

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK
English for Life in the UK - November 2020
Season 2 Episode 3: British Citizenship

(Music)

- Mark Hello, and welcome to the Podcast, **English for Life in the UK**. My name's Mark and Christine is with me, today. Hello, Christine, how are you?
- Christine Hiya, I'm very well, Mark - a bit sad to see the sun setting at just after 4 o'clock¹. Seems like winter's upon us, Mark but er ...
- Mark Yes - it gets dark! It gets dark very early, doesn't it, at this time of year?
- Christine It really does, it really does.
- Mark Now also, today, with us, I'm delighted to say we've got Israr - and Israr - this is your first time on the Podcast, so would you like to just introduce yourself?
- Israr Yeah, it's my first time on the podcast and I'm very happy to be here. So, I'm - you know, actually one of the members of the "army", you know, of St Augustine's English tutors. So, it's really good to be here.
- Mark That's great - so are you doing some one-to-one teaching with people, over the - erm, over the internet, or are you part of a class?
- Israr Well, I'm, I'm part of a class - and, you know, I should say that, as I said a minute ago, I'm one of the tutors - but if anything, it's the other way around, because I'm learning so much more from the people in the classes than they're probably learning from me.
- Mark Yes - I think that's one of the advantages of group sessions, isn't it? which we're doing over Zoom at the moment, aren't we? Because we're not being able to do face-to-face lessons, which is what we would normally do.
- Christine And you, Israr, I'm just saying, just so that people know this, that you are a proper Halifax person. That's where you were born and bred, I think - is that right?
- Israr Yes - that's absolutely right. So, you know, I think the word for it is, sort of "native", but I prefer the term "dweller".
- Christine Of course, I'm Scottish and Mark comes from London way.
- Mark So one of the things we've always thought was useful for the Podcast was to have different voices and different accents, and so we've got a nice mix today. So, Christine what are we doing today?
- Christine Well, we're talking more about the process of becoming a British citizen - about the process, itself, and then, about the responsibilities and freedoms that go along with that, because as part of the process, you have to pledge to give your loyalty to the United Kingdom. In fact - shall I tell you what the pledge is?
- Mark Yes - go on - that would be useful.

(2 minutes: 57 seconds)

- Christine I've got it in front of me.
(reading) "I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfill my duties and obligations as a British Citizen".
 So -

¹ o'clock = literally, an abbreviation of the old expression "of the clock" and as in other examples, such as "hasn't", or "wouldn't", abbreviations are signified by the apostrophe (')

Mark So, that's the pledge you have to take - but before you get to that stage - what ... er, what do you have to do before that, Christine?

Christine Well - yes, that's the end of quite a long process. You have to erm ... you have to have lived in the country for a certain number of years and it depends on who you are - what category of person: if you're marrying a British person, if you come as an asylum seeker or a refugee, or if you've settled from another country. So, in the main, it's five years, you need to have lived in this country. You also need to prove that you can speak English well. If you've studied, if you have a degree in English, or if you come from an English-speaking country, you don't need to do anything in particular, but otherwise you need to pass a test - an English test to show you can speak English well enough.

And then, of course, you have to do the Citizenship Test and that's the test that, Mark, you and I, have referred to, quite often in this podcast, and the topics that we cover are all part of the syllabus of that - **Life in the UK Citizenship Test**.²

Oh - one other thing - you have to be of good character. So, that means you have to not have broken the law, certainly not seriously to have broken the law, or not recently. You have to show you're of good character and have two referees who will speak up for you in that respect.

Mark I think, maybe, we ought to say, for people who want to know more about this, it would be really important that they go to the official government website to find out about how you become a British citizen. We're talking in general terms about the process here, but if you go to:

www.gov.uk then, and put in "Citizenship".

then, there's lots of information [about] there, about who's eligible and what the process is.

What we're trying to do on this Podcast is help people in two ways. One is to help to improve their English because, as Christine says, you need to be able to demonstrate that your English language is proficient, but also that you then have to do this Citizenship Test and, as Christine says, we base a number of - not all - but a number of our podcast episodes around what's in the Official Government Guide, which is called "**Life in the United Kingdom: A Guide for New Residents**" which is produced by the British Government.

