness to persevere through tasks that are hard or even just boring, including *að jenna* (Icelandic), and *Sitzfleisch* (German), which literally means 'sit meat.' There are

also exhortations towards perseverance, such as the Japanese *ganbaru* (頑張る), translated as 'to do one's best.' Somewhat similarly, there are words extolling the importance being energised, such as *jaksaa* (Finnish) and *orka* (Swedish). Likewise, Greek *kefi* (κέφι) captures a spirit of joy, passion, enthusiasm, high spirits, even frenzy. On a more mystical level, the Arabic *baraka* (بركة) is described as a gift of spiritual energy or 'sanctifying power' that can be transferred from one person to another (Safi, 2000, p.264). Similarly, *orenda,* from the Native American Huron language, describes the power of the human will to change the world in the face of powerful forces such as fate.

Related to perseverance and spirit are words eulogising resourcefulness and skill. Some describe the ability to 'make do' or 'get by,' particularly in difficult circumstances, such as *jugaad* (जुगाड; Hindi) or *arrangiarsi* (Italian). Related to these is the Portuguese *desenrascanço*, i.e., to artfully disentangle oneself from a troublesome situation. Pertaining to skill more generally (not simply as a coping resource), German *Fingerspitzengefühl* (literally 'fingertip feeling') describes the ability to think clearly about numerous phenomena and to understand how they relate on multiple levels. Reflecting a different manifestation of skill, the Italian *sprezzatura* articulates a certain nonchalance, wherein all art and effort are concealed beneath a 'studied carelessness.' Similarly, *saper vivere* describes the ability to handle people and situations with charm, diplomacy and verve. Hungarian *pihentagyú*, literally meaning 'with a relaxed brain,' describes quick-witted people who can come up with sophisticated jokes or solutions. Likewise, Polish *kombinowa*ć refers to working out an unusual solution to a complicated problem, and acquiring coveted skills or qualities in the process. Pertaining more to creative skill, Greek *meraki* (μεράκι) depicts a sense of ardour, specifically in relation to one's own actions and creations, such that one puts all one's effort and creativity into these. Finally, Chinese *yuan bèi* (圓備) articulates a sense of complete and perfect accomplishment.

Of course, grit, spirit and resourcefulness are not the only character strengths valued across cultures. Most languages have specific terms for particularly valorised traits, many of which touch upon notions of decency. For instance, in German, *brav* is an adjective used to commend children, encompassing qualities including being pleasant, earnest, and well-behaved. Similarly, *majime* (真面目) in Japanese, and *kàopǔ* (靠譜) in Chinese, depict someone who is reliable, responsible, and able to get things done without causing problems for others. Relatedly, Japanese *sunao* (素直) could be translated as 'meek,' 'docile' or even 'submissive'; however, whereas these terms generally carry negative connotations, *sunao* is positive, exemplified in the respect given by a student towards a teacher. In Hungarian, *szimpatikus* identifies a person as a decent human being, while Chinese *fēngyùn* (風韻) describes personal charm and graceful bearing. Switching tack slightly, Swedish *lagom* captures a sense of moderation, of doing anything to just the right degree. Finally, in the Tshiluba language of the Democratic Republic of Congo, *ilunga* – rated by linguists as the world's most difficult word to translate (Conway, 2004) – refers to a person who is ready to forgive abuse the first time, and tolerate it a second time, but never a third time.

Beyond these personal characteristics are words articulating a sense that a person is living *well*, that they are flourishing. In Japanese, *ikigai* (生き甲斐) translates as a 'reason for being,' capturing the feeling that life is 'good and meaningful' and that it is 'worthwhile to continue living' (Yamamoto-Mitani & Wallhagen, 2002, p.399). Similarly, *genki* (元気) refers to being healthy, energetic, and full of life. In French, *joie de vivre* articulates a zest for life, the 'knack of knowing how to live' (Lopate, 1986, p11). It is, as Harrow and Unwin (2009, p.19) put it, 'a Weltanschauung [a German term for 'philosophy of life'], a behavioural mode and form of practice. It is joy generalised, a result of many experiences, a sustained and boundless enjoyment of the here and now.' Similarly, a *bon vivant* describes someone who

