

English for Life in the UK
Episode Six: Review of 2019 and Preview of 2020

Welcome to episode six of the podcast **English for life in UK**.

This podcast is intended for intermediate level learners of English. It is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire and is intended primarily for our students most of whom are asylum seekers, refugees or migrants. However we hope that this podcast will also be of use to anyone wanting to improve their English and learn more about life in the United Kingdom.

This is the first podcast of 2020 so happy New Year to all our listeners. We thought this would be a good opportunity to look back at 2019 and to look forward to 2020.

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Mark: So as it's the beginning of a new year because we're recording this on January the ninth...?

Christine: It is, yeah.

Mark: We decided it would be good to have a session where we looked back at the previous year, 2019, and looked forward to the New Year, 2020. There is a tradition in Britain and I think in quite a lot of Western countries for people at the beginning of a year to look back but also particularly to look forward and to make what are called 'New year resolutions' which means commitments that you make for things that you want to do in the year ahead. So in this session we are doing a bit of that. We're doing some looking back, reviewing, and some looking forward, that's previewing.

So for the looking back, the reviewing part, of the year 2019 we asked our students today to think about that at four different levels: for them personally; for the centre here, it's the St Augustine Centre where we're recording this, here in Halifax; for the United Kingdom as a whole and for the world. And we got our students to come up with ideas but I am going to ask Christine for this podcast to give her reflections. So Christine, for you, what was memorable, important, significant for you personally in 2019?

Christine: It's a hard question Mark because there were..there were many things that were important and memorable but I'll just pick one which was going to the Shetland Islands. We went kayaking in the Shetlands.

Mark: What's a kayak?

Christine: A kayak is a boat. It's .. it's one I paddle. I have a kayak. This is a sea kayak actually. It's a boat, a small boat for one person with.... and I paddle it using a paddle with, well it's a paddle with a blade at each end. And the Shetland Islands was glorious.

Mark: Was that the first time you've been there?

Christine: No it's not.

Mark: But tell me what the Shetland Islands are like.

Christine: They are the most northerly islands in the UK. In fact when you're in the Shetlands the nearest station is in Norway not in... not in Scotland. And it was..ocht.. they're very wild, very windy with delightful birds and wildlife and what was remarkable this time was that the sun shone almost every day which is very unusual for the Shetland Isles.

Mark: That sounds lovely.

Christine: It was.

Mark: So at the level of the St Augustine's Centre here where we volunteer what d'you remember for last year, what's been significant for you?

Christine: Again there are many things I can think of... I really enjoyed the evening at the Square Chapel when people from different countries talked about their country.

Mark: Yeah that was good I was there too and I found it fascinating.

Christine: I have been to one of those sessions before in the St Augustine Centre itself but by bringing, taking it down to the Square Chapel, it made it seem quite important.

Mark: Yeah. It was a special event.

Christine: It was. It was.

Mark: OK so now at the level of the United Kingdom as a whole, what was memorable, significant for you from the last year?

Christine: Well of course, it was Brexit and the Prime Ministers. I mean Theresa May trying to get Brexit through by the end of March and failing and eventually standing down. And then Boris Johnson being elected and trying again to get Brexit through by the end of October and failing. So holding a General election and getting a huge mandate.

Mark: Yes

Christine: So they were the significant events in the UK that... stood out for me.

Mark: Yes. Certainly when I was thinking about this, you almost couldn't think of anything else that was significant because that whole debate about Brexit and then the change of Prime Minister and change of government has dominated the last year.

Christine: Funny, as I think about it I'm holding my head in my hands because it was so, so difficult to follow on the news. So difficult.

Mark: Okay, what about the world? Think about the world as a whole. What d'you think was significant and memorable for you from 2019?

Christine: Well it's very interesting. It's very interesting what the students said. So they are uppermost in my mind. About the bushfires in Australia when, which are still carrying on. Actually in the session we called them forest fires because that is what the students said but, in fact, in Australia, of course, they're called bushfires which just means the same as a forest, I suppose, but it's the uncultivated and forested part of the country bushfires. About the ... the many people being killed.. particularly the Muslim population who are fleeing Myanmar coming across the border to Bangladesh and Aung San Suu Kyi coming to the United Nations to talk. Those are some of the things that stood out for me as well.

Mark: And they also talked about the protests in different parts of the world. Didn't they?

Christine: Oh yes, they did.

Mark: Because there were protests in some of their own home countries, Iran for example, during this last year and obviously there were very significant protests in Hong Kong. So I think those are some of the things that ... that they came up with and I remembered as well.

