

# Analysing Nostalgia in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

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**Abstract** This paper presents a contrastive semantic analysis of the English *nostalgia*, the Italian *nostalgia* and the Japanese *natsukashii* adopting the methodology of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage. It is argued that: (i) emotion terms of different languages reflect different and culture-specific conceptualisations of human feelings; (ii) the Anglo conceptualisation of feelings is not valid for all cultures; (iii) linguistic analysis is central to the analysis of human feelings. The paper challenges the claim made by some psychologists that the English word *nostalgia* expresses a feeling which is “pancultural” and criticizes the use of English emotion terms as the basis for discussions on human feelings.

**Keywords** nostalgia, natsukashii, homesickness, NSM semantics, translation

## 1. Introduction

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ  
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·  
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,  
πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,  
ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.  
ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὧς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·  
αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο,  
νήπιοι, οἳ κατὰ βοῦς Ἑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο  
ἦσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ.  
τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπὲ καὶ ἡμῖν.

Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices,  
who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy.  
Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned, aye,  
and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea,  
seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades.  
Yet even so he saved not his comrades, though he desired it sore,  
for through their own blind folly they perished—  
fools, who devoured the kine of Helios Hyperion;  
but he took from them the day of their returning.

Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where thou wilt, tell thou even unto us.

(Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by A. Murray, 1960)

The Ancient Greek noun *nostos* used in the incipit of the *Odyssey* means ‘return’. When *nostos* is combined with another Ancient Greek noun, *algos*, also used in the incipit of the *Odyssey* and typically glossed as ‘pain’ or ‘woe’, it forms an emotion term available in many European languages: *nostalgia* (English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Polish, Finnish), *nostalgie* (French, German, Czech, Dutch), *nostalgiya* (Russian) or *nostalgi* (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian), pronounced differently in different languages. This word expresses, in different ways, the feeling associated with the desire to “return” home or to the past time, or both.

According to various psychologists (Batcho, 1995; Hepper *et al.*, 2014; Kusumi *et al.*, 2010; Kaplan, 1987; Peters, 1985; Sedikides *et al.*, 2004; Wildschut *et al.*, 2006), the English emotion term *nostalgia* expresses a feeling which is universally experienced. These scholars assume that all world languages have a semantic equivalent to the English *nostalgia* which reflects the same feeling conceptualisation as that of speakers of English. Contrary to what these psychologists maintain, evidence from cross-linguistic semantics indicates that emotion terms used in different languages to express the feeling linked with the desire to return to the past time differ substantially in meaning. Significant differences can be found already in typologically related languages like English and Italian: differently from the English *nostalgia*, the Italian *nostalgia* (/nostal'dʒia/) can express (i) the feeling linked with the desire to return to the past, (ii) the feeling linked with the desire to return home and (iii) the feeling of missing someone.

It can be expected that semantic differences are even more marked between typologically unrelated languages. The most striking differences emerge as soon as we get away from the European semantic and cultural heritage of *nostos*. Japanese is a particularly interesting case, because in this language, unlike in English and Italian, the feeling associated with pleasant memories of past experiences is expressed with an adjective, *natsukashii*, not with a noun. Differences in word class between emotion terms of different languages imply differences in use and in meaning which are well known by second-language learners and translators. English and Italian translators of Japanese often find great difficulty in rendering *natsukashii* in their languages; approximate translations like

‘nostalgic’, ‘dear’ or ‘missed’ in English,<sup>1</sup> and ‘*nostalgico*’, ‘*caro*’ (‘dear’) or ‘*indimenticabile*’ (‘unforgettable’) in Italian<sup>2</sup> capture only part of what is, we will argue, a Japanese-specific conceptualisation of a feeling which is invariably “lost” in translation because of the lack of an exact semantic equivalent for *natsukashii* in these two languages.

Differences in word usage and untranslatability are the unmistakable signs of a difference in feeling conceptualisation across linguacultures which undermines the universalist claim and emphasises the impossibility of using English emotion terms as culturally-neutral terms in discussions on human feelings. To highlight such conceptual differences, this paper presents a contrastive semantic analysis of the English *nostalgia*, the Italian *nostalgia* and the Japanese *natsukashii* based on numerous examples from corpora and novels. Like previous studies of emotion terms in cross-linguistic perspective, the present analysis starts from discourse; both the analysis of discourse on feelings and the analysis of feelings in discourse across linguacultures has revealed a great deal of variation (section 3). The analysis, presented in section 4, starts from English and then focuses on the differences with Italian and with Japanese. The methodology adopted is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage framework, to be introduced in section 3. A criticism of the universalist position on the English *nostalgia* is made in section 2. The paper concludes with a discussion of the similarities and the differences in feeling conceptualisation between the three investigated languages and of the implications for cross-cultural research on emotion terms (section 5).

## 2. A Criticism of the English Nostalgia as a “Pancultural” Feeling

According to psychologist Kaplan (1987:465), “there is no one who at one time or another has not experienced nostalgia”. Peters, also a psychologist, writes that “nostalgia is a universal human experience” (1985:137).

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1 <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/translator> | <http://jisho.org/search/natsukashii>

2 Marino and Enomoto, *Dizionario giapponese-italiano*, Zanichelli, 2006, p. 134.

Psychologists Hepper *et al.* (2014) argue that nostalgia is a “pancultural” feeling, basing this statement on the fact that almost two thousand speakers of different languages who participated in their study have agreed on thirty-five “prototypical features of nostalgia” (*ibidem*). The authors compiled a list of prototypical triggers of *nostalgia* for UK and US laypersons and presented it to speakers with different linguacultural backgrounds to verify if these triggers are the same for non-English speakers, too. The list was translated in the languages of the target speakers “on the assumption that translated terms were equivalent in meaning” (744). Japanese was one of these and the term used in the list provided to Japanese speakers is *natsukashii*. The authors observe that the “findings identified key points of cross-cultural agreement regarding conceptions of nostalgia, supporting the notion that nostalgia is a pancultural emotion” (733) and add that

Prototypical nostalgia is universally considered to involve *remembering* or *reminiscing* about *fond memories* from the *past* that may have *personal meaning* and/or involve *relationships with others* – and crucially, it is universally considered as an *emotion*, especially one of *longing*. (*sic*, 743)

There are two theoretical misconceptions which we see in the universalist position on *nostalgia*: the first is the assumption that the Anglo conceptualisation of human feelings is universally applicable; the second is the assumption that the English *nostalgia* has exact semantic equivalents in other languages. One cannot help wondering how the psychologists who support the universalist claim can take the Anglo conceptualisation as paradigmatic. It is hard to see how the statement “there is no one who at one time or another has not experienced nostalgia” made by Kaplan could be true. This would imply that speakers of languages other than English think and speak in terms of the English word *nostalgia*, which is not the case. The same linguistic and cultural bias characterises Hepper *et al.*’s research focus, because they start from the Anglo conceptualisation to investigate a feeling in cross-cultural perspective and use the English *nostalgia* as conceptual reference point. As against this, we endorse the view that “to understand human conceptualization of emotions, we also need to take an interest in the emotion concepts lexicalized in other languages of the world. We need to try to understand those concepts from a native’s point of view, to try to enter the conceptual world of other peoples and abandon our Anglo perspective in interpreting that world.” (Wierzbicka (1994:139))



