

# Grammatical and semantic features of some adjectives denoting happiness - the feeling of pleasure

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**Abstract.** The topic of happiness draws a lot of attention from different types of people. In fact, there are so many ways to express our happiness, one of which is employing words and idioms denoting happiness. In this article, the authors discuss five adjectives denoting happiness - the feeling of pleasure: "cheerful", "gay", "glad", "merry" and "pleased" in terms of grammar and semantics. Their grammatical features include syntactic functions and morphological features, and the semantics includes lexical meaning, synonyms, antonyms, collocations and idioms of which these words are a component. The authors finally provide some suggestions in the teaching and learning of as well as in the translation concerned with the words.

## 1. Introduction

Linguistic items in English utilized to express happiness are numerous. As the feeling of happiness can range from the feeling of pleasure to that of great pleasure, the English language is not poor in the expressions of the feeling. More concretely, the feeling of happiness can be expressed by such adjectives denoting happiness as "happy", "cheerful", "gay", "glad", "merry", "pleased", "delighted", "elated" and "jubilant". They are sub-classified, on the basis of the degree of expression of pleasure they denote, into two groups: (1) "happy",

"cheerful", "gay", "glad", "merry" and "pleased" (denoting pleasure) and (2) "delighted", "elated" and "jubilant" (denoting great pleasure). In this article, the adjectives denoting pleasure, excluding "happy", shall be explored in terms of grammar including syntactic functions [1] and morphological features [2], and semantics including lexical meaning, synonyms, antonyms, collocations [3,4] and idioms of which the adjectives denoting pleasure is a component [3-5].

## 2. Grammatical features and semantics of adjectives denoting pleasure

The adjectives "cheerful", "gay", "glad", "merry" and "pleased" are to be discussed in

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this section in term of grammar and semantics 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]. These adjectives denote an emotion of pleasure people have, but in not the same ways. According to Quirk *et. al.* (1972), they can function as head of adjectival phrases, pre-modifier of noun phrases, and complement of such verbs as "appear", "be", "become", "feel", "look", "seem" and "make", with or without taking complementation. They all denote the property of feeling pleasure but not the one at a great degree; thus, they can be modified by such intensifiers of degree as "very", "so", "extremely", etc.. To some extent they are synonymous with "happy", but to some other extent they are not. We shall analyze these words in turn:

## 2.1. "Cheerful"

### 2.1.1. Grammatical features and semantics of "Cheerful"

"Cheerful" shares the syntactic functions of adjectives denoting the property of feeling pleasure except for the fact that it cannot take complementation. Morphologically, it consists of two morphemes, the root *cheer* and suffix *-ful*. It does not allow inflection for comparative and superlative forms. However, it has a very productive root *cheer*, and has two derivatives: "cheerfulness" (n) and "cheerfully" (adv).

Semantically, "cheerful" is polysemous, used formally, informally, and in literature with its three senses: (a) "in good spirits, feeling pleasure all the time", (b) "pleasantly bright, likely to cause happy feelings", and

(c) "helpful and enthusiastic, reflecting willingness". "Cheerful" in the first sense is a near-synonym of "happy", for part of the meaning of "cheerful" suggests a good characteristic of somebody, not just a happy feeling when something good happens. "Cheerful" is a synonym of the old-fashioned word "cheery", collocating with nouns denoting people to describe one of their characteristics as in "a cheerful child", and with "disposition", "smile", "grin", "tone", etc., as in "a cheerful disposition/smile/grin" and "in a more cheerful tone". In the second sense, it is an antonym of "cheerless", which means "dull and depressing", collocating with such typical nouns as "music", "news", "room", "conversation". "Cheerful" in the third sense collocates with nouns denoting people, e.g. "cheerful worker".

### 2.1.2 Words formed from "Cheerful"

"Cheerfulness" as a non-count noun can function as head of noun phrases and clause constituents: subject, object and complement, and occur with the preposition "with" as in "work with cheerfulness".

"Cheerfully" (adv) can collocate with such typical verbs as "live", "accept", "grin", "say", "sing", "smile", "whistle", "work", and others.

