

English for Life in the UK

Podcast Transcript : Episode 18 : Everyday Life and Customs

(Mark) Welcome to Episode 19 of the Podcast 'English for Life in the UK'. Today's episode is concerned with Everyday Life and Customs in the UK. This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St. Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire.

In normal times, we run a course at that Centre, which is supported by this Podcast, but we are now recording these podcasts from our homes, as a result of the virus lockdown. I should apologise that today's episode - the sound quality is not quite as good as we would normally hope to be able to bring you, but we hope you still find it helpful and useful.

You can find links to other episodes - and to the written transcript of our episodes - on our website www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

You can also find more information about the Centre, and about the other support that is available, and for any of those of you who can afford it, how to make a donation to help to keep our work going in these difficult times.

Today's episode is brought to you by Christine, John and myself, Mark.

(Music)

(Christine) So our topic today is "Everyday Life and Customs in the UK". And we're focussing on that because, whenever we've asked our students what aspects of life in the UK they are interested in, they say customs - and they don't mean traditions like Christmas or celebrations at Easter, they're interested in every day life and customs and we find that difficult. We found it difficult to produce a lesson on that because these are things we don't normally think about. But right now, coronavirus is requiring us all to do things differently, and so suddenly we're thinking about our everyday customs.

(3 mins)

So, we're going to we're going to talk about some aspects of every day life in this country. Now, of course, behaviour varies greatly from person to person, from family to family, and from region to region, and social situation to social situation. So, we're going to try to navigate a way through that and we're going to start, I think, John, i think you're going to start by talking about how people greet each other.

(John) Yeah, Greetings: so, there's verbal greetings and non-verbal greetings. So the most common non-verbal greeting would be a handshake. So if you meet somebody for the first time perhaps in your ESOL

class, or if you meet somebody in a pub, or a restaurant or at school, and you are introduced to them, you'd shake hands. Now, in Italy, or France, perhaps a kiss on each cheek; that's not something we tend to do in England, or in the UK. We'd usually shake hands that's between men and women and that's a friendly, non-verbal greeting.

In terms of verbal greetings, it's quite straight forward - we'd say "hello", and you'd say, "hello" back. But quite often as well, it would depend on the time of day, or if you met someone at your class, in the morning, you'd say 'good morning' obviously, or, 'good afternoon', or 'good evening' - that's quite a formal way of greeting somebody. You might say, quite an old fashioned way of greeting somebody, is to say "how do you do?". That's kind of an old, English verbal greeting. But one of the things we looked at as well, used quite a lot in our everyday speech, especially in Yorkshire, we use contractions, so this is where, like, for instance, instead of saying, "should not" you'd say "shouldn't", or instead of 'would not', you'd say 'wouldn't' and contractions are often used in everyday greetings. So if you bumped into somebody in Yorkshire, in the morning, you'd quite often just say 'morning' or 'evening' - so they quite often drop the 'good' from the 'good morning' or 'good evening'.

As well, in terms of "how do you do?", in Yorkshire, they might just say "how do?". Another very common greeting in the north of England is just to ask somebody - it's kind of a rhetorical question, you'd say "are you alright" to which the answer is, usually, "yeah, not bad". And again, this is also contracted sometimes just down to "alright?", with a questioning intonation, to which the answer, again "not bad". We also talked about terms of address which sometimes can be quite complicated for people who are new to the UK, because these can vary quite differently across regions. So a lot of people in West Yorkshire would refer to each other as "love" (*pronounced "luv"*) and that's just a friendly term, it just means 'friend' or, for example, where Christine's from (in *Scotland*), they might say "pal" - "how are you doing, pal?" And this is just a friendly term of endearment and, for example, in the Midlands, they might refer to you as "duck" which quite often confuses people but it's actually from ...it's similar, quite similar, to "sir" - it's from the old English word for *Duce*, it's like a duke - a little bit like *Monsieur, en francais*.

So we do have quite a lot of peculiar terms of address in different parts of the UK which you might have to get used to, depending on where you're living.