Christine: Yeah and if you'd asked me who were the significant people? One of the significant people in 2019, as well as the world rulers, was the Swedish schoolgirl, Greta Thundberg. She made, and has made, a big difference and made an impact across the world. She started by... because she was so concerned about climate change, she started a protest just by herself. She went and sat outside the parliament building, the Swedish Parliament building, every Friday. And then this year schoolchildren, certainly all across the UK and other countries, ..followed her and they ... they struck on a Friday. They didn't go to school but they did small demonstrations in their own towns.

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Christine: So after we'd reviewed 2019, we invited people to look forward to 2020. And again we did ask them in the class about what they would hope for the world and for the United Kingdom but ... and St Augustine's Centre but let's just here concentrate on personal ... personal hopes and dreams, the results they wanted to create. So I

asked people to think of what they would like to create in the year going forward. We had a discussion about what, what is in your own hands to create and what is out of your hands so, actually almost everyone in that classroom what they want more than anything, is to be granted leave to remain.... because they're all asylum seekers but of course that is out of their hands so I invited people to concentrate on something that ... that they could themselves make happen. So Mark, we asked a series of questions and I am going to ask you them now about something you would like to create this year. So can you think of one result that you want to create this year?

Mark: Well for me personally, I want to significantly improve my French. I want to be able to converse naturally, speak naturally with French people.

Christine: OK. So now I'm going to ask you the second question in fact I'm going to ask you all the questions in turn. So... why do you want to create this?

Mark: Well I am very lucky in that I spend a significant amount of time in France. I have a house in France as well as a house in England. And.. I want to feel that I am part of the French community. So I want to do it because I want to feel when I'm there that I'm not just on holiday, not just visiting, not just an English person on holiday in France. I want to feel part of that French community.

Christine: Why is this important to you?

Mark: I think because I believe that that's important. I believe that people who're going to spend a significant amount of time in a country should be properly engaged with people in that country. I want to feel part of that community and contribute to that community. I think that's important. Also for me personally I want a challenge and I enjoy a challenge and I want to challenge myself to improve my French to get to a level where I am more fluent.

Christine: Aha... So can you now, you know what you want to create and you're clear about why you want to create it, but can you now close your eyes and just imagine yourself creating it. Now this is not very good podcast if you're just going to sit quiet so why don't you close your eyes and just speak out some of the things that you can see.

Mark: OK. Well, what I am seeing is I am seeing myself in the local café and bar in the town in France where I live and I am sat at a table exclusively with French people. And I am listening to, understanding, their conversations and I am contributing to those conversations and that this isn't just a one-off this is something that I am doing regularly.

Christine: Mmm Great. I can see you in that café Mark. So next question... What actions will you take?

Mark: Well, I am going to continue to follow a particular French course online on the Internet, which I have signed up for. This involves me listening to French people talking to each other, it involves me doing some exercises to test my understanding and also my French grammar. So I'm going to do that. I am going to make an effort to engage with more than just the small group of French friends I've got at the moment because those French friends are actually quite good at speaking English. So I need to find the opportunities to engage with some of the local French people that I don't currently know.

Christine: So have you any idea, any sense of how you might do that?

Mark: Well I think part of it is just to be brave and, in that situation, to go and introduce myself. Or maybe to use my existing French friends to.. to introduce me to, to the group, to some of their friends. ... I think, also, that there are enough people who know that I want to improve my French, that if I'm brave enough to approach them I think they will engage with me and help me.

Christine: Great. Ah well. I wish you good luck with that Mark but I wonder you've talked just about the actions you're going to take I wonder if there's anybody who could help you? Anybody, you know, it's often helpful when we're trying to create things to have somebody alongside you (yes) who can either give you practical or moral support.

Mark: Yes. I agree. And I have some French, I have some English friends who already speak good French, I think they can help me. ... I have some existing French friends, as I said, and I think that I can use them to get access to a wider group of French people I think.... and I will continue to use the ... the prof, the teacher of French that I have found through the Internet to continue to improve. I certainly can't just do it on my own.

Christine: Great. So how confident do you feel about that Mark?

Mark: ... I feel confident that I can make progress. I have some doubts about how brave I will be ..but saying this to you, and saying this out loud and maybe if I wrote it down as well, might be a motivation for me to try to make sure I do take it that bit further.

Christine: Oh well, well done Mark and well done for being brave and saying it out loud. It is, it's interesting when we do say things out loud it often ends up that we are more able to do it. It's like we feel more inclined or I certainly feel more inclined to do it if I've said I will.

Mark: Yeah... that's back to this idea of making some commitments, isn't it, that it is going to try to improve What were the ones that struck you that the students themselves came up with today?

Christine: Well I was interested one of the students is going to, or wants to, become an assistant teacher and rather than wait .. to get her right to remain and start... start, you know, applying for that course the training, to become that, she wants to start as a volunteer.

