

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK
English for Life in the UK

Season 2 - Episode 19 The Census in the UK
March 2021

Mark Hello and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This podcast is for people who want to improve their English by listening to native speakers talking about different subjects and at the same time learn about life in this country. I'm joined today by John and Sheena. Hi, John - how are you?

John I'm not bad, Mark - yeah - good.

Mark That's great. Sheena?

Sheena Yeah, fine, thank you, Nice to see you both.

Mark That's great. We should explain to people that we're doing all this online¹, these days. When we first started the podcast we used to record it together, in a room. But, of course, as with so many things these days, we're doing it 'virtually'², and so the quality of the sound is not always quite as good as we'd like it to be, but it seems to ... people seem to manage.

So - today, we're going to talk about something called **the Census**, and we're doing this because, last Sunday, 21 March³- so we're recording this the Friday after that - but last Sunday, 21 March was "Census Day" in England and Wales. And so the Census is something that happens every 10 years and it's to collect information about the people who are in England and Wales, on that day. And it is **actually compulsory to complete this**, so if you are in England and Wales - or if you were in England and Wales on 21 March - then by law, **you must complete** the census, and you can be fined,⁴ if you don't.

And we'll give you some information at the end, in terms of, if you haven't done your census and you are in England or Wales, at the moment, about how you can get help with that - so don't worry too much about that. It is important: you do **have to complete**

¹ Online means using a computer on the internet

² In general use, the word virtually means almost or nearly. However it is now widely used to mean events or meetings that take place online via the internet

³ The date in writing is slightly shortened as shown here; you will hear Mark is saying "the twenty-first of March"; it may also be written as "21st March" but "the" and "of" is not usually written down.

⁴ fined = be required to pay money as a legal punishment

it. We're going to start with a bit of history about the census and then we'll talk a little bit more about the one that's taking place at the moment.

So John, you're going to take us right back, I think.

John Yeah - maybe the most famous census that people will have heard of, was the one that took place 2000 years ago, which features in the Nativity story⁵. So if you remember, Joseph and Mary were going from Nazareth to Bethlehem, before Jesus was born, and the reason that they were making this journey - the Gospel of Luke⁶ tells us this - a decree went out⁷, from Emperor Augustus - the Roman Emperor - that all the world [population] should be registered, so Joseph were [was] going back to the place of his birth or where his family were [was] from, Bethlehem, to register for the Roman authorities, with his family. And the Romans did this right across the huge expanse of their empire, so that they knew exactly who they were governing, how many people in each province, and probably, most importantly, how much tax they were all going to pay to the Roman Emperor.

So that's a theme we've seen through many other censuses, coming forward through history.

In terms of UK history, arguably the most famous census would be contained in what became known as the Domesday Book. Now some of our listeners might remember, when we talked a few podcasts ago, about the Norman Conquest. So, when William the Conqueror came from Normandy with his armies and invaded England, famously in 1066, well, 20 years later, William was establishing his rule and William - similarly to the Roman Emperor - sent his men all over England, into every shire⁸, to find out how much land there was, how much [many] cattle and sheep and animals were living on the land, how much tax was due from each person living on that land.

(4 minutes:14 seconds)

Moving forwards, the first modern census took place in 1801 so, as Mark pointed out, the census takes place every 10 years, so we're now in 2021, so the census always has a "one" on the end of the year. So this census took place in 1801, in the middle of what we refer to as the Napoleonic wars. This was the war that the UK were [was] fighting against France, after the French Revolution. It puts, at that time, interestingly, the population of England and Wales, at 8.9 million, Scotland at 1.6 million. Ireland wasn't included until 1821. So, you can see there, the huge population growth that we're going to see, through the Industrial Revolution.

⁵ the nativity is the story in the bible about the birth of Jesus

⁶ the Gospel of Luke = a section in the Bible

⁷ decree went out = law was issued

⁸ shire - district, appears as a suffix (ending) on county names, frequently: as in *West Yorkshire*,

This census, as with all censuses, looked at the numbers of people, numbers of families, numbers of houses, very, very importantly: a key point was your occupation. So the government wanted to know if you were a sailor, if you were a soldier, a shipbuilder, carpenter, so that they could utilise these people to fight the war against France.

The other, very important thing about this census were [was] - at this time - a lot of people were following the ideas of a man called Thomas Malthus. Thomas Malthus was very worried about the rapidly expanding population and he thought that this was going to outstrip the amount of food we had in England and that people were going to starve. So it was very important in monitoring population growth, in relation to agriculture, and how we were going to feed all these new people that were coming along.

