

English for Life in the UK

July 2020

Episode 25 - Climate Change and the Green Agenda in the UK

(Mark) Hello and welcome to Episode 25 of the podcast English for Life 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 where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need and particularly to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The aim of this podcast is to help those of you wanting to improve your English and at the same time to learn more about life in this country. You can find links to our other episodes and to the transcripts at our website: www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Here you can also find more information about the Centre, other support that's available and, for any of those of you that can afford it, how to make a donation to help keep our work going, particularly in these difficult times. Today's episode is about **Climate Change and the Green Agenda** and is brought to you by Christine, Mark and Sheena.

(Music)

(Christine) So this week, we're going to talk about climate change and **the green agenda**. It's something that is big in the news and in the political ... with the political parties, at the moment. But it has also been highlighted very much by the lockdown due to coronavirus. Suddenly, everyone is more aware of nature, of the environment. We get woken up with birdsong, instead of cars, instead of traffic - it's quite a change. So we thought we'd focus this session on erm... on .. the green movement and climate change. So Mark, perhaps you could start by telling us what we mean by climate change.

(2:38 minutes:seconds)

(Mark) Yes, OK. Thanks, Christine. Well, this is to do with the temperature of the earth and the temperature of the earth varies over time. It's varied throughout the history of the planet, but - over the last 200 years - the earth has been getting hotter at a faster rate than at any time in its history. So that's - that is what we call 'global warming' - that is, the warming of the planet as a whole. And what that has produced and continues to

produce is climate change - so changes in the climate, the weather - and the impact of the weather on the environment. This is largely related to something that's called the "greenhouse effect". Now a greenhouse, in normal, everyday language, is something that people might have in their garden and it's a little hut made of glass and people use it to grow things in it and it's good for that, because it attracts the sun and it gets very warm inside. Well, the earth is a bit like that - the atmosphere around the earth, that's the gases that are around the earth, actually trap in some of the heat and so it is a bit like a greenhouse, so it's called the 'greenhouse effect'. But, what has happened over the last 200 years, is that we've been adding to that heat and in particular - this is the actions of human beings on the earth - that what we have done is we have created more, particularly, carbon dioxide - that is a particular gas which gets trapped in the atmosphere and makes the greenhouse effect stronger and therefore the planet warmer.

And what the this carbon dioxide has largely come from - there's lots of different sources - but the main ones are from what we call fossil fuels. So, that is, fuels that come from in the ground, from in the earth, and, in particular, we're talking about coal, oil and gas.

And the scientists are pretty unanimous, now - that the result of that is we have been contributing to global warming, we've been making the planet warmer and er - the result of that is that the climate, the weather, around the world has been changing. Twenty of the warmest years on record have been in the last twenty-two years.

(C) (That's remarkable)

(M) It is remarkable! and the impact is on a number of things: so, sea levels have also been rising and that's partly because as the sea gets warm, so it expands a little, but also that the ice has been melting - around the ice caps, at the two ends of the poles: the North and the South Pole. And, scientists reckon that if we don't do anything about what the impact we're having on the climate, that actually on current trends, the direction that the increase is happening at the moment, that by the end of this century, the earth could be anything from between 3 and 5 degrees warmer than it was at the beginning of the century. And the kind of effects that that will have are all around the world are things like water shortages, impact on food production because of droughts,

it will almost certainly lead to population movements, migrations out of the areas that are most effected by this, and of course, the weather itself, will produce events like floods, storms, heatwaves and droughts. So the impact on the whole of the earth, the whole of our planet and including this country, will be quite significant.

(7:30)

So there is an organisation set up called the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (that's the IPCC) and they have issued a number of reports the most recent one of which has recommended is that we should keep the increase in the temperature down to 1.5 degrees, rather than the 3 - 5 degrees that will happen otherwise. The IPCC report recommended that the UK government should aim for net zero **emissions** by 2050 and since then, the British government have committed to this - it's now gone into law. And what we mean by 'net zero' is that the balance between the amount of greenhouse gases produced, for example, by burning fossil fuels, is balanced out by the amount of gases that are removed, for example, by the planting of more trees, but - to do that, we've got to do some radically different things in relation to those fossil fuels, the use of them in relation to **deforestation**, in relation to our farming and food, and what we do about that. I expect, Sheena, you can say a bit more about some of those things because I'm sure they've been on **the green agenda**.

So in summary, er ... global warming and climate change is about the earth heating up. It's having a significant impact already. It is us as humans that has accelerated that - that change - and that is what's meant it has become a huge issue on the political agenda.