luxuriates in the good life. Then there are terms for living *fully*, experiencing life deeply and intensely in the 'here and now,' including *Erlebnis* (German) and *vivencias* (Spanish). Added to these are words signifying living a *good* life, i.e., being a good person, such as *namus* (Turkish), which reflects a combination of honour, chastity, decency, and virtue. Likewise, *menschlichkeit* (Yiddish) 'encompasses being a good human being in its fullest sense… to not only be human and humane, but also filled with reverence for life, compassion for others, concern for the health and well-being of the planet, and justice for all' (Blumberg, 2006, p.724). Then finally, there are words expressing the sense that one *has* lived well, such as *míng mù* (瞑目) in Chinese, meaning to 'die without regret.' This sentiment is epitomised by the Cherokee battle-cry *yutta-hey*, which translates as 'it is a good day to die,' embodying the feeling that one is leaving life at its zenith, departing in glory.

Spirituality

Finally, the world's cultures have developed a rich lexicon to reflect the notion that to *truly* flourish, to experience life's emotional peaks, one must cultivate some kind of spirituality. For a start, many languages have words to express the idea of a soul, some inner essence, removed from the accoutrements of personality and changing behavioural patterns, that reflects the truest, deepest core of a person. These include: Russian *duša* (душа), one's inner heart and soul; Arabic *fitra* (فطرة), an innate purity and closeness to God; and Hindi *ātman* (आत्मन्), i.e., breath or spirit. Moreover, in Hinduism, the *atman* is regarded as identical with *brahman* (ब्रह्मन्), the all-powerful and pervasive power that continually creates the universe (Ho, 1995). Somewhat similarly, Buddhism valorises the notion of consciousness through Sanskrit terms like *smriti* (स्मृति), a concept that, in a Buddhist context, emphasises the importance of present-moment awareness. In contrast to Hinduism, Buddhism generally denies the existence of a distinct individual soul or spirit, using the Sanskrit *anātman* (अनात्मन्) to reflect this. At the same time though, consciousness, as reflected in terms like *smriti*, is

valorised within Buddhism as an important inner vehicle of psychospiritual development (Wallace, 2007).

As the latter sentence suggests, for some cultures, the soul is not simply a static entity, but something that can be cultivated spiritually through practice. For instance, Hinduism and Buddhism share a concern with the *dhárma* (धर्म), a multifaceted, polyvalent term that refers both to what one should do (e.g., ethical norms), and why one should do it (e.g., so that one becomes aligned with the moral and spiritual 'laws' of the universe) (Creel, 1972). One may cultivate alignment with the *dhárma* by following a *márga* (मार्ग; Sanskrit), i.e., a spiritual path or way, which is called a '*dō*' (道) in Japanese. This path would involve psychospiritual practices, notably meditation, referred to in Sanskrit as *dhyāna* (ध्यान). (When Buddhism was transmitted to China, *dhyana* became *ch'án* (禪), which in turn was pronounced Zen in Japan.) For instance, one might meditate on a *mantra* (मन्त्र), a Sanskrit term translated as 'mind tool,' i.e., repeated words/phrases used to 'leverage the power of our minds' (Rheingold, 2000, p.48). Or there are various physico-spiritual practices encompassed by the Japanese term *budō* (武道), which translates as 'martial arts.' Indeed, most religious traditions have evolved comparable meditative practices, as evidenced by the Arabic *muraqaba* (مراقبة) for example, a Sufi word meaning 'to watch over' or 'to take care of.'

One of the goals of such practices is to cultivate an understanding of the *dharma*, of the nature of reality, and to bring oneself in alignment with it. This goal is captured by the Sanskrit term *prajña* (प्रज्ञ), which does not simply mean intellectual wisdom, but experiential insight (Kang & Whittingham, 2010). In a Buddhist context, developing insight means understanding what in Sanskrit are called the three *lakṣaṇas* (लक्षण), i.e., the three 'marks of conditioned existence.' These refer to what Buddhism regards as the three fundamental properties of the universe: *anitya* (अनित्य), i.e., impermanence; *anātman* (अनात्मन्), i.e.,

insubstantiality (as used above in relation to Buddhism denying the existence of a soul); and *duḥkha* (दुःख), i.e., suffering or dissatisfaction. Buddhism holds that it is the failure to appreciate *anitya* and *anātman,* and consequently the attempt to pursue and attach to phenomena that are intrinsically 'empty,' that is the cause of suffering. (This notion of 'emptiness' is captured by the Sanskrit term *sūnyatā* (शून्यता). This isn't a nihilistic concept which denies that phenomena exist. Rather, it articulates the idea that things are not self-subsistent, but come into being dependent upon conditions, and are therefore subject to change.) However, should one reach a deep understanding and appreciation of *sūnyatā*, this leads to *sukha*, described above as a form of 'lasting happiness,' which is the antonym of *duḥkha* (i.e., suffering).