(C) Interesting, John. I find I'm often less formal than that. When I meet people, especially somebody I know, I would say, "Hi" - just "hi" - and if I'm meeting a good friend, I often hug them. That's really quite common - hugging, and sometimes people do 'air kissing' - pretending to kiss either side of them - I don't tend to do that, b.....

(J) I've seen that, but again, we going back to what we were saying last week, handshaking and hugging, the non-verbal greetings are off the cards, at the moment, aren't they, so to speak, because of the coronavirus.

So we are restricted to verbal forms of address and communication and greeting at the moment, unfortunately.

(C) That's right! And that wave - the two metre wave. Yeah.

(M) OK - shall we move on? I was going to talk a bit about neighbours - so your neighbours can be those people who live immediately either side of you, or even in the same building as you, or just near you, we call the neighbourhood, the area kind of around where you live. And you will - those are the people that you're going to meet, as and when you go out, because, obviously you are close to them, in terms of where you live. And certainly to start with, you won't know them at all, but the chances are that after a period of time, you will see them regularly, so those greetings that John talked about are ones that you can use with them. It's good to get on with your neighbours, to be on good terms with them, to say 'hello', to ask how they are, to have very small, low-key conversations.

(9:00) You might talk about the weather; that's very common in the UK, to talk about the weather. So you can just remark on that, to your neighbour. So, getting on with your neighbours is good. You will find that some neighbours will offer to help you and you can offer to help them, so it might mean doing a bit of shopping for you, or it might mean helping to put your bin out, which I'll say a bit more about, in a minute. So helping each other out is good, offering to help outyou could offer to make a cup of tea and invite your neighbour round for a tea or a coffee; obviously, you wouldn't do that the first time you met them, but after a while, if you felt as if that was somebody you had something in common with. So that's the kind of general thing.

On the other side of it, it's important to get on with your neighbours so you mustn't do things that are going to annoy them, and that would be things like being too noisy - noisy neighbours are not good neighbours, generally, so try and be aware of that yourselves and if somebody is being too noisy, then, just very politely point out to them, that 'could they keep the noise down?'. That would be the kind of phrase you might use with somebody like that.

I mentioned specifically, rubbish bins, and it is one of those things that, in Halifax, where most of our students are, then there is a system for putting out grey bins that have general rubbish in, and then there are boxes and bags and caddies that are put out for different kinds of rubbish. You can find all that information out, if you haven't already learnt that, from the local council website. But you can help each other with that as neighbours, in terms of taking in a bin or putting it back out, but only do that if you've agreed that with your neighbour. And related to the rubbish, leaving rubbish around, leaving litter around, is very bad and that's a sign of not being a good neighbour, is if you left outside of your house untidy with rubbish and litter in it, then people wouldn't be very happy about that. So it's important to be careful that you keep your house and the surrounding area of your house as clean as possible. And in fact, its important to say, that you can

actually get fined, you can be ... have to pay some money, if you have dropped litter, if you've left rubbish on the street, outside your house, or indeed if you go for a walk, if you drop a cigarette end, for example, you could actually be fined for dropping litter. So generally, I'd say with neighbours, try and get on with them, help each other out, and then there are those particular issues about things like bins and litter.

(12:18)

(J) Could I just mention? - in terms of where we live, and quite often people who listen to our podcasts might be living in rented accommodation, in the UK, we have things called tenants' associations, so that's where groups of people who live together in the same estate, or in the same area, grouped together and that's a way they can deal with issues that they have in the quality of housing, or provision. There's also a thing called 'neighbourhood watch' which is where people who live on a certain street or in a certain block of flats, would work alongside the council, or police, if there are any issues of antisocial behaviour, of littering, or anything like that. So they're interesting things for people perhaps, to look into, if they're living in the UK.

(M) Thanks John. Anything to add Christine?

(C) No - the only thing I would say the amount of friendliness one has with one's neighbours can vary greatly from place to place. In large cities, people often like to be anonymous and not talk to their neighbours more than a nod. Whereas in small villages, people like to know everything about their neighbour and they are considered nosy, being nosy is common - it's also friendly in small villages.

