

Gigil

There are many special emotion words in Tagalog that don't have an exact English translation. For example, *sayang*, which is to waste a chance or waste food, and *pag-ibig*, a stronger form of love that can only be said at certain times to lovers. One word that doesn't translate well and will be explained is *gigil*. One can feel *gigil* when they are either happy or angry, but not with sadness. An online Tagalog dictionary defines it as, "trembling or gritting of the teeth in response to a situation that overwhelms your self-control (tagaloglang.com)." But it is not exactly the gritting of the teeth or the act of trembling. The closest description in English I found is, "an extreme urge to squeeze someone or something, usually brought about by a cute or irritating object (Ong, "8 Filipino Words That Don't Translate to English")."

Seeing something extremely cute can bring the feeling of *gigil* to a person, such as seeing a cute baby and having the urge to pinch their cheeks. *Gigil* can be felt towards not only humans but also animals and plants, like flowers. An example in Tagalog is, "Nakakagigil naman ang baby mo, ang taba taba ng pisng." This translates to "I have the urge to squeeze your baby's chubby cheeks." The urge to squeeze the baby's cheek is *gigil*. Another example is one my mom always uses. When she sees a lot of cherry blossoms she will exclaim, "Nakakagigil ang mga cherry blossoms na ito, ang dami dami at ang ganda ganda." She means that the cherry blossoms are so beautiful and she wants to squeeze them all. The feeling of wanting to squeeze the cherry blossoms is *gigil*. People don't always act upon their urge to squeeze, but it expresses their great appreciation towards the beauty of the flowers and the cuteness of the baby.

There is also a song that expresses great appreciation towards someone's beauty. The lyrics go, "Nanggigil ako sa iyong kagandahan." The lyrics are difficult to translate into English.

The lyrics only express appreciation towards appearance, no squeezing involved. It simply means, "You're so beautiful that I feel something because of your beauty." This shows that gigil isn't the act of squeezing or the urge to squeeze but can be the expression of utter appreciation towards something.

On the other hand, people will use gigil when feeling extreme anger or frustration. For example, "Nanggigil ako sa galit sa boss ko." This could translate into "I'm so angry at my boss, I want to strangle him." In this case, gigil would be the urge to strangle the boss in order to release the anger. Then another use would be during the time of complete frustration. Imagine a pile of never ending paper work. Halfway through the day, the pile is still a lot; you feel so overwhelmed and just want to give up. Your fists start to clench and tremble and you release an "UGHH" sound. The feeling of being overwhelmed and the trembling and clenching of the fist are gigil. Therefore, when using gigil for anger, it can be defined as the trembling and feeling of being overwhelmed or the urge to strangle someone or something that you are angry at.

As mentioned in the beginning, gigil cannot be used when expressing sadness. For instance, one could say, "*Nanggigil ako sa lungkot," which translates to "I'm so sad, I want to squeeze the thing that I'm sad at." It translates fine into English, however, in Tagalog it sounds strange because there isn't anything someone can squeeze out of sadness. One could say, "Nanggigil ako sa kanya dahil iniwan niya ako, na nalulungkot mag isa," which translates to "He left me to be sad alone, therefore I want to squeeze him." However, this is more of an expression of anger towards the person that left than an expression of sadness of being left alone. So, it is not possible to use gigil with sadness.

Looking at the examples of gigil, it seems gigil can be defined as the urge to squeeze or strangle something that's very cute or very irritating. However, it is also used when expressing

extreme appreciation or frustration without the squeezing or strangling. This proves that there is no exact English translation for gigil. There isn't even a direct definition in English or Tagalog. Filipinos can only explain the feeling through describing their own personal experiences. It is a feeling that Filipinos believe everyone on Earth experiences. If someone doesn't feel gigil, then they're not human or numb to emotions.

References:

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