The root "cheer" (n) is also a polysemous word with two senses. "Cheer" with the first sense "good spirits, a feeling of happiness and confidence" is a non-count noun. This sense is dated, literary or formal. "Cheer" in the second sense "a shout of joy, praise and encouragement" is a count noun widely used at present. "Cheer" in the first sense can form the derivative "cheerless" (adj), apart from "cheerful" by means of derivation. "Cheerless" meaning "lacking cheer; depressing" also has two derivatives "cheerlessness" (n) and "cheerlessly" (adv) by means of derivation. 'Cheery' (adj) is also

a derivative of "cheer" (n) with two derivatives: "cheeriness" (n) and "cheerily" (adv). "Cheery" means "showing or suggesting good spirits" and synonymous with "cheerful", but is out-dated.

The root "cheer", by means of zero derivation, can change into "cheer" (v). "Cheer" (v) has two senses. It is both an intransitive and mono-transitive verb in the first sense of "give shouts of joy, praise, support and encouragement (to somebody or a team or a cast of performers)". In the second sense of "make happier or more cheerful, less worried", "cheer" is a mono-transitive verb. It can form an adjective "cheering" meaning "making cheerful, encouraging" as in "*cheering news*"; and such phrasal verbs as "cheer somebody on" meaning "encourage somebody by cheering", and "cheer (somebody) up" meaning "(cause somebody to) become cheerful".

"Cheers" formed from "cheer" as a noun is an interjection used for expressing good wishes when drinking with someone, especially when taking the first mouthful of a new drink. In British English, it also means "goodbye" or "thank you" in an informal way.

By means of compounding, "cheer" (n) can form the compound "cheer-leader" (n) which denotes either a person who leads the cheering of spectators, as at a sports event or the one who expresses or promotes thoughtless praise as an adulator. It is used especially in the United States. By means of back-formation, the verb "cheer-lead" is formed, meaning "lead organized cheering, as at sports events" or "express or promote automatic or servile praise".

## 2.2. "Gay"

### 2.2.1. Grammatical features and semantics of "Gay"

"Gay" shares the syntactic functions of "cheerful". Morphologically, as a one -

morpheme word, it has two inflected forms *gayer* (comparative) and *gayest* (superlative) by virtue of inflection, and some derivatives by means of derivation. Semantically, "gay" has three senses: (a) "showing or characterized by cheerfulness and lighthearted excitement", (b) "bright or attractive so that one feels happy to see or hear it", (c) "homosexual; of, relating to, or sharing the lifestyle and concerns of the homosexual community".

The first two meanings of "gay" have become dated due to the presence of the third meaning. "Gay" in the first sense is near-synonymous with "cheerful" in the first sense, for it describes the light-hearted spontaneity rather than the characteristic. It is generally used to qualify a gesture or a statement rather than the person, thus collocating with such words as "wave (of the hand)", "smile", "laughter", etc.. "Gay" in the second sense can occur with "colours", "streets", "room" etc.. It is rarely used in regular conversation, but mostly used in dated literary works. However, "gay" is pre-empted with its contemporary use to denote male homosexuals. Examples of the current use of "gay" include "Gay Liberation Front", "gay bars".

### 2.2.2. Words formed from "Gay"

"Gay" (adj) in the first two senses has "gaiety" as non-count noun or count noun, "gaieties" as plural noun and "gaily" (adv). "Gaieties" denotes happy events and activities, especially at a time of public holiday. "Gay" (adj) in the third sense has two noun derivatives "gay" (n) (denoting gay people) and "gayness" (n) (denoting the state of being gay).

## 2.3. "Glad"

### 2.3.1. Grammatical features and semantics of "Glad"

"Glad" has a number of the syntactic functions as head of an adjectival phrase,

attributive, predicative as subject complement or object complement, taking complementation types of prepositional phrases, *that*-clauses, and *to*-infinitive post-modification and allowing comparison structures of equality, inequality, comparative and superlative. These syntactic functions are not the same for all senses. In other words, its syntactic functions may depend on each of its senses. Morphologically, as a one-morpheme adjective, "glad" has two inflected forms: *gladder* (comparative) and *gladdest* (superlative). It can form other related words by means of derivation and compounding.