So - shall I go through the responsibilities and freedoms that are identified in the booklet?

Christine I think that would be very helpful.
(6:44)

Mark So - it says - if you wish to be a permanent resident or citizen of the UK, you should respect and obey the law, respect the rights of others, including their right to their own opinions and treat others with fairness, look after yourself and your family, and look after the area in which you live, and look after the environment.

² "Life in the UK: The Official Guide to Becoming a Citizen" (published by The Stationery Office (STO), UK Government.)

Christine That's sounds fair enough.

Mark So those are your responsibilities, as a citizen. I don't know that we need to explain any of those in any great detail, do we, Christine? I think they're fairly obvious.

Christine I would think so.

Mark Yeah - "treat others with fairness" - I think people will understand the notion of fairness. And we've talked a bit about some of these before - like "respect and obey the law" - we've talked about that when we were looking at the principles. Anyway - in return, the UK offers : - so these are the freedoms that the UK offers to people who become citizens : "freedom of belief and religion, freedom of speech, freedom from unfair discrimination, a right to a fair trial and a right to join in the election of a government".

Again - those are ... some of those things we've talked about in previous episodes. So let's have a bit of a discussion about what we think about these. Israr, have you got a view about what we think about the idea of laying down certain responsibilities and freedoms of people who are going to become citizens.

Israr I've got ... You know, I think it's quite straightforward, I think. So, you know, we've got these sorts of rights and responsibilities and, you know, I'd say they've been part of our, you know, **civil discourse** for well over 100 years now. And you know what I find is, there's always a strong implication that, you know, people that arrive at our borders don't, you know, ... somehow innately are unable to follow those rules and that seems to be a big part of, you know, a lot of the objections to sort of, you know, asylum, you know, the right to refuge and fundamentally immigration but ... You know it absolutely astounds me because sort of there's You know - I've been around for a while now - and I've travelled quite a bit - and I've been fortunate enough to, and everywhere I've ever set foot on, no one's ever asked me so, you know:

"Are you willing to be kind to people?" "Do you intend to break the law?" you know, "Do you have a, sort of, innate hatred of this country?"

I think the fact of the matter is that people everywhere are the same: they just want, you know, to get on and really make the best of whatever situation they're in.

(9:56)

Christine It is interesting to see the responsibilities and freedoms that are expected of people in a society, set out and made explicit. I mean we don't challenge other citizens: "Oh! Do you treat others with fairness, Mark?". You know, we don't I mean, my neighbour, well, no actually he does treat other people with fairness, but I have lived next door to people who don't. It's funny seeing it laid out and it's all .. It is interesting, the fact that we have a test, or an expectation, that you need to be one of the "good guys" if you like, to come and live in this country and ... it is challenging, and as you say, Israr, it is ... **it's a bit cheeky**. You know, it's almost as though it makes the assumption that people who want to come here are not like that, whereas actually, respecting and obeying the laws, the rights of others and treating others with fairness, looking after yourself and your family - they're all just common decency, it's what is expected in society.

Israr You know - this guy ... I actually met him in the lunch service that St Augustine's provides for people who are down and out and just need that leg up³. The way our conversation began was - it was coming towards the end of the lunch service - what they ... the really fantastic sort of team in the kitchen that do it - they're always trying to save some for staff and volunteers at the Centre. So - you know, I walked into the kitchen because I had to grab some thing towards the end of a shift⁴. The guy, he pointed at me - now, you know, I think in this country, it is a very ... it's a terrible thing to point at someone, you know you really mustn't do that - but he pointed at me, then, when he got my attention, he made a sort of hand gesture, as if to say "have you eaten?". And, you know, I looked at him and made the assumption that his English was not good, so you know I rubbed my stomach, and in return, he said, "oh, that's ok, I'll fix you a plate" (*laughing*) so, you know - you've got this guy, he'd - more or less - cooked for me. So, you know - who am I to say ... ? In reality, you know you've got this guy, cooking and I was lucky enough that he'd noticed that perhaps I was hungry too, so he'd feed me! How's that for - you know - responsibilities and looking after your fellow citizens? He was really helping the helpers there, and that's commendable in my view.

