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ПОСОБИЕ ПО ОБУЧЕНИЮ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОМУ ЧТЕНИЮ. ЧАСТЬ I

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Учебное пособие по обучению межкультурному чтению предназначено для студентов, обучающихся по программам 44.03.05 Педагогическое образование (с двумя профилями) / Английский язык и немецкий язык, 45.03.02 Лингвистика, 45.05.01 Перевод и переводоведение, а также 45.04.02 Лингвистика / Лингвистика и межкультурная коммуникация.

Цель пособия – развитие межкультурной компетенции обучаемых, совершенствование их умений в области межкультурного чтения на английском языке, формирование межкультурных грамматических и лексических навыков, а также развитие умений межкультурного общения. Данное пособие может быть использовано на занятиях по дисциплинам «Практический курс первого иностранного языка (английский язык)», «Практикум по культуре речевого общения (английский язык)» и др.

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Содержание

ВВЕДЕНИЕ

Учебное пособие по обучению межкультурному чтению предназначено для студентов, обучающихся по программам 44.03.05 Педагогическое образование (с двумя профилями) / Английский язык и немецкий язык, 45.03.02 Лингвистика, 45.05.01 Перевод и переводоведение, а также 45.04.02 Лингвистика / Лингвистика и межкультурная коммуникация.

Цель данного учебного пособия – развитие межкультурной компетенции обучаемых, а именно, совершенствование их умений в области межкультурного чтения на английском языке как средства общения, формирование межкультурных грамматических и лексических навыков, а также развитие умений межкультурного общения.

Необходимость разработки данного пособия объясняется потребностью в современных учебных пособиях для студентов университета, разработанных в контексте межкультурного обучения [6; 10; 11]. В частности, актуальными являются задачи создания и разработки учебных пособий, которые бы обеспечили реализацию межкультурного аспекта иноязычного чтения.

Формирование межкультурной компетенции личности осуществляется в учебном процессе через межкультурное образование, имеющее целью сформировать у обучающихся новое культурное сознание – способность при контактах с другой культурой понять иной образ жизни, иные ценности, не теряя свои ценности, и отказаться от существующих стереотипов и предубеждений. Основная цель межкультурного обучения - это не передача определённой информации о новой культуре, а привитие способности к её пониманию, к ликвидации определённых предубеждений и стереотипов.

Переход к межкультурному образованию требует изменения всей системы обучения иностранному языку, потому что изменив цели системы, необходимо внести соответствующие изменения во все остальные ее компоненты: содержание