Semantically, "glad" is a polysemous word having five senses. "Glad" in the first sense is synonymous with "happy" (in the first sense), denoting the feeling of pleasure about something good that has happened (especially because a situation has improved). It is frequently used informally and in literature. It can be the head of adjectival phrases, and function as complement; but in this sense, it cannot be a pre-modifier of noun phrases. As a complement "glad" can take complementation types of prepositional phrases with "about"; *that* - clauses and *to* - infinitive post-modification, e.g.:

*I was glad to learn/hear/see they'd reached home safely.*

*She was very glad about her exam results.*

"Glad" can be an object complement as in:

*Her exam results could make them glad*

The second sense of "glad" is "causing or bringing happiness". In this sense, "glad" can only be a pre-modifier of noun phrases as in "glad news", "glad days", and "a glad occasion". The third sense of "glad", though archaic, is "showing happiness". "Glad" can also only be used attributively in this sense, e.g. "a glad cry", "a glad expression".

Another sense of "glad" - "very willing" makes it synonymous with "happy" again.

Like "happy" in the same meaning, it is a formal word functioning as subject complement taking the complementation type of *to*-infinitive post-modification; but cannot take comparison structures, and cannot be a pre-modifier of noun phrases:

*I shall be only too glad to help you study history.*

The last sense "grateful, appreciative" makes the word distinct from "happy". In this sense, it can play the function of subject complement only taking prepositional phrases with "of", as in:

*I'd be glad of some help with these boxes.*

### 2.3.2 Words formed from "Glad"

It can form such derivatives as "glad" (v), "gladden" (v), "gladness" (n) and "gladly" (adv) by means of derivation. "Glad" (v) as an archaic verb is a descriptive synonym of "gladden" (v). Both of them mean "make glad or happy". "Gladden" (v) is a mono-transitive verb, often collocating with "one's heart" as in:

*The news gladdened his heart.*

"Gladness" (n) means "happiness". "Gladly" (adv) means "happily, with gratitude" and "willingly". "Gladly" can also be a constituent of a semi-idiom "not/never suffer fools gladly", meaning "not to be patient with people whom one considers to be foolish".

By means of compounding, "glad" can be a constituent of such compounds as "glad eye" (n), "glad hand" (n), "glad rags" (n) and "gladsome" (adj). "Glad eye" is a British English old-fashioned slang word meaning "a look of sexual invitation". "Glad hand", an old-fashioned informal word, means "a warm welcome or greeting, especially one made in order to gain personal advantage". The collocations "give somebody/get the glad hand" are informally used with the meaning of "treat somebody/be treated warmly and

enthusiastically, but often insincerely". By means of zero derivation, "glad hand" can be a mono-transitive verb, meaning "greet somebody warmly and enthusiastically, but often insincerely". "Glad rags" is an informal word in British English denoting clothes for a special occasion or celebration. It is usually used in its plural form. Finally, "gladsome", an archaic literary word, means "cheerful".

To sum up, "glad" is a polysemous word with five senses and it has different functions in each sense. It is also a constituent of five compounds, in which "glad" cannot be literally interpreted and whose meanings cannot be deduced from their constituents. 'Glad' can only be literally interpreted in the archaic literary compound 'gladsome'.

## 2.4. "Merry"

### 2.4.1 Grammatical features and semantics of "Merry"

"Merry" also has the same syntactic functions as "cheerful". It is a one-morpheme adjective, which has two inflected word-forms: *merrier* (comparative) and *merriest* (superlative) and can form other words by means of derivation and compounding. Semantically, it is also a polysemous word with three senses. In the first sense "full of lively happiness, fun", used in literature, "merry" is near-synonymous with "cheerful" and "happy", for it describes the outward manifestations of enjoyment, especially in entertainment. It can be a pre-modifier of noun phrases, collocating with nouns denoting people and other nouns, e.g. "life" in "merry lives"; or associating with the communication of enjoyment - through the eyes, smile, speech, etc., e.g. "a merry smile", "merry eyes" or "a merry heart". It can also be a subject complement as in:

*We were very tired, we were very merry.*

"Merry" has another sense of "marked by or offering fun and enjoyment at parties or special occasions". Though "merry" in "Merry Christmas" conveys the idea of festivities, it is near-synonymous with "happy" since we can replace "happy" it for it, making a wish with similar meaning. "Merry" in this sense collocates with 'day', "time", "feast", etc.

