

Questionable studies, spending raise my eyebrows

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We often hear about a "new study" that reveals some weird fact about our current lifestyle. They make the headlines and are repeated on the radio.

Some have made me smile and laugh, while others left me with a look of consternation.

The latest left me shaking my head.

Apparently, a new study revealed that moderate alcohol consumption helps you to learn a new language.

British and Dutch researchers conducted an experiment, published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*. They found people in the study really did speak more fluently after a low dose of alcohol – even when they didn't think so themselves.

The study included 50 native German speakers who were studying at Maastricht University, located in the Netherlands near the border with Germany. Each person was asked to have a casual, two-minute conversation with an interviewer in Dutch. Before that chat, half were given water to drink, while the other half were given an alcoholic beverage. The amount of booze varied based on the person's weight, but for a 150-pound man, it was equivalent to just under a pint of beer.

The authors say it's possible that a low-to-moderate dose of alcohol "reduces language anxiety" and therefore increases proficiency. "This might enable foreign language speakers to speak more fluently in the foreign language after drinking a small amount of alcohol," they conclude.

This is not new. A study conducted in the 1970s saw English-speaking college students complete a pronunciation proficiency test in Thai after a few snorts. Results showed "those who drank 1.5 ounces of alcohol performed better on the pronunciation test than those who had drunk an alcohol-free placebo."

Add this to the study results. In my expert opinion, using first-hand data that I collected over the past three decades, alcohol does expand one's vocabulary of other languages. The top languages spoken after a few drinks include Gibberish, Balderdash, Gobbledygook and Babble. There are likely others.

I hope that no taxpayers' money was used to fund this study.

Further, relying on common vernacular from the early 1700s, slurred-speech language skills can be attributed to a person being "stewed, corned, salted or pickled." Further, data from England in 1812 indicated that those speaking in foreign tongues were actually "pissed as a newt."

All kidding aside, there are countless examples of some really weird studies, many of which waste taxpayers' money. And this is really sad, if not downright sick.

Unfortunately, we have some shining examples of government waste on our doorstep.

The federal government spent at least \$4.5 million on ads that ran during the two weeks of the London Olympics. They gave out only \$214,000 to Canadian athletes who won medals during the Games.

If it quacks like a duck. The province dished out \$121,000 for the rental of a 19-metre-tall rubber duck, seen floating in Toronto harbour this summer.

The Toronto District School Board came under fire a couple of years ago for some questionable spending on maintenance work. My favourite was a bill for \$143 to install four screws to secure a \$17 pencil sharpener. They paid \$266 to hang three pictures on a wall, and then \$857 more a week later to hang them again.

How many school board officials does it take to change a light bulb? None; they paid someone \$2,670 to replace bulbs in a school lunch room.

Justin Trudeau's government spent more than \$416,000 to renovate a two-year-old office building in Ottawa, including paying more than \$5,000 for 56 coat hooks. Of that, \$3,426 was to 'modify the lighting to an existing quiet room' by installing a window film and a dimmer switch.

Of course, our spending pales in comparison to our counterparts around the world.

Professors at the Newcastle University in the UK visited dairy farms over 10 months, discovering that cows give more milk if you call them by name.

In the 2015, the U.S. Department of Defense spent \$2 million on a robot, not as a fighting machine, but one that plays a trumpet.

Two grad students at the University of Washington received a government grant for \$1.3 million to study how foam beer can holders keep beer cold.

Hey, will anyone fund my study on the impacts of tequila over the span of 4-6 hours on the ability of left-handed males over 50 to recite Shakespeare while balancing a ball on their nose? That's a trick question. I have already personally amassed plenty of data on this subject.

While tongue in cheek, such ridiculous examples of waste abound. It's sad, really, given the really important stuff that needs to be addressed in our society. The reality is within some government bureaucracies if they hope to receive funding every year, they must spend every penny of their budget, literally by throwing it out the window!

If we took all of the money directed towards inane studies and over-blown contracts, and spent it on health care, homelessness or world peace, we'd actually make a difference.