

《英语中最烦人词汇“huh”通行全球》

It is one of the most irritating words in the English language and it seems there is no escaping it. The word ‘huh’ is in worldwide use, a study found.

Researchers discovered that languages spoken in countries from Ghana and Laos to Iceland and Italy all include ‘huh’, or something that sounds very like it.

They said that while the project may sound frivolous, the word is an ‘indispensable’ part of speech.

Without it and similar words, it would be impossible to show that we haven’t heard or understood what had been said and this would lead to constant misunderstandings.

But while other words used in the same context, such as ‘sorry’ or ‘what’, vary widely across languages, ‘huh?’ remains unchanged.

The Dutch researchers recorded around 20 informal conversations in each of ten languages from around the world.

These included Siwu, which is spoken in Ghana, Cha’palaa from Ecuador, and Murriny Patha - an Australian Aboriginal language, as well as Italian, Spanish, Dutch and Mandarin Chinese.

The tapes were analysed for words that sounded like ‘huh?’ and were used to request that whatever had just been said was repeated.

All contained a version of ‘huh’. The word was also found in another 21 languages from around the globe that were studied in less detail.

While there were subtle differences in each country, all had a near-identical sound.

This is surprising because normally unrelated languages will use very different words to describe the same thing.

For instance, the Japanese for ‘dog’ is ‘inu’, while the French is ‘chien’.

It is thought that languages around the world have developed their own version of ‘huh?’ because the sound is quick and simple to form, as well as being easily understood.

Or, in words of the EU-funded researchers, it is a ‘simple, minimal, quick-to-produce questioning syllable’.

