

**St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK**  
**English for Life in the UK**  
**Season 3 Episode 4 - Owning and Managing a Family Bakery in the UK**

Mark Hello and welcome to the podcast: ***English for Life in the UK***. This Podcast is for those people who want to improve their English and, at the same time, learn more about life in this country.

The idea behind this podcast is that you will get lots of practice at listening to native English speakers talking about a range of different subjects. We believe that if you listen to native English speakers talking in a natural way, this will help both your understanding of English and your ability to speak it. Because these are real conversations, you will find that there are unfinished sentences, "filler"<sup>1</sup> words, and people who change what they're saying, part-way through. This is how language - all languages - work.

We also produce a transcript of each of our episodes. This is usually available a few days after the episode is published. We recommend that you listen to the podcast first of all, without the transcript, and then listen again, following the transcript as you do so. The transcript also includes footnotes - that is, a little note to explain some of the more difficult vocabulary and phrases.

To find out about how to get the transcript of this and all other episodes, and to find out more about the work of our charity - the St Augustine's Centre - stay listening to the end of this episode, where we will give you the address.

Today's episode is introduced by Elsa - one of the new members of our team. For those of you who listened to our "Preview" episode, you will know that Elsa has spent most of her career working in the food industry, both in the UK and internationally. So we are doing a number of episodes related to food and in the first of these "food episodes", Elsa interviews the owner of a family-owned bakery called "Lottie Shaw's" which is based in Brighouse, in Calderdale, Yorkshire.

***(Music) (2 minutes : 46 seconds)***

Elsa Hello - my name is Elsa and today I'm delighted to be in the bakery of a company called "Lottie Shaw's" - talking to the owner of the business - Charlotte Shaw.  
Hello, Charlotte.

Charlotte Hi, Elsa - hi.

Elsa So - what sort of day have you had, so far?

Charlotte Good - a varied day, today, but very good. Everyday is varied here - so, yes.  
Good day.

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<sup>1</sup> "filler" words - words that don't add to the sense of what is being said - when people hesitate, they may say: ...so, ....well, .....erm, ...you know, whilst they are thinking about how to say the next phrase or sentence.

- Elsa I can imagine. I can smell some wonderful smells - it's always a delight when you're in a bakery. What have you been making today?
- Charlotte So today we've been baking our Yorkshire parkin cake. It's a regional cake made to our 100-year-old family recipe that dates back over 100 years. So today, we've been baking that and then that'll get wrapped on Monday. We leave it to settle over the weekend, 'cos [*because*] the sugars caramelize, and then they soften, and then, we wrap it on Monday, ready to go out next week, to our customers.
- Elsa So tell me about your family.
- Charlotte So - I have my husband, Ian, who is in the business with myself - so Ian and myself own the Bakery - and then, we have two children, Tom and Evie, who are now teenagers. My father - he's a "master baker"<sup>2</sup> of over 60 years - and he is still very much involved in the business, as is my mother, who used to run the retail-side of their business, many years ago.
- Elsa So - does that mean "shops": when you say, "the retail side"?
- Charlotte Yes - the shop-side of it. Lots of people don't know this, but my mum: she trained as a cake decorator and that's how she met my father, years and years ago. My grandfather: he's a "master baker" and then - prior to that - my great aunt founded the business, back in 1912.
- Elsa I read about your great aunt on the ... on your website, and was fascinated by the original recipes - so which particularly of your products - of which I often buy, and enjoy eating - which are your actual aunt's recipes?
- Charlotte So, the Yorkshire parkin cake - which is a regional speciality.
- Elsa Can you explain what parkin is, and where the name comes from?
- Charlotte Yes - so, Yorkshire parkin is a ginger cake, traditionally eaten on Bonfire Night<sup>3</sup>, because the ginger was thought to warm the blood. But the characteristic of the Yorkshire parkin cake is the oatmeal, which has a gritty texture, in the cake - it is a very coarse texture. And the oatmeal is very, very filling, a very hearty food. So, lots of the farmers' wives and things used to bake trays, big trays of parkin, to fill up the workers, as did lots of people working in the mills, as well. They used to have Yorkshire parkin as a staple<sup>4</sup> in their packed lunch boxes<sup>5</sup>, often. And so, it's a really good, staple cake that could be ... that was baked and lots of different families have their little **tweaks** on that recipe.
- (6:01)
- Elsa When you said "**tweak**" - you mean, they may put ... add different ingredients?
- Charlotte Well, interestingly, we use a medium-coarse oatmeal which we always have - there are different types of oatmeal: there's the pin-head oatmeal, some peoples'

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<sup>2</sup> Master Baker - used to denote a skilled craftsperson; the term "master" can be used for different crafts - a term to show a certain standing or status, in a particular craft or skill.

