



They Have A Word For It: A Lighthearted Lexicon of Untranslatable Words and Phrases

Howard Rheingold

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Introduction

Hearing Is Believing: The Cracks Between Our Worldviews

This book is meant to be fun. Open it at random and see if you don't find something that will amuse you, entertain you, titillate your curiosity, tickle your perspective. But you should know that reading this book might have serious side effects at a deeper level. Even if you read one page as you stand in a bookstore, you are likely to find a custom or an idea that could change the way you think about the world. It has to do with the insidious way words mold thoughts.

It all started with a friendly lunch. Jeremy Tarcher is the kind of publisher a writer dreams about. He isn't likely to merge with a new multinational conglomerate every other week, as book publishers are wont to do, and he actually likes to sit down with authors and talk about ideas. During one of our brainstorming sessions, Jeremy mentioned his desire to publish a lexicon of "untranslatable words" that don't exist in English but would add a new dimension to original languages. Words that would open a window on the way other cultures encourage people to think and feel, and thus point out new ways for us to think and feel.

"Oh, you mean words like wabi," I said.

"Perhaps," he replied. "What does it mean?"

"It's a Japanese concept for a certain

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