(C) Yes, thank you Mark. I wanted to mention the significance for us. Halifax is in Calderdale, where we are. Calderdale is called that because it is in the valley of the River Calder and of course, climate change has led to much more significant flooding in recent years and so several of the towns in the Upper Calder Valley have been flooded in the most awful way. Businesses and homes have just been completely washed out and that's happened about three times in the last five years. They've had the flood, the largest flood of 100 years, but they've had it 3 times in the last ten years. I may have got those numbers perhaps, not exactly right - but ... it's certainly a huge issue for hundreds and hundreds of families and businesses in Calderdale.

And Sheena, you .. you could tell us something about the history of ... of the reaction. Certainly, in this country. People are now ... I would say that almost everybody is aware, of the green agenda and climate change. They will have different feelings about it or thoughts about it and attitudes towards it but, historically, there has been certainly one party in this country that's been trying very hard to move that up the political agenda.

(Sheena) Yes, perhaps before I come to the Green Party, I could just go back a little bit, as some of the organisations that were very much talking about the things that Mark's just talked about, fifty years ago, and they were seen as, maybe, people who were not to be taken that seriously - y'know, people who were seen as a bit alternative and a bit scare-mongering. Organisations like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth - they were trying to warn about the environment taking non-direct political action - non-violent, should I say, political action - trying to raise awareness. But it was only, I think, in recent years, in the last, perhaps, twenty years, where maybe more political parties have started to take this more seriously and tried to put it on the political agenda.

(12:20)

So, the Green Party was originally the Ecology Party, and it was only in the last 20 years that it's been known as the Green Party or the Greens. And it's been a global movement - they've always wanted to put **the green agenda** at the centre of politics and they've tried to do that themselves. One of their main agenda items is the use of wind and renewable and sustainable energy, for all the reasons that Mark mentioned. To have a carbon tax on fossil fuels: so, yes - a carbon tax on these imports, so they would be taxed and it would be based on the **emissions** that these produce when they were burnt and that's how they would work out their carbon tax.

Erm .. houses: they only want to build houses that are passive houses - that are carbon neutral - that have no emissions at all; they want to insulate all the other houses; they have a ride and stride policy, where they would develop foot paths and pathways so that people can cycle and walk. Electric coaches would be one of the big things they would want people to use, as well as railways; more railways being brought back into use and the packaging - that manufacturers and retailers would be the people who would pay the cost of the **recycling** of the packaging on their goods, which I think is something we'll probably come to later, won't we?

They want to plant several hundred million trees - encourage organic farming and also very local - everything localised - localised retail, localised transport. They would have a 'frequent flyer levy', they would call it, and they say that 15% of the people in the country, take 70% of the flights and those people would be taxed very heavily on that, and they also want a universal basic income, for everyone.

(M) Thank you, Sheena.

(C) Quite ...quite a broad ... a broad sweep there, for the Green Party and I They have also influenced the other main political parties, who also have green policies as part of their own.

(S) Absolutely, well - the Labour Party: their manifesto - and this is only 6 months ago - was talking about a green revolution, green investment where the Bank of England would delimit companies who created the most emissions. They wanted steel recycling plants in some of the places that lost - because of the industrial revolution, were wealthy, then they lost some of their industries, and they would want to put recycling industries back into those places, so the Labour Party had a massive agenda and most of it was very similar to the Green Party agenda, apart from, they would have nuclear fuel, as a back up. And it was quite interesting the way the Conservatives seem to have embraced the green agenda. So, they were promoting electric vehicle charging stations; they were going to have £800 million for carbon capture and storage; and support nuclear and hydrogen power; and [*then Prime Minister*] Theresa May, after the Paris Climate Agreement, committed to cutting greenhouse gases to almost zero by 2050. And then, there was the Lib-Dem [*Liberal Democrats*] party which had a very serious green agenda, as well. So, they wanted to end fossil fuel subsidies; have £2 billion available for ultra-low-, or zero-, emission buses; a new investment bank to create [the] green economy; plant 70 million trees a year; so they had a very comprehensive green plan for the future, as well.

(C) Thank you. Yes - it is such a big issue at the moment.

(17:03)