(M) Yeah - I think I agree with you there, Christine, and maybe I've over-emphasised there, the talking with your neighbour. You don't have to do that and just a smile and a hello may be quite enough for lots of people, but it will dependas you say, where you are, what kind of area you are in, who the kind of people are, who live near you.

(C) So I thought I would tell you about some of the things that the British are known for. People from other countries often see us as being, as liking to queue - the queue - standing in line, to be served in a shop, as being something important for British people, and I think that is more or less true. It's not that we like queueing, but we do not like people arriving and pushing in to be served in front of us. So if you're in a situation where there is a counter, where there is and people can be served in turn, it's better not to push in, in front of other people.

(15:04)

It's interesting now in coronavirus, we're suddenly seeing this more clearly because the shops have two-metre marks laid out, so people are standing in a great big long line, waiting to get into the shop or to pay at the cash desk. Another thing that we're known for, is our politeness - some people would say - our over-politeness. We tend to use a lot of 'please', a lot of 'thank you', a lot of 'would you mind if.....?' - a lot of language that's very roundabout - 'oh I wonder if you could ...?' - here, and that can be a real shock for people

from other countries. I have a friend from Poland and when she first came to this country, she couldn't understand all this 'please', all this 'thank you': it really confused her. And what's more, the people who met her thought she was very rude. Because she wouldn't say 'please' or 'thank you' - she'd just say "I want this" or "give me that" in the shops. And I can hear John laughing, because it seems so rude to us Brits, but it did not seem rude to her as a Pole in Poland, and many other countries have different standards of politeness.

Another thing about shopping, in some countries I've visited, and when I'm buying something, I need to spend some time agreeing the price with whoever is selling it. Now in almost every situation in the UK, the price that is displayed is the price that you must buy it for: there's no leeway - in fact, it's illegal for shops to display one price and charge another. However, there are some places where you can argue the price; there are situations when you can haggle over the price - particularly, in a market where items are out and they're not priced, for example, antiques or bric-a-brac or second-hand goods, then it makes sense to haggle over the price. In other words, to say, if they say '5 for a £1' you can say 'Oh no, I want 10 for £1', for example.

(18:00)

At the end of the day - towards the end of the day, it is often possible to ask somebody if they would sell you things that they have had on display, particularly if its food, because at the end of the day, usually that food may well be thrown, so you could ask - you could offer a price at the end of the day, perhaps, but generally speaking, a price is a fixed price.

(J) We've been talking a little bit about eating - and some of the customs around eating and drinking in the UK. Now, one of the main differences in how we talk about meals - erm - there is a divide between the north of England and the south of England - or between Scotland and the north of England and the south of England. So myself and Christine would say we have our breakfast in the morning, our dinner at around noon and our evening meal, we would refer to as tea - so that's not tea as in a 'cup of tea', that would our evening meal, that many other people would call dinner. Whereas where Mark is from, in London, in the south of England, he would have his breakfast, then his lunch for his midday meal, and for his evening meal he would have his dinner, so if somebody in Yorkshire, or Fife, where Christine's from, says or your neighbour says, "would you like to come over for your tea?", what they actually mean is would you like to come over for your evening meal. So that can be, can be quite confusing at times.

(M) If I ...I'll just come in there, John - to say - for me you're right - for me, if somebody talks about coming for tea, we're talking about a cup of tea: a drink and maybe, a piece of cake or a biscuit, or something like that, at the end of the afternoon, but it wouldn't be what I would mean by my main meal. So you're quite right there.

(J) What Mark's referring to there, is quite often known as afternoon tea - so that would be a cup of tea with perhaps a slice of cake or a couple of biscuits or something like that, just to keep you going through the afternoon, so that is something that does confuse people that are new to this part of the UK sometimes. So as

we said, not to be confused with tea as in tea, the drink, but that is another, very important part of British culture. As many people will know, British people, on the whole, and Irish people, are very big tea drinkers - so as we said before - your neighbours might invite you in for a cup of tea. Quite often, when you have a break from your work, or from your work at college we would refer to it as 'a tea break' because we are huge tea drinkers in the United Kingdom. The best tea, of course, is Yorkshire Tea, as you will all probably already know and I'm thinking we probably drink more tea than anyone else in Europe - whereas perhaps, you might be used to - if you are from Africa, or the Middle East, or North America, you might be more used to drinking coffee, regularly. Quite often, in England and Scotland and Ireland more often people will drink tea.