However, "merry" is informally used to mean "rather drunk" as in:

*We got a bit merry at the party.*

### 2.4.2 Words and idioms formed with "Merry"

By means of derivation, "merry" has three derivatives: "merriness" (n), "merrily" (adv) and "merriment" (n). "Merriment" is a non-count noun, formally used to denote happy talk and laughter. By means of compounding, "merry" is a constituent of the compound noun "merry-go-around". It is also a polysemous word denoting either a revolving circular platform fitted with seats, often in the form of animals, ridden for amusement, or a piece of playground equipment consisting of a small circular platform that revolves when pushed or pedaled, or a busy social round, a whirl as in "a merry-go-round of parties".

"Merry" is also a constituent of the compound noun "merry-making", a literary uncountable noun meaning "fun and enjoyment, especially eating, drinking, dancing and games". This noun is formed from the semi-idiom "make merry", which means "to have fun, especially eating, drinking for enjoyment". "Merry-maker" is another noun formed from this idiom to denote people who make merry. Another idiom, of which "merry" is a component, is "the more the merrier". It is a literal idiom meaning "the more people joined in an activity, the more enjoyable it will be".

We have discussed the grammatical features and semantics of "merry" as well as words and idioms formed with "merry". "Merry" is a polysemous word with its derivatives, compounds and idioms of which it is a constituent. The important point to note is that it may have similar or different syntactic functions in its different senses. When denoting one of happy states, it can function as pre-modifier of noun phrases and complement without taking complementation.

## 2.5. "Pleased"

### 2.5.1. Grammatical features and semantics of "Pleased"

"Pleased", as an adjective having an identical form with, but different features from, the past participle of the verb "please", has the syntactic functions as head of an adjectival phrase and complement. Morphologically, it has two morphemes: the root *please* (v) and suffix *-ed*. It has no inflected forms for comparative and superlative. The noun derived from "pleased" is also the noun derived from "please" (v) - "pleasure" (n).

In terms of semantics, "pleased" is a very standard term, having two senses. In the first sense, it is descriptively synonymous with "happy" and "glad" in their first senses, denoting the feeling of pleasure or satisfaction about something good that has happened, but it is not as all-inclusive as "happy". "Pleased" is frequently used informally with this sense. It is similar to "glad", but different from "happy" in that it can be the head of adjectival phrases, functioning as subject complement taking complementation, and object complement without taking complementation, but it cannot be a pre-modifier of noun phrases in this sense.

The complementation types of "pleased" as a subject complement are prepositional phrases with "about" and "with"; *that* - clauses and *to*-infinitive post-modification as in:

*I am very pleased that you have decided to come.*

The second sense of "pleased" is "willing". "Pleased" in this sense is also a synonym of "happy" and "glad" with the same descriptive meaning and connotation. Like "happy" and "glad", "pleased" in this sense is formally used, playing the function of subject complement taking complementation of the type of *to*-infinitive post-modification only, as in:

*We will be pleased to offer any assistance you need.*

### 2.5.2. Idioms with "Pleased"

"Pleased" is a constituent of two idioms. "Pleased as Punch" is a culturally related idiom, meaning "very pleased". "Punch" is Judy's hook-nosed husband in the comic puppet show "Punch and Judy". He always seems to be pleased and excited, especially when doing something cruel to other characters. The other idiom "pleased with oneself", a literal idiom, means "(too) satisfied with what one has done". These two idioms can function as complement, but not as pre-modifier of a noun phrase.

### 2.5.3. Words formed from "Pleased"

We are to deal with such words related to "pleased" as "please" (v), "pleasing" (adj), "pleasant" (adj), and "pleasure" (n). As the root of "pleased", "please" (v), a one-morpheme word, has two senses. In the first sense of "make (somebody) happy, give pleasure or satisfaction (to)", it is both an intransitive verb and a mono-transitive one as in:

*The girl in the shop is always eager to please (everyone).*

"Please" (v) in the first sense, as a mono-transitive verb, has "gladden" and "delight"

as near-synonyms. To please someone supposes a definite effort being made to give pleasure. The second sense of "please" (v) is "want, like or choose" in which "please" as a mono-transitive verb is formally used in subordinate clauses, e.g. "whatever you please", etc.. "Please" in these two senses cannot be used in progressive forms.