<sup>3</sup> Bonfire Night - 5 November every year, marking an historical event from the 17th century.

<sup>4</sup> staple - main constituent, of importance and regularly used

<sup>5</sup> packed lunch boxes - workers and school children may take food from home to eat in the middle of the day for convenience or cheapness

recipe perhaps didn't have oatmeal - they may have used the flour more and not use the oatmeal - that was often called a "moggy cake" .

Elsa I've never heard of that before!

Charlotte And then if you move to different regions, such as Lancashire, away from ... across the border, from Yorkshire - then again, they perhaps have different variations of Yorkshire ... of the parkin cake, sorry - as you've got Lancashire Parkin, Yorkshire Parkin. And they can also vary the quantities on the ginger - the amount of ginger, in the cake, and the different quantities of black treacle and syrup which are also characteristics in the cake.

Elsa Oh, that's wonderful .. Well, I know it's wonderful, but it's lovely to hear it described by someone who makes it so well. So - who are your customers today?

Charlotte So, today - we supply across the UK - we also have some customers abroad, but mainly across the UK, and we supply independent retailers, mainly, ...

Elsa So by "independent" you mean not a supermarket chain?

Charlotte Yes - so like farm shops, garden centres, delicatessens<sup>6</sup>, leisure attractions, we supply - but then we do supply like **the Co-op**, regionally and we supply Marks and Spencer's, regionally, as well.

Elsa I see them in my local Co-op, which is where I do most of my shopping. So it's always nice that I can pick up some parkin or some of your biscuits, as well. It's your ginger biscuits that I'm particularly fond of.

Charlotte So, interesting - with the ginger biscuits we took the Yorkshire parkin cake and we took the characteristics: the black treacle and the ginger and the syrup, and we created the biscuits. And they're a great biscuit and they have the oatmeal in, a lovely dunking biscuit. Which, again regionally, maybe across the north, maybe across the UK, lots of people like to dunk the biscuit.

Elsa I think you, perhaps, have to explain to our audience what dunking is, so they can indulge in the pleasure, too.

Charlotte OK well - dunking a biscuit is fabulous and what you do, you get your biscuit and you basically make a fabulous pot of tea or coffee - and then you basically, dip your biscuit into the drink, before you eat it. And the good way to tell a good dunking biscuit is, it really holds together and doesn't fall into crumbs when you put it in the mug. So yeah, very ... - you're either a dunker or not a dunker - I don't know about you - are you a dunker, Elsa?

Elsa Sometimes.

**(9:02)**

Charlotte Yes - me too.

Elsa I must admit - I like my biscuits crunchy if I'm being honest - that's my style, but everybody has their own.

So - you've got biscuits, you've got cakes - when I came in to see you, just now, I saw some beautiful shapes, that you were experimenting with, for new products.

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<sup>6</sup> delicatessens - small specialist food shops