In support of the affirmation of their “pancultural nostalgia”, Hepper *et al.* (2014) mention a study by Kusumi *et al.* (2010) on the role of “nostalgic themes” in advertising strategies and consumers’ attitudes in Japan. Kusumi *et al.* identify specific themes which appear to constantly evoke feelings which make Japanese consumers more willing to purchase a product. Among these, there are scenes of elementary school days and family gatherings, images of the natural landscape and, most of all, music which was frequently heard by adults during their childhood or adolescence (e.g. *anime* openings). Discussing Kusumi *et al.*’s study, Hepper *et al.* write that “the majority of Japanese adults report feeling nostalgic when they hear old music” (735). If this were really the case, it would imply that the Japanese respondents who participated in Kusumi *et al.*’s study think and speak in terms of the English adjective *nostalgic*, and this cannot be the case because *nostalgic* is not an indigenous word of Japanese.<sup>3</sup> It is much more likely that the Japanese participants reported that something was *natsukashii*, because this is an indigenous word of Japanese. Regrettably, the Japanese psychologists, too, discuss their study entirely in terms of the English word *nostalgia* (the word is even used in the title of their paper), taking for granted that *natsukashii* is exactly equivalent in meaning to *nostalgic* (the authors explicitly state this on page 155).

In our view, an investigation of the Japanese conceptualisation of *nostalgia* is invalid in principle, because it presumes that Japanese speakers have an indigenous conceptualisation of an English word, and this is not the case. As pointed out by Wierzbicka (2014),

What is at issue here, however, is not whether a person could entertain a concept without having a word for it, but whether it is justified to posit an indigenous concept – that is, a concept supposedly shared by the indigenous community – if this alleged concept is named in English but not in the indigenous language itself. (44)

As we will discuss in section 4, the English emotion terms *nostalgia* and *nostalgic* are semantically and conceptually framed within English discourse, which reflects the Anglo conceptualisation of feelings and is

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3 The adjective *nosutarujikku(na)* (ノスタルジックな) used in Japanese discourse is a borrowing from English and is not used in the same way as *natsukashii*. For example, it cannot be used in exclamative clauses (e.g. *\*nosutarujikku yo!/\*nosutarujikku ne!*, ‘how *nosutarujikku*’, ‘it’s *nosutarujikku*, isn’t it?’) and in relation to people (e.g. *\*nosutarujikkuna hito*, ‘person’), whereas this is possible with *natsukashii* (section 4).

informed by Anglo cultural values about the expression of feelings in discourse. Therefore, by claiming that *nostalgia* is a “pancultural” feeling Hepper et al. impose the Anglo conceptualisation of feelings on speakers of other languages.

The universalist position is also undermined by the fact that emotion terms of languages other than English which are *prima facie* considered equivalent to the English *nostalgia* turn out to be not equivalent at all when these words are analysed contrastively from the point of view of discourse. One case in which significant differences in discourse and in meaning with the English *nostalgia* have been identified is that of the Portuguese word *saudade* analysed by Bułat Silva (2012). For example, in Portuguese discourse someone can “be with *saudade*”, “leave *saudade* behind”, “kill *saudade*”, “die of *saudade*” or be “at the mercy of *saudade*”, “gnawed of *saudade*” and “dead of *saudade*”. In addition, in Portuguese discourse *saudade* can “kill”, “hurt” and “torment” someone and sometimes *saudade* is personified or conceived as a liquid and one can even smell and taste it. There is also an adjective *saudoso* meaning, roughly, ‘with *saudade*’ as in the collocation *beijo saudoso* (‘a kiss full of *saudade*’). Significantly, these collocations are not available in the English discourse on *nostalgia* (\*nostalgic kiss, \*dying of nostalgia, \*being with nostalgia, \*nostalgia hurts, \*nostalgia torments, \*being at the mercy of nostalgia). These differences in discourse reflect differences at both the semantic and the conceptual level between *saudade* and *nostalgia*.

Discussing the meaning of *saudade*, Bułat Silva writes that this word expresses a feeling of sadness, loss and melancholy and “is conceptualized as something really painful and life threatening” (206); she also points out that in Portuguese culture *saudade* “is highly valued, and is often used in a positive context: it is good to die of *saudade*, it is good when *saudade* rules” (207). By contrast, *nostalgia* is not positively valued in Anglo cultures (section 4.1) and this is a very significant conceptual difference with Portuguese. In light of these differences, much of the meaning of *saudade* and of the Portuguese feelings conceptualisation would be lost if the word were translated in English as *nostalgia*.

Considering the case of *saudade*, we believe that it is illegitimate to speak of a “pancultural nostalgia”, also because *saudade* is not the only case in which substantial differences in meaning with the English *nostalgia* can be identified. There are differences with the Italian *nostalgia* and the Japanese *natsukashii*, too, as this paper purports to show. To capture

and highlight these semantic differences precisely, it is necessary to have comparable definitions based on the same template. This is possible adopting the methodology of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage.

### 3. Methodology of Semantic Analysis and Data

The methodology adopted for the present analysis is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2002; 2014; Goddard, 2008a; 2008b; Wierzbicka, 1996, 2006a; Peeters, 2006). The Natural Semantic Metalanguage is a reduced language used to define the meaning of words. This mini-language differs from ordinary languages in that it consists of only sixty-five semantic primes, primitive concepts intended to represent the semantic core shared by all humans. The criteria for identifying the primes are three: (i) a prime is an undefinable concept, i.e. it is impossible to say what it means without ending up with circular definitions;<sup>4</sup> (ii) a prime is a basic concept, i.e. a concept which cannot be further decomposed or reduced to a simpler concept; (iii) a prime has a lexical exponent in a natural language which is directly cross-translatable. Decades of cross-linguistic empirical research have revealed that FEEL, for example, is the English exponent of a concept which is undefinable, basic and directly cross-translatable into other languages. The prime FEEL is part of the mini-lexicon of NSM, presented in its English, Italian and Japanese exponents in the Appendix.

