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## **DANISH *HYGGE* AND ITALIAN *IL DOLCE FAR NIENTE* IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ONLINE DISCOURSE**

*The article explores the two borrowings, hygge and il dolce far niente, used in English-language online publications that introduce English speakers to the Danish and the Italian cultures where these lexical items verbalize cultural practices. The research reveals that unlike il dolce far niente, hygge is successfully assimilated in English by expanding its morphological properties. The loans are perceived as concepts, yet the scope of the Italian one is broader: it is interpreted as philosophy inherent in Italian culture, while hygge is a seasonal (winter) lifestyle.*

*Content analysis shows that the main component of hygge is coziness. Coziness is divisible and sensory by nature: its components are verbalized by lexemes warm, simple, slow and natural. Il dolce far niente, in its turn, rests on the component 'enjoyment' expressed with the words pleasure, to enjoy and their synonyms as well as, like hygge, slow and simple. In addition, the Italian concept has no time limits, is applied to any aspect of human life and influences considerably conceptualization of other fundamental concepts.*

*Thus, though the borrowings share some components, their application and meaning differ significantly in terms of depth and scope.*

**Keywords:** *loan word, concept, hygge, il dolce far niente, discourse, culture.*

**Problem statement and its topicality.** The 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by increased cultural exchange facilitated by mass media, the Internet and accessibility of travel. Western European cultures acquired immediate access to exotic cultures and got carried away with Buddhism and Hinduism. The fusion of the Eastern philosophies and religions produced the hippie movement; Zen and yoga contributed to the New Age movement; feng shui aesthetics gained popularity and influenced architectural and design trends.

Willingness to explore and plunge into other cultures have been a noticeable feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Exotic background highlights shortcomings and imperfections of British and American cultures in such films as *Shirley Valentine*, *Under the Tuscan Sun*, *To Rome with Love* or in books *Eat. Pray. Love* (and its screen version) by Gilbert or *What French Women Know: about Love, Sex, and Other Matters of the Heart and the Mind* by Ollivier. Due to increasing purchasing power of the middle class in English-speaking countries, various sectors of the economy use exotic flavour of their products as a marketing tool: Lenovo names its product *Lenovo Yoga tab*; perfume producers come up with products such as *Ethnic Oud, African Dance, Nirvana*. Locally based food producers have started claiming their exclusive right to call their products *champagne, cognac, hamon or feta*.

The impact of cross-cultural encounters may be long- or short-lived: they may introduce an entirely new perspective on life and modify a recipient culture, or they may suggest a new concept that is quickly forgotten sometime later. Whatever the lifespan of a trend may be, cultural borrowings usually entail lexical borrowings because a cultural feature is introduced under its native name. The Danish '*hygge*' and the Italian '*il dolce far niente*' are examples of such foreign concepts discussed and actively promoted in English-language media and publishing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dias, 2023; Edberg, 2016; Hahnemann, 2016; Laucht, 2024; Mastronardo, 2023; Petris, 2022; Wiking, 2016).

**Theoretical framework and literature review.** English vocabulary never ceases to expand: every year English dictionaries add new lexemes to verbalize merging concepts. English is open to borrowings from other languages and since Great Britain was for a long time the Empire on which the sun never set, numerous languages have contributed to English vocabulary.

Loanwords provide researchers with a window into cultural and social trends since a speech community borrows a word to fill in a lacuna when a concept exists without a nomination (Zhan, 2023). Loanwords and their thematic fields are widely studied, in particular, by Ukrainian linguists (Avchinnikova, & Stavchuk 2020; Dzhava, 2012; Rabosh, 2016).

Linguistic analysis reveals two types of borrowings: loan translations (calques) and loan words. Some calques have been accommodated to such an extent that they are perceived as part and parcel of English vocabulary. For example, the idioms '*to save face*' and '*to lose face*' were first registered in the British community in China in 1898. This interpretation of '*face*' is said to have entered English from Chinese at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and replaced '*appearances*' in '*to save (the) appearances*' (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Loan words are easier to identify due to their phonetic and morphological 'foreignness'.

According to Myers-Scotton, loan words fall into two groups: cultural borrowings and core borrowings (Myers-Scotton, 1992): the former name new concepts that have just emerged in the culture of a speech community, the latter are new prestigious labels of familiar concepts associated with the high status of a donor language (Arkhypenko, 2022).