Mark: Yes that was a good idea. Of course of a number of them actually did choose improving their English, didn't they? Just as I have spoken have about improving my French and I thought that was ... you know those are commitments to things that really are within their control. There are things they can do and they are I think, by and large, determined to do that.

Christine: Yes and there were more than one of them who were focusing on their family and trying to get their family back together because most of them, of course, are living apart from their family at the moment.

Mark: Yes. And one other one that I thought was interesting was that somebody said they wanted to travel from the north to the south and the east to the west of the United Kingdom because he wanted to get to know the country that was his new home.

Christine: Yeah, and he was interested in accents in different parts of the country as well.

Mark: Yes he was, Yeah.

Christine: Very interesting.

Mark: And we were... you pointed out something which I have mentioned on this podcast previously but we hope it is useful to people, is that the three of us contribute to this podcast usually, have three very different accents. So mine is a London based accent from the south of England

Christine: and mine is Scottish. Although I tend to, I notice I take the corners, the rough corners off my accent when I'm speaking here on this podcast.

Mark: That's interesting.(???)... and then is John, who is not with us this week but will be in future sessions has a Yorkshire accent, quite a.. quite a distinctive Yorkshire accent actually.

Christine: Yeah

Mark: That is good... people to experience the different English accents.

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Language support

In this part of the podcast we focus on some aspects of language. Today we're going to look at **tenses** and, in particular, the **past tense** and the **future tense**. This episode, as it involves

reviewing, looking back at the year before, there is a lot of use of the **past tense**. And then in looking forward to the year ahead we are using the **future tense**.

Let's start with the **past tense**. The most common **past tense** in English is the **simple past tense** and there are lots of examples of this in this podcast. For example:

'she **ended** up'

'she **attended** the United Nations'

'we **reviewed** 2019'

'it **dominated** last year'.

These are all examples of **regular verbs** using the **past simple** by adding **-ed** to the verb.

Unfortunately in English there are a lot of **irregular verbs** in the past tense and there were a number of examples of those in this podcast. For example:

'there **were** many things' past tense of **to be**

'we **went** kayaking'. **Went** is the past tense of **to go**

'The sun **shone** almost every day' That's the past tense of **to shine**.

So you've got both **regular** and **irregular verbs** in the **simple past**.

There were also examples of other **past tenses**. For example:

'Theresa May **was trying** to get Brexit done.' **was trying** is what we call the **past continuous tense** because it is describing something in the past that went on for a period of time. We were talking about Brexit here and that definitely went on for a period of time.

There were also two examples of what we call the **present perfect tense**. For example Christine said:

'I **have been** to one of these sessions before'

And then later she was talking about the Swedish schoolgirl, Greta Thornburg, and she said:

'She **has made** a big difference.'

So for this tense you use the **present tense of to have** combined with the **past tense**, in this case, of **to be** ... and then of **to make** as in **has made**. We use this when we're talking about something in the past but which is still relevant, still connected to the present.

Then in the other part of the podcast when we were looking forward and previewing the year ahead we used two different **future tenses**. I said, for example:

'I **am going to ask**'

'I **am going to follow** a fresh course'

'I **am going to make** an effort'

So this is the **'going to' future tense** and it is made up of the verb **to be**, so in this case **I am**, followed by **going**, the **-ing** part of the verb **to go**, and then the **infinitive**¹ of the main verb **to ask**. **I am going to ask**. This is used for events in the future, things in the future that are planned over a period of time.

The second **future tense** uses **will**. So I said, for example:

¹ Mark actually said 'infinity' not 'infinitive'. He apologises for this mistake at the end

'I am confident they **will engage** with me' or

'I **will continue** to use the teacher'

And in this case we use the **subject** plus **will** plus the **main verb** so '**I will continue**'.

This is for events in the future as well but these are usually more certain than the '**going to**' ones although both are, in many cases, interchangeable and you will be understood using either of those for the **future tense**.

Finally we also used some **verbs** in the **present tense** to express a desire or hope about the future. So I said:

'I **want to improve** my French'

'I **hope to engage** with my friends'

'I **would like to get better**'

In this case we are using the **present tense** of those **verbs** that express a desire, a want, a hope. Or we use **would like**, that's a **conditional tense** with **like** to say something ... we hope to happen, would like to happen in the future.

That's the end of this rather longer episode. Two apologies to make at the end. One is that the sound quality hasn't always been as good on this one and that's partly because parts of it were recorded without our better quality microphone.

Secondly I noticed when I replayed this that I made a mistake when talking about the future tense. I talked about the **infinity** of the verb and I meant the **infinitive** of the verb. I hope you'll forgive these errors.

OK. Thank you very much for listening if you've kept going ... this long and ... look forward to doing another episode for you in the near future.