

English for Life in the UK; Episode 21 - Eid in the UK

(Mark) Hello, and welcome to Episode 21 of the podcast English for Life in the UK.

This is a podcast for intermediate-level learners of English and it is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the Saint Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire. In normal times, we run a course at the Centre in English and this podcast is a support for those people undertaking that course. However, under lockdown, we have been recording these podcast from our homes. As a result the quality of the sound is not quite as good as we'd have liked it to have been, but I hope you will still manage.

We hope these podcasts are of help to anyone who is trying to improve their English and at the same time learn more about life in the United Kingdom. You can find links to all the previous episodes and to the transcripts - the written version of all these episodes - including this one, on our website: www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Today's episode is rather different. I'm recording this a few days after the Eid celebrations undertaken by Muslims throughout the world. In previous episodes we've talked about Christian festivals such as Christmas, so we decided it was important for us to talk a bit about the experience of Muslims in the United Kingdom, when they are celebrating Eid. This year those celebrations have been very different as a result of the lockdown, so in this episode I am interviewing three Muslims and asking them about the experience of Eid in normal times and Eid this year.

You will find that the English language being used by these three Muslims is rather different. The first one, Sheikh, was born in this country. He is a native speaker of English and you will find his language is standard English - a very good level and quality of English. The second person I interview is called Jihen. She has been in the country about 5 years. Her English is good but she is still perfecting the language and she does use some non-standard English phrases.

The third person I am speaking to, Mohamad, has only been in this country for a few months and quite understandably his level of English is more limited, although still good for someone who has only been here for a short time.

(4:00 minutes)

We hope that you will find these recordings interesting and useful for their content, but it will also show the progression of the English language for people, depending how long they have been in this country. In the final part of this podcast, in the section we call Language Support, I will identify some of the learning points from these interviews.

(Music)

So we start with my interview with Sheikh. Welcome Sheikh, thank you very much for finding some time to do this interview. Just start off by, just tell me a little bit -... our listeners, a little bit about yourself.

(Sheikh) Yeah - firstly Mark, thank you for reaching out to the Muslim community to get their views and thoughts. It's really appreciated, yeah. So my name's Sheikh Ullah. I was born here in the UK and my family are originally from a place called Bangladesh. I'm involved with my local community.

(M) That's great, thanks Sheikh. Can you just tell me in general terms, for Muslims, what's ...what's the importance of Ramadan and Eid to you.

- (S) Yeah, So the importance for many Muslims is Ramadan - which is 30 days of fasting which is for observance to God and our faith. Eid symbolises the end of Ramadan, where there's a celebration of many, many things but the main thing is probably, the special Eid prayer which is performed in the morning, followed by seeing friends and family and receiving gifts. Very, very much like all other faiths, Christmas Day, and other faiths where it's - the principle is exactly the same - where we see our family, we see our friends and we basically just have a good time. But for many Muslims the Eid celebration or the run up to it, the atmosphere, and you can really tell by certainly, the last week of Ramadan, gearing up in town and around the shops, getting ready and preparing for Eid. It's a really symbolic festival for all Muslims, seeing the end of Ramadan and coming into Eid, but this year I think that now there is more importance - where younger children and younger family members and other people within the family are observing it as well.
- (M) Yeah, OK. So tell me - obviously this year, has been very different. We'll come to that in a minute. Just tell me what would what would Eid have looked like in most other years, if you go back over the last two or three years - what would happen, for you and your family?
- (S) I think, for me, before lockdown, Eid was - we would usually get up in the morning and we would go up to the special Eid prayer, which is at 09.30 - which is led by an Imam. There's a sermon and then, the prayer and usually from the prayer, we see our friends within the mosque, and then from there, I usually go to the graveyard at Almondbury.

(7:45)

Because I've got a number of my family members are there, including my grandma, so me, my dad and my brother we usually get in the car with our children and we go to the graveyard and pay our respects to our loved ones there. We then come back and then there's usually a big meal, usually at my Dad's house, 'cos I've got a big family, so there's usually about twenty of us around a table in my Mum and Dad's house, including my siblings and our nieces and nephews. We used to spend the whole day there and then, the day after Eid, which would usually be Boxing Day in the Christian faith, we'd go and see our Mother-in-Law, or our in-laws or our extended family, or even my neighbours next door, Viv and Jim, they'd be around, probably my house - and it was a whole - not just a Muslim event, but a massive community event, for non-Muslims as well - they'd embrace it as well, as that was really supported and it was always nice to see that.