In the last 20 years, languages have experienced a landslide trend to borrow lexemes that would allow people to talk about foreign concepts that quickly become accommodated. If linguistic research is bound with Social Studies, Cultural Studies and Psychology, it opens up new perspectives on causes, functions and consequences of borrowings. Regarding loanwords as merely a lexical act means overlooking their other features, since these lexemes are socially meaningful: they are "a contextual expression of self, social identity and language" (Zenner, Rosseel, & Calude 2019). Using a certain

loanword is a marker of social, cultural, place or political identity. In particular, Divita and Curtis offer a diachronic study of *le coming out* in the first gay French magazine *Têtu*. They conclude that a loanword may gain "potency in its symbolic function as a marker of belonging to the sociocultural realm that its use and meaning conjure" (Divida & Curtis 2018, p. 6). The anglicism turns into a socially charged word presented as significant for gay personhood, "pointing perhaps toward something deeper and more durative than mere «lifestyle»" (ibid.).

The usage of swearwords borrowed from English into Finnish shows that "borrowing from English is currently a flexible and meaningful resource available for speakers to create an indexical link to global urban (sub)cultures and lifestyles" (Vaattovaaraa, & Peterson 2019, p. 1).

Stepanyan applies both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the role of language in establishing democratic practices in Armenia and exposes the challenge of introducing new practices and, correspondingly, new lexemes when cultural changes are induced (Stepanyan, 2022). The study by Broadwater is based on a similar idea, yet she anchors loanwords to popular culture and carries out a diachronic analysis of mutual lexical exchange between English and French (Broadwater, 2007).

***The objective of the research*** is to explore and compare the concepts verbalized in discourse by the lexical loans *hygge* and *il dolce far niente* borrowed into English from Danish and Italian respectively.

To achieve the objective, the study deals with the following **tasks**: 1. to apply the method of continuous sampling to single out contexts of usage of the lexical loans; 2. to analyse the environments of the loan words and research the key slots that constitute concepts verbalized by the loans; 3. to compare the components and identify shared and specific areas of the concepts.

***Research results.*** The sample consists of 18 online English-language publications dedicated to *hygge* and 15 online English-language publications that delve into the concept *il dolce far niente* or refer to the concepts in question.

The analysis reveals that *hygge* appeared in the titles of English-language books, blogs and mass media sites around 2016. One of the

bloggers offers a shortlist of 21 books dedicated to *hygge* and the majority of the books date back to 2016–2017 (Mumtastic life, 2023). In fact, 2016 was declared the year of *hygge* by *The New Yorker* (Altman, 2016).

*Il dolce far niente*, in its turn, first emerged in English-language mass culture and had an impact on English mass media and mass culture discourse after the publication of the book by Gilbert (Gilbert, 2006) and, even more so, after the release of its screen version (Murphy, 2010). The film episode where the main character is being introduced to this Italian concept comes among the most popular hits (Eat Pray Love – Dolce Far Niente clip, 2011). Unlike *hygge*, the promotion of *il dolce far niente* does not produce an impression of a promotion campaign, yet it comes up now and then in publications ranging from marketing and management instructions to popular psychology sites.

The sample displays both differences and similarities of the lexemes. The word *hygge* shows certain assimilation in English: *hygge* may be used as a noun, a verb or an adjective:

*Experiencing hygge reportedly reduces stress and improves emotional well-being.* (My online therapy, 2022).

*Hygge together! (...) Dig out your favorite warm and cozy garments and get ready to hygge!* (LaVolpe, 2024).

*A proper hygge fire should use real wood (if possible).* (LaVolpe, 2024).

The sample contains the Danish derivative (adjective) of *hygge*, *hyggelig* (Eng. 'nice'), used as self-explanatory due to its semantic transparency:

*...forest bathing is a great way to bring about Hyggelig feelings.* (SlowBox, 2017).

*The sidewalks are filled with smiling, hyggelige people.* (Altman, 2016).

Another borrowing from Danish is the compound *hyggebukser*. The second stem is not familiar to English speakers, so its meaning is explained:

*Wearing comfortable and cozy clothing, such as your "hyggebukser". This is the Danish word for pants that you love, but would never wear in public.* (Delaware Psychological Service, 2020).

*Put on those **hyggebukser**! (...) "hyggebukser" are ... the most unattractive pair of pants you own but also the comfiest, so while you love them, you wouldn't be caught dead with them in public.* (HyggeBox, 2021).

*Il dolce far niente* does not show any signs of assimilation, since borrowed phrases are difficult to incorporate into a foreign language. The lack of assimilation may be the reason for the frequent English translation, *the sweetness of doing nothing*, in the sample:

*The **sweetness of doing nothing** may seem like a luxury afforded to a lucky few, but **Italians in Florence and Tuscany** maintain that the pleasure derived from **il dolce far niente** can be found in everything from mealtimes to doing what you love.* (Beard, 2019).