Most spiritual traditions have similar notions about bringing one's understanding into alignment with the nature of the universe. For instance, the Chinese dialectical symbol y*in-yang*, highlighted above, is central to the Chinese religious/philosophical tradition of Taoism. Taoism focuses on experiential understanding of the Tao (道), a complex term that, like *brahman* means an all-powerful and pervasive power, but like *dō* also means path or way. Taoism thus extolls the importance of aligning one's understanding and behaviour with the Tao. This alignment is represented by the ideogram *te* (德), which also carries connotations of integrity, virtue and inner power (Chang, 2013). A related concept of importance in Taoism is *wú wéi* (無為). This literally translates as 'do nothing,' but means to act in such accordance with the Tao that one's actions are entirely natural, uncontrived and effortless.

As practitioners progress in the context of their religious traditions, we find words that capture increasingly deep, transformative states of flourishing. For instance, in Buddhism, the zenith of psychospiritual development is referred to in Sanskrit as *bodhi* (बोधि), translated as 'enlightenment' or 'awakening.' With *bodhi*, one has attained complete insight into the

nature of reality, and accordingly has been 'liberated' from suffering. In Japanese, *bodhi* is referred to as *satori* (悟り), and also sometimes as *kenshō* (見性); however, the latter refers more to a temporary 'glimpse' of awakening, while the former implies durability and even permanence. Once awakened and liberated, a person is said to have realised their 'Buddha nature,' i.e., become perfected and enlightened just as the Buddha became. Buddha nature is referred to in Sanskrit as *tathāgatagarbha*; this is a compound of *garbha* (गर्भ), meaning 'embryo,' and *tathāgata* (तथागत), which translates as 'one who has thus come/gone,' and is the term the Buddha deployed to refer to himself. There are comparable concepts in other cultures. For instance, in Islam, *tazkiah* (تزكية) refers to the process of 'purification of the self,' i.e., progressing towards purity and submission to Allah. This process culminates in *fanaa* (فناء), the 'annihilation' of the ego, thereby enabling one to achieve enlightenment and union with God (Nilchian, 2011, p.5). Such terms depict peaks of psychospiritual development and wellbeing that are described as far exceeding the positive feelings elucidated in the first section, and which chart the far possibilities of what it means to flourish as a person.

Conclusion

This exercise in collating and analysing 'untranslatable' words has revealed a rich lexicon of terms pertaining to wellbeing. Using an inductive 'grounded theory' approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a tentative conceptual framework was established. This framework was generated by grouping words into themes, themes into meta-themes, and finally meta-themes into three overarching categories (feelings, relationships, and character). The themes, meta-themes, and categories are illustrated in figure 1 below. It must be emphasized that this figure is simply a visual representation of the thematic groupings that I identified in my analysis. It will require a comprehensive future research agenda to turn this initial conceptual framework into a sophisticated nomological network. This research agenda would need to include factor-

analytic examinations of construct validity and of the interrelationships between the concepts, as elucidated further below.

[Insert figure 1 about here]

In considering this emergent lexicography, there are two key questions. First, whether this taxonomy can enrich the conceptual landscape of PP, and help the field to develop a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing. Second, whether this taxonomy can similarly expand the emotional vocabulary of English speakers themselves, and likewise enrich their understanding of wellbeing. To be clear, these questions cannot be answered definitively here; this paper is simply a first step towards doing so. In developing an initial lexicography here, the hope is that this will be the basis for a future research agenda aimed at answering these questions.