- (M) I wonder if we could just pick up on two or three of the things that you talked about there, Sheena? You talked about 'renewable energy' as being one of the things that the Green Party, and then other parties have come on the back of, as well. So what do we mean by 'renewable energy'? What are the main things that would be included in that?
- (S) I ... my understanding of renewable energy and Christine might know more and you too, would be to do with things like wind power and water power things that will be renewed naturally and would be sustainable and at no cost, no cost to the earth. They're there and we just need to capture this energy, and have the technology to use it effectively.
- (C) Unlike the fossil fuels that you talked about earlier, because they're **a finite resource**, they have already been captured within the earth and as they're being mined or drilled out they - they are then burnt and all the carbon they contain is emitted into the atmosphere.
- (M) I think the other main ... the other main renewable one, of course, is solar energy. So, I think, it's solar and wind probably are the two major ones. I wonder whether we should also perhaps just explain nuclear - so you talked about nuclear energy, and I'm no expert on nuclear power, but we maybe should say that in .. as opposed to fossil fuels, the main other source of energy, until the renewable energy started coming in, was nuclear power, which came after the Second World War and in some countries - France, for example - most of their energy is produced by nuclear power. I'm no physicist to know, to be able to explain exactly, how nuclear power works, but obviously, the down side of nuclear power is that it has potential dangers and also the waste from it, as I understand, is very difficult to get rid of and actually lasts for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.
- (C) I wanted us to think for a bit about how this impacts our daily lives - that climate change - what difference does it make? So, the governments, the political parties are involved in the discussion, but in our life, I know as well the issues of climate change, I know there's big focus on pollution, as well. The pair of those - there're a lot of ways it impacts on our lives and I want to start by mentioning one that impacts on everybody's life now - which is **recycling**. We no longer just put our rubbish in a bin

and expect it to be collected but we all - every family in the whole country is required to sort out their waste into different categories and each different category of waste is dealt with differently by the Local Authority, trying to minimise how ... the waste that is sent to **landfill** and maximise the amount of re-use or recycling of different products. Another thing that I notice certainly was when we had to start paying 5p [pence] for a carrier bag. Do you remember?

(S) Yes - two years ago, maybe?

(C) I think it might be more than that - but haven't ... I don't know exactly, but suddenly we're all using our own bags - we take our own bags to the shops, whereas in the past we'd just get new plastic bags and all that plastic, of course, is ending up in the ocean, in the sea. And there's been a big increase in the awareness of the problems of pollution - particularly, of the sea, with the airing of David Attenborough's natural history programmes. He's suddenly ... he spent one whole hour looking at the pollution that's evident in the sea and it was very, very powerful images of the creatures that we've all been admiring in the sea, trapped in plastic bags or caught up in nets along with all sorts of things. So people seem much more aware of that.

(22:30)

(M) What sort of things? - I'm just wondering what other things can we as individuals do that could help with the issue of ... the environment?

(S) Well, I was ...I'm sorry, I was just thinking of plastic bottles, as well, because that has been an issue which has been talked about a long time, hasn't it? It appeared in the manifestos of the political parties to have some scheme where plastic bottles are recycled - or glass bottles are used - but I think now, nothing seems to be being done about it - maybe different types of plastic might be created - but it's still a massive issue, is the idea of bottled water, I think, although a lot of people do have their own reusable containers that they always use, all the time. But there're still a lot of plastic bottles around.

(C) Yes, there have been some changes in the way people are eating. I mean - always, there have been vegetarians who have objected to eating animals to avoid cruelty to animals but what's happening now is that more people are becoming vegetarian, or

indeed vegan, that means to say they're having .. eating no animal products at all, no milk, no dairy products either, and that's partly because cows, in particular, they produce methane the way they digest food means they produce a lot of gas, and methane is another greenhouse gas. So there's that. But also, large areas of natural forest are being cut down across the world to make way, to make room to grow food products, fodder products for animals, because of the increasing demand for burgers or whatever, so vegan foods are becoming much, much more common in this country. Its very, very rare to be in a restaurant or a café and not find something vegan on the menu. I didn't know that, Sheena. It's very interesting.

(24:54)

I have .. I know a lot of people who are being environmentally conscious, who try to avoid buying food that has travelled a long distance, so they talk in terms of 'food miles'. So rather than .. I was in the shop earlier today and I could have bought beans - green beans - from Kenya, or green beans from Lincolnshire - so rather than flying foodstuffs around the world - we're encouraged - people are encouraged - to eat foods that are in season, here, in the UK.

(M)

Yeah - I think just on that food agenda, there doesn't seem to be any doubt, scientists are pretty clear that actually animal farming is far more damaging to the environment than plant based farming ander so that that is an important part, I think, of the green agenda now, is to, not necessarily do away with animal products altogether, although obviously some people argue for that, but actually just if we all moved away from so much dependence on meat and we moved more towards plant-based foods, that would be much more sustainable for the environment.

(26:20)

(C)

While I agree with you, Mark, and I think you're and I think what you're saying is accurate, I know ... several farmers, small scale farmers, who would disagree with you. They ... and what they would highlight is that the that all the calculations of the damage that is being done by animal farming, by the beef industry, is based on the kind of industrial agricultural methods that are used in the Americas, for example. Rather than the much smaller scale agricultural methods that's used in Europe and in parts, certainly, in parts of the United Kingdom.

So like ...- that's not the only issue that we've mentioned that people hold strong opinions on and they are not always in agreement on.