*Hygge* is defined as a 'concept', a 'mindset' and a 'lifestyle':

*Hygge ...is a Danish **concept**... it's a **mindset**... (LaVolpe, 2024).*

*...hygge is more a **way of life**... (My online therapy, 2022).*

*...this is a Danish **lifestyle approach**... (Delaware Psychological Service, 2020).*

*Il dolce far niente* may be categorized in the same terms:

*They go on to describe the **concept** of dolce far niente – the **sweetness of doing nothing**.* (Beard, 2019)

*Dolce far niente isn't just a beautiful Italian phrase but a **lifestyle** and **mindset** deeply entrenched in the Italian culture...* (Chervinska, 23)

However, the Italian *il dolce far niente* is a 'unique' cultural phenomenon, a cornerstone of the Italian culture:

*...the Italian **philosophy** of Dolce far niente – translated as the **sweetness of doing nothing** – offers a refreshing **perspective on life**.* (Chervinska, 2023).

*It embodies a **unique approach to life**...* (Dias, 2023).

*... "il dolce far niente" gives us a glimpse into the **unique way** that **Italians approach life**. It encapsulates their **philosophy** of*

*enjoying the simple pleasures, savoring every moment, and embracing a balanced lifestyle.* (Mastronardo, 2023).

While *hygge* is 'a seasonal thing', a winter practice, *il dolce far niente* is an attitude that has arisen from the specific Italian geography, climate and landscape. Hence, each text in the sample presents *hygge* as practices that help get through a cold, grey, dark winter. In fact, the texts on *hygge* are densely packed with the lexemes *winter, cold, dark, chill(y)*:

*Now I am all about the slow and cozy Danish way to do winter. ... There's nothing more cozy than a comfy chair, a blanket, hot chocolate and a good book on a chilly winter afternoon...* (Mumtastic life, 2023).

*This time of year, the weather can be cold and grey, and the dark mornings and evenings may have you dreaming of warmer and brighter months. If you are feeling the chill and blues of the season, then a dose of hygge may be in order.* (LaVolpe, 2024).

*As a concept and cultural practice, hygge became popular in Denmark in the 19th century as a celebration of comfortable conviviality during the long, dark Scandinavian winters...* (My online therapy 2022).

*Hygge can be found in a bakery and in the dry heat of a sauna in winter...* (Altman, 2016).

The Mediterranean climate is presented as a factor facilitating the *il-dolce-far-niente* attitude, but the only cause. Thus, on the one hand, 'the sweetness of doing nothing' stems from hot summertime and picturesque views:

*I have a vivid memory of the moment when I truly embraced Il Dolce Far Niente... It was the summertime, and if you've ever been in Rome in August, you know how hot it can get.* (Mastronardo, 2023).

*The leisurely enjoyment of sweet idleness feels out of reach for most people, a notion tied to a romantic ideal of long Italian summers and carefree days.* (Beard, 2019).

*She said for her it can be as simple as turning the twinkle lights on that intertwine with the rose vines on her pergola or noticing the warm glow that comes from lighting a candle – or staying to watch the sunset turn to stars at the end of the day. One of her friends quickly replied, "It's all about moments like sitting on the beach, watching the waves crash".* (Mastronardo, 2023).

On the other hand, *il dolce far niente* is a 'philosophy' so it may be brought to life anywhere and anytime:

*Her boyfriend, on the other hand, shared that it wasn't so much about the location for him...* (Mastronardo 2023).

The essential feature of *hygge* is verbalized by the lexemes *cozy* and *coziness*: 'create your own winter *cozy* life', 'what it means to be *cozy*' (Mumtastic life, 2023). An article may contain from seven (LaVolpe, 2024) to 16 (Mumtastic life, 2023) cases of using the lexemes. Remarkably, 'coziness' is interpreted through sensory experiences: '*cozy*' means 'warm' or even 'hot'. The words may be taken literally or figuratively to characterize tactile as well as visual, olfactory and gustatory sensations. Thus, 'warm' or 'hot' may be attributed to clothes, drinks, a fireplace, relationships, light and smells:

*When you think *cozy*, I am guessing a *woolen sweater*, a *steaming cup of hot chocolate* and an *open fire*...*