- Charlotte Yes. So we do novelty gingerbread - so we do lots of different shapes of gingerbreads. The gingerbread-man shape is our most popular - that's traditional - the gingerbread man has been around for many, many years - and then we do different shapes for different customers. So we have gingerbread bunnies, we have gingerbread pigs which the farms like, and we have just been working on a gingerbread crown, for the Jubilee<sup>7</sup>.
- Elsa Oh - right - you'll be busy in June, with that.
- Charlotte Yes - that should be a good one. And we just look at the different occasions and just look at which gingerbread is suitable. Interestingly, in Eastern Europe, the gingerbread tends to have lots of cinnamon in - our recipe is a more traditional recipe, to our region - and so we just use the ginger, we don't add cinnamon into our gingerbread.
- Elsa Oh - it's really interesting to hear this from somebody who knows all these things so well - to be with an expert. You run a business and, I can see, in a very impressive bakery, but there must be challenges running a business, today?
- Charlotte Erm ... lots of challenges around running businesses. We're very fortunate that, during the pandemic, we were able to keep working and keep baking, so that was lucky. But there has been many challenges around that, as well - so, I think particularly, at the minute - things like energy costs rising. There's challenges around our different customers, who are recovering from the pandemic and just trying to work with them, like the airlines: we were supplying some airlines - and some train companies, as well. They've really been feeling, you know, how difficult, it's been.
- Elsa It's been really difficult, hasn't it? Our life's changed, so much.
- Charlotte Yes ... and one thing we did - we were sending out our products directly to customers, much more.
- Elsa You mean "mail order<sup>8</sup>" ?
- Charlotte Yes - mail order was really big for us. Throughout covid, we had to really adapt our business and change it so we basically changed it to move, so we could keep it going and keep working through the pandemic, so yes - it has been challenging but we have been quite fortunate, you know - we have come out the other side. So we've been lucky from that.
- We also do quite a bit of community work, as well so ...erm, we donate **to food banks** - you know - we do help that when we can. We don't have any food waste so we bake to order and then, anything that there was surplus, then tends to go to food banks. We work with the Yorkshire Air Ambulance<sup>9</sup> as well, and so we give a donation of some biscuits to sell and with other charities. That works well. So, yes, we try and do our bit [*to help others*].

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<sup>7</sup> Jubilee - a celebration of the Queen's reign of 70 years

<sup>8</sup> mail order - ordering by letter or post - would also now include "on-line" orders

<sup>9</sup> helicopters that are equipped as ambulances to use in emergencies - they can get to places that can't be reached by road and are often faster.

**(12:23)**

Elsa Given the importance of the environment and the waste of packaging - has that been something that you found easy to adapt to or do you find there's still a lot of work that needs to be done, across the industry - the food packaging industry, for example?

Charlotte Erm ... very interestingly, when the family started baking all those years ago - their packaging was just not a requirement, like it is now - you know - the products would get baked daily and then sold in the shop.  
I know my aunt had an outside catering business and they would supply catering and they would put food into the barracks<sup>10</sup> and things, and they would just take them loose and then sell them, or they might have the brown paper bags at the time, that, you know, customers would come and buy daily, so they hadn't got the packaging that they've got, in this day and age.

Since we .... when we created the brand "Lottie Shaws", the packaging was really key, to keep it sustainable - so we've always tried to use sustainable packaging which we have. An example of that is, when we box our biscuits, we've never used like the plastic trays, because we've never needed them, because the way we designed the boxes, we've never needed them. So we have the cardboard that can be recycled and we've used the sugar to preserve the product, so we're not using artificial products to enhance the life [of the product]. We're using the sugars to do that, to keep it quite a natural product - but then to do that, and keep it fresh, so to speak, then we need to make it .... heat-seal the product ...so we put it into the film<sup>11</sup>, that heat- seals it. That film, then, needs to .. we need to find a way to recycle that, going forward, and that's what the challenge is right now: we need to find a film that can be re-used and recycled. - erm - Interestingly, in terms of thinking about the packaging and recycling .... we've just, in our gifting range, introduced like, a wash-bag, which is sourced in the UK.

Elsa So, by "a wash-bag" what do you mean?

Charlotte So, if you can imagine a wash-bag - it's like, you put your toothbrush and your toothpaste in it, normally, or your makeup or something, in the bag - but we've taken this bag, had it made in the UK with our design on, and then we put our treats in and then the customer - after they've eaten the treats - can then re-use the bag, so they're not having to discard that packaging - there's another purpose, for the packaging, to make it ... you know, there's not ... make it a lovely gift, that can be used.

Elsa It is really good to hear just how much thought and care, you are putting into this, because I think all consumers, everybody around the world, is worried about the environment and concerned that we all do the right thing - so great, to see this is really happening, here at Lottie Shaw's, in Brighouse.

