

**WHAT'S WRONG WITH «HAPPINESS STUDIES»?
THE CULTURAL SEMANTICS OF *HAPPINESS*,
BONHEUR, *GLÜCK*, AND *SČAS'TE***

1. Measuring happiness?

On September 16, 2009, Australian newspapers reported that the French president Nicolas Sarkozy was proposing that the Gross National Product and similar economic indicators should be replaced with an «index of happiness» as a measure of a country's economic, social and political achievements. He was also reported as saying that France would lead other nations in placing people's happiness ahead of measures like the Gross National Product.

Thus, *The Australian* (Sept. 16, 2009) wrote: «President Nicolas Sarkozy has announced plans to include happiness and well-being in France's measurement of economic progress». Other sources carried similar reports. For example, on September 21, a feature appeared in the British newspaper «Independent» entitled «Sarkozy's happiness index is worth taking seriously». The article stated: «President Sarkozy has suggested that ...instead of measuring national well-being and political success wholly in terms of money and growth (...) the world should devise a new 'happiness index', an internationally approved barometer of 'joie de vivre'.»

The background of the story was, the article explained, that twenty months earlier, «before a global economic crisis driven by the good of short-term growth, Mr Sarkozy set up a commission of 20 economists. They were asked to report back on ways of changing the statistical currency beloved of the OECD, the EU and all national governments; in other words, how to replace Gross Domestic Product with a new measure: Gross Domestic Happiness».

I was immediately suspicious of such reports, because as I had discussed in earlier publications (see e. g., [Wierzbicka 2004]), French has no word matching in meaning the English word *happiness* as it is used in present-day English and in so-called «happiness studies». The word *bonheur*, which is normally offered by bilingual dictionaries as a would-be equivalent of *happiness*, does not mean the same as *happiness*, and to many speakers of French, the idea of measuring people's level of 'bonheur' sounds somewhat bizarre. I was also struck by the fact that sometimes the English-language reports used some other word in combination with *happiness* to explain Mr Sarkozy's

idea, for example, «happiness and well-being», or «happiness and contentment», or used the phrase «*joie de vivre*,» which is well-known in English, even to those who don't know French. So my guess was that perhaps Mr Sarkozy did not in fact use the word *bonheur* but some other word or words, which were then translated into English as *happiness*.

My guess was right. What was reported in English as a new «happiness index» was phrased in French (in most media reports) as «*la mesure du bien-être*». French newspapers carried features with titles such as «*Sarkozy veut que le bien-être entre dans la mesure de la richesse des pays*» ('Sarkozy wants well-being to be included in the measure of wealth of different countries'). It transpired that Sarkozy was in fact using the word *bien-être*, literally, 'well-being', rather than *bonheur*.

Since the French word *bien-être* has a close equivalent in the English word *well-being*, one may well ask why *happiness* was used in the English reports instead of a more literal gloss *well-being*. Evidently, the answer is that there is a huge industry of so-called «happiness studies» in English and that when Mr Sarkozy was setting up a commission of 20 economists to investigate «*le bien-être des personnes*» he was taking up ideas stemming from that field. In particular, he was clearly building on the work of the editor of *The Journal of Happiness Studies*, Ed Diener and his colleagues, according to whom [Biswas-Diener et al. 2004: 18]: «in the last few decades there has been something of a revolution in the scientific study of happiness. (...) For the first time, we are able to measure happiness...». And a longer quote, echoed by Sarkozy:

In many modern societies, public policies stress the role of wealth in producing happiness. When material necessities are in short supply, it is understandable that economics will be the focus of policymakers and politicians. However, (...) as material well-being in modern societies becomes increasingly common, people move beyond strictly economic concerns in what is important to their quality of life, and public policies ought to reflect this evolution. We propose that the economics of money should now be complemented by an economics of happiness that bases its policies on measures of subjective well-being. (p. 24—25)

Economists are very actively involved in so-called «happiness studies» and two of them, Daniel Kahneman and Joseph Stiglitz, had won the Nobel prize for their work in that area. Stiglitz was in fact one of the three co-chairs of the commission set up by Sarkozy, along with another Nobel-prize winner, Amartya Sen, and the leading French economist Jean-Paul Fitussi.

Interestingly, in an interview that Stiglitz gave for the French journal *Liberation* (Sept. 15, 2009) he was reported as saying that it is necessary to «*changer de modèle statistique et mesurer le bien-être et le bonheur*» ('change the statistical models and measure the well-being and happiness (*le bonheur*)').

It is not surprising that the recommendations conceived by three intellectuals, two of them (Stiglitz and Sen) Anglophone and one (Fitussi) Francophone, would be moving to and fro between the usual English concept of 'happiness', which predominates in the Anglophone literature on the subject (and which is occasionally translated into French as *bonheur*), and the French concept of 'bien-être'. The fact that the word *bien-être* has

a close counterpart in the English word *well-being*, and that *well-being* is also used, to some extent, in the English-language literature on the subject, helps no doubt to create the impression that the participants are talking about the same thing. But in fact, they are not, because *bien-être* does not mean the same as *happiness*. And the fact that the English word *happiness*, which is the key word in the discourse of Anglophone «happiness studies», is seldom rendered in French as *bonheur* underscores the non-equivalence of these two words, *bonheur* and *happiness*.