- (M) Yeah that sounds, sounds great. So this year has been very different, I imagine. Tell me a bit about it this year.
- (S) Well, this year has been extremely, extremely different and from, usually from about the last week of Ramadan, as I said, we're gearing up, we're buying clothes and presents for you know, for our children, for our family. We're usually in town, definitely buying clothes. But what we've seen this year is that all the shops are closed, all the graveyards are closed and because of the social distancing measures, we can't see friends and family. So even when we're shopping online, I was finding the delivery times were, for clothes or for toys - my son wanted a special Lego technic set because he's a bit mad about Lego, and it was taking 8 weeks to come which would have been in the middle of June which would have been a little bit pointless. But I think it's made us realise that, as a family of four, my wife and my two children, that you know, sometimes on festival - certainly on Eid, I mean, I'm guilty of it as much as anyone, I really go out on Eid and I buy lots of things for my children, for my wife and we make it a really big festival. And this year it's made me kind of like realise that we have got things at home, that you know - clothes, for example, which my children haven't even worn, they're in the packet. And it was them bringing those sorts of things out, I think the hardest thing for me was that prayer - not being able to go to that. Not being able to be to go to the graveyard and certainly, not being able to see my parents and my other siblings, was extremely difficult because each year we rotate it and we'll have it at my Dad's house one day, and my house the next Eid, and my brother's house - so there'll be about 20 or 25

of us. We'd have a bouncy castle and we'd have face painting and we'd make it a really good event. But we have cakes and we'd go out and really have -- I think last year my brother ordered a sweet stand - and none of that was - happened this year. I mean, you could tell in the atmosphere - in the run up to Eid, around the shops, and around town that it was really flat - people wasn't really up for it, because of the lockdown and stuff like that. But this year, what was different for me, this year is that my extended friends and family, non-Muslim people who usually embrace Eid with me as well, were very, very good and embraced Eid with us. In previous years, where we've just had messages saying 'Eid Mubarak' ('I hope you have a nice day'). The messages have been a lot more supportive this year. In the messages, people have said 'I hope you're trying to make the best under lockdown, trying to make the best out of it, and those messages, and words of support, have been really really helpful, certainly to me, because it's been really, really difficult not being able to see your friends and family and not being able to share and embrace Eid with the extended family.

- (M) Yeah - I can imagine what that must have been like for you and it's good to know that there's been a positive side to it in terms of you reflecting on it, actually 'do you need to go out and spend all that money?'. Also reflecting on the connections that people have still managed to make with you, despite the restrictions.
- (S) Yeah, I mean, you know - it was lot of FaceTime on the day of Eid, with my parents and with my extended family, but you know, it is what it is. You know, we are blessed, our community I think that non-Muslim people have been so supportive over Eid and Ramadan its really hard to express in words, because their text messages their phone calls their words of comfort have really, really helped, certainly people like me and my family.

(12.40)

- (M) That's great. Listen - thanks very much Sheikh, I've really appreciated you giving time for this and I'll say 'thank you', on behalf of our listeners, as well.
- (S) Thank you, Mark.
- (M) In this next section you will hear my interview with Jihen.

Hello, Jihen. Thank you very much for joining me today. Would you just start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

- (J) I'm Jihen, and I'm originally from Tunisia. I came to this country - 5 years ago, six, nearly six years ago. Yeah, and that's it. Now I work at St Augustine's Centre as Integration and Support Worker for vulnerable people.
- (M) Yeah, that's great - thank you, Jihen. So, as you know this week we're talking a bit about Eid, so perhaps you can just tell me, for you as a Muslim, what's important about Ramadan and Eid.

(13:54)

- (J) Yeah for Muslims, you know, Ramadan first, is the ninth month of the lunar you know, year and it's very important month for Muslims as we have to fast and pray. Its the month of fast and prayers, and its a very spiritual month. For me, I believe that it's the best month in the year. And I think for all Muslims, because you get lots of rewards and to get, you know if you fast you will get lots of rewards from God - that's what we believe. And the rewards will be multiplied during Ramadan. For Eid, it's the day of feast, you know, we celebrate it as our biggest day in the year, because it's a day of celebration, after a long month of fasting. So, as well it's the day of visits, sharing, like, gifts - giving gifts to each other, exchanging gifts. It's the best day, I think, ever, after Ramadan.