So, the first question is whether this taxonomy can enrich the conceptual landscape of PP. A research agenda based on this lexicography would go some way towards addressing present limitations of PP. Firstly, there is currently a bias towards the use of participants who Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) refer to as 'WEIRD,' i.e., from Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic societies. Secondly, there is a resulting tendency within PP to develop concepts and models of wellbeing based on the analysis of such participants. Thirdly, it is then widely assumed in PP that these concepts and models are generalizable across cultures (Izquierdo, 2005). Fourth, there is a corollary assumption that Western psychology has little to learn from psychological constructs and models developed within non-Western cultures (with some exceptions, like the burgeoning enthusiasm for mindfulness and other Buddhist-derived concepts (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006)).

A research agenda based on this lexicography – using the lexicon to better understand wellbeing in a cultural context – would help address these limitations. So, what might such an agenda look like? We could imagine a number of stages. First, all 216 terms considered here

arguably warrant their own individual paper, explicating and analysing them in rich detail. Such papers could include analysis of the word's etymology and cultural significance, as for example Silva (2012) did with *saudade*. Such papers would ideally also develop psychometric scales in English pertaining to these concepts, as Scheibe et al. (2007) did with *Sehnsucht*. Moreover, it is a certainty that the present list is by no means exhaustive, and that there are many more words that could be deemed 'untranslatable.' As such, this first stage could also see the expansion of this lexicon by scholars who are intimate with other languages and cultures. Such researchers could identify relevant words and concepts, and then similarly develop etymological analyses and psychometric scales.

As the lexicon develops, and with it a battery of psychometric scales, this could lead to a second stage of research focused on establishing construct validity. This does not only mean assessing the validity of any potential scales, but also the validity of the concepts themselves, so-called 'substantive' validity (Messick, 1995). It will be important to explore where the concepts identified in this lexicography sit within the nomological network of existing constructs within PP. We might ask, for instance, how the Finnish notion of *sisu* relates to conceptually similar terms in English, like perseverance or grit. This means exploring the ways in which these words overlap, and examining whether *sisu* incorporates qualities not found in these other terms. This second stage would therefore involve factor analytic research, comparing the new psychometric scales (based on terms in this lexicon) with existing scales (of constructs already recognised in PP). This will enable us to see how the concepts in this lexicography relate to and overlap with existing concepts within PP.

Once the validity of these constructs (and their scales) has been established, a third stage of research could then involve extensive cross-cultural assessment. This would enable us to explore the extent to which people in different cultures understand and experience the concept at hand. This does not only mean investigating whether English speakers can

experience concepts found in other languages (as per this lexicography). A related line of enquiry is whether constructs in Western psychology are applicable to other cultures. For instance, Hormes and Rozin (2010) have noted that many languages do not appear to have an equivalent for the term 'craving.' These types of cross-cultural analyses will indicate whether, as per strong linguistic determinism, one must be intimate with a culture in order to understand its 'untranslatable' words (Taylor, 1985). Or, conversely, such analyses may corroborate Wierzbicka's (1999) argument that we can indeed appreciate what such words refer to. That is, even if English does not possess a word for a particular feeling, we may find that English speakers can still recognize the feeling as something they have previously experienced.

This third stage leads us into consideration of the second key question raised at the start of this conclusion. This was whether this lexicon could expand the emotional vocabulary of English speakers themselves, and likewise enrich their understanding of wellbeing. Even if the emotions depicted in this paper are unfamiliar to English speakers, it is possible that people can be *trained* to recognize these. For instance, in the context of developmental psychology, interventions have been developed to enrich children's emotional vocabulary, thereby helping them to develop 'emotional competence' (Saarni, 1999). It is possible that the lexicon developed here could be helpful in such situations, expanding their vocabulary even further. Such training has implications for wellbeing, including potentially addressing mental health issues. For instance, research with male meditators by Lomas, Edginton, Cartwright, and Ridge (2014) found that many had previously become emotionally 'restricted' due to gender socialisation pressures. However, through meditation, participants were able to develop emotional intelligence, which in turn enhanced their mental health. Part of their meditation training involved introspecting and attempting to label their emotional experience. Their training also featured practices to help them develop new emotional

qualities, like *maitrī* (a Sanskrit term, featured above, which translates as 'loving-kindness'). It is conceivable that this kind of 'emotional training' could be enhanced by a lexicon such as the one developed here. As such, in addition to the conceptual research agenda outlined above, this lexicography may also have practical applications.