Before exploring in some detail the semantic differences between *happiness* and *bonheur* it needs to be noted that the two concepts are not culturally equivalent either. *Happiness* — a word which occurs in innumerable titles of contemporary books in English, many of them runaway bestsellers — is a cultural key word in modern English [Wierzbicka 1997; 2006], a word which points to a salient Anglo-American ideal, a widely shared target of pursuit, and for many a self-evident purpose of life (cf. [McMahon 2006], Wierzbicka Forthcoming). The word *bonheur* enjoys no similar standing in the French language and culture. This cultural difference is related to the difference in meaning between the two words, and the former cannot be properly understood without the latter.

So what is *happiness* and what is *bonheur*? To be able to show what the differences between these concepts are, we need a suitable methodology. Such a methodology is provided by the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to semantic and cultural analysis.

2. The natural semantic metalanguage (NSM)

NSM is a technique for the investigation of meanings, ideas and ways of speaking which is based on, and interpretable through, natural language — any natural language. The central idea of this theory, supported by extensive empirical investigations by a number of researchers, is that despite their enormous diversity, all natural languages share a common core: a small vocabulary of 65 or so conceptual primes and a «universal grammar» (the combinatory properties of the primes). The set of universal conceptual primes identifiable as distinct word-meanings in all languages, includes elements such as SOMEONE, SOMETHING, PEOPLE, GOOD, BAD, KNOW, THINK, WANT, FEEL, and so on. The full set of these primes is given in the table below. [Cf. Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard; 1998; Goddard, Wierzbicka (eds.) 1994; 2002].

The inventory of semantic primes given in Table 1 below uses exponents from three languages: English [Goddard, Wierzbicka 2002], French [Peeters 2006], and Russian [Gladkova 2010], but equivalent lists have been drawn up for many languages. Because semantic primes and their grammar are shared across languages, it is possible to construct equivalent NSMs in any language: a Chinese NSM, a Malay NSM, a Spanish NSM, a Japanese NSM, and so on (see especially the chapters in [Goddard, Wierzbicka (eds.) 2002; Peeters (ed.) 2006; Goddard (ed.) 2008]). The use of NSM as a system of conceptual analysis depends on being able to break down complex language-specific

meanings and ideas into extended explanatory paraphrases, known as explications. In the case of ‘emotion words’, like *happiness* and *bonheur*, such explications are often based on prototypical cognitive scenarios (see section 3).

Table 1

Semantic primes — English, French and Russian exponents

ENGLISH	FRENCH	RUSSIAN	
I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING/THING, PEOPLE, BODY	JE, TU/VOUS, QUELQU'UN, QUELQUE CHOSE, GENS, CORPS	JA, TY, KTO-TO, ČTO-TO/VEŠČ', LJUDI, TELO	substantives
KIND, PART	TYPE, PARTIE	ROD/VID, ČAST'	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER/ELSE	CE, MÊME, AUTRE	ÉTOT, TOT ŽE, DRUGOJ	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH/MANY	UN, DEUX, BEAUCOUP, CERTAINS, TOUT	ODIN, DVA, MNOGO, NEKOTORYE, VSE	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	BIEN, MAL	XOROŠIJ/XOROŠO, PLOXOJ/PLOXO	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	GRAND, PETIT	BOL'ŠOJ, MALEN'KIJ	descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	PENSER, SAVOIR, VOULOIR, SENTIR, VOIR, ENTENDRE	DUMAT', ZNAT', XOTET', ČUVSTVOVAT', VIDET', SLYŠAT'	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	DIRE, MOTS, VRAI	GOVORIT'/SKAZAT', SLOVA, PRAVDA	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	FAIRE, ARRIVER, BOUGER, TOUCHER	DELAT', PROISXODIT'/SLUČIT'SJA, DVIGAT'SJA, KASAT'SJA,	action, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	ÊTRE (QUELQUE PART), IL Y A, AVOIR, ÊTRE (QUELQU'UN / QUELQUE CHOSE)	BYT' [GDE-TO], BYT'/EST', [U KOGO-TO] BYT'/EST' [ČTO-TO], BYT' [KEM-TO/ČEM-TO]	location, existence, possession, specification
LIVE, DIE	VIVRE, MOURIR	ŽIT', UMERET'	life and death
WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	QUAND, MAINTENANT, AVANT, APRÈS, LONG-TEMPS, PEU DE TEMPS, POUR QUELQUE TEMPS, MOMENT	KOGDA/VREMJA, SEJČAS, DO, POSLE, DOLGO, KOROTKOE VREMJA, NEKOTOROE VREMJA, MOMENT	time
WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	OÙ, ICI, AU-DESSUS, AU-DESSOUS, LOIN, PRÈS, CÔTÉ, DANS	GDE/MESTO, ZDES', NAD, POD, DALEKO, BLIZKO, STORONA, VNUTRI	space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	NE ... PAS, PEUT-ÊTRE, POUVOIR, À CAUSE DE, SI	NE, MOŽET BYT', MOČ', POTOMU ČTO, ESLI	logical concepts
VERY, MORE	TRÈS, PLUS	OČEN', EŠČE/BOL'ŠE	intensifier, augmentor
LIKE	COMME	KAK/TAK, KAK	similarity