- (M) Thank you - that's great. Tell me a bit about what would Eid have been like back in Tunisia, for you.
- (J) I think it's nothing to compare with, you know, Eid over here is different from my back country because in Tunisia we just don't - we used to not sleep the night of Eid and all we prepare the sweet of faith as well, all night - the women I mean. And the men(s) you know - they go to get ready for Eid, so they go to barbers', they go to Turkish Baths - the night of Eid, you know I mean - so its from 12 o'clock pm midnight, 'til the morning, 'til the pray(er) of Eid, you know. Same for woman as well - they will go to the beautician and everything so to get ready for the big day, then we have to put new clothes, clean clothes. We do as well 'bokhor' so a nice and natural perfume with the charcoal and everything like. Then we go all to pray in open area, you know, and we do takbeer in the streets so you will find all the streets full with people, women, men, children as well 'til they arrive to the, you know, prayer place to start. We finish the pray(er), we go to each other, like to visit exchange the visits. So we visit the grandpa and grandmas' house first, then the cousins' house. And then normally, we just gather in my grandma and granddad's house, but something - our Tunisian culture is very nice, because when the men come back from the pray(er), he will get his - as soon as he get home - he will get his coffee - Arabic coffee, with the sweets that has been made - cookies and different baklava, and when he finishes his coffee he has to - he can't give the cup back without, like, putting something in it - for example money, or gold or silver, for the woman to say 'thank you'. It's a way, the Tunisian way to say 'thank you' for the woman who has been cooking all the Ramadan you know? And I found it really nice you know tradition that we still having it now, whatever you can give, even a flower, anything, but you have to give the cup with something not empty you know. So I grew up with this culture. When I come to UK it's different culture especially my husband is not Tunisian or Arab, he is Asian. So different culture, but they still Muslim, they still celebrate Eid and Ramadan. But it's completely different in this country.
- (M) So tell me what it's been like in this country before this year, because of course this year's been very different hasn't it? So before this year what would you have done for Eid, the last 2 or 3 years?
- J: Same thing we just gather in my husband's parents' house and my in-laws will all come to my you know father- and mother-in-law's house. My sister-in-law will cook for all of us big meal we will have it all together, maybe 5-6 families all together. The visitor will come and celebrate for Eid and we will save them some food and some sweets and everything. But it's different from a little bit from our culture you know, from Tunisian culture. They don't have that, you know, coffee in the morning with a sweet and you'll get like something gift or something in the morning.
- M: So you don't get the money and the gold and the gifts in the cup?
- J: No I don't get it. But I'm trying to, my husband this year he tried to get me something nice, but it's not in the cup, separately. But at least I got something, you know. Better than nothing.
- M: Now this year I know with the lockdown has been quite different, and probably difficult for Muslims, tell me a bit about what it's been like this year, Jihen?
- J: This year first of all in Eid we just woke up a bit lazy, not like before you don't sleep all night and then you go to pray because even the pray is allowed in UK in open area it's really nice. But this year they haven't done any pray in open area or anything so which is very sad. But we performed, me and my husband, my children, Eid pray in our house. We got like a big breakfast, Tunisian breakfast. And I had coffee as well with sweet and everything. So I try to apply my culture this year. And then we decided just to go in a ride in the car and say hello to everyone you know? And the 2nd day of Eid, because my children they couldn't cope, they had their new clothes on and with their toys new toys and everything and they wanted to play, you know? So we just decided to gather like 2 families in the back garden and have

some food with social distance. So we manage. And the kids they managed to play outside you know because we have big area outside so they play together. And I found it like at peace like something. It's not like a big family like before but at least the kids like met their cousins and they have some fun that day.

M: That's good thank you. Listen, Jihen, thank you very much, that's absolutely (you are welcome) really helpful.

And finally, here is my interview with Mohamad.

Ma: So, Mohamad, thank you very much for agreeing to talk to us. Can you just tell me a bit about yourself, where are you from originally and how long have you been in this country?

Mo: I'm from Syria

Ma: And how long have you been in the UK?

Mo: Here now around 6-7 months.

Ma: About 6 or 7 months, thank you.

Mo: More than 7 months.

Ma: More than that, ok. And you are Muslim, aren't you Mohamad?

Mo: Yeah, I'm Muslim.

Ma: Can you tell me, what's important about Ramadan and Eid for Muslims generally?

Mo: Very good for healthy is Ramadan because it's fasting. And there is celebrate for Eid also. And family.

Ma: So when you were in Syria, what would you usually do on Eid?

Mo: We make some sweet – special sweet. And get some money for children, give some money to children.

Ma: Yes so that would be gifts, yes.

Mo: And give gift yeah.

Ma: And would you meet with other people?

