MISSING WORDS

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If we wish to refer to the quantity midway between the numbers one and two, we say ONE AND A HALF. Elementary as the concept is, it has taken us four words to express it. By comparison, there are a good many other languages in which just one word will suffice. Polish, for instance, uses the single word POLTORA; German, the word ANDERTHALB; and Latin, the word SESQUIALTER.

Why, in effect, are four English words needed to translate one word in other languages? If this were an isolated instance, we could shrug it off. Actually, however, there are hundreds of similar cases, and we must conclude that English is a primitive language, in which many essential concepts are not yet expressible, except by way of circumlocution. For those of us who have always admired our language, this revelation comes as quite a shocker.

Other missings words for simple number concepts include equivalents for the Polish POLOSMA (seven and a half), the Latin QUATERNI and the Turkish DORDER (four at a time), the Polish STOKROC (a hundred times), and the Hungarian SZAZHUSZONOT (one hundred and twenty-five), and the Hungarian FELAKKORA (half as big). Many more examples could be adduced, a statement equally true in relation to the illustrations in the following paragraphs.

It is equally difficult to express time concepts in English. THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY, a clumsy four-word phrase in English, becomes VORGESTERN in German, ANTEAYER in Spanish, and PRZEDWCIORAJ in Polish. Its correlative, THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, is simply UBERMORGEN in German, DOPODOMANI in Italian, and POLUTRZE in Polish. Three days ago is VORVORGESTERN in German and ANTEANTEAYER in Spanish. IN THE EVENING becomes ABENDS in German, VESPERI in Latin, and UVECE in Serbian. THE NEXT DAY converts into NAZAJURTRZ in Polish. The Hungarian language gives us words such as SZADEVENKENT (every hundred years), PERCENKENT (every few minutes), MINAP (the other day), and MASODNAPONKENT (every other day). Spanish provides words like ANTEANOCHE (the night before last),
ANTEANTEANOCHÉ (three nights ago), VERANO (early summer), and ESTIO (late summer).

One's relatives have been shamefully neglected in English. Where we must use the roundabout expression BROTHERS AND SISTERS, for which siblings is not yet an accepted substitute, German speaks of GE-SCHWISTER, Polish uses STRYJ for a paternal uncle and WUJ for a maternal uncle, and SZWAGROSTWO for one's husband's brother and his wife. Children born at intervals of one year are collectively known as POGODKI in Russian. Uncle and aunt fuse into TIOS in Spanish, and WUJOSTWO in Polish.

Any survey of other languages invariably uncovers words possessing complex and interesting meanings for which there is no analog in English. Examples: the Spanish DENTERA and the Polish OSKOMA (a setting of the teeth on edge); the Italian PAPABILE (having some chance of becoming Pope); the Polish PIECDZIESIECIORUBLOWY (costing fifty rubles); the Czech PREDSVATEBNY (taking place on the eve of the wedding); the Dutch KWELDER (land on the outside of a dike); the Hungarian EZERNYOLCSZAZNEGYVENYOLCBAN (in 1848); the Lettish PASAULVESTURIS (of worldwide significance); the Turkish MIHRAP (a woman still beautiful though no longer young); the Provencal UBAC (the sunless north side of a mountain); the Turkish HAFENDAZ (one who makes insulting remarks to women in the street) and PENCELESMEK (to lock fingers with another and have a test of strength); the Lettish MEZABRALIS (a revolutionary hiding in a forest); the Brazilian Portuguese MATAO (a jockey who crowds the others against the fence); the Japanese NEMIMI (the ears of one sleeping) and YOKOTOJI (bound so as to be broader than long -- said of a book); and the Portuguese TOADEIRA (a harpooned whale which continues to sound).