Notes: • Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes)
 • Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes • They can be formally complex
 • Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

The NSM approach to semantic and cultural analysis has been employed in hundreds of studies across many languages and cultures. A large bibliography is available at the NSM Homepage: www.une.edu.au/bcss/linguistics/nsm/index.php. As these studies demonstrate, the mini-language of universal conceptual primes can be used for discussing ways of thinking, feeling, acting and speaking, and for doing it without cultural or linguistic biases, without theoretical preconceptions, and in a unified framework [cf. Wierzbicka 2006].

3. 'Happiness' vs 'bonheur'

The word *happiness* has a long and complex history in English. I have discussed this topic elsewhere (Wierzbicka, forthcoming) and cannot discuss it here. Some of the older meanings of *happiness* are still around, at least in the passive competence of speakers of English. I will focus here, however, on two meanings of the word which are common in contemporary speech. The first meaning (*happiness*₁) can be illustrated with the phrase «the pursuit of happiness», and the second (*happiness*₂), with a passage from a story about a church wedding:

The groom, who had a roguish side, pulled Alison into a showy clasp, and Father Marino stepped back and led the quick applause for the couple. «They're examples to us all, these two», he said. «Why don't we follow their lead? There's no better day than a wedding for a hug». In the pews, people relaxed and smiled at one another. (...) On the altar, Alison and her groom kissed again, as prettily as dolls. (...) Father Marino watched what he had set in motion. All around him people embraced. Happiness sang through the hot church air. He felt it himself. [McGraw 2004: 104]

Roughly speaking, *happiness*₁ is a state characterized by a capacity for an ongoing good feeling linked with a set of «appreciative» construals about the subject's personal situation (a state which is seen as good for the person in question). *Happiness*₂, on the other hand, is an emotion that anyone can feel at a particular time (or a transient mood) — but an emotion (or a mood) whose quality is associated with the same construals which underlie *happiness*₁. Using NSM, we can portray these two meanings of *happiness* as follows:

[A] *happiness*₁ (as in «the pursuit of happiness», «money doesn't bring happiness»)

- a. it can be like this:
- b. someone can feel something good for some time
because this someone can think like this at that time:
- c. «some good things are happening to me now as I want
- d. I can do many things now as I want
- e. this is good»

- f. when this someone thinks like this, this someone can feel something good,
like people feel when they think like this
- g. it is good for this someone if it is like this
- [B.] *happiness*₂ (as in «a moment of happiness»)
- a. it can be like this:
- b. someone feels something good at some time,
like people can feel when they think like this:
- c. «something good is happening to me now as I want
- d. I can do something now as I want
- e. this is good»

So-called «happiness studies» usually fail to distinguish between these two meanings. On the whole, however, economists and sociologists tend to focus on the first of the two, and psychologists, on the second.

Turning now to the French *bonheur*, we will note that here, too, at least two different meanings need to be distinguished. Both these meanings can be illustrated with the following examples from French-English dictionaries (with their English glosses):

1. j'ai eu le bonheur de le connaître
'I had the good fortune to know him' [Harrap 1972]
2. Dieu leur accorda le bonheur d'avoir des enfants.
'God blessed them with children'. [Ibid.]
3. quel bonheur de vous revoir!
'what a pleasure it is to see you again!' [Collins Robert 1987]
4. des vacances! quel bonheur!
'holidays! what bliss!' (what a delight!) [Ibid.]

Here, too, the difference can be linked, broadly speaking, with 'having' *le bonheur* (examples 1 and 2) and 'feeling' *le bonheur* (examples 3 and 4), but the two meanings are different from their closest English counterparts. One of these meanings has its opposite in *malheur*, and the other, in *douleur*, that is, in words which are very different in meaning from *unhappiness* and *sadness*, usually regarded as the opposites of *happiness*.

*Bonheur*₁ is closer to (someone's) 'great good fortune' or 'blessing' than it is to *happiness* in any of its meanings. *Bonheur*₂, which refers to a feeling, *can* sometimes be translated into English as *happiness*, but by no means always, as examples 3 and 4 above illustrate. And even in those sentences in which *bonheur* can be translated as *happiness*, the intensity of the feeling so described could strike English readers as being excessive. The following sentences from Romain Rolland's novel *Jean-Christophe*, together with their English translations, illustrate this.

1. [A little boy, Jean-Christophe, is watching a great river through the window, daydreaming about freedom and music.]

Et tout à fait au loin, (...) — la Mer. Le fleuve court à elle. Elle semble courir à lui. (...).
La musique tournoie, les beaux rythmes de danse se balancent éperdus; (...) l'âme libre

fend l'espace, comme le vol des hirondelles, ivres d'air, qui traversent le ciel avec des cris aigus... (...) O bonheur infini!..