"Please" (v) is a lexical constituent of three idioms. The idiom "If you please" is formally used to give force after requests, similar to the interjection "please". It also has an old-fashioned sense of "Can you believe this?" in which, the idiom is a pure one, as in:

*He's broken my bicycle, and now, if you please, he wants me to*

*Get it mended so that he can use it again.*

"Please oneself" is a literal idiom, meaning either "do whatever one likes without having to obey others" or as an informal imperative: "Do whatever you like, it doesn't matter to me". "Please God" is a pure idiom used formally in its sense of "I hope; may God let it happen; may God grant something".

Apart from "pleased" (adj), the root "please" has another derivative as adjective: "pleasing" with the identical form of present participle. Unlike "pleased" (adj), "pleasing" (adj) has a derived adverb "pleasingly". "Pleasing" (adj) is formally used in the sense of "likable, giving pleasure or enjoyment", in which "pleasing" is a pre-modifier of a noun phrase as in "a pleasing young man", "pleasing dreams" and "pleasing eye or face"; or a complement taking the complementation type of prepositional phrases with "to" as in:

*The results were pleasing to both of us.*

The adjective "pleasant" is also related to "please" (v) in terms of form. It, however, has such derivatives by means of derivation as:

"pleasantness" (n) "pleasantly" (adv), "unpleasant" (adj), "unpleasantness" (n) and "unpleasantly" (adv). "Pleasant" is a polysemous word with three senses. The first sense is "giving one a feeling of enjoyment or happiness, enjoyable". It collocates with "meal", "evening", "view", "walk", "atmosphere", "smell", "surprise", etc.. In the second sense of "likable, friendly", "pleasant" occurs with "woman", "girl", "smile", "voice", "manner", etc.. Apart from the function of pre-modifier of noun phrases, it can be a complement with or without taking the complementation type of prepositional phrases with "to" as in:

*Please make an effort to be pleasant to your brother.*

"Pleasant" means "fine, fair and comfortable" when it is used to describe the weather. "Unpleasant" (adj) is the antonym of "pleasant" in all senses.

The noun derived from "please" (v), also from "pleased" (adj), is "pleasure". The first sense of "pleasure" found a lot in the study is "the positive state or feeling of happiness or satisfaction resulting from an experience that one enjoys". In this sense, it is a non-count noun and it can be used in prepositional phrases accompanied by "with" and "of" as in:

*He listened with pleasure to the beautiful music.*

"Pleasure" is also a non-count noun in its second sense "doing things for fun rather than for work". In this sense, it has a restricted collocation "pleasure cruise" and it can be used in prepositional phrases with "for" as in:

*He has gone to Paris for pleasure.*

"Pleasure" is also a non-count noun denoting desire or wish. In this case, it can also be formally or politely used in prepositional phrases with "at" as in:

*You are free to come at your pleasure (i.e. "as you wish").*

"Pleasure" as a count noun denotes a thing that causes happiness, enjoyment or satisfaction.

There are five idioms of which "pleasure" (n) is a lexical component. "Take pleasure in" is formally used in its sense of "enjoy; get enjoyment or satisfaction from". It is used for the enjoyment gained by doing something which gives the doer unfair power to others. "Pleasure" here can collocate with "no", "little", "great", etc... "Have the pleasure of" is used to make polite requests, invitations as in:

*May I have the pleasure of the next dance?*

"With pleasure", meaning "willingly; of course" is formally used to reply requests or invitation. Two other idioms: "my pleasure" and "it is a pleasure" is formally used to reply to expressions of thanks with the same descriptive meaning as "you are welcome", "not at all" or "it's no trouble".

"Pleasure" is also a verb by means of zero derivation applied to "pleasure" (n). "Pleasure" (v), though rarely used, can be mono-transitive in its sense of "give pleasure or enjoyment to" as in:

*Our host pleased us with his company, and intransitive in its two other senses "take pleasure" and "go in search of pleasure or enjoyment" as in:*

*The hiker paused, pleasuring in the sounds of the forest.*

"Pleasure" (n) has two derivatives "pleasurable" (adj) and "pleasurably" (adv) by virtue of derivation. "Pleasurable" (adj) is a formal word with the sense of "giving enjoyment; enjoyable", collocating with typical such words as "sensation" as in "a pleasurable sensation" or "companionship" as in "pleasurable companionship".