Mark Yeah - I understand the point about saying that - it does sound kind of distrustful of somebody feeling you have to say you know part of your responsibility is to be, you know, fair to other people and to look after your family. I mean, who on earth is not going to say that they're going to do those things? I suppose I do think that it's not unreasonable for a country to say, that if somebody is going to come and live the rest of their life here, and become a citizen, and be able ...erm ... vote and help to decide who the government of the day is here, that we actually say, there is an expectation that people in those circumstances, do actually, for example, obey the law. I do think that that is a kind of minimal thing that we should expect of people. I don't think it's ... I don't think it's unreasonable to have some expectations.

(14:10)

I think the difficulty for me, probably, is "how you define them?" You know, as soon as you start to put something down in writing, then it becomes often something that you could debate. I mean, you know, we had a discussion previously, about ... it's all very well to say that one of the freedoms you get is freedom of speech, but you do have to have some limitations on that. It's not absolute freedom of speech because we cannot accept people who would say things that, actually, are hateful and might lead to violence against other people, because of what they're saying. So none of these things are completely pure statements and that's the problem once you start to write it down, I think.

Israr Yeah - I think you make a really great point here, Mark. So, I'll give you ... I'll tell you a little story about a relative of mine, who came from Pakistan. So, you know, he'd gone through the sort of process of getting citizenship, you know, and he'd really studied for this test, but once he was eligible to vote and you know, he'd put his roots down⁵, he voted. His first time he had ever voted and you've got to bear in mind, this man had

³ Another way of saying "a helping hand"

⁴ Shift = period of working time

⁵ put his roots down = settled more permanently

lived under military dictatorship, and I think what would be sort of reasonable to say as a **fractured democracy** - so as soon as he found himself in Britain, he voted for the British National Party (BNP). So, I asked him, you know - we were all sat as part of the family, in pre-Coronavirus times, we asked him who he voted for, in the election. My family - they're all Labour voters you know, they all vote Labour, but he'd voted BNP. Now, that, to sort of many ethnic Labour voters, is an unforgivable sin, but his reason was this: he said, because, they stood up for Britain. So, you know, at some point, he'd got to believe that these people they really care about this country - they're British and I want to be British, so - but once we explained it to him, he said "Oh my God! I made a terrible mistake!". And eventually he went on to vote Green Party.
(Laughter)

Christine We perhaps should explain, that the BNP is a party which ... the British National Party has very strong anti-immigration views, in particular.

Mark I think most people would say that it is a quite outwardly racist party. They might deny that themselves but I think anyone else .. and happily, they are fairly ... there's not many of them around anymore, but there was a period when they were quite popular, in this country. That's a really interesting example.
So what do we think about the actual idea that citizens have to pass a test, that they have to have a good level of English and that they have to make this pledge? What do we think about that?

Christine Well, I think the test - I think that having a test of British citizenship - a test - it's like understanding some of the culture and some of the history of this country: it's a very, very, **dubious** thing to do - when you ... I have taken one of these practice tests. I am a very well-educated person. I've lived in this country most of my life, for many years, and I couldn't answer many of the questions: I didn't know the answer. In particular, the historical details of the English Kings. I mean, I'm Scottish - I didn't learn about the English kings at school. Have I ... am I somehow a lesser citizen, because I don't know that?

(18:22)

Israr Why would you be asking somebody from some place far, far away, history that happened a very long time ago, when, you know, really you should be asking people things like, you know, "in 1997, who was the Prime Minister of Great Britain?" or "when was same-sex marriage, or civil partnership, you know, sort of legalised?" You know, if you really want to ask questions about, you know, do you subscribe to the values of a secular and liberal Britain, you should be asking those sorts of questions.
You know - why would you ask somebody about [*King*] Henry VIII [*the eighth*], "what was the name of his third wife?". You know, I would be scratching my own head⁶, thinking about it.