And as you say, it's taken place, every ten years since, with the exception of 1921, in Ireland, due to the Irish war, and 1941, during World War Two, there wasn't a census. But going forward, every 10 years into the twentieth century, it is hugely important in policy around health and housing. But there's been still some controversies - moving forward in the twentieth century - Sheena, I think are you going to tell us a little bit about the census of 1911, I think?

Sheena It's to do with women and the census. So - the Women's Freedom League launched a campaign to boycott the census, because they ... women had no right to vote at that time. Their slogan⁹ was "No Vote, No Census", so they encouraged women to either not be at home on the night of the census, by moving around or by hiding somewhere, outside the household. Many women actually ruined their census paper as well by writing that slogan "No Vote, No Census". I know for a fact that some women in Halifax also used the census form as a form of protest and they wrote down under "occupation": "Slave", because they wanted to make a point about the status of women in society. And, maybe ... one very famous suffragette, called Emily Wilding Davison, whom we know because she was actually killed at the Races¹⁰, when she threw herself under the King's horse. She, on the day of the census, hid in a cupboard in Parliament, so that, on her census paper, she could write down her address as "House of Commons". It was their way of using the census as a protest.

(7:58)

John So there's actually a plaque commemorating her, inside the cupboard in the House of Commons, isn't there?

Sheena Oh, fantastic - I didn't know that.

(8:05)

John Yeah.

⁹ slogan = short, recognisable phrase used by organisations and political activists, but also commercials for marketing - to try to convey a memorable message

¹⁰ Races = Horse Racing event

Sheena That's really interesting.

John Well, Tony Benn - a Labour MP - he's recently passed away¹¹ - put the plaque inside the broom cupboard, in the House of Commons.

Mark So what are the controversies more recently, Sheena?

Sheena The census changes, doesn't it? The idea is that everybody is asked the same questions, but they can't ask the same questions now, as they did 100 years ago, so again: to do with women really, in 1971 and in 1981 census, as I presume it was under "occupation", there was a choice of the occupation of being a "housewife", which suggests the wife is married to the house, and that wasn't looked on very favourably really, so that was actually changed. So by 1990, it was replaced with "looking after home or family". A change of wording, but also to show that there's an understanding that that phrase was no longer acceptable.

This year, there's been for the first time, a question about "gender identity". Every adult over 16 could specify their own gender identity and the ONS (the Office for National Statistics) said that was so they could see the extent and the nature of the disadvantage, faced by the LBGT+¹² community.

Mark The other thing that's new about this year's census is that it is done online for the first time. So - all these other censuses we were talking about were written - they were paper-based, in some form or other. For the first time this year, **you have to complete it** online, although there is support available if you don't have access to the internet.

Maybe ... to say a little more about how it is likely to be used: I mean, this is important for a whole number of different reasons, for the Government, the data about how many different people there are, in different parts of the country, of different ages, different genders, actually does feed into policy: it feeds into decisions that are made about housing, about taxation, all sorts of decisions by government. It's used a lot by researchers. Universities use the census information to track what's changed, over the years. At a personal level, my wife, Janice is really interested in researching our family - our family history - and she uses the old census information to find out about where her relatives were, what occupations they had, where they were living, how many children they had, and so on, and there's a lot of information that can be gathered that way.

(11:21)

John I think that's an important point in regards to the actual data, isn't it, Mark?
There's a thing called 'data sets' - that's how many people live in over-crowded houses, what the levels of education are in Halifax, or what people's religion are across

¹¹ passed away = died

¹² LBGT+ community = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Community

Yorkshire. That data is released to policy makers, social scientists. But, what's called micro-data, so specific things about your house, or your life, Sheena, or Mark, they are not released¹³ for 100 years. We can now look at the 1921 census and look at what an individual person did for a job, or where they lived or what they earned, but we can't look at personal information from recent years.

Sheena I think the results are not out yet, from the 1921 census. I think there's been a delay, so I imagine Janice and other local historians are really waiting anxiously to get their hands on this data.

Mark You're absolutely right about that - you're definitely right about that. But that's important what you said there, John - to reassure people that this is - the information that you're putting on there - is confidential to you for 100 years, it will not be released. Nobody else will be able to access the personal information that you put on ... it will be put together - we say aggregated - in order to collect that kind of information will be made available, but not the individual, personal one.

I said at the beginning that it was compulsory: that **you had to do this**, by law. There is help available, so if you haven't completed yours, then there is a 'phone number you can call for help; so that is : 0800 141 2021.

I think you can also go on the government website.

There is actually a specific support as well for people whose English is not good enough to be able to understand the questions that are being asked. So there is a free language help-line where, I think, you can get a translation; people who will help you, depending on what language is your first language, and that number is 0800 587 2021.