NSM primes can be combined in canonical syntactic constructions which are available in all sampled languages. Each semantic prime has specific combinatorial possibilities; FEEL, for example, can be used in the canonical clauses ‘someone feels something good/bad’, ‘someone feels something good/bad in one part of the body’ and ‘someone feels something good/bad towards someone else’. Other syntactic constructions which may be available in some languages but not in others (e.g. the English ‘*to feel strongly about something*’), and therefore are not directly

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4 In semantics, a definition is circular if it is phrased with words whose meaning ultimately refers to the meaning of the word being defined, e.g. ‘*to know* is to have *knowledge* of something’.

cross-translatable, are not part of the NSM syntax. The mini-language and syntax of NSM are the only permitted tools to produce semantic explications. Explications typically consist of several lines, single lines being referred to as ‘semantic components’, and are produced following the method of reductive paraphrase, that is decomposing concepts into their core meaning and explaining it in simple words.

NSM explications of emotion terms capture the prototypical cognitive scenario associated with a feeling (‘someone feels something good/bad, like people can feel when they think like this: ...’). The prototypical cognitive scenario is essential to distinguish the meanings of emotion terms which would otherwise be identical; for example, both the meaning of *shame* and the meaning of *fear* include a component ‘someone feels something bad’, but the difference lies in the prototypical cognitive scenario associated with each feeling (cf. Wierzbicka 1999). In addition, explications for emotion terms are structured on the same template and therefore are easily comparable: it is possible to identify the semantic differences between emotion terms clearly and precisely by looking at single semantic components. Over the years, NSM has been successfully applied to the semantic analysis of emotion terms in cross-linguistic perspective (Goddard and Ye, 2014; Wierzbicka, 1992; 1999; Harkins and Wierzbicka, 2001).

The linguistic data are taken from two sources: language corpora and contemporary novels. Corpora are essential to identify specific phrases and collocations in which emotion terms are used, and extracts from novels illustrate the kinds of contexts in which an emotion term is used. The selected corpora are Collins Wordbanks for English, Coris-Codis for Italian and Kotonoha for Japanese, which comprise both written texts and transcriptions of spoken language.

## 4. Semantic Analysis and Cross-Linguistic Comparison

### 4.1 *The Meaning of Nostalgia in English*

In English discourse, one speaks about ‘feeling’ or ‘having *nostalgia* for something’, the optional prepositional phrase headed by *for* indicating the specific object of the feeling. *Nostalgia* is also used in a series of noun



phrases belonging to the semantic field of feelings: *a feeling of nostalgia*, *a sense of nostalgia*, *a touch of nostalgia*, *a mood of nostalgia* and especially *a wave of nostalgia*, by far the most frequent collocation in Wordbanks. Furthermore, in English discourse *nostalgia* can be modified by a series of intensifying adjectives such as *heavy*, *fierce*, *sharp*, *powerful* and *great*. In the following extracts from Michelle De Kretser's novel *Questions of Travel* (2012), different speakers talk about feeling *nostalgia* for a past time when some good things happened to them:

- (1) Desmond and Merle would want to discuss the events that had brought him to Sydney. They would call up an age when everything was better in Sri Lanka – it had ended when they left. Their nostalgia was what attracted Ravi now.
- (2) In the days that followed, the memory of late-night journey to and from Theo's room continued to nag. [...] Laura was in the grip of nostalgia. It had begun in Naples; when she went back there for the *Wayfarer*, she had dreamed of Sydney every night.
- (3) A jacaranda-haunting went on for weeks. Aerial views, sunsets, the twist in *The Sixth Sense*: Laura had missed them. Her mind's eye had drifted to the jacarandas – the wild romance of the trees! [...] It was the colour of nostalgia itself: elusive yet unmistakable, recollection and promise. Nostalgia floated jacarandas over London traffic, above the aisles in Sainsbury's.

The examples suggest that when these good things happened a long time ago, the speakers felt something good and in remembering these experiences at present time they still feel something good. The good feelings are reflected in the strong element of intentionality emerging from the examples: the speakers deliberately choose to do certain things because by doing these things they can live certain moments again and can feel something good. It is stated that the speakers “*would want to discuss the events*”, “*would call up an age*”, that a “*jacaranda-haunting went on for weeks*” and that “*her mind's eye had shifted to the jacarandas*”. The following extract, too, suggests that the speaker intentionally recalls a specific memory of his past to feel something good:

- (4) I allowed myself a private nostalgic farewell. I thought of Veronica dancing, hair all over her face. I thought of her announcing to her family, ‘I'm going to walk Tony to his room’... (Julian Barnes, *The sense of an ending*, 2011)



The collocations *exercise in nostalgia* and *indulge in nostalgia* attested in Wordbanks also point in this direction. Reporting the results of their study on the Anglo conceptualization of *nostalgia*, psychologists Holak and Havlena (1992) mentioned various activities which their respondents would deliberately perform to recall past experiences and feel something good, for example organising school reunions and family gatherings, collecting old objects, listening to music and even recalling past eras:

Subjects such as holidays, religious observances, family, popular music, and school-related experiences tend to occur repeatedly in the set of experience descriptions. Both personal nostalgia, for events or objects from the author's own past, and historical (or intergenerational) nostalgia, for events or objects outside the realm of the respondent's direct experience, are represented in the descriptions. Tangible objects and intangible presentations (in the form of music or film) are depicted as key nostalgia stimuli. Even food and aromas are given considerable attention within narratives. (n.p.)

These results are mirrored by the collocational range of the adjective *nostalgic* attested in Wordbanks, which includes, among others, nouns for various activities like *film*, *music*, *trip*, *journey*, *gifts*, *songs*, *return* and *event*. Considering these elements, we hypothesise that the meaning of the English *nostalgia* includes a semantic component 'I want these things to happen to me now', which reflects the semantic heritage of *nostos*, the idea of wanting to "return" to the time when some good things happened. At the same time, the fact that in the examples *nostalgia* co-occurs with the words *sorrow*, *nag* and *miss* suggests that its meaning includes the idea 'someone feels something bad', too. In the following examples from Wordbanks, *nostalgia* is used in collocation with various words expressing bad feelings:

- (5) Compared to the rest of the city, Camden is like Jamaica, only colder. Most of the pavement habitués are heavily pierced and exotically garbed. Seeing them, I feel a small pang of nostalgia for my youth. (brbooks)
- (6) As I watched the man leave with his Masterpieces of the Baroque LP tucked under his arm, I felt a small throb of nostalgia for the old days (brbooks)
- (7) When society suffered bouts of nostalgia it was usually a sign of disillusionment with the present and uncertainty about the future (UK magazine)

- (8) She heard the old commercial in her head and felt a twinge of nostalgia. (US books)

The examples indicate that the bad feelings are generated by two thoughts: (i) the good things which happened in the past are not happening now; (ii) the speaker knows that these good things cannot happen anymore. The element of “irreversibility” emerging from the examples is an important part of the prototypical cognitive scenario inherent in the meaning of the English *nostalgia* and represents a significant difference with both Japanese and Italian. In the English corpus, *nostalgia* occurs in collocation with *the old regime*, *the good old days*, *an idyllic past*, *a time when...*, *one’s youth*, *a romantic past* and *the British Empire*, all things which are forever gone. On the view of anthropologist Kate Fox (2004), “irreversibility” is the key characteristic of a typically English “nostalgic moaning”:

The English do suffer from a sort of ‘nostalgia isn’t what it used to be anymore’ syndrome. The belief that the country is going to the dogs, that things are not what they were, that some cherished bastion or emblem of Englishness (such as pub, queuing, sportsmanship, the monarchy, courtesy) is dead or dying, seems to be endemic. (169)

However, not all situations which would be considered “irreversible” can be the object of one’s *nostalgia* in English discourse, for example death. Differently from Italian speakers (next section), speakers of English say that they *miss*, not that they *\*feel nostalgia* for someone who has died. This may seem as counter-evidence for the hypothesis that “irreversibility” is part of the invariant meaning of the English *nostalgia*. However, the reason why in English discourse one does not say, for example, *\*I feel nostalgia for my dead grandmother* is not related to the irreversibility of death as a condition, but to the kinds of things for which speakers of English say that they feel *nostalgia*. In English discourse, *nostalgia* is used to talk about things which happened to someone in the past, not about wanting to be with someone. Wanting to be with someone who has died is just not one of the contexts in which the word *nostalgia* is used in English discourse, independently of whether or not this is impossible because death is irreversible. The irreversibility of death is totally irrelevant in this case.

Finally, there is compelling evidence for a component ‘it is not good if someone feels something like this’ in the meaning of the English *nostalgia*. This component captures the cultural assumption that feeling *nostalgia* is not considered to be good in Anglo cultures (as opposed to *saudade*

in Portuguese culture). The following extracts from two different works by the Australian novelist Tim Winton illustrate very clearly that speakers of English are discouraged from saying that they feel *nostalgia*:

- (9) ‘Don’t, Jerra.’ Not today. It’s Christmas. There’s things ahead.  
 ‘What?’ He looked at her, annoyed.  
 ‘That nostalgia stuff, don’t.’  
 ‘Why not, for God’s sake?’ His face hardened. He seemed ready to fight her on it this time.  
 ‘Because-’  
 ‘Because you weren’t there. I’m excluding you when I remember, I’m sorry.’  
 [...] ‘No, because it makes you pathetic. You do it like an old man who can’t handle the present’. (Tim Winton, *Minimum of two*, 1987)
- (10) She had never understood the grip that places held over people. That sort of nostalgia made her impatient. It was awful seeing people beholden to their memories, staying on in houses or towns out of some perverted homage.  
 (Tim Winton, *Dirt Music*, 2001)

What is being criticised in these extracts is not feeling *nostalgia* in reaction to a stimulus, i.e. not when the feeling is unintentional, but when someone deliberately chooses to feel *nostalgia*, when someone tends to indulge in sweet memories excessively. This cultural assumption is also reflected in the adjectives collocating with *nostalgia* in the English corpus: *over-rated*, *romantic*, *cheesy*, *self-blinding*, *pointless*, *wistful*, *desperate*, *dewy-eyed*, *useless*, *pathetic*, *silly*, *illusory*, *childlike*, *unabashed* and even *communist*. Significantly, no such collocations exist in Japanese and Italian discourse.

The cultural assumption that it is not good to feel *nostalgia* reflects a uniquely Anglo distaste for anything vaguely sentimental, and *nostalgia* could be said to be the quintessential expression of sentimentalism. There are specific Anglo cultural values which discourage sentimentalism and any exaggerated and unrestrained expression of feelings in discourse. These values and their implications for discourse have been discussed at length by Goddard (ed. 2006, 2009), Wierzbicka (2006a, 2006b) and Waters (2017). As Wierzbicka (2006a) wrote, in Anglo cultures the exaggerated,

unrestrained expression of feelings and sentimentalism are seen as “inimical to reason: ‘too much feeling’ can be seen as an obstacle to ‘good thinking’” (47). In Anglo cultures, “good thinking” is influenced by reason not by feelings, and *cool reason*, *cool reflection* and *cool headedness* reflect the importance of logical thinking over emotional thinking. Wierzbicka pointed out that in English discourse it is good to speak *dispassionately*, i.e. “it is a good thing if one’s speech is free from emotion” (*ibidem*). In line with Wierzbicka, Waters (2017) has emphasised the importance of “keeping emotions toned down” (32) and “avoiding extremes of feeling” (37) in English discourse, adding that “minimising expression of feeling is positively valued in Anglo-Australian discourse” (*ibidem*).

These Anglo cultural values explain the existence of, to borrow Wierzbicka’s words (2006b:137), a “revealing ethnopragmatic gap” in the English discourse on *nostalgia*: the impossibility of using *nostalgia* and *nostalgic* in exclamative clauses of the kind *\*how nostalgic!* or *\*what nostalgia!*. At this point, though, a clarification is necessary: it is not that in English emotion terms cannot be used in exclamative clauses at all. It is perfectly fine in English to say, for example, *how I miss you!* or *I love you so much!*; however, it is significant that one does not speak about *\*indulging in missing someone* or *\*indulging in loving someone* as one speaks about *indulging in nostalgia*. It is not the expression of feelings in discourse *per se* that is discouraged in Anglo cultures, but it is the deliberate exaggeration in the expression of feelings and sentimentalism which are highly frowned upon and which make it impossible to say *\*what nostalgia!* and *\*how nostalgic!* in English discourse.

In sum, linguistic evidence suggests that the English *nostalgia* is a “bittersweet feeling”, so to speak, as its meaning includes both good and bad feelings. We propose the following explication for the meaning of the English *nostalgia*:

someone feels *nostalgia* (English)

this someone feels something good, like people can feel when they think like this:

“a long time before now some good things were happening to me

I felt something good because of this”

at the same time, this someone feels something bad because this someone thinks like this:

“these good things are not happening to me now

I want these things to happen to me now

I know that these things cannot happen to me anymore”

it is not good if someone feels something like this



## 4.2 The Meaning of *Nostalgia* in Italian

The Italian emotion term *nostalgia* can express different feelings linked with three different desires. Linguistic data from the CORIS-CODIS corpus illustrate that in Italian discourse one can *sentire/provare* ('feel') or *avere* ('have') *nostalgia di* ('of') or *per* ('for'):

- (i) past events and periods: *l'infanzia* ('infancy'), *l'adolescenza* ('adolescence'), *la giovinezza* ('youth'), *il passato* ('the past'), *i vecchi tempi* ('the old times'), *i bei tempi andati* ('the good times gone');
- (ii) places and things related to places: *la casa* ('home'), *la patria/la terra natia* ('one's homeland'), *la cucina italiana* ('Italian cuisine');
- (iii) people and things related to people: *gli amici* ('friends'), *la famiglia* ('family'), *la persona amata* ('the person one loves'), *le ricette della mamma* ('mum's recipes').