*Gather with friends over a *warm cup of coffee*, serve a *hot meal* around the table... *warmth of friendship*... Don't forget to serve up those *hot drinks*. Mugs of rich hot cocoa, *tea*, and *coffee* are all good for *warming the soul*... *hygge* is about creating a *warm and inviting space*... a *warm scarf*, dive into your "wellies", and get outside (as long as you have a cup of *hot cocoa* and a *roaring fire*)... Simply turn off "the big light" and opt for *warm-toned lamps* or *fairy lights* to heighten *warmth* and *coziness*... a sense of *coziness* and *camaraderie*... (LaVolpe, 2024).*

*...creating environmental flow and *warmth* ...buy *warm amber bulbs* for your lamps... *thick socks* that *keep your feet warm*... Cuddle up with some *hot tea*, wrap yourself in a *warm blanket*... *hot chocolate*, mulled wine... (My online therapy, 2022).*

*Grab a cup of coffee and a warm jumper... Light some candles, brew a cup of coffee and snuggle down with a cinnamon swirl... (Mumtastic life, 2023).*

The other aspects of coziness are *natural* and *simple* verbalized with the help of the adjectives *natural*, *real*, *authentic*, *simple* as well as nouns *nature*, *sustainability* and *simplicity*.

*Dim the lights and dig out the candles (opt for natural beeswax over scented ones). A proper hygge fire should use real wood (if possible)... (LaVolpe, 2024).*

*...true coziness comes from finding and being comfortable in your own authentic skin. ...The beauty of hygge is its simplicity. Finding contentment in the magical and simple things... a passion for simple home living and sustainability... (Mumtastic life, 23).*

*It is quite normal for people to be outside whatever the weather & their houses are adorned with natural things to keep that connection even when indoors. I have noticed a number of similarities between Danish & Japanese culture & one of the most striking is the appreciation of our connection with & reliance on the natural world (SlowBox, 2017).*

Finally, hygge presupposes "slow time" (LaVolpe 2024): cooking, walking, gardening without haste, i.e., one needs "to slow down and look for the magic in every day" (Mumtastic life, 2023):

*Time for slow and comforting cooking... All those slow country winter walks. ... the garden is the perfect place to slow down... (Mumtastic life, 2023).*

*...hygge food is also very much slow food – meaning, part of the magic is in its preparation... (My online therapy, 2022).*

The notion of *slow food* is in opposition to the urban lifestyle of everything fast, food included. The idea of slow walks is intertwined with nature: the slowness of trees "*is comforting, they are stable and secure in a fast-paced world*" (SlowBox, 2017).

*Il dolce far niente* does not involve 'material attributes' and tangibility of *hygge* though there are some references to sensory experience:

*...carving out time to enjoy dolce far niente is a crucial part of his daily routine. "Every evening, between 6.30 and 7.30, I have a glass of wine in the garden – no matter what is going on", Emanuele says. "I listen to the birds sing. I look at the view. I leave my phone in my office. No one is allowed to speak to me. That is dolce far niente for me".* (Beard, 2019).

*The small pleasures in life, like enjoying a good meal with all the time in the world, a contemplative walk in nature without haste, a nap in the afternoon breeze with no time to wake up, a drink at the end of the day.* (Dias, 2023).

The recurrent component of *il dolce far niente* shared with *hygge* is an attitude to time as a resource to be enjoyed: time 'is carved out' during the day to enjoy a break, walks are taken 'without haste'. Pleasure, as one of the articles says, "eludes those who are bereft of time" (Gupta, 2022). It is important *to slow down, to take one's time, make time for yourself and not to be in a hurry* to enjoy each present moment of the day in its simplicity as opposed to *rushing through the day and worrying about the future or the past*:

*...slow down and truly savor each moment, appreciate the beauty in simplicity, and consciously make time for relaxation. Consider the traditional Italian piazza, where people gather to socialize, enjoy an espresso, or simply observe life around them. This is Dolce far niente in practice – taking time out of the day to relax and connect with the community. Similarly, the Italian tradition of long meals, often stretching for hours, perfectly illustrates the preference for savoring moments over rushing through them. ...slow down, appreciate our surroundings, and focus on the present, rather than constantly worrying about the future or the past.* (Chervinska, 2023).

The key components of *il dolce far niente* are 'enjoyment' and 'pleasure' verbalized with verbs *to enjoy, to savor, to relish, to indulge, to appreciate*, the nouns *pleasure, joy, happiness*,

*relaxation, indulgence, idleness, slowness* and contrasted to the lexemes *to rush, to strive, hectic, motion, autopilot*. Simplicity and routine are a source of the pleasure:

*It... allows one to savor even the smallest experiences.*

*"Il dolce far niente" is a reminder to cherish life and find joy in the simplest of moments.* Dolce far niente can be a part of any moment, but the key is to *enjoy* that time and to embrace the feeling. ... *Take the time to appreciate the little things, indulge in moments of stillness, and find solace in the peacefulness of idleness.* (Mastronardo, 2023).