(13:48)

John For anybody - if anybody listening to this and they are interested in looking into it in a little bit more detail - the website I found the most useful is a gentleman called Danny Dorling - he's an Oxford professor, but he writes it in very accessible language, and he explains some really, really interesting things about the Census, about homelessness, about inequalities across the UK, and - one of the things he's argued for is that we'll probably need another census in 5 years, because we're going to see so many people potentially leaving the country due to Brexit - going back to Europe, where they may have come from; Covid, obviously: we're going to see really big changes, demographic changes, over the next couple of years.

Mark What's that website address, John?

John It's **DannyDorling.org**. So that's d-a-n-n-y-d-o-r-l-i-n-g-.org

¹³ released = made available for the public to look at

Mark Sheena: you were going to say something about the impact - the potential impact - of the Covid pandemic.

Sheena A few weeks ago, I read an article about people asking for another census and saying that, because of Covid, a lot of young people like students or even people who don't want to be on their own during lockdown, have moved back home, so the information about households won't be totally accurate.

Mark And the other thing I'd heard was that there is some discussion about whether there will even be another census because the argument is that, actually, a lot of this information can now be collected in other ways. Because of the internet's ability to collect data in a whole range of ways, whenever we engage with local government or central government, then information is being collected; and it may be that the government feels it can get enough information from other sources, without having to do this exercise, which does cost it's a significant sum of money involved in actually doing the census, and maybe we may not need it.

I think that would be sad because I like the idea: we've got a regular 10 year survey and certainly, Janice would be very upset if they stopped doing the census, because she wants her relatives, in the future, to be able to look back and find out about her.

Sheena I think it would be a great loss to stop doing the census, so let's hope it doesn't happen.
(Music)
(16:35)

Language Support

Mark This is the part of the podcast that I choose some of the words from the episode and talk about them.

So today I'm going to talk about a number of different ways of talking about something we call "**obligations**". An **obligation** is something you *have* to do and there are lots of different ways of talking about that in the English language. In this episode, this came up because we said that "**the census was something that you have to do**". So there's one form.

We said the census **is compulsory** so there, you're using the verb "**to be**" with "**compulsory**" as an adjective.

You can say it **is an obligation** to complete the census.

It is a requirement - and also you can add to that - **a legal requirement** so something you have to do, by law.

So those are a number of ways you can talk about it but there are two key verbs: one of them I've already used - is **to have to** - and we said in the episode, **you have to complete the census**. So that is using the verb "to have" but with "to" - **to have to** - and that's an obligation. And that verb takes its usual different forms: so, "**you have to**", "**she has to**", and, in the past - "**they had to**".

So that's the form of that verb.

Then there is the verb "**must**" - that's a special verb - it's one of the verbs we call a "modal" verb. So, we said in the episode "**by law - you must complete the census**". So "**must**" doesn't change - it only has that one form, for all uses of that verb, and it's always linked to another verb - so "**must complete ...**", "must do".

Then there are the negative versions of those things - so obviously, you can say "it is not compulsory", "it is not an obligation", "it is not a requirement". And you can use negative ... the negative, with the verb "have to", so you can say: "you do not have to do your homework this week"; "she does not have to go to school today". Now those have their usual abbreviations: so you could say: "you don't have to", "she doesn't have to".

And then there's the negative of "must". Now this is rather different because this is a '**negative obligation**' - so it's something you must not do. So, for example, you could say: "you must not smoke in this building" - or, you could say "she must not drop litter in this area". Those have their abbreviations, as well. So you can say "mustn't": "you mustn't smoke"; "she mustn't drop litter".

So - I hope that's helpful. That's it for this week. If you want more information about the transcript for this episode and all our others, and you want to find out how to make contact with us via our email address or our website, then stay listening for that information. Otherwise, thank you very much for listening and we will be with you again very soon.

(Music) (21:25)

You can find the transcript - that's the written version of this episode - on our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

And that's where you can also find links to all the other episodes, and the transcripts, so you can listen and read along at the same time. That's also where you can find out how to donate, to help our work. We are a charity, supporting particularly, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants but also, all those in need in our local area and we would welcome your support, if you felt able to give it. If you follow on the website, the links to "**Get Involved**" and "**Donate**".

We also have an email address - that's **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And we would love to hear from you - your thoughts on our podcast and ideas for the future.

We also have a Twitter account : **@EsolSaint**
and there is additional material on that site.

I'll spell out all those addresses:

So, the website: w-w-w-.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.uk

So that's the website.

The email is: englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com

And that's "English for" spelt: f-o-r

And finally, the Twitter account: is : @ [at] [capital E] E-s-o-l- [capital S] -S-a-l-n-t

(Music) (24:07) Ends