In the following examples, *nostalgia* expresses the feeling linked with the desire to return to a past time when some good things happened to someone. These good things are not happening at present time and cannot happen anymore:

- (11) *Felice continuava a ricordare di tanto in tanto, con inconfessata nostalgia, l'amicizia che lo aveva legato a Malommo, incapace di concepirla sepolta per sempre, senza l'ombra di un rimpianto.*  
Every now and then, Felice kept on remembering, with secret *nostalgia*, his friendship with Malommo, incapable of conceiving it as forever buried, without the smallest sign of regret. (Ermanno Rea, *Nostalgia*, 2016)
- (12) *Oggi, a distanza di tanti anni, insieme alla nostalgia per i tempi della giovinezza, provo un certo sgomento all'idea di essermi sottomessa senza troppi problemi a queste vessazioni della cultura maschile.*  
Today, after many years, I feel both *nostalgia* for my youth and a certain dismay when I think about how I have let myself succumb to these vexations of masculine culture without much resistance. (CORIS-CODIS corpus, MON2001\_04)

In the following examples, *nostalgia* expresses the feeling linked with the desire to return to a dear place where one was before:

- (13) *Io ero, a quel tempo, una bambina piccola; e non avevo che un vago ricordo di Palermo, mia città natale, dalla quale ero partita a*



*tre anni. M'immaginavo però di soffrire anch'io della nostalgia di Palermo, come mia sorella e mia madre.*

I was a small girl then and I had only the vaguest memory of Palermo, the city where I was born and then left when I was three years old. I believed, however, that just like my mother and sister, I too missed Palermo terribly.

(Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare*, 1963)

(14) *Chissà quanti bambini capiscono e non dicono, ma lui era un bambino di vetro e perciò lo capimmo. Un giorno mi mandò a chiamare. Piangeva.*

– *Marta, io non capisco.*

– *Cosa non capisci, Federico?*

– *Non capisco perché mi sento così triste.*

– *Forse è perché sei ricoverato da tanto tempo e hai nostalgia di casa?*

Who knows how many children understand and do not say a word, but he was a child as transparent as glass, and so we understood him. One day he asked for me. He was crying.

– *Marta, I don't understand.*

– *What don't you understand, Federico?*

– *I don't understand why I feel so sad.*

– *Could it be because you've been in hospital for a long time and you feel *nostalgia* for home?*

(Marta Verna, *Nessuno esca piangendo*, 2016)

Examples (13) and (14) show that in Italian discourse it is perfectly possible to say that a child feels *nostalgia*, whereas in English discourse one does not speak of children feeling *nostalgia*. Because of the meaning and the contexts of use of *nostalgia* in English, a child is way too young and does not have enough memories to be considered capable of feeling *nostalgia*. In the following examples, the Italian *nostalgia* expresses the feeling linked with the desire to be with someone with whom one was before. In this context, *nostalgia* is used in the key collocation *avere nostalgia di qualcuno* ('to have *nostalgia* of someone'), which is not available in English discourse:

(15) *Ma avevo anche nostalgia di Dede e di Elsa, tanto che telefonai a Pietro e lui finalmente me le riportò.*

But I also missed Dede and Elsa, so I telephoned Pietro and he finally brought them back.

(Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 2014)

- (16) a. *Chiedo a Gojko perché mi ha cercato solo adesso, perché solo adesso ha avuto nostalgia di me. “Sono anni che ho nostalgia di te.”*

I ask Gojko why he waited all this time to look for me, why he didn't miss me before now. “I've been missing you for years.”

- b. *Se torna a Sarajevo, si ripeteva, vuol dire che anche lei ha nostalgia di noi.*

If she comes to Sarajevo, he kept telling himself, it will mean that she misses us, too.

(Margaret Mazzantini, *Venuto al mondo*, 2008)

Noticeably, in the official English translations of (13), (15) and (16a-b) the Italian *nostalgia* is rendered as ‘missing’ (a place or someone), because the translators realised that the English *nostalgia* cannot be used to capture the meaning of the Italian *nostalgia* as used in these contexts. Each of the three feelings expressed by the Italian *nostalgia* is expressed by three different words in English: *nostalgia*, *homesickness* and *missing*. This implies that there is possible semantic correspondence between the English *nostalgia* and the Italian *nostalgia* only in one sense of the Italian word. In addition, in comparison with English, the Italian *nostalgia* can be used in a much broader range of contexts and collocations.

The examples suggest that the Italian *nostalgia* prototypically expresses the idea ‘someone feels something bad’. In the examples, *nostalgia* collocates with words expressing bad feelings: *sgomento* (‘dismay’), *soffrire* (‘suffering’), *piangere* (‘crying’) and *triste* (‘sad’). *Nostalgia* is explicitly associated with pain and suffering by Primo Levi in his book *La Tregua* (1963), where the author writes about his experience in the concentration camp of Auschwitz:

- (17) *Furono mesi d’ozio e di relativo benessere, e perciò pieni di nostalgia penetrante. La nostalgia è una sofferenza fragile e gentile, essenzialmente diversa, più infima, più umana delle altre pene che avevamo sostenuto fino a quel tempo: percosse, freddo, fame, terrore, destituzione, malattia. È un dolore limpido e pulito, ma*

*urgente: pervade tutti i minuti della giornata, non concede altri pensieri, e spinge alle evasioni.*

They were months of idleness and relative comfort, and full, therefore, of penetrating nostalgia. Nostalgia is a fragile and tender anguish, basically different, more intimate, more human than the other pains we had endured till then – beatings, cold, hunger, terror, destitution, disease. Nostalgia is a limpid and clean pain, but demanding; it permeates every minute of the day, permits no other thoughts and induces a need for escape.

In the Italian corpus, the noun *nostalgia* collocates with a series of adjectives expressing bad feelings: *dolorosa* ('painful'), *malinconica* ('melancholic'), *rabbiosa* ('furious'), *angosciante* ('distressing'), *struggente* ('moving'), *fastidiosa* ('annoying'), *tremenda* ('terrible'), *insanabile* ('incurable'), *maledetta* ('damned') and *lacerante* ('tearing'). Collocations of *nostalgia* with adjectives expressing good feelings are attested, too, for example *dolce* ('sweet'), *romantica* ('romantic') and *affettuosa* ('affectionate'); however, these collocations are infinitely less common than the ones with adjectives expressing bad feelings,<sup>5</sup> and this suggests that prototypically *nostalgia* in Italian is not conceptually associated with good feelings, but with bad feelings. Moreover, in the Italian corpus the collocations *morire di nostalgia* ('die of *nostalgia*'), *brivido di nostalgia* ('shiver of *nostalgia*') and *lacrime di nostalgia* ('tears of *nostalgia*'), all expressing bad feelings, are attested, whereas no collocations like *\*gioire di nostalgia* ('rejoice in *nostalgia*') or *\*sorriso di nostalgia* ('a smile of *nostalgia*') which would express good feelings are attested.