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<sup>10</sup> barracks - housing for military personnel

<sup>11</sup> film - here, means a thin, transparent plastic wrapping

- Charlotte Exactly.
- Elsa So we're coming to the end of our conversation. How do you see the future for Lottie Shaw's?
- Charlotte Well, the future's bright - I think we bake premium products, using premium ingredients, so we try and source the best products locally, that we can for our recipes - and I think, whilst we do that, then I think that there'll be great ... you know, that people will keep hopefully buying and enjoying the products. There's more emphasis on portion sizes, reducing.
- Elsa Explain "portion sizes"?
- Charlotte So portion size is the size of the products - the recommended daily intake of calories and things that the government recommends and, as responsible bakers and food producers, then we are always looking at how we can look at the portion size and make sure we fit in with the guidelines, and look at the products that we can develop that perhaps do have less sugar, for some customers.
- (16:30).
- We also have other requirements - like, we have naturally vegan products now, so we are appealing to lots of different people and I think as long as we can adapt our business and our recipes to meet the needs of today and today's consumer, then I would like to think that actually, hopefully, we've got a positive and bright future.
- Elsa Do you think your family will want to continue in the business?
- Charlotte Perhaps. I always think it's important they move ,...you don't come straight into the business. For me - when I ... I think it's important to maybe go away, get some education, get some experience and find out what's out there, and then maybe come back to the business later in life, with new ideas. Rather than just coming straight into the business, I think it will benefit them too, possibly they may come into the business eventually. It's very hard work - very hard work.
- Elsa That's right! I can imagine it is! Well, Charlotte - I can only say thank you for such an interesting conversation - I've learnt a great deal and hopefully our listeners will enjoy hearing about Lottie Shaw's parkin and ginger biscuits.
- Charlotte Well - lovely. Thank you for coming to see us. It's been a pleasure to have you here. And - I'll make sure you have some treats on the way out.
- Elsa *(Laughing)* Thank you.

***(Music) (17:57)***

- Mark **Language Support**
- This is the part of the podcast where I choose some words and phrases from the episode and explain their use.
- I'm going to start with the word "**tweak**". In this episode we talked about "**tweaking a recipe**" - to tweak is to make a small change to something, so there was a recipe for this particular product - a traditional recipe - and, in this case, they made some small changes to that traditional recipe - they have **tweaked it**. You can talk about tweaking a document - where you make a few changes to

some of the words or the sentences in that document - you could say: "I have tweaked the document". So "**to tweak**" is to make small changes to something.

Then, I'm going to talk about two phrases that relate to the topic of food.

First of all, Elsa referred to shopping at "**the Co-op**". Now, the Co-op is short for the Co-operative. A *co-operative* is a business or association where people have come together to jointly own and run that enterprise, with a common purpose and shared benefits. Now **The Co-op** refers specifically to "*The Co-operative Group*" which is a UK-based enterprise and provides a range of food, pharmacy, financial and legal services, on a co-operative basis, and the users of those services are also the members of that co-operative association. Most towns in Britain have a Co-op shop - so it is usually a small supermarket selling quite a wide range of products and certainly, when Elsa was referring to "the Co-op", she meant the shop in her town where she is able to buy a range of things, including some of the items from Lottie Shaw's.

The Cooperative movement began its life in the north of England and we will do a future episode about this.

The other food-related phrase was a reference to **food banks**. Food banks are where people have organised to collect donated food - food given free, by other people, that can then be distributed to those people who are desperately in need of food and cannot afford to buy all the food that they need. Sadly, in the UK - particularly, in the last few years - there has been an enormous growth in the number of food banks, partly as a result of the pandemic - the virus - but also as a result of a growing poverty and a gap between the rich and the poor, in the UK. So food banks are quite common in the UK, now. Again - we will make reference to these in future episodes.

That's it for this week - I hope you've found this a useful episode. There will be other ones related to the topic of food in the future. If you want to get the transcript for this episode and to listen and read the transcript at the same time - which we do recommend to help with improving your English - you can find this on our website. This is also where you can find out more about the work of our charity and if you are in a position to do so, to donate to help us to keep this work going.

So the website is: [www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk](http://www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk)

I'll spell that out:

s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org (o-r-g) .uk

That's it, for this week - thank you very much for listening - keep up your English practice and we'll be back with another episode very soon. Goodbye for now.

**(Music) (23:57)**