By means of compounding, "pleasure" (n) is a constituent of six compounds. "Pleasure beach" (n) is used in British English to denote places of outdoor

entertainment at the seaside, with large machines to ride on and other amusements. "Pleasure seeker" (n) denotes people who do something for pleasure without considering other people. "Pleasure-seeking" (adj) has the sense of "devoted to a wish or desire". "Pleasure boat" (n), though dated, denotes boats used for short tourist trips. "Pleasure craft" (n), with the same form for both singular and plural, is a descriptive synonym of "pleasure boat" (n). Finally, "pleasure-ground" (n) denotes areas used for public entertainment or recreation.

In this section, not only has "pleased" been discussed, but other words and idioms related to "pleased", especially "pleasure" as a noun denoting happy states have been dealt with as well. It follows that "pleased" is a polysemous word; words related to "pleased" in terms of form, however, may or may not be polysemous and related to "pleased" in terms of meaning.

### 3. Conclusion

We have conducted the investigation into the grammatical features and semantic structures of the five English adjectives denoting pleasure: "cheerful", "gay", "glad", "merry" and "pleased". These adjectives, though sharing some syntactic functions, have their own syntactic and morphological features. In respect of semantics, "glad" and "pleased" have one of their senses of denoting the feeling of pleasure when something good has happened. "Cheerful" has one of three senses suggesting one of the happy states - the good characteristic of somebody, not just the happy feeling when something good happens. "Gay" has one sense describing one of the happy states - the light-hearted spontaneity, but is dated today.



One sense of "merry" describes the outward manifestations of enjoyment, especially in entertainment.

On teaching and learning these five words, like teaching the word "happy", although the introduction of their grammatical features may be simpler than that of their semantic structures, they must not be separated from each other. Different techniques of presenting their meaning (as in Ur [9] ) should be applied. The study has proved that there are no absolute, but descriptive, synonyms; thus, the teaching of these words by means of synonyms cannot be conducted alone. By means of the context, both their descriptive meaning and connotation can be conveyed. With regard to the polysemous words, other meanings should be introduced to the English learners after they have mastered the central meaning of denoting happy states. The compounds and idioms of which the words are a constituent should be provided then; for, in each compound or idiom, the words may not carry their literal meaning.

With regard to translating an English discourse, which contains these five words, into another language or vice versa, the translators should carefully analyze the context of the discourse and the linguistic features of the discourse with a view to understanding clearly the message communicated. When dealing with these English words, the translators should base on the context, whether informal or formal or literary, to make a happy choice of the words. The happy choice and the correct use of the words by the translators, as a matter of fact, are subject to the mastering of the

grammatical features and semantic structures of the words. These English words, apart from their description of happiness, have their connotations. They also have their broad collocational ranges or restricted collocations. If the translators have a comprehensive and systematic knowledge of these English words, they will certainly have no difficulty in translating them. Hopefully, the study of the five English words can help the teachers, learners and translators of English with more or less knowledge about these words.

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## Đặc điểm ngữ pháp và ngữ nghĩa của các tính từ chỉ hạnh phúc

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Đề tài hạnh phúc luôn thu hút sự chú ý của mọi người. Thực tế có rất nhiều cách để diễn tả cảm giác hạnh phúc, một trong những cách đó là sử dụng từ và thành ngữ chỉ sự hạnh phúc. Trong bài báo này, 5 tính từ chỉ hạnh phúc: “cheerful”, “gay”, “glad”, “merry” và “pleased” được phân tích về mặt ngữ pháp và ngữ nghĩa. Về ngữ pháp, chúng tôi đề cập đến các chức năng cú pháp của nó trong câu và các đặc điểm về hình thái. Về ngữ nghĩa, chúng tôi bàn đến cấu trúc ngữ nghĩa của từ, từ đồng nghĩa, trái nghĩa, kết hợp từ và các thành ngữ chứa các từ này. Qua đây, chúng tôi đưa ra một số gợi ý trong việc dạy từ chỉ hạnh phúc.