(M) Yeah - I know one of the other ones was about transport and our reliance on the car generally, as it's clearly something that is not environmentally friendly. It would be much better for us and much better for our planet if we drove less in cars, if we went less on aeroplanes, as you were saying, Sheena, but of course ... erm the car industry is an enormous industry and employs lots of people and so that's the debate there, but, of course, the move recently has been away from petrol and diesel cars towards electric cars, as being a more sustainable way of operating. I don't know if you've got any views about that?

(C) Well, I have an electric car.

(S) Oooh!

(C) Well, it's not ...it's called a 'hybrid' - that means it can run on electric and on petrol.

(M) I mean ...I do agree that we all individually have some responsibility here, to try to do things that are better for the environment. And I ... you know, ... I do agree with that, there are things we should do, however, there is so much more that big companies and governments can do, than individuals can do, and I do think it's down to big corporations and governments. And the governments have to force the big corporations, if they're not going to do it themselves, to actually move and do things in a different way, for the future.

(29:04)

I mean there are people saying that, on the back of the covid virus emergency we've had, that actually one way out of that is to have a big new green agenda which will .. in order to create more jobs but also to - you know - improve the environment and build on those things you said at the beginning, Christine, about how we've become more aware of the importance of the environment, during this lockdown.

(C) And to me, the targets that Sheena was saying that our politicians and the politicians across the world have signed up to, to try to counteract this seemingly inevitable global warming.

(S) I think there is hope with the young people, though. So that's why, I think with the green agenda, you know - the Conservative Party greened up their agenda before the election. The political parties need young peoples' votes and I think a lot of young people are a lot of the people who are vegan, aren't they? Extinction Rebellion was quite an interesting movement.

(M) Tell us about that, Sheena.

(S) Well, I don't know a lot about Extinction Rebellion, but it it seems a long time ago now but it was only October, 2018, apparently, when they first assembled in Parliament Square, to announce a declaration of rebellion against the British Government and it was all to do with, you know, the climate change - the climate emergency - and they blocked five of the main bridges over the River Thames in London. They caused chaos and they were again non-violent, peaceful, demonstrations: they super-glued themselves to various places like Buckingham Palace and read a letter out to the Queen. Did all sorts of things to raise awareness ...erm ... and you know, I know that some people disagree with their methods and things but I think there was a spirit there and they weren't just young people. A lot of them were grandparents and they were doing it for the future because they realise that this is a climate emergency. The .. We've had a terrible time for the last three months, with the virus, but actually, the extinction of the world, possibly, is a real and serious issue for a lot of young people.

And the only other person I could mention is Greta Thurnberg, who has been amazing for raising awareness of politicians and global leaders and, you know, she's very straight-talking and quite scientific, I think, in her approach. And her climate strikes for schools brought out - I don't know how many it was - ...twenty thousand students, turned up on a Friday, to protest.

(C) Yes - she's a very dedicated Swedish school-girl, but she's really followed across the world, and in this country, very much so.

(S) Absolutely, yes. She's stunning.

(Music) (32:33)

Language Support

(M) In this part of the podcast I choose a few words and phrases from this episode and explain them in a little more detail.

So, at the very beginning, we talked about "**the green agenda**". Now obviously green is a colour and it has become associated with the idea of a healthy environment, a healthy planet, a planet that is good for us and is sustainable, can last into the future. And so, a **green agenda** are those things that support the environment - the protection of the environment.

We spoke about "**emissions**". In this case, we were talking about the 'emission of gases' into the environment. An **emission** is something that's been produced, or released in this case, those gases that are being released into the atmosphere.

We talked about "**deforestation**". A forest, obviously, is where there are lots of trees - **deforestation** is the getting rid of those trees and very often this has been the cutting down of trees for the land to be used in other ways - ways that are often damaging to the environment. So **deforestation** is, generally, a bad thing for the environment.

We mentioned "**landfill**" - that is when rubbish - the stuff that we are getting rid of - is put into a large hole in the ground: that is know as **landfill**.

And in order to do less of that, because that is damaging to the environment, we need to do more **recycling** so recycling is when things are used again - they are reused. So for example, paper, plastic, tins, bottles - all those things can be **recycled** and used again, so that they are less damaging to the environment.

And finally we talked about the fossil fuels - that is the gas, the oil and the coal - as being "**a finite resource**". So, something that is '**finite**' means: there is a limit to it - there will be an end to it at some stage. So those ... er ...those fuels will have an end to them, eventually they will have been used up and therefore, it is a **finite resource** and what we want to try to find are sources of energy, for us as human beings, that are

natural and that, actually, will be renewable - can continue to be used - without doing damage to the environment.

That's it for this week. I hope you've found this a useful episode and we will back with you again with another episode in the not too distant future.

Bye for now.

(Music) (37:09)