

# Grammatical and semantic features of some English words and idioms denoting happiness - the feeling of great pleasure

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**Abstract.** This article is intended for the discussion of the lexemes denoting the feeling of great pleasure sub-classified into four groups of adjectives ('delighted', 'elated', and 'jubilant'); nouns ('bliss', 'ecstasy', 'euphoria', 'glee', 'joy', and 'rapture'); verbs ('exult' and 'rejoice'); and idioms ('walk on air', 'in seventh heaven', 'on cloud nine', 'on top of the world', 'over the moon' and 'thrilled to bits'). They are dealt with in respect of their grammatical features including the syntactic functions and morphology, and their semantic structures including lexical meaning, synonyms, collocational range, words and idioms of which the word denoting the feeling is a constituent. Some suggestions in the teaching and learning of as well as in the translation concerned with the lexemes are finally provided.

## 1. Introduction

The feeling of happiness ranges from the least pleasure to the greatest one, which can be expressed by different linguistic items in the English language. Each linguistic item has its subtle nuance of meaning in terms of grammar and semantics. In this article, we are to discuss the grammatical features [1,2] and semantic structures [3-5] of the English words and idioms denoting the feeling of great pleasure sub-classified into four groups of adjectives ('delighted', 'elated', and 'jubilant'); nouns ('bliss', 'ecstasy', 'euphoria', 'glee', 'joy', and 'rapture'), verbs ('exult' and 'rejoice'), and idioms ('walk on air', 'in seventh heaven', 'on cloud nine', 'on top of the world', 'over the moon' and 'thrilled to bits'). All the lexemes listed are the headings of each sub-section, in which the grammatical features, lexical

meaning, synonyms, collocational range and idioms with the words as well as words related to them in terms of form are to be of our concern based on the information collected from the English native speakers and such dictionaries as *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* [6], *The American Heritage Dictionary of The English Language* [7] and *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms* [8].

## 2. Adjectives Denoting Great Pleasure

All the adjectives discussed here denote the property of feeling the pleasure to the extreme degree; they, therefore, cannot be modified by intensifiers of degree such as 'very', 'too', 'extremely', etc [1]. They can function as head of adjectival phrases, pre-modifier of noun phrases, and complement of such verbs as 'be', 'become', 'feel', 'look', 'appear', 'seem' and 'make' with or without taking complementation [1].

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## 2.1. 'Delighted'

### 2.1.1. Grammatical Features and Semantics of 'Delighted'

'Delighted' is an adjective having an identical form with, but different features from, the past participle of the verb 'delight', having the syntactic functions as head of adjectival phrases, pre-modifier of noun phrases and complement. Morphologically, it has two morphemes: the root *delight* and suffix *-ed*. By means of derivation, the adverb 'delightedly' is formed. It has no inflected word-forms for comparative and superlative.

In terms of semantics, 'delighted' is specific and frequently used. It denotes the property of feeling great pleasure about something good that has happened. It has the same descriptive meaning with 'happy', 'glad' and 'pleased' in their first sense - denoting the feeling of pleasure about something good that has happened, but different in term of degree of feeling - expressive meaning, thus being their descriptive synonyms. It can be modified by 'absolutely' in its restricted collocation 'absolutely delighted', and by 'quite' meaning "totally". 'Delighted' can function as complement. When it is a subject complement, it can take complementation types of prepositional phrases with 'about', 'at', 'by' and 'with'; *that*-clauses and *to*-infinitive post-modification as in:

*His parents were absolutely delighted about the baby.*

*I am delighted at your success / to hear of your success.*

*He felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone [9].*

'Delighted' in part of the sense of "showing the feeling of great pleasure" can be used as pre-modifier of noun phrases as in collocations with such typical nouns as 'child', 'lady', 'look', 'smile', 'spirit', etc.

### 2.1.2. Words Formed from 'Delighted'

'Delightedly' (adv) means "in a delighted manner" and functions as adverbial as in:

*She jumped up and took me delightedly in her arms, just as she used to do [10].*

'Delight' (v) can be intransitive and mono-intransitive, meaning "give great pleasure (to somebody), please (somebody) greatly" as in '*a book that is certain to delight*'. It is a component of an idiom as phrasal verb 'delight in something/ doing something' in the sense of "enjoy or take great (and often cruel or wrong) pleasure in something / doing something" as in:

*He delighted in teasing his younger sister.*

'Delight' (n) first as a non-count noun denotes the feeling of great pleasure. Examples are the restricted collocations '*give delight to somebody*' and '*To one's (great) delight*' or prepositional phrases with 'in' and 'with', either post-modified by prepositional phrases with 'at' or not, as in:

*I asked in delight [10].*

*... and [the old man] chuckled with delight at his pupil's proficiency [9].*

'Delight' (n) can also be a count noun denoting things that give great pleasure or enjoyment. In addition, 'delight' (n) is a lexical component in the semi-idiom 'take delight in', which means "find pleasure in something / doing something (especially something cruel or wrong)". 'Delight' (n) has two derivatives by virtue of derivation: 'delightful' (adj) and 'delightfully' (adv). 'Delightful' (adj) has the sense of "giving delight, very pleasing", thus descriptively synonymous with 'pleasing', e.g.:

*And everything that is delightful to you is delightful to me, Miss Spenlow! [10].*

It can collocate with such typical nouns as 'holiday', 'melody', 'conversation', 'news', etc...

We have been concerned with 'delighted' together with other words and idioms related to it in terms of form, which are, it follows, related in meaning as well.

## 2.2. 'Elated'

'Elated' is an adjective having an identical form with, but different features from



participle of the verb 'elate', having the syntactic functions as head of adjectival phrases, pre-modifier of noun phrases and complement. Morphologically, it has two morphemes: the root *elate* (v) and suffix *-ed*. It has no inflected forms for comparative and superlative. It has two derivatives 'elation' (n) and 'elatedly' (adv).

Semantically, 'elated' is specific and formally used to describe a very high level of 'delight'. It can also contain an idea of triumph. In other words, it denotes the property of feeling very happy and proud, especially because you have achieved something that is important to you. It is however infrequently used. In this sense, it cannot function as pre-modifier, but as complement with or without taking complementation. The complementation types of 'elated' as a subject complement are prepositional phrases with 'at' and 'by', *that*-clauses, and *to*-infinitive post-modification as in:

*Jeremy felt elated at / by this sudden and unexpected success;*

*We were all elated that we had won / to hear of the victory.*

In the sense of "showing excited delight and pride", 'elated' can also be a pre-modifier of noun phrases, exemplified by '*the elated crowd*', '*an elated smile*', etc..

'Elate' (v) means "make happy and proud" as in:

*Her success elated the family.*

'Elation' (n) as a non-count noun, denotes the feeling of great happiness and pride as in:

*She was filled with elation when her daughter was born.*

It has a restricted collocation with the intensifying adjective 'sheer' as an emphazier [1]: '*sheer elation*'.

### 2.3. 'Jubilant'

'Jubilant' as an adjective can function as pre-modifier and complement in sentences. It is

a one-morpheme word with two derivatives 'jubilation' (n) and 'jubilantly' (adv). In terms of semantics, it is formally used to denote the property of feeling very happy and proud especially because of something good you have achieved as in:

*The climbers were jubilant after reaching the top of Everest.*

It can also contain an idea of feeling happy because something bad has happened to someone else. It is not commonly used. In the sense of "showing great happiness, especially at a success", 'jubilant' can also be a pre-modifier of noun phrases as in '*a jubilant mood*', '*jubilant shouts*', etc.

'Jubilation' (n) denotes the feeling of great happiness and pride in one sense and a celebration or other expression of great happiness in the other sense.

## 3. Nouns Denoting Great Pleasure

Apart from the noun 'delight' discussed under the heading of 'delighted', the nouns denoting great pleasure discussed in this section include 'bliss', 'ecstasy', 'euphoria', 'joy' and 'rapture'. The words and idioms, if available, are dealt with as well.

### 3.1. 'Bliss'

'Bliss' is a non-count noun with two derivatives 'blissful' (adj) and 'blissfully' (adv). 'Bliss' used in literature denotes the complete or perfect happiness as in '*a life of bliss*', '*a young couple in married bliss/ in wedded bliss*'. 'Bliss' can collocate with 'in' in prepositional phrases, as in:

*If there's another world, he lives in bliss* [11]

And with such adjectives as 'everlasting', 'immortal', 'perfect', 'sheer', 'pure', etc., e.g.:

All that in this delightful garden grows,

Should happy be, and have immo [11].



In terms of syntactic functions, 'bliss' can be subject, object and complement, as in:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive

Follow your bliss [11]

'Blissful' (adj) is mostly used formally and in literature to describe an occasion, situation or period of time when someone feels extremely happy and not worried about anything as in 'the first day of his or her marriage'. It can also describe a romantic feeling that is totally complete and leaves you feeling extremely happy. In addition, 'blissful' can restrictedly collocate with 'ignorance'. 'Blissfully' (adv) also has restricted collocations with 'happy', 'ignorant' and 'unaware'. 'Blissfully happy' means "feeling extremely happy, for example, because of being in love or because something very good has happened to someone". Today it is only used in a slightly comic style as in 'the blissful smile of the cat who stole the cream'.

### 3.2. 'Ecstasy'

'Ecstasy' can be a non-count noun and a count one having the same syntactic function of nouns. As a one-morpheme word, it has two derivatives 'ecstatic' (adj) and 'ecstatically' (adv). 'Ecstasy' has two descriptive meanings. It first denotes a state of a very strong feeling of happiness or delight as in:

*This is the very ecstasy of love [11]*

'Ecstasy' can function as subject, object and complement in sentences, as in:

*To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life [11]*

*Ecstasy affords the occasion and expediency determines the form [11]*

The non-count or plural forms of 'ecstasy' can join the collocations 'be in ecstasy / ecstasies over something', 'go/ be thrown / etc. into ecstasy / ecstasies over something', as in:

*Dissolve me into ecstasies,*

*And bring all Heaven before mine eyes [11]*

'Ecstasy' has its second sense informally used to denote an illegal drug used by young people to give a feeling of great pleasure. 'Ecstatic' (adj) has its sense of "being in a state of ecstasy, feeling extremely happy and excited about something". It is very specific: one may be ecstatic about something - it is too intense an emotion to last long - the whole body and mind is excited because something, usually unexpected or very much longed-for, has happened. It can be used informally, formally and in literature, but it is actually not common. 'Ecstatic' can occur with 'absolutely', as in:

*She was absolutely ecstatic when I told her the news.*

### 3.3. 'Euphoria'

'Euphoria' is a non-count noun which can play the syntactic functions of a noun phrase as a subject, object and complement. By means of derivation, it can form three derivatives: 'euphoric' (adj), 'euphorically' (adv), and 'euphoriant' (n). With regard to the semantics of 'euphoria', it denotes a feeling of great happiness or well-being. It is mostly formal and literary but not common in real life. 'Euphoric' (adj) is also very limited in use. It applies to extreme happiness, almost a trance of happiness - as can be temporarily induced by drugs or huge emotional pleasure. At such a time nothing can hurt or impede you. 'Euphoriant' (n) denotes a drug that tends to produce euphoria. 'Euphoriant' can be an adjective by means of zero derivation applied to 'euphoriant' (n).

### 3.4. 'Glee'

'Glee' is both a count noun and a non-count one sharing the functions of nouns. As a one-morpheme word, it has two derivatives 'gleeful' (adj) and 'gleefully' (adv) by means of derivation, and two compounds 'glee club' (n) and 'gleeman' (n) by means of compounding. 'Glee' has two descriptive meanings. As a non-count noun, it denotes a feeling of great





especially jubilant delight resulting from a particular circumstance, such as winning a victory as in:

*Her glee knew no bounds when she crossed the finish line first;*

and it may suggest spiteful pleasure such as that experienced at another's bad fortune as in:

*He laughed with glee when he learned of his opponent's defeat.*

'Gleeful' is an adjective functioning as pre-modifier of noun phrases and complement in sentences and denotes the property of showing glee, delight and excitement, often because of someone else's foolishness or failure. It can collocate with 'faces', 'laughter', etc. It is infrequently used in real life. 'Gleefully' means "in a gleeful manner" and functions as adverbial in sentences as in:

*The old man rubbed his hands gleefully together...*[9].

'Glee' in its second sense is a count noun denoting a song or an unaccompanied part song scored for three or more male voices that was popular in the 18th century. The two compounds of 'glee' have their senses related to this sense of 'glee'. 'Glee club' (n) denotes a group of singers who perform usually short pieces of choral music, and 'gleeman' (n) denotes a medieval itinerant singer.

### 3.5. 'Joy'

#### 3.5.1. Grammatical Features and Semantics of 'Joy'

Like other nouns discussed above, 'joy' has the same syntactic functions. Morphologically, as a one-morpheme word, it has such derivatives as 'joyful' (adj), 'joyfulness' (n), 'joyfully' (adv); 'joyless' (adj), 'joylessness' (n), 'joylessly' (adv); 'joyous' (adj), 'joyousness' (n), 'joyously' (adv). By virtue of compounding, it has such compounds as 'joy ride' (n), 'joy ride' (v), 'joy rider' (n), 'joy riding' (n), 'joy ride' (v), 'joystick' (n), and 'overjoyed' (adj).

Semantically, 'joy' has three senses. First, 'joy' is used informally, formally and in literature to denote the feeling of great happiness. It suggests an intense and especially an ecstatic state; the word is often associated with sharing, self-realization, or high-mindedness as in:

*The deep joy we take in the company of people with whom we have just recently fallen in love is undisguisable* [11]

'Joy' can function as subject, object and complement in sentences as in:

*The joy of life is variety; the tenderest love requires to be rekindled by intervals of absence.* [11]

*Love begets love. This torment is my joy* [11]

'Joy' is used in prepositional phrases with 'with', 'to', 'for' and 'in' as in 'To my joy', 'jump for joy', and 'begin in joy'. Prepositional phrases with 'of' or 'at' can be its post-modifiers. In the second sense of "a person or thing that brings great happiness", 'joy' is a count noun as in:

*My child is a great joy to me.*

In British English, 'joy' is also informally used in questions and negatives as a non-count noun in the sense of "success" as in:

*I tried to get her on the phone, but I didn't have any joy.*

#### 3.5.2. Idioms and Words Formed from 'Joy'

As far as idioms in which 'joy' is a lexical constituent are concerned, 'joy' is related to three idioms in terms of both form and meaning. 'Somebody's pride and joy' as a literal idiom denotes a person or thing of which somebody is proud. 'Full of joys of the spring' functioning as complement means "lively and cheerful". 'No joy' is also a literal idiom in which 'joy' has its third sense discussed above, meaning that you have not had the luck. news. or information in which you were hopi



'Joyful' (adj) is a formal word, having the senses of "full of or showing joy" and "causing joy as in its collocations with such typical nouns as 'person', 'scene', 'celebrations', 'occasion', 'births', etc.. 'Joyless' (adj) is the antonym of 'joyful' and 'unhappy', meaning "without joy", e.g. 'a joyless affair', 'a joyless marriage'. 'Joyous' (adj), a formal word used in literature, means "bringing joy to someone" and it refers to a song or event - rarely personal. It collocates with 'song', 'occasion', 'sense of freedom', and other nouns. These adjectives have their syntactic functions as head of adjectival phrases, pre-modifier of noun phrases and complement in sentences. 'Joyful' (adj) and 'joyous' (adj) are infrequently used in real life.

'Joyride' (n) is an informal and slang word denoting a ride taken for pleasure and often for the thrills provided by reckless driving or a hazardous, reckless, often costly venture. 'Joyride' (v) means "take a joyride". 'Joyrider' (n) denotes people who joyrides. 'Joyriding' (n) denotes the act of taking a joyride. 'Joystick' (n) as a count noun denoting an upright handle moved to control the operation of something, e.g. the movement of an aircraft. 'Overjoyed' (adj), a synonym of 'delighted', denotes the property of feeling extremely happy as the response to an event, gift, success, etc.. It can be informal, formal and literary. It is used as complement only taking the complementation types of prepositional phrases with 'at'; *that*-clauses and *to*-infinitive post-modification as in:

*She was overjoyed at the news.*

*We were overjoyed (to hear) that they were safe.*

### 3.6. 'Rapture'

'Rapture' can be used as a non-count noun or in plural form. By means of derivation, it has such derivatives as 'rapturous' (adj), 'rapturously' (adv) and 'enrapture' (v). It is formally used to denote a feeling of intense delight as in:

*Oliver would sit by one of the windows, listening to the sweet music, in a perfect rapture [9]*

'Rapture' is used in prepositional phrases with 'in' and 'with' and prepositional phrases with 'of' or 'at' can be its post-modifiers. The plural form 'raptures' can join the collocations 'be in / go into raptures at / about / over somebody / something', meaning "feel or express great delight or enthusiasm" as in:

*She went into / was in raptures at the news.*

'Rapturous' (adj) means "expressing great delight or enthusiasm, especially the great delight that fills you and carries you beyond yourself, usually of short duration". It can function as pre-modifier of noun phrases with such typical nouns as 'applause', 'welcome', 'reception', 'look', etc.. It is, however, rarely seen today. 'Rapturously' (adv) means "in a rapturous way", exemplified in:

*Mr. Bumble, seeing with excruciating feelings, the delight of the two old paupers, who were tittering together most rapturously, hesitated for an instant [9].*

'Enrapture' (v) as a mono-transitive verb is formally used in the sense of "to fill somebody with great delight or joy", as in:

*The beauty of her singing enraptured us.*

## 4. Verbs Denoting Great Pleasure

In this section, we are to deal with two verbs denoting happiness: 'exult' and 'rejoice'. They share the categorical meaning of intransitive verbs, playing the central function in sentences and taking complementation. They are near-synonyms.

### 4.1. 'Exult'

'Exult' usually takes the complementation types of prepositional phrases with 'at', 'in' and 'over'. In terms of morphology, it is a one-morpheme word with three derivatives 'exultation' (n), 'exultant' (adj) and 'exultantly' (adv). Semantically, it has a sense



great delight and pleasure, often at the defeat or failure of someone else, celebrate”, as in:

*The soldiers exulted at their victory.*

*The soldiers exulted over their defeated enemies.*

‘Exult’ is a formal word and is usually found in literature. ‘Exultation’ (n) denotes the feeling of great delight or pleasure. ‘Exultant’ (adj) is also a formal word and is usually used in literature. It denotes the property of feeling pleasure when something bad has happened to someone else, especially because they have been defeated in some way:

*He was exultant. “They lost the game”, he shouted.*

#### 4.2. ‘Rejoice’

Like ‘exult’, ‘rejoice’ usually takes the complementation types of prepositional phrases with ‘at’, ‘over’ and ‘with’; *that*-clauses and *to*-infinitive post-modification. Morphologically, as a one-morpheme word, ‘rejoice’ has only one derivative ‘rejoicing’ as a noun. ‘Rejoice’ has the sense of “feel or show great joy”, as in:

*They all rejoiced that the war was over.*

It is formally used, especially in religion and literature.

*Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost [11].*

In British English, it has a humour sense of “have (a particular name or title, especially one that is silly and amusing)”, e.g.:

*He rejoiced in the name of Pigg.*

‘Rejoice’ is a component of the pure idiom as a phrasal verb ‘rejoice in’. ‘Rejoice’ is a transitive verb but with no passive form. This idiom means “have, possess (something that brings happiness)”, e.g.:

*They rejoiced in their good fortune.*

Another idiom of which ‘rejoice’ is a component is ‘rejoice somebody’s heart/ the heart of somebody’ meaning “make someone feel glad”, as in:

*The victory rejoiced the heart of the whole nation.*

‘Rejoicing’ (n) as a non-count noun is a literary or formal word. It denotes the feeling of great and uncontrolled joy, especially shown by a number of people. ‘Rejoicing’ can be a count noun, but is always used in plural form to denote celebrations.

We have worked on the two verbs denoting happiness. They are near-synonymous for the reason that they express the feeling of pleasure, but in different way. ‘Exultant’ as an adjective denoting the property of happiness has also been concerned with. In the next section, we shall deal with the idioms denoting happiness.

#### 5. Idioms Denoting Great Pleasure

The following idioms denoting happiness are to be discussed in this section: ‘walk on air’, ‘in seventh heaven’, ‘on cloud nine’, ‘on top of the world’, ‘over the moon’ and ‘thrilled to bits’. The idiom ‘walk on air’ acts an intransitive verb, ‘thrilled to bits’ is an adjectival phrase, and the others are prepositional phrases which can function as complement or adverbial in sentences. They are all pure idioms informally used. ‘Walk on air’ describes the euphoric behaviour of someone who is very happy or elated usually because something great but totally unexpected has happened to them as in:

*She’s been walking on air ever since she met Julia.*

‘In seventh heaven’ denotes the property of feeling very happy about something or enjoying oneself immensely as in:

*Gloria was in seventh heaven as she wandered around the shops knowing she could buy whatever she liked.*

‘On cloud nine’, synonymous with ‘euphoric’, denotes the property of feeling extremely happy, usually for those who love or have just got a promotion, etc.,



*He was on cloud nine after winning the competition.*

‘On top of the world’ denotes the property of feeling extremely happy and proud, especially because of success, good fortune or something good and material that has happened, e.g. a promotion, winning a lottery. Everything is going well for the one who is on top of the world.

‘Over the moon’ means “delighted about something”. It is informally used in England, but not much in Canada. When someone is over the moon, he/she is euphoric to a greater degree than the degree ‘on cloud nine’ expresses, as in:

*The whole team were over the moon at winning the competition.*

‘Thrilled to bits’ means “very surprised and very happy about something”. It refers to a kind of physical feeling of happiness. Something good and unexpected has happened to those who are thrilled to bits. It is used informally and more common than other idioms, exemplified in:

*I was thrilled to bits with the gift from my family/when I received her marks from the research paper.*

All these idioms have the same descriptive meaning with the adjectives denoting the property of feeling extremely happy such as ‘delighted’, ‘elated’, ‘ecstatic’ and ‘jubilant’. They can be used informally and in literature.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the English words and idioms denoting happiness - the feeling of great pleasure are very interesting to study. As can be seen in the discussion, of all the lexemes denoting the feeling of great pleasure, ‘ecstasy’, ‘glee’; and ‘rejoice’ are polysemous while ‘delighted’, ‘elated’, ‘gleeful’, ‘jubilant’, and ‘overjoyed’; ‘bliss’, ‘euphoria’, ‘rapture’; and ‘exult’ are not. Their grammatical features depend on the sub-classes they belong to, but each word may not have all the grammatical features that its sub-class has. All of them can

join the three word-formation processes of derivation, back-formation and compounding to produce new lexemes. In teaching and learning as well as translating these words and idioms, their subtle nuance of meaning should be paid attention to. The teacher should, therefore, apply more than one technique of presenting their meaning such as giving context, synonyms (descriptive, though), antonyms, and associated ideas or collocations [12]. The translator should carefully analyze the message to be conveyed in order to make a happy choice of the words and idioms in question. Hopefully, the article is of some good use for English learners, teachers and translators.

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## Đặc điểm ngữ pháp và ngữ nghĩa của một số từ và thành ngữ tiếng Anh chỉ hạnh phúc - cảm giác rất hạnh phúc

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Bài báo này bàn đến bốn nhóm từ vị tiếng Anh chỉ cảm giác rất hạnh phúc: tính từ ('delighted', 'elated', và 'jubilant'); danh từ ('bliss', 'ecstasy', 'euphoria', 'glee', 'joy', và 'rapture'); động từ ('exult' và 'rejoice'); và thành ngữ ('walk on air', 'in seventh heaven', 'on cloud nine', 'on top of the world', 'over the moon' và 'thrilled to bits'). Chúng tôi chỉ đề cập đến các từ vị này về các đặc điểm ngữ pháp - cú pháp và tình thái, và ngữ nghĩa - nghĩa từ vựng, đồng nghĩa, kết hợp từ, các từ và thành ngữ có chứa các từ chỉ cảm giác rất hạnh phúc. Qua đây chúng tôi đưa ra gợi ý trong việc dạy học và dịch thuật liên quan các từ vị tiếng Anh này.