And far, far away, (...) — the sea. The river runs down to it. The sea seems to run up to the river. (...). The music hovers. (...). The soul, set free, cleaves space, like swallows' flight, like swallows drunk with the air, skimming across the sky with shrill cries... (...) ... Oh, infinite happiness!.. [Rolland 1961: 79, Eng. transl. 1913: 67].

2. [The same scene, a few hours later.]

Et le petit Christophe était toujours penché sur le coin du soupirail, avec sa figure pâle, barbouillée, rayonnante de bonheur. Il dormait.

And little Jean-Christophe was still leaning forward on the window-sill. His face was pale and dirty; happiness shone in him. He was asleep. [Rolland 1961: 80, Eng. transl. 1913: 67].

3. [Jean-Christophe, at bed time.]

Il est dans son lit tiède. (...) le supreme bonheur est lorsque maman vient, qu'elle prend la main de Christophe assoupi, (...) Il la serre (...). Comme il l'aime, comme il aime tout! Toutes les personnes, toutes les choses! Tout est bon, tout est beau...

(...). Qu'il est heureux! Qu'il est fait pour être heureux! Rien en lui qui ne croie au bonheur, qui n'y tende de toutes ses petites forces passionnées!..

He is in his soft bed. (...) the crowning joy [bonheur] is when his mother comes and takes Jean-Christophe's hands. (...) He hugs her close. How he loves her! How he loves everything! Everybody, everything! All is good, all is beautiful.

(...) How happy he is! He is made to be happy! There is nothing in him that does not believe in happiness, and does not cling to it with all his little strength and passion!.. [Rolland 1961: 40, Eng. transl. 1913: 25—26].

4. [A famous composer, Hassler, invites the little boy to visit him in Berlin, when he grows up.]

Christophe nageait dans le bonheur. Le reste du monde n'existait plus.

Jean-Christophe swam in happiness. The rest of the world had ceased to exist for him. [Rolland 1961: 90, Eng. transl. 1913: 77].

5. [Jean-Christophe day-dreaming at his old piano, in his garret, alone.]

Il pense à ses maîtres chéris, les génies disparus, don't l'âme revit dans ces musiques. Le cœur gonflé d'amour, il songe au bonheur surhumain, qui dut être la part de ces glorieux amis, puisqu'un reflet de leur bonheur est encore si brûlant. (...).

Hélas! S'il devient un jour l'égal de ceux qu'il aime, s'il atteint à ce bonheur lumineux qu'il envie, il verra son illusion...

He thinks of his beloved masters, of the genius that is gone, though its soul lives on in the music which it had lived in its life. His heart is overflowing with love; he dreams of

the superhuman happiness which must have been the lot of these glorious men, since the reflection only of their happiness is still so much aflame. (...)

Alas! If one day he does become the equal of those whom he loves, if he does achieve that brilliant happiness for which he longs, he will see the illusion that was upon him... [Rolland 1961: 150—151, Eng. transl. 1913: 141].

As an approximation, the two meanings of *bonheur* can be described as follows. *Bonheur*₁ (like *happiness*₁) refers to a state characterized by a capacity for an ongoing good feeling linked with an appreciative construal of the subject's personal situation. Unlike *happiness*₁, however, it also refers to something that actually happened to that person, as its opposite, *malheur* ('disaster/misfortune'), unlike *unhappiness*, refers to something that actually happened to a person. *Bonheur*₂ (like *happiness*₂) refers to an emotion that anyone can feel at a particular time, but it is a more intense and more unusual emotion than *happiness*₂; and also, more likely to be grounded in an actual appreciative thought (in other words, *bonheur* is less likely than *happiness* to be used to refer to a mood).

Using NSM, we can portray the two meanings of *bonheur* (*bonheur*₁ and *bonheur*₂) as follows:

[C] *bonheur*₁ (eg., «le bonheur d'avoir des enfants», 'the *bonheur* of having children')

- a. it can be like this:
- b. something very good happens to someone at some time
- c. because of this, this someone can think like this for some time:
- d. «something very good is happening to me now
- e. this is very good
- f. things like this don't often happen to people»
- g. when this someone thinks like this, this someone can feel something very good because of this
- h. it is very good for this someone if it is like this

[D] *bonheur*₂ (e. g., «quel bonheur de vous revoir!», 'what *bonheur* to see you again!')

- a. it can be like this:
- b. someone feels something very good at some time, like someone can feel when this someone thinks like this:
- c. «something very good is happening to me now
- e. this is very good
- f. things like this don't often happen to people»

Both meanings of *bonheur* include a component that suggests something rare and unusual («things like this don't often happen to people»), which is absent from the meaning of *happiness*. The English *happiness* can be seen as a norm rather than an exception. Two prominent 'happiness researchers', David Myers and Ed Diener (1995: 10, see also [Myers 1992: 25]) are in fact on record as saying that «most people are reasonably happy». Similarly, one can often read in English that every child has the right

to health and happiness, whereas in French one doesn't often find similar references to people's right (*droit*) to *bonheur*. Furthermore, both meanings of *bonheur* include a reference to someone 'feeling something very good', rather than merely 'feeling something good', as in the case of *happiness*.