Mark I think the issue for me is that, it is difficult, once you ... when you say you're going to have a test for citizenship, is what on earth do you decide are the kind the areas that people should know about? Because, you know, I agree with both of you, I think

⁶ a common expression to indicate uncertainty, needing to think about an answer

that you know what you end up choosing to put in it, what they put in this Guide, if you ask half-a-⁷dozen people in this country, a lot of people, (a) wouldn't know and wouldn't have the answer, they'd also have a different view about what's important for people to know and, you know, there are some people who would argue that it's actually really important and I would say it's really important that people know about the impact of the British Empire on people in other parts of the world and how that has influenced the way Britain is today and yet, some aspects of that are completely missing from the syllabus⁸, and then, other things that you might think are unimportant are there, so I think that's part of the problem.

(20:14)

Christine I want to say just now we're talking, ... we're each one of us criticising, particularly the content of this Citizenship Test but, in these podcasts, we will none-the-less cover the subjects, the topics, that are currently in the Test. We are coming along ... we are alongside - we are going to help any of the listeners learn what is required to be learned for the Citizenship Test.

Mark Yeah - because the fact is that is, you know - that is the law, actually, of this Country, about how you become a British citizen. You do have to do these things and we want to help people to do that. I think what we're doing is just having a discussion about how difficult some of that is, erm ... and the fact that not everybody would agree that is the best thing to do, but the reality is: that is the position. And we want to help people as best we can to go ... jump through the hoops, is a phrase we might use in English; something where you have to complete a set of tasks, in order to achieve something at the end of it, and some of those hoops, you have to jump through, might seem a little bit strange, but sometimes you just have to do it. I think that's really where we stand on this.

(Music) (21:50)

Language Support

Mark This is the part of the Podcast where I choose a few phrases that we've used and explain a little more about their meaning or their use. So, there are three phrases I'm going to pick out - and also then, there are some typical speech patterns.

So, for phrases -

Israr used the phrase "**civil discourse**" - if something is in "civil discourse" it means it's something that is spoken or discussed widely - spoken about or discussed widely, across society.

Christine used the phrase she said something was "**it's a bit cheeky**". For something to be "a bit cheeky" means: it lacks respect or politeness, if something's a bit cheeky.

And then, another time, she said something was "**dubious**": to be dubious, is something not to be relied upon, something uncertain, or unsure.

And finally, Israr used the phrase "**fractured democracy**" - if something is "fractured", it is broken, so a "fractured democracy" would be a country which is supposed to be a democracy, but where it isn't really working properly - it's broken.

⁷ a dozen is 12, half-a-dozen is 6

⁸ a syllabus is a list of things that have to be learnt in a course or for a test

I wanted, then, to just explain a little bit about kind of, what we might call "filler words" that are regularly used by people in English. All languages have these filler words and very often, they are quite personal to the individual, so you may have noticed during this particular recording, for example, that I used "er ..." and "erm..." when I'm saying something and I'm thinking on my feet, as I speak, and might need a little pause, so I go "er ... well, I really meant this" or I'm talking about something, "erm ..." but I'm not quite sure of. So those little filler words then, I use "anyway" and "I mean" quite often, as little filler phrases, that don't actually mean anything in themselves but just are another way of expressing something in a sentence.

Israr uses "so, you know", quite a lot and he also uses the "sort of" - so "sort of" means "kind of" "a bit like", and again, those are little filler phrases that don't in themselves mean very much but, actually, just help the speaker, as they are explaining something.

Christine uses "you know" occasionally. She also says "I mean" after ,, if she's said something and then needs to explain a bit more, she says "I mean" and then she says "well, actually" and that's again, one of those pauses before you go on to say something else.

So those are just some examples. There are lots of others, of little filler-words or sounds, that are used regularly in English, in everyday conversation and the point about our Podcast is, we always try to speak in a natural way; we don't have a script and we don't plan in detail what we're going to say, so that means those filler-words are there, because that's the kind of things people do naturally.

So that's it, for this week. I hope you've found that interesting. Don't forget, you can find all the previous episodes and the transcripts - the written versions - of all the episodes including this one, on our website:

staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Or you can contact us by email - and we would love to hear from you: your thoughts on the podcasts and ideas for future episodes etc. And the email address is:

englishforlifeintheuk@gmail.com

OK, thanks very much for listening and keep practicing your English. Speak to you again, soon.

(Music)

(Ends) (26:58)