There are differences in discourse between the English and the Italian *nostalgia* with respect to the intensity of the feeling. The range of adjectives describing *nostalgia* in the Italian corpus includes various levels of intensity, from bad, to very bad to very very bad. In Italian discourse, *nostalgia* can be described as *sottile/lieve* ('light') and one can say "*sentò un po'/una punta/un pizzico di nostalgia*" ('I feel a bit/touch/pinch of *nostalgia*'), but *nostalgia* can also be described as *profonda*

5 Out of one hundred sentences, there are only three instances of the collocation *dolce nostalgia* in the Italian corpus.

(‘deep’), *acuta* (‘intense’), *fortissima* (‘very strong/intense’), *grande* (‘big’), *incontenibile* (‘uncontrollable’), *enorme* (‘huge’) and one can also talk about someone being *lacerato/affranto/afflitto dalla nostalgia* (‘broken/overcome/afflicted by *nostalgia*’) and about *trovare un modo per sentire meno la nostalgia* (‘finding a way to feel less *nostalgia*’). By contrast, in English *nostalgia* is never described as an “extreme” feeling; the English discourse on *nostalgia* does not include collocations expressing the idea ‘someone feels something very very bad’ (e.g. *\*broken/afflicted by nostalgia*, *\*dying of nostalgia*) and one does not speak about ways of reducing the intensity of *nostalgia* and about *nostalgia* as a “penetrating” feeling which “permeates every minute of the day” as in the extract from Primo Levi’s novel.

These differences in discourse between Italian and English indicate that there are differences in feeling conceptualisation and in the expression of feelings in discourse between these two languages. The possibility of describing *nostalgia* as an extremely bad feeling in Italian discourse demonstrates that the unrestrained, exaggerated expression of feelings in discourse is not discouraged in Italian as it is discouraged in English. In fact, Italian speakers are highly encouraged to express their feelings in discourse in an extreme, overstated, hyperbolic manner for the sake of rhetorical emphasis (Farese 2019). The case of *nostalgia* is consistent with these analyses; this is proven by the fact that, unlike in English discourse, in Italian discourse it is possible to use *nostalgia* in exclamative clauses as in (18):

- (18) *Gojko guarda la mia pelle che s’affaccia dalla seta bagnata. “Che nostalgia...” sussurra.*  
 Gojko looks at the skin showing beneath the wet silk of my shirt.  
 “What a yearning,” he whispers. (Margaret Mazzantini, *Venuto al mondo*, 2008)

The English translation of this extract shows very clearly that the English translator could not use *\*what nostalgia* to render the Italian *che nostalgia*. Differently from English, no semantic component ‘it is not good if someone feels something like this’ can be posited for the meaning of the Italian *nostalgia*. In addition, whether or not something can or cannot happen again is irrelevant to the invariant meaning of the Italian *nostalgia*. The fact that *now* things cannot be as they were before is consistent with



all contexts of use of this word. The explication which we propose for the Italian *nostalgia* is the following:

someone feels *nostalgia* (Italian)

this someone feels something bad, like people can feel when they think like this about something:

“I don’t want it to be like this now, I want it to be like it was a long time before now before it was good, I felt something good because of this

I know that now it can’t be like it was a long time before, this is bad”

### 4.3 The Meaning of the Japanese *Natsukashii*

In Japanese discourse, the adjective *natsukashii* is used to modify a noun or can be used by itself in an exclamative clause *natsukashii!* which may or may not be reinforced by the exclamative particle *yo* or the tag *ne* (cf. Asano-Cavanagh 2011). In both cases, this adjective is used in relation to something which brings back fond memories of the past and evokes some feelings. Apart from *kanjiru* (‘feel’), in the Kotonoha corpus *natsukashii* and the adverbial form *natsukashiku* frequently occur in collocation with the verbs *yomigaeru* (‘bring back to memory’, ‘revive’), *omou* (‘think’), *omoidasu* (‘remember’), *miru* (‘see’), *kikoeru* (‘hear’) and *niteru* (‘resemble’), all verbs indicating that the recollection of past experiences occurs in reaction to a stimulus. Linguistic evidence indicates that various elements can stimulate the recollection. The following extracts illustrate that past events can be described as *natsukashii*, both things which used to happen frequently to someone but cannot happen anymore and things which have happened again to someone after a long time:

- (19) *Yoku miru to, jaketto ni shiwa ga yotte-iru koto ya, kubi no ushiro no atari ga sukoshi tarunde-iru koto mo, chūnen no otoko no hito ni hisashiburi ni atta watashi ni wa natsukashikatta.*

It had been a while since I’d talked to a man of his age, and even things like the wrinkles in his jacket and the slightly flabby skin at the back of his neck felt nostalgic.

- (20) *Pari ni itte sa, otōsan to sannin de tabeta ne. Natsukashii ne. Furomāju buran. Kazoku toshite wa ii jidai datta naa.*

We had some on our trip to Paris, with Dad, do you remember? *Fromage Blanc*. Wasn’t that a great period for us as a family?

(Yoshimoto Banana, *Moshi Moshi Shimokitazawa*, 2010)



In addition to events, the following extract illustrates that meeting someone after a long time is another kind of situation described as *natsukashii*:

- (21) *Burūtasu ni boku no namae to shashin ga notta koto de, sore kara too-ka hodo no aida ni nanninka no mukashi no shiriai ga boku o tazunete mise ni yatte kitta. Chūgaku ya kōkō no dōkyūsei tachi da. [...] Boku datte mochiron mukashi no tomodachi ni au no wa natsukashikatta.*  
 For ten days or so after the feature article with my name and photo appeared in *Brutus*, old acquaintances dropped into the bar to see me. Junior high and high school friends. [...] It put me in a pleasant, nostalgic mood.  
 (Murakami, Haruki, *Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*, 1992)

In line with the observations of Kusumi *et al.* (2010) discussed in section 2, the following extracts indicate that sensory triggers, too, are primary stimuli of *natsukashii* elements. Noticeably, the English translators had to find periphrastic ways of rendering the collocations of *natsukashii* plus nouns denoting a sense, as the adjective *nostalgic* is not used in such collocations in English:

- (22) *Atsukute chīzu no aji ga shite, paseri ga ippai haitte-ita. Kodomo no toki kara tabetsudukete-iru, natsukashii aji datta.*  
 It was warm, with plenty of parsley, and tasted of cheese. It was a familiar flavour I'd known in childhood. (from *Moshi Moshi Shimokitazawa*)
- (23) *Genkan o akeru to, natsukashii ie no nioi ga shite kite, kono ie ga ikite-ita koro no omokage wa aru.*  
 Once past the entry, the house smelled the way it always had, and I recognized a shadow of a time when the place had been alive. (from *Moshi Moshi Shimokitazawa*)
- (24) *Sonna ki ga shinagara juwaki o toru to, Sotarō kara deatta. Kare wa mukashi no...koibito datta. [...] “Moshi moshi? Mikage ka?” Nakitai hodo natsukashii koe ga itta. “Hisashiburi ne!” na no ni genki yoku watashi ga itta.*  
 I picked up the receiver, knowing who it would be. It was Sotaro. He was my old...boyfriend. [...] “Hello? Mikage?” The sound of his voice made me want to weep with nostalgia. “Long time no see!” I cried out joyfully.  
 (Yoshimoto Banana, *Kitchin*, 1988)

- (25) *Ano sa, Shinjuku no raibuhaisu no tenchō nanda yo ne, kiita?*”  
*watashi wa itta. “Un, kiita yo. Natsukashii yo” okāsan wa itta.*  
 “Um, so he did mention he runs that venue in Shinjuku?” I said.  
 “Yeah, he told me. It takes me back,” Mom said. (from *Moshi Moshi Shimokitazawa*)

In all cases, the things which happened to the speaker in the past made him or her feel something good and in remembering these things now the speaker feels something good. In no case the examples suggest that the meaning of *natsukashii* includes a component ‘someone feels something bad’. In the Japanese corpus, *natsukashii* frequently occurs in collocation with adjectives expressing good feelings such as *itoshii* (‘dear’, ‘loved’), *tanoshii* (‘fun’), *ureshii* (‘happy’) and *utsukushii* (‘beautiful’), but no collocation with words expressing bad feelings is attested. It is true that one can shed tears at the thought of something *natsukashii* as in (24), but the tears are tears of joy, not of sorrow. Thus, when *natsukashii* is translated in English as *nostalgia/nostalgic* and in Italian as *nostalgia/nostalgico* not only is the feeling changed from good to bad, but the translator also adds a negative connotation to the sentence which was totally unintended by the author, who meant, in fact, the opposite.

There are differences with both English and Italian with respect to the intensity of the feeling, too. In Japanese, the good feelings expressed by *natsukashii* are prototypically sweet, comforting feelings which are not typically described as very strong or extreme. For example, the collocation *natsukashikute shinisō* (roughly, ‘it’s so *natsukashii* it feels like I’m dying’), which is perfectly natural and idiomatic in Japanese, is comparable to the Italian collocation *morire di nostalgia* (‘to die of *nostalgia*’). In Yoshimoto’s novel *Kitchin* (1988), the collocation *hen ni naru hodo natsukashii* is attested, translated in English as “How I missed her! So much I thought I’d go mad!” and in Italian as “*una nostalgia da impazzire*” (‘a *nostalgia* which drives one crazy’). However, in Japanese *natsukashii* does not lend itself to adverbial intensification as easily as *nostalgia* in English and *nostalgia* in Italian. The figures for collocations of *natsukashii* plus an intensifying adverb in the Kotonoha corpus are extremely low: one hit for *taisō* (‘very much’), five hits for *sugoku* (‘incredibly’/‘awfully’), six hits for *totemo* (‘very’) and no hit for *chō* (roughly, ‘super’). Obviously, the amount of intensification varies across speakers and depends on individual speakers’ idiosyncratic preferences and need for expressivity in

discourse. For example, an intensified phrase like *chō natsukashii* is quite natural and idiomatic in the language of younger Japanese speakers.

Examples (20) and (25) illustrate that, unlike in English, in Japanese discourse it is possible to use *natsukashii* in exclamative clauses. Significantly, the English translator had to find periphrastic ways of rendering *natsukashii ne!* and *natsukashii yo!* in English (“do you remember?” and “it takes me back”), as these exclamative clauses cannot be translated in English as *\*it’s nostalgic, isn’t it?* and *\*how nostalgic!* for the reasons discussed in 4.1. The fact that *natsukashii* can be used in exclamative clauses indicates that in Japanese discourse the overt expression of *natsukashii* feelings is not discouraged. For this reason, no semantic component ‘it is not good if someone feels something like this’ can be posited for the meaning of *natsukashii*.

The Japanese examples also suggest that the recollection of pleasant memories is totally unintentional. A stimulus causes someone to recognise something which they know from past experiences and to feel something good, but in the meaning of *natsukashii* there is no element of intentionality and deliberate indulging in good feelings. This is confirmed by the fact that in none of the Japanese examples the speakers express the wish to return to the past time. If one wants to go back to the past, one can explicitly say it by adding an extra phrase, for example “*natsukashii koe o kiite ano koro ni modoritai to omotta*” (‘hearing that *natsukashii* voice, I thought I wanted to go back in time’). Thus, our hypothesis is that there is no semantic component ‘I want this to happen to me now’ in the meaning of *natsukashii*. In other words, there is no element of *nostos* in *natsukashii*, and this is probably the biggest semantic and conceptual difference with the European areal semantics of *nostos*.

The absence of the desire to return to the past time is also consistent with the fact that the things which happened in the past can happen again, as the examples illustrate. The speakers describe as *natsukashii* things which have happened to them again after a long time, as the expression *hisashiburi* (literally, ‘it’s been a while’) in (19) and (24) confirms. This means that neither a component ‘I know that this cannot happen to me anymore’ nor a component ‘I know that this cannot happen to me now’ is part of the invariant meaning of *natsukashii*, whereas a component ‘this hasn’t happened to me for a long time before now’ seems to be very plausible for the invariant meaning, as it is consistent with all the examples.

The semantic and conceptual differences between Japanese, English and Italian reflected in the untranslatability of *natsukashii* in many con-

texts indicate that this Japanese emotion term expresses a culture-specific feeling conceptualisation, as pointed out by Cohen (1996):

The word “natsukashii” in Japanese [...] is a very common word in everyday conversation and would be used in phrases such as “kyonen koko ni kitan da yo ne. Natsukashii ne” which would translate something along the lines of “We came here last year, didn’t we? Sweet memories”. This is not natural in English and it is almost certain that the utterance would end in English with the observation that no comment along the lines of “ahhh sweet memories” or “how dear to my heart that time is” would be made. In fact, I would argue that not only the words, but the actual feeling would not enter into the head of an English native speaker, whereas it would be very strongly felt by a Japanese. A Japanese faced with a situation in which he/she would wish to say the above phrase in Japanese, could not only embarrass themselves by referring to a dictionary and translating the word “natsukashii” into English or at best would be thought of as sappy or sentimental. Thus we see a very clear case of a word and its meaning being so culturally loaded that it cannot be transferred into another language. We can look at the same case from the opposite angle and say that English native speakers are culturally, and perhaps more accurately sentimentally, restricted by their lexis so that they cannot express the feeling of “natsukashii” until they have taken on board both the word and its meaning in their interlanguage and “interculture” (107–108).