Certain languages present us with a whole series of words we cannot translate into English, Russian being an excellent example of such a language. Some typical Russian words: ZAVYECHERET (to be overtaken by night); ZABORSCHIK (one who buys on credit); CHETVY-ERENKI (hands and feet); OBEZNOZHEL (he has lost the use of his feet); RAZNOGLAZY (with eyes of different color); CHIKANE (a noise resembling the clipping of scissors); NYEDOIMSHIK (one who is in arrears with taxes); OTMUCHIT (to finish tormenting); ZACHVANIITSYA (to begin to be haughty); NASHATATSYA (to be tired of strolling about); PEREOBUVATSYA (to change one's shoes); PEREGORKNUT (to become too bitter); and ZASKREZHE-TAL (he started to grind his teeth).

Almost any area of language or any particular subject will produce further samples. Take land areas or specific locations. Untranslat-
able foreign words: the German RAIN (a ridge between two fields); the Portuguese VARZEA (low, grassy land bordering a stream); the Russian MEZHIDUGORYE (a region between mountains); the Turkish REHGUZAR (a place through which a road passes); the Russian OPUSHKA (the edge of a forest); ZARUBYEZHE (country beyond the boundary), and PODMOSKOVNAJA (a country house on the outskirts of Moscow); and the Japanese SHIKYOKU (the four cardinal points of the compass).

Some languages delight in particularizing a subject that seems to be of passing interest to speakers of English. Consider Ladin or Romansh, a language spoken in Switzerland, which uses these highly specific terms for domesticated animals: BLASSA (a cow with a white spot on its forehead); STUZZA (a cow with a short tail); CHAPPA (a cow with horns turned upward); MUOTTA (a cow with broken horns); BUZ (a one-year-old male sheep); CHAISCH (a one-year-old female sheep); and STARNIGL (a one-year-old roebuck -- not exactly domesticated, but falling into the same general category).

Anyone who wants to have a field day in spotting gaps in our language need only consider names of plants. A few specimens: the Italian SCOPINA (Alpine forest heath); the Romanian BROSCARITA (the broad-leaved pondweed); the Swedish MJOLKORT (the rose-bay willow-herb); the Serbian ZVEKAC (the square-stemmed St. John’s wort); the French MUGUET (the lily of the valley); the Provencal SANGARI (the Good King Henry); the Polish ZWIESINIEC (the ivy-leaved toadflax); the Provencal VENO (a clove of garlic); the Brazilian Portuguese MURURE (a large mass of floating river vegetation); and the Japanese KAERIBANA (flowers that bloom out of season).

Bird names are just as cared for by other languages as they are ignored by ours. Examples: the French EPEICHETTE (the lesser spotted woodpecker); the Spanish CHAMARRON (the long-tailed titmouse); the Brazilian Portuguese IPECUTAUA (the chestnut-winged yellow woodpecker); and the French OREILLARD (the long-eared bat -- not a bird, really, but certainly a flying creature).

Language itself provides numerous examples of which we cite only a few here: the Lettish DAUDZSKAITLINIEKS (a noun used only in the plural); the Turkish NAZIRE (a poem written to resemble another poem in form and subject); the Spanish ESDRUJULIZAR (to give an incorrect proparoxytonic accent to a word); the Spanish GANGUEAR (to speak through the nose); and the Lettish IZRUNATIES (to have a heart-to-heart talk).

Is it time, perhaps, to bring English up to the level of other modern languages by its comp...
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dern languages, by providing it with the kind of vocabulary displayed by its competitors? Think about it!

We are deeply indebted to Mr. Dwight Ripley of Greenport, Long Island, New York, for furnishing most of the 100 examples quoted in this article. For simplicity in printing, all diacritical marks (accents, cedillas, umlauts, etc.) have been omitted, and words from languages such as Russian transliterated.

QUERY

If one constructs a crossword puzzle using each letter of the alphabet exactly once, the result can be termed a pan-grammatic crossword. Three examples are given in Shipley's Playing With Words on page 141; a fourth example is given on page 95 of Dudeney's 300 Best Word Puzzles (unfortunately, separated into three independent parts). How compact a pangrammatic crossword can be constructed?

Shipley's crosswords can be enclosed in rectangles of size 12x7, 7x11 and 10x8; Dudeney's, in a rectangle of size 8x7. Can the reader construct a pangrammatic crossword in a rectangle of smaller area than the 7x7 example given below?

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