Since *bonheur*₁ ('great good fortune') implies that something very good really happened to a person (component b) and since there is no such component in *happiness*₁, *happiness*₁ is closer in some ways, to 'subjective well-being', and to the French *bien-être*, than to the French *bonheur*₁. As for *bonheur*₂, which is sometimes translated into English as *bliss*, it implies a greater 'intensity' than *happiness*₂. For example, the wedding scene in which all the people in the church hug one another would be unlikely to be described in French as a moment of general 'bonheur'. *Joie* (joy), perhaps, but probably not *bonheur*.

It is important to note that a few centuries ago, English, too, had a concept of 'happiness' seen as a state rather exceptional and extremely good (and not just simply good). This changed, however, in the 18th century (for reasons which I have discussed elsewhere, see Wierzbicka, Forthcoming).

4. 'Happiness' vs 'Glück'

I don't have the space here to analyse the meaning of the German *Glück* (the German dictionary-equivalent of *happiness*). I will only say that *Glück* is often used in a sense closer to 'luck' or 'good fortune' than to *happiness*, and also, that its other uses are closer to the uses of *bonheur* than of *happiness*. I would, however, like to point out some striking differences between the attitudes to so-called «happiness» between the philosophers of the English and the German language, differences which are clearly correlated with the semantic differences between the words *happiness* and *Glück*, *happy* and *glücklich*. The main difference is that philosophers writing in German and relying on the word *Glück* were much less likely to present *Glück* as the aim of human life than the Anglophone ones, relying on the English word *happiness*.

Thus, Nietzsche famously declared that «Man does not strive after happiness [Glück], only the Englishman does that» («Maxims and Arrows», quoted in [Nussbaum 2004: 60]). As Martha Nussbaum [Nussbaum 2004: 61] notes, he «expressed his scorn for Englishmen who pursued that goal rather than richer goals involving suffering for a noble end, continued striving, activities that put contentment at risk, and so forth».

Schopenhauer argued that «happiness» (*Glück*) was impossible: «Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is destined to be frustrated or recognized as an illusion» («Alles im Leben giebt kund, dass das irdische Glück bestimmt ist, vereitelt oder als eine Illusion erkannt zu werden», [Schopenhauer 1913 vol. 2: 376]).

Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and in other writings, also spoke with some scorn of what McMahon [McMahon 2006: 353] paraphrased as «The Capitalist Ethic and the Spirit of Happiness».

Finally, Freud founded psychoanalysis on the assumption that «the intention that man should be ‘happy’ [*glücklich*] is not included in the plan of ‘Creation’» [Freud 1949: 27] and that the most one can hope for is «the transformation of hysteric misery into common unhappiness (*gemeines Unglück*)» ([Freud 1910], quoted in [McMahon 2006: 444]).

What we call ‘happiness’ (*Glück*) in the strictest sense comes from the (perfectly sudden) satisfactions of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree. It is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon. (...) We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things. Thus our possibilities are already restricted by our constitution. («Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning», 1910, quoted in [McMahon 2006: 444])

By contrast, modern philosophers and writers of the English language, from the early 18th century on, have indeed expressed the view that the aim of human life is to seek happiness.

Simplifying the main story we can say that until the 18th century, *happiness* and *Glück* both referred to «very good feelings» which cannot endure and which most people experience rarely or not at all. From the early 18th century on, however, *happiness* started to refer to «good» rather than «very good» feelings, with the concomitant expectation that these «good feelings» could be achieved by many people and could be experienced often and for long periods.

The meaning of the German word *Glück* (and of its counterparts in most other European languages) did not undergo a similar change in meaning. Consequently, when Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber or Freud wrote about «Glück», they were not writing about the same thing as Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, or William James did when they were writing about «happiness».

The psychologists David Meyers and Ed Diener (1995) start their frequently cited article «Who is happy?» with the observation that «Books, books and more books have analysed human misery. During its first century, psychology focused far more on negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety, than on positive emotions, such as happiness and satisfaction.» (p. 10) They note, with approval, that this is now changing quite dramatically. (Cf. also the quote from Biswas-Diener et al. (2004) adduced in section 1.)

No doubt the revolt of Anglophone psychiatrists and psychologists against Freud and the radical turn from investigating «abnormal bad feelings» to studying «normal good feelings» had many causes. One component, however, may well have been linguistic: the everyday concept of ‘being happy’, on which English-speaking psychologists relied in their everyday lives, simply didn’t fit Freud’s teachings read in English translations. In the second half of the twentieth century the English word *happy* did not refer to «intense pleasures» or to the elimination of all pain and discomfort (that Freud linked with the word *Glück*). Since most psychologists in English-speaking countries were reading Freud in translation, that is, through the prism of the English language, sooner or later a revolt was perhaps inevitable.