Mo: Yeah of course we'll visit all the family in their house or come to my house they visit us. But this is you know situation for corona virus you cannot do anything, Syria also stop it, nobody go somewhere or nobody come, you know.

Ma: And would you, when you were in Syria would you have prayers on the day of Eid? (Yeah) Would that be in the mosque?

Mo: Yeah, we will go to also go to mosque and big prayer morning time.

Ma: Do you have a big meal?

Mo: Yeah 1st day yeah we make big meal in our house because all the peoples come to visit us. All the family.

Ma: How many people would you have at your house?

Mo: More than 20, between 18-20 like this around.

Ma: A very big event.

Mo: Yeah, very big. It's good.

Ma: So as you say this year it has been very different for you (yes, of course) you've been in this country but also because of the corona virus and the lockdown. So what did you do for Eid this year?

Mo: This year, I didn't do anything because I go to my friend and we are alone because I cannot visit any way or I cannot go anywhere. But I go to my friend and visit around 2-3 hours and I come back. Because I don't have any lot of friends here, because only 1 year.

Ma: Yes, you don't have your family here. (No). Were you able to make contact with your family or friends for Eid?

Mo: Of course, yes of course. I have contact with my family with my children and my wife and I have my sister in Syria. And my aunt with uncle, I call all of family in Syria.

Ma: You spoke to them by telephone?

Mo: Yeah, by telephone, by WhatsApp.

Ma: were you able, did you do anything else for Eid? Did you have a meal yourself?

Mo: In here, yes I have sweet, I make with my friends I make sweet. I spend a good time.

Ma: And did you pray together?

Mo: Of course, yes I pray with them.

Ma: Important for you. Listen, thank you very much.

Mo: Thank you very much

Ma: See you again soon.

Mo: Thank you, bye bye.

28:00 minutes

Language Support

In this part of the podcast I am going to identify a few learning points from the interviews with Jihen and Mohamad. Jihen speaks very good English but she is still trying to improve and perfect her English. And in our conversation there were some learning points for her and for you as listeners.

One thing which is quite common for non-native speakers of English, even at quite an advanced level, is that they are still not sure about definite and indefinite articles. That is the word **'the'** and

'a' or sometimes 'an'. In English it is usually the case that a noun has to have in front of it 'a' or 'the', for example; *a book* or *the book*. Exceptions include when you use a number, so you can say *two books* or a general number, such as *many books*. Also when the noun belongs to somebody then you can say *my book* or for example *her book*. So when Jihen said of Ramadan "it's very spiritual month" she should've said "it's a very spiritual month"

Then there was another sentence which included this and another learning point, she said "in my back country the mens will go to barbers" so here we could say the phrase *back country* is completely understood, but you would probably say "the country I originally came from" or "the country where I was born". She said "the mens will go" but *men* is a plural noun so you don't need an '-s' on the end of it, so it's "the men will go to barbers". And as we were saying in correct English we would say 'to a barbers' or even 'to *the* barbers' if it was a specific barber we were talking about.

One other point to pick up from the interview with Jihen, she sometimes confused the noun 'prayer' with the verb 'to pray'. So she said, "we finish the pray". This is using 'pray' as a verb, but actually here it is a noun, so it is "we finished the *prayer*" so it is 'to pray' the verb, and 'a prayer' or 'the prayer' that is the noun.

Mohamad is at an earlier stage of development of his English. He said that Ramadan was "very good for healthy". Now a better way of saying that would be that Ramadan was 'very good for his *health*' or '*my health*' or '*our health*' so it's 'health' rather than 'healthy'. A person can be healthy but if you are saying that something is good, it is good for your health.

Later he said "all the peoples came visit us" now here the word 'people' is a plural noun, that means you don't need an '-s' just like with Jihen we said 'men' is plural and you don't say 'mens' so you don't say 'peoples' it's '*all the people came to visit us*'

And then one more thing very common at the intermediate stage of learning English is to talk mostly in the present tense, a good development for Mohamad and others will be to try using the past tense when talking about things in the past. So he said "I call all my family" it would've been better to say 'I *called* all my family'. Then he said, "I go to my friend". In the past tense this would be 'I *went* to my friend'.

So that's a few learning points on this weeks' interviews. I hope you've found it useful in terms of learning a bit about Eid in different cultures and Eid in the United Kingdom and particularly Eid under lockdown. And also to learn some language points as we listened to three different speakers at different stages of their learning of English.

Thank you very much for listening and we'll be with you again soon.

Bye bye.