(C) Its interesting John, can I tip in here? And talk about breakfast because the English breakfast we're known for eating bacon and eggs. Now, but I don't know about you, but I'll have bacon and eggs for breakfast about once a month. Not more. Do you have bacon and eggs every morning?

(J) Er - If I'm on holiday or at Christmas, I don't normally have time - its quite ... you'll see this quite often in cafés, or in hotels, if you're staying in a hotel and they're providing breakfast, there'll be two choices - what they call a continental breakfast, which is fruit, croissants, fruit juice, things like that, and if they refer to an English or a Scottish breakfast or, in Northern Ireland, what they call an Ulster Fry, you will be getting sausages, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, beans - a very big, hearty meal, which some people, new to the UK, will find a bit over facing, sometimes, don't they, Christine?

(C) Yes, Yes and I would find that over facing if I ate like that every day. Do you eat a breakfast like that every day, Mark?

(22:45)

(M) I don't - no, I don't. But the same as John, I do - its kind of like a special treat - if I'm going out or staying somewhere else, then very occasionally I might do something for myself or, within the family, we quite often have a late breakfast - we call it a "brunch" - so that's a mixture between breakfast and lunch - and the brunch would usually include things like bacon, eggs, sausages, things like that - but we don't do it very often. But I think I do think that a lot of people in Yorkshire do have a big breakfast, most mornings.

(J) And one of the other things we talked about was in terms of where we were talking about restaurants, cafés, there - when you're going into restaurants, cafes - the way that you conduct yourself, how you order meals, quite often a lot of the food you eat will be very similar to other countries.

One of the kind of unique things about eating, drinking and socialising in the UK, is the pub. So, that's another example of a contraction in the English language - because pub is short for public house - which is basically a type of bar, which usually has a very convivial, friendly atmosphere. If you go to a village in

England, or Scotland or Ireland, there'll always usually be what people refer to as a local - or a local pub - and that's somewhere traditionally most British people have done quite a lot of their socialising on evenings and weekends.

(C) And it's interesting, when I was young - pubs were places really where men went - but what's happened now over the decades since then, they've become much more welcoming, not only to women but also to children - most pubs - so families can go there and they can eat, because most pubs serve food these days.

(J) They do, yea - Traditionally, as Christine says, most of the pubs round Halifax and Keighley, round this area, would have been traditionally just about going out to drink beer and spirits, but the market and social mores have changed over recent decades and quite often are more about going out to eat with together friends and family, than just going out and drinking lots of beer which was the traditional passtime for many of the British men, wasn't it, Christine?

(C) It was, indeed!

(25:25)

(M) Well I think maybe we should say that for people who actually want to avoid places with alcohol, then actually it is still the case that a pub is predominantly somewhere where a lot of people will be drinking alcohol, although you don't have to drink alcohol.

(C) Certainly not! And there are also cafés and restaurants where you can eat instead, if you want to avoid alcohol.

(M) OK - so, last part: I was ... going to talk a bit about family and this is one of those things - as Christine said at the beginning - this has changed over time. It also varies for different parts of the country and different cultures will regard family life rather differently.

So I thought I'd start just telling you about my experience, because, when I grew up, I was born in the 1950s so I was a child in the '50s and then into the 1960s, and I was in, what at the time, would have been called a typical family which is that I had a mum and a dad, myself and my sister. My dad went out to work, my mum stayed at home and her job was looking after the family - my dad earned the money. Later my mum did get a part-time job, but my dad was seen as - it wouldn't have been unusual for somebody to call him - the head of the household. Now that has changed really significantly over the years and a family, today, can be lots of different ways, lots of different patterns, to what a family looks like, these days.