The Japanese-specific conceptualization expressed by *natsukashii* is captured with the following explication:

something is *natsukashii*  
 when someone thinks about it, this someone feels something good  
 like people can feel when they think like this about something:  
 “I know this  
 a long time before now, this was happening to me for some time  
 I felt something good because of this  
 it hasn’t happened to me for a long time before now”

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The contrastive analysis presented in this paper has highlighted substantial differences in discourse and in meaning between the English *nostalgia*, the Italian *nostalgia* and the Japanese *natsukashii*. The key semantic differences are that the Japanese *natsukashii* expresses the idea ‘someone feels something good’, whereas the Italian *nostalgia* expresses the idea ‘someone feels something bad’ and the English *nostalgia* expresses both good



and bad feelings. Further differences lie in the respective prototypical cognitive scenarios associated with each emotion term. These semantic differences undermine the claim made by several psychologists that *nostalgia* as conceived in English expresses a universal and pancultural feeling.

It could be argued that the differences in discourse and in meaning between the three investigated languages do not imply a difference in the feeling itself, which is basically the same. We strongly reject this view and argue that cross-linguistic differences between emotion terms unambiguously indicate that human feelings are characterised by cross-cultural variation, not by universalism. The contrastive analysis presented in this paper has shown that emotion terms in different languages can reflect highly culture-specific conceptualisations of feelings.

The analysis has highlighted similarities, too. Two semantic components are shared by the meanings of the three words analysed: ‘something happened a long time before now’ and ‘I felt something good because of this’. In all three languages, the feelings are linked with pleasant memories of past experiences. There are similarities in the triggers of the feelings, too; in all three languages, the feelings are evoked by sensory triggers and by the thought of specific people, places and past experiences. These similarities, however, are far from revealing a feeling conceptualisation on which speakers of these three languages could agree, let alone speakers of all languages.

Ultimately, the paper has emphasised the importance of linguistic analysis for the analysis of human feelings. It has shown that it is possible to identify cross-cultural differences in feelings conceptualisations by analysing how emotion terms of different languages are used in discourse and by applying a suitable methodology to compare their meanings. An accurate cross-linguistic analysis of feelings in discourse and especially in translation can highlight cross-cultural differences as well as commonalities in human feelings conceptualisations. A collaboration between linguistics and psychology on the analysis of human feelings is not only possible but desirable, as long as the analysis is not based in principle on an Anglocentric perspective but is oriented towards cross-cultural differences. The use of cross-translatable words and of comparable definitions is essential for the analysis. The NSM methodology has allowed us to capture and highlight the differences between the three investigated languages clearly and precisely. The same approach can be applied to the analysis of other human feelings in cross-cultural perspective and it can help shed light on other relatively unexplored aspects of human experience.



## APPENDIX: English, Italian and Japanese lexical exponents of the NSM semantic primes.

私 WATASHI, あなた ANATA, 誰か DAREKA, 何か〜こと NANIKA~KOTO, 人々 HITO-BITO, 体 KARADA IO, TU, QUALCUNO, QUALCOSA, GENTE, CORPO	substantives
<b>I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY</b>	
種類 SHURUI, 部分 BUBUN GENERE, PARTE	relational substantives
<b>KINDS, PARTS</b>	
これ〜この KORE~KONO, 同じ ONAJI, 他 HOKA QUESTO~CIÒ, LO STESSO, ALTRO	determiners
<b>THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE</b>	
一 HITO~ICHI, 二 FUTA~NI, いくつか〜何人か IKUTSUKA~NANNINKA, すべて SUBETE, たくさん TAKUSAN, 少し SUKOSHI UNO/A~UN, DUE, ALCUNI, TUTTO, TANTO, POCO~UN PO'	quantifiers
<b>ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW</b>	
良い YOI, 悪い WARUI BENE~BUONO, MALE~CATTIVO	evaluators
<b>GOOD, BAD</b>	
大きい OOKII, 小さい CHIISAI GRANDE, PICCOLO	descriptors
<b>BIG, SMALL</b>	
知る SHIRU, 思う OMOU, たい〜欲しい -TAI~HOSHII, たくない〜 欲しくない -TAKUNAI~HOSHIKUNAI, 感じる KANJIRU, 見る MIRU, 聞く KIKU SAPERE, PENSARE, VOLERE, NON VOLERE, SENTIRE <sub>1</sub> , VEDERE, SENTIRE <sub>2</sub>	mental predicates
<b>KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR</b>	
言う IU, 言葉 KOTOBA, 本当 HONTÒ DIRE, PAROLE, VERO	speech
<b>SAY, WORDS, TRUE</b>	
する SURU, 起こる OKORU, 動く UGOKU FARE, ACCADERE, MUOVERSI	actions, events, movement
<b>DO, HAPPEN, MOVE</b>	
(どこかに) いる〜ある (DOKOKA NI) IRU-ARU, ある〜いる ARU~IRU, (誰か〜何か) である (DAREKA-NANIKA) DEARU ESSERE (DA QUALCHE PARTE), C'È/CI SONO, ESSERE (QUALCUNO QUALCOSA)	location, existence, specification
<b>BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)</b>	
私の (もの) である WATASHI NO MONO (DEARU) (È) MIO	possession
<b>(IS) MINE</b>	
生きる IKIRU, 死ぬ SHINU VIVERE, MORIRE	life and death
<b>LIVE, DIE</b>	

いつ～時～回 ITSU~TOKI~KAI, 今 IMA, 前 MAE, 後 ATO, 長い間 NAGAI AIDA, 短い間 MIJIKAI AIDA, しばらくの間 SHIBARAKU NO AIDA, 一瞬 ISSHUN QUANDO~TEMPO~VOLTA, ORA, PRIMA, DOPO, TANTO TEMPO, POCO TEMPO, PER QUALCHE TEMPO, MOMENTO	time
<b>WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT</b>	
どこ～所～どこか DOKO~TOKORO~DOKOKA, ここ KOKO, 上 UE, 下 SHITA, 遠い TOOI, 近い CHIKAI, 面 MEN, 中 NAKA, 触る SAWARU DOVE~LUOGO~DA QUALCHE PARTE, QUI, SOPRA, SOTTO, LONTANO, VICINO, SU UN LATO, DENTRO, TOCCARE	space
<b>WHERE~PLACE~SOMEWHERE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH</b>	
ない NAI, 多分 TABUN, できる～得る DEKIRU~ERU/URU, から KARA, (もし) -ば, (MOSHI) -BA NON, FORSE, POTERE, PER~PERCHÉ, SE	logical concepts
<b>NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF</b>	
とても TOTEMO, もっと～もう MOTTO~MŌ MOLTO, (DI/IN) PIÙ	intensifier, augmentor
<b>VERY, MORE</b>	
よう～ように YŌ~YŌNI COME~COSÌ	similarity
<b>LIKE~AS</b>	

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