5. 'Happiness' vs. 'ščast'e'

The Russian dictionary-equivalent of *happiness* is *ščast'e*, but the semantic profiles of these two words are even more different than those of *happiness* and *bonheur* or *happiness* and *Glück*. For example, a statement that all people have a right to (*pravo na*) *ščast'e* would sound even more strange in Russian than a similar statement about *bonheur* would in French. Similarly, to describe a shared moment of mutual good will and warm interpersonal feelings (as in the wedding scene) as a moment of *ščast'e* would be odd — even more so than to describe it as a moment of *bonheur*.

What then, is *ščast'e*? In trying to answer this question, I will note, first, that this word can be used in Russian with reference to something like 'luck' (a use to which I will return shortly), and second, that apart from that meaning, the two main uses of *ščast'e* parallel, to some extent, the two main uses of *bonheur* — but only to some extent.

Here are two initial examples, both from a recent novel by Ljudmila Ulitskaya, *Daniel' Štajn, perevodčik* (2007):

1. Kakoe ščast'e, čto sud'ba mne podarila Efima kak sputnika žizni. (p. 323) 'what *ščast'e* (happiness/gift) it is that 'fate' gave me Efim as a life companion'
2. S 1959 goda ja živu v Izraile. Velikoe ščast'e žit' na étoj zemle. (p. 458) 'Since 1959, I've been living in Israel. It is a great *ščast'e* (gift/happiness) to live in this land.'

In both of these sentences, *ščast'e* implies both great good fortune (something 'external' that happens to a person) and a wonderful feeling due to a person's appreciation of that good fortune. This meaning of *ščast'e* (*ščast'e*₁) is comparable to that of *bonheur* in sentences like 'it's a *bonheur* to be a mother' (*bonheur*₁), but it includes, I would argue, additional components which make *ščast'e* even more precious and out of the ordinary than *bonheur*.

[E] *ščast'e*₁ (e. g. it's a great *ščast'e* to live in this land)

- a. it can be like this:
- b. something very good happens to someone at some time
- bb. things like this don't often happen to people**
- c. because of this, this someone can think like this for some time:
- d. «something very good is happening to me now
- e. this is very good
- f. things like this don't often happen to people»
- g. when this someone thinks like this, this someone can feel something very good because of this
- h. it is very good if someone can think like this
- i. it is very good if someone can feel like this

This meaning of *ščast'e* is in fact very close to that which I have characterised earlier as 'luck'. One example (a quote from Pasternak speaking about poetry): «Vo vsem étom zaključaetsja otradnejšij fakt. Prosto ščast'e, čto imeetsja oblast' nesposobnaja simulirovat' zrelost' ili rascvet v period do krajnosti uslovnyj» [Bykov 2007: 236]. 'In

all this, there is a very comforting fact. It's simply *sčast'e* [a blessing] that there is a domain incapable of simulating maturity or flourishing in such uncertain times ...'. *Sčast'e* could be translated here (inadequately) as «fortunately» or «heureusement», but this use of *sčast'e* is much closer to *sčast'e*₁ than *fortunately* is to *happiness*, or *heureusement*, to *bonheur*₁.

Such uses of *sčast'e*, which should probably be regarded as a separate meaning, but which are clearly related to *sčast'e*₁, seem to suggest that *sčast'e* can be shared, or that it can be simply 'there', without 'belonging' to any one person. Further, they suggest that *sčast'e*₁, too, may have a slightly less personal character than *happiness*₁ and *bonheur*. I have tried to account for this by phrasing the last two components of *sčast'e* (h) and (i) in terms of «it is very good» rather than «it is very good for this someone».

Turning now to the 'emotional' meaning of *sčast'e*, which I will call *sčast'e*₂, I will start with several examples from the Russian National Corpus.

1. Daže dumaeš' inoj raz, esli dolgo čuvstvovat' sčast'e, serdce ne vyderžit, razorvetsja! [M. S. Šaginjan 1923] 'sometimes you even think that if you feel happiness (sčast'e) for a long time, your heart won't stand it, it will explode!
2. V Geteborge zloradstva na p'edestale ja ne čuvstvoval, serdce napolnilos' sčast'em. [Natal'ja Bestem'janova et al. 2000—2001] 'In Göteborg I didn't feel any schadenfreude when I was on the podium, my heart was filled with happiness (sčast'e).'
3. I my s mamoj čuvstvuem, dejstvitel'no, SČAST'E. [Vadim Sidur 1974] 'Mum and I feel — really — HAPPINESS (SČAST'E).
4. V étix sadax ty, nakonec-to, ispytyvaeš' sostojanie polnogo sčast'ja. [Marina Merzlikina 2002] 'In these gardens, you finally experience a state of complete happiness (sčast'e).
5. Ja ispytala nastojaščee sčast'e. (...) Poezdka na čempionat v Venu na menja svalilas' kak podarok sud'by. [Natal'ja Bestem'janova et al. 2000—2001] 'I felt true happiness (sčast'e). (...) The trip to Vienna, for the championship, landed on me like a gift from fate.'

When one reads page after page of citations with *sčast'e* from the *Russian National Corpus* one is struck, first of all, by the tendency of this word to co-occur with the adjective *polnyj* 'full' and the verb *napolnit'sja* 'to fill with', and also, with adjectives like *nastojaščee* and *istinnoe* ('true', 'real'). The image of a heart filled to the brim with *sčast'e* supports the component «I can't want anything more now»; whereas adjectives like 'true' dispel any potential suspicion that the speaker may be exaggerating.

A third type of collocation recurring in the Corpus material links *sčast'e* with words like *ostryj* 'sharp', *rezkij* 'sharp' and *pronzitel'nyj* 'piercing'. For example:

1. Ot togo, čto krome nas, byl ešče kto-to čužoj, ešče ostree čuvstvovalos' sčast'e. [Kaverin 1938—1944] 'Because there was, apart from us, someone else, a stranger, our happiness (sčast'e) felt even more acute (sharper).'
2. Medea, uvidev éto soveršenno vypavšee iz ee pamjati dviženie Lenočkinoj malen'koj kisti, ispytala rezkoe sčast'e. [Ulitskaya 1996] 'Medea, seeing the movement of Lenočka's little hand that she'd completely forgotten about, felt a sharp pang of happiness (sharp happiness, rezkoe sčast'e).'

3. Molodaja ženščina (...), rešivšaja iskupat'sja v nebol'šoj štor, podxvačennaja morskoj volnoj, vnezapno čuvstvuet čuvstvo pronzitel'nogo sčast'ja. [Latynina 2003] 'The young woman, having decided to bathe during a patch of stormy weather, and being caught by a wave, felt a sudden surge of piercing happiness (sčast'e).'

Such collocations suggest that *sčast'e*, in contrast to both *happiness* and *bonheur*, can be quite sudden and they suggest that the explication of *sčast'e*₂ should perhaps include a component like «I didn't know before that something like this would happen to me».

Finally, I will illustrate the points made here about *sčast'e* with a few sentences taken from the same text (the first chapter of Dimitrij Bykov's 2007 biography of Pasternak), so that the context can be clearer.

1. Imja Pasternaka — mgnovennyj ukol sčast'ja. (p. 9) 'Hearing Pasternak's name is like a sudden injection of happiness (sčast'e).'
2. Pasternak taet ot sčast'ja, rastvorjaetsja v nem. (p. 10) 'Pasternak melts from happiness (sčast'e), dissolves in it.'
3. Ètot zarjad sčast'ja i peredaetsja čitatelju. (p. 11) 'This charge of happiness (sčast'e) communicates itself to the reader.'
4. Èto sčast'e ne samovljublennogo triumfatora, a vnezapno pomilovannogo osuždenno. 'It is not the happiness (sčast'e) of an egotistical and triumphant victor, but of a convicted man who has suddenly been pardoned.'
5. Èto (...) i napolnjaet nas sčast'em pri odnom zvuke imeni «Pasternak». (p. 14) 'It fills us with happiness (sčast'e) when we just hear the sound of the name «Pasternak».'

From an English speaker's point of view, all such sentences (with *sčast'e* translated as *happiness*) may seem a little over the top. And conversely, from a Russian speaker's point of view, many translations from English in which the word *happiness* has been translated as *sčast'e* seem odd for the opposite reason. Here is one such example, which comes in fact from the *Russian National Corpus* and which many native speakers of Russian find amusing (so out of place the word *sčast'e* seems to them here).

Ja ispytyvaju sčast'e, — govorit angličanin, — kogda zimoj, posle xorošej oxoty vozvraščajus' domoj i so stakanom xorošego brendi raspologajus' v kresle naprotiv gorjaščego kamina. 'I experience happiness (sčast'e), — says the Englishman — when in winter, after a good hunt, I come back home and, with a glass of good brandy, settle myself in an armchair in front of a fireplace.'

As these examples illustrate, the second, 'emotional', meaning of *sčast'e* also includes some additional content in comparison with *bonheur* (*bonheur*₂); and the feeling implied by *sčast'e* appears to be even more 'intense' and 'sweeping', and even more out of the ordinary than that implied by *bonheur*₂ (let alone *happiness*).

The explication of *sčast'e*₂, given below, differs so much from that of *bonheur*₂ that it is not practical to mark all the differences between the two in the way it was done for *sčast'e*₁ in relation to *bonheur*₁. I have, however, put some components (absent from the explication of *bonheur*₂) in bold.

[F] *sčast'e*₂ (e. g. ja ispytal nastojaščee *sčast'e*, 'I experienced real *sčast'e*')

- a. it can be like this:
- b. **something happens to someone at some time**
- c. this someone thinks something because of this at this time
- d. at the same time, this someone feels something very good
- e. **people don't often feel something like this**
- f. this someone feels like people can feel when they think like this:
- g. «something very good is happening now
- h. this is very good
- i. things like this don't often happen
- j. **I didn't think before that something like this would happen to me now**
- k. **I can't want anything more now»**
- l. it is very good if someone can think like this
- m. it is very good if someone can feel like this

When we try to sort out the differences in the meaning of closely related words such as *happiness*, *bonheur* and *sčast'e* it is helpful to look at the opposites of such words. As mentioned earlier, the English *happiness* in one sense can be contrasted with *unhappiness*, and in another sense, with *sadness*. The French *bonheur* can in one sense be contrasted with *malheur* (great misfortune), and in another, with *douleur* ('pain'); and it cannot be contrasted with *tristesse* ('sadness'). The Russian *sčast'e* can be contrasted with *nesčast'e* ('malheur'), and with *gore* (woe, great misfortune combined with sorrow/grief), but not with *grust'* ('sadness') or with *bol'* ('pain').

Unhappiness and *sadness* are both feelings, but *malheur* and *nesčast'e* are not feelings. *Malheur* is something that can **happen** to a person, and so is *nesčast'e*. This parallelism between *malheur* and *nesčast'e* suggests that there is also a certain parallelism between *bonheur* (*bonheur*₁) and *sčast'e* (*sčast'e*₁): they, too, can be conceived as something that happens to a person.

But the fact that *bonheur* can also be opposed to *douleur* whereas *sčast'e* cannot be opposed to *bol'* suggests that *bonheur* as a feeling (*bonheur*₂) is not identical with *sčast'e* in any of its senses. This is consistent with the hypothesis that *sčast'e* never refers to a purely subjective state of a person's feelings and that it differs in this respect from *bonheur* (and also from *happiness*). Even when a person is described as experiencing (*ispytyvat'*) or feeling (*čuvstvovat'*) *sčast'e*, there is always a concomitant reference to something that 'happens' or 'comes' to the experiencer. By contrast, *bonheur* as opposed to *douleur* implies, exclusively, a subjective psychological state.

For example, in Camus' novel *The Plague*, when one of the protagonists, Rambert, becomes reunited with his wife, he cries, and he doesn't know himself if his tears come from his present *bonheur* or from the preceding and long suppressed *douleur* [Todd 1996: 360]. One could hardly juxtapose *sčast'e* and *bol'* (pain) in this way.

Another feature of *bonheur* which distinguishes it from both *happiness* and *sčast'e* is that it can occur in the plural, as in the following sentence about a wedding:

Albert et Simone ne se jurent pas fidélité. Pourquoi se priver de bonheurs possibles, quand les corps se lassent? [Todd 1996: 67]. ‘Albert and Simone don’t swear fidelity to each other. Why should one deprive oneself of possible «happinesses», when the bodies get tired?’

Unlike *bonheur*, *happiness* cannot normally be used in the plural, presumably because it is something that one feels for some time, not something that happens to one at a particular time. And *sčast’e* can’t normally be used in the plural either, presumably because it is conceived of as something absolute, like *fulfillment* or *salvation*, perhaps, not as something repeatable.

6. Conclusion

There is a huge industry of so-called «happiness studies» that relies on cross-national statistical comparisons, which challengers like myself see as based on false and ethnocentric assumptions (see e. g. [Wierzbicka 2004], Levisen forthcoming). In particular, the assumption that all languages have a word for ‘happiness’, and that there can be a reliable «index of happiness» based on self-reports (given in different languages) is naïve and untenable.

As we saw at the outset, «happiness» has now become a big issue in politics and in economics. But here, too, a lack of attention to the meaning of words leads to unwarranted conclusions and causes confusion and miscommunication. Both in «happiness studies» and in the «politics of happiness» genuine progress requires a greater linguistic and cross-cultural sophistication than that evident in much of the existing writings on the subject.

As I have discussed in detail elsewhere [Wierzbicka 2011], progress in emotion research depends, to a considerable extent, on a recognition of the fact that language goes deeper in us than many students of emotion (especially psychologists) are willing to admit. Fortunately, there is already a growing trend in psychology not to restrict itself to one perspective (say, one focussing on ‘brain’ as opposed to ‘mind’, ‘culture’, and ‘experience’, or vice versa), and to seek dialogue, interaction, and even cooperation between different perspectives, methodologies, and disciplinary traditions [Ibid.]. Semantics must be a partner in this dialogue.

Furthermore, in the era of global English, international communication, too, needs to be informed by some understanding of cultural and cross-cultural semantics. Semantics can, and should, make a significant contribution to world-wide understanding. For a variety of reasons (political, linguistic and cultural) Europe is a good place to start, and the misunderstandings surrounding *happiness*, *bonheur*, and *Glück* illustrate the need for uncovering, and explaining, the differences between significant words wrongly assumed to be readily cross-translatable.

As for Russian in relation to English, given, on the one hand, the rise of English as a world language, and on the other, the size of Russia on the map of the world and

the prominence of Russian semantics on the world map of linguistics, an in-depth comparison of the meaning of English and Russian cultural keywords presents a particularly worthwhile task for semantics in the years to come. In view of «happiness»'s place at the forefront of current debates across a range of disciplines, a comparison of *happiness* and *ščast'e* seems especially topical.

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