So, for example, lots of women now work and work full time as well as being mothers in the family. So, I did actually look this statistic up - and I thought this was really interesting - that 72% of women in this

country, adult women, in this country, are now in employment - they have a job. And its only 80% of men - so the difference between men and women, now, in terms of work in this country, is not great and its very common for both men and women in a family to be working.

The second thing is: there are actually a lot of one-parent families. Most often, that is a woman with children but it can also be a man with children and, of course a man and a woman can be separated and they can each play a role in bringing up the children, as well. And as divorce has become more common, people don't always stay in the same marriage and the same family all their life, so you get these variations, and you get more mixed families where you have children who are from different partners in the same family and in the same household. Then of course, you also now have same sex couples and same sex families. Since 2014, its been possible to get to be married, as two women marry or two men marry, and for those to have children so again, you have that kind of family arrangement, as well.

And then, interesting - I was thinking about older people and generally speaking in this country certainly, for the last 50 years or so, I would say it was not very common to have more than two generations in a household, so you usually would have the parents and the children but not very often grandparents, living in the same house. Now that did vary and in fact there is some evidence that is changing again now - and going back to a pattern that was more common in the past in this country, of having at least three generations. And certainly there are cultures that are now well settled in this country, from the Asian sub-continent for example, where it is very common to have three or four generations of the same family living in the same household. So that's just a bit about different patterns.

I suppose one more thing I would say that comes out of that, is that it is important not to make assumptions, not to assume, that, for example a woman is not working because she's a mother, not to assume that the man is the head of the household, because these days there's much more equality in the way in which families operate, between the gender roles, in particular. So it's important not to make assumptions, it's important to treat people equally and with respect, and in fact it is actually a legal position now and has been for some years, that treating people with equality, is part of the law. And that it is actually illegal to discriminate against somebody - to be prejudiced against somebody - for their gender, for their race, for their age, for their sexual orientation, or for their religion. And that's an important thing to bear in mind in your daily dealings with people. (31:20)

(C) Thank you Mark, I think you've summed it up very well. But I'm going to repeat what you said, and what I said at the beginning, of course, we are all different in this country and so what we've tried to tell you is just a glimpse into life in the UK. Keep your eyes and your ears open and you will see different people with different expectations and different customs and as long as you're respectful and polite, then you will be .. you will make friends and will fit in well.

(M) In fact, Christine, I think I'd go further than that and say, that actually one of the things that makes the United Kingdom what it is, is the fact that we welcome and celebrate differences - so actually differences of family patterns, and differences of the way people eat, and differences in the way people interact with each other, is something that we positively value and celebrate to have that diversity within our country.

(C) Well, I agree with you - Mark, and I certainly welcome that. However, it must also be said or we could also say, there are some people still with some prejudices who won't feel like that. Unfortunately, there are those strands within our society, as it were.

(Music)

Language Support

(M) Today I'm going to pick on a few phrases that we've used in this podcast.

I found there were three phrases in particular that all related to the word 'social'. If we use the word social, we usually refer to situations, places, times, when there are groups of people, there are a number of people together. So early on, Christine talked about 'social situations' so that's a place or a time or a situation when there are a number of people together.

Later she talked about anti-social behaviour. 'Anti-' in front of a word, means against whatever that word is, so anti-social behaviour is people behaving in ways that's not nice, that other people won't like, that people will find difficult, or nasty, so anti-social behaviour in this case, we were talking about, dropping litter, dropping rubbish or something.

Then later on, John talked about 'social mores'. Social mores are what this whole podcast has been about really, about the customs, the traditions, the usual ways of people treating each other, people being together, in our particular country, in our particular society.

Two further phrases - John referred to people having a 'hearty meal' - a hearty meal just means full and healthy - lots of food, lots of good food - we talk about that being as being hearty meal - I suppose it comes from the original idea that that is good for your heart or your health.

We also then talked about - Christine talked about a meal - in this case, a very big breakfast, as being over-facing - and over-facing means too much - so that's beyond a hearty meal - that's just too much - that's over facing - it's over-facing, it's too much.

That's it for today - this episode, in lockdown. We hope you found it helpful .. and until next time, goodbye and stay safe.

(Music). (36:35)