*Embracing simplicity, relaxation, and the joy of living in the moment, this concept resonates with current global trends towards mindfulness, wellness, and work-life balance.* (Chervinska, 2023).

*...it's okay to simply exist, to relish in the moment without constantly striving for something, it dawned on me that this is what Il Dolce Far Niente truly meant. I made a promise to myself that no matter how hectic life became, I would always make space to savor the sweetness of life. From sipping espresso in a bustling café to indulging in delicious cuisine, Italians truly know how to appreciate the beauty of life. But Il Dolce Far Niente is more than just idleness and indulgence, it's also about being present in the moment and finding joy in the little things. In our constant motion, rushing from one task to the next, we often switch to autopilot, missing out on the joy of being fully present. By intentionally creating space for moments of slowness, we can truly appreciate the little things in life and find happiness in the present moment.* (Mastronardo, 2023).

*Il dolce far niente* is not idleness. Pleasure may be derived from any moment and activity, so, within this system, work is reconceptualized:

*Reshaping our perception of the concept of work is one way to channel dolce far niente... The first rule is that you must be able to enjoy what you do, the time you spend doing it... The second is that nobody is allowed to judge – their own work or the work of anybody else. The third rule is very important: work as little as possible* (Beard, 2019).

Consequently, work is anything that one does not enjoy and it should be avoided. Watching Italians employed in the hospitality business, Beard concludes that "work is nothing to them" (Beard, 2019), i.e., they enjoy what they do.

**Conclusions and further research.** The research reveals that *hygge* and *il dolce far niente* borrowed from Danish and Italian are presented to the English-speaking audience as loan words of different assimilation degree that stand for culturally foreign concepts worth accommodating in everyday life.

*Hygge* is interpreted as a winter practice with the core component 'coziness' that includes slots 'warm', 'simple', 'natural' and 'slow'. The online publications relate *hygge* to sensory experiences: one achieves *hygge* by shaping one's surroundings.

*Il dolce far niente* is defined as a cornerstone philosophy of Italian culture and centres around 'enjoyment'. Like *hygge*, it involves slowing down and simplicity, yet *il dolce far niente* is a mindset of indulging in everyday experiences. Since *il dolce far niente* is a fundamental cultural concept, it is all-pervading and prone to impact on other significant concepts, e.g., work is reconsidered from the perspective of 'pleasure' and interpreted as activities one does not enjoy.

Thus, English-language online publications introduce *hygge* and *il dolce far niente* as similar in terms of purpose and components, yet their scope and depth are different.

The research may be furthered by scrutinizing the structure of the two concepts in various types of discourse as well as by relating them to concepts and practices native to English-speaking communities.

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## ДАТСЬКЕ *HYGGE* ТА ИТАЛІЙСЬКЕ *IL DOLCE FAR NIENTE* В АНГЛОМОВНОМУ ОНЛАЙН-ДИСКУРСІ

Стаття присвячена вивченю двох запозичень, *hygge* та *il dolce far niente*, в англомовних онлайн-публікаціях, які знайомлять носіїв англійської мови з датською та італійською культурами, де ці лексичні одиниці вербалізують культурні практики. Дослідження виявило, що на відміну від *il dolce far niente*, *hygge* успішно асимілюється в англійській мові шляхом розширення морфологічних властивостей. Обидва запозичення сприймаються як концепти, але обсяг італійського запозичення ширший: воно представляється як філософія, притаманна італійській культурі, в той час як *hygge* – сезонний (зимовий) спосіб життя.

Контент-аналіз виявив основну складову *hygge*, *coziness*. *Coziness* має чуттєву природу та підлягає подальшому поділу: її компоненти вербалізуються лексемами *warm*, *simple*, *slow* та *natural*. *Il dolce far niente*, у свою чергу, трунтується на складовий 'enjoyment', яка виражується словами *pleasure*, *to enjoy* та їх синонімами, і, так само як і *hygge*, лексемами *slow* та *simple*. Також італійський концепт не

має часових обмежень, охоплює всі сфери життя та суттєво впливає на концептуалізацію інших фундаментальних концептів.

Таким чином, хоча запозичення мають спільні компоненти, їх вживання та значення значно відрізняються своєю глибиною та обсягом.

**Ключові слова:** запозичення, концепт, *hygge*, *il dolce far niente*, *discourse*, культура.

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