In summary, it is hoped that this lexicography will improve our understanding of wellbeing, enhancing PP by bringing in ideas from other cultures. It is furthermore hoped that it may have applied benefits too, such as enriching the emotional landscape of native English speakers. However, this type of research is only in its infancy, with this paper merely offering the beginnings of a positive cross-cultural lexicography. This can hopefully then be expanded, refined, tested and validated over the years ahead.

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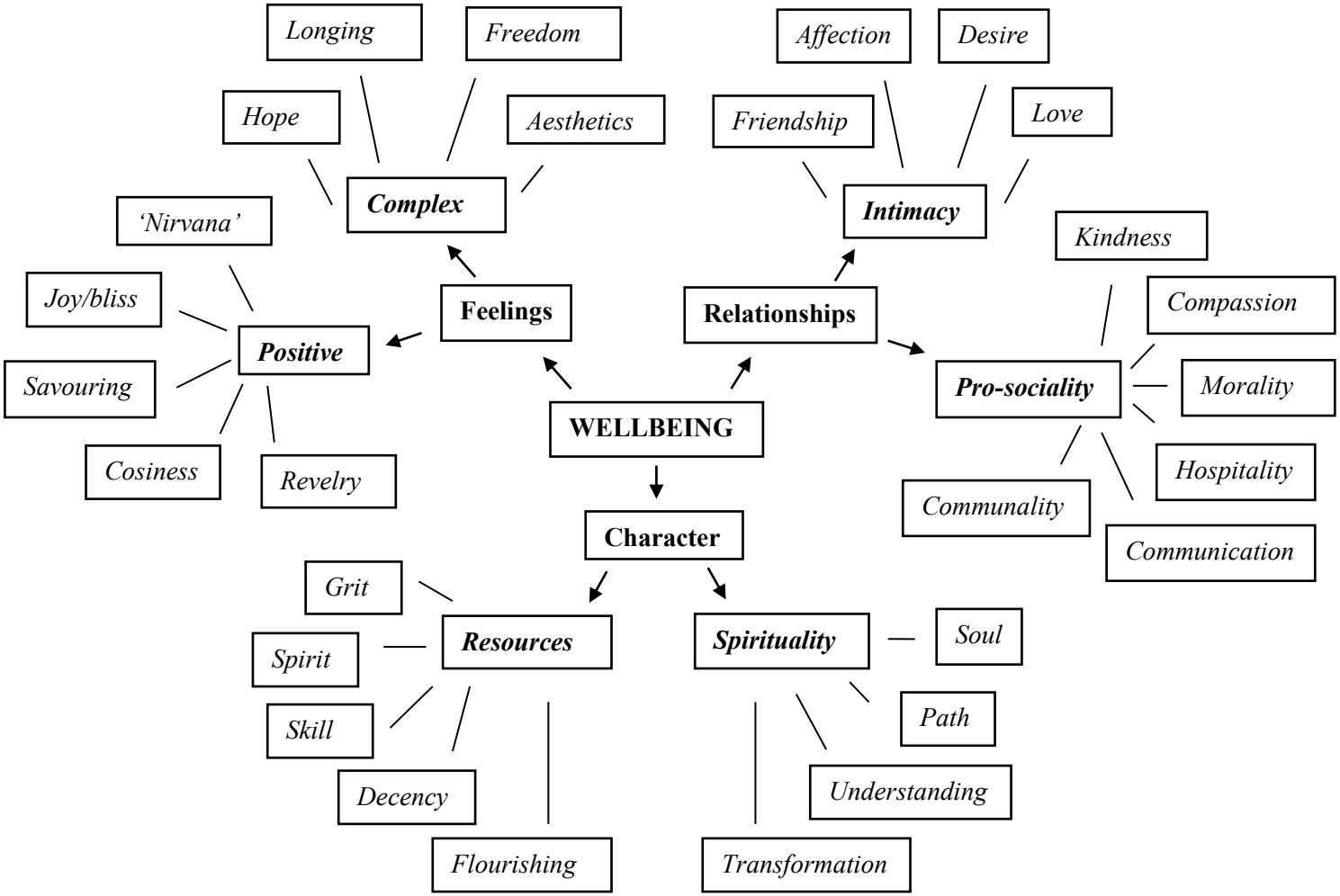
Figure 1: Thematic map of emergent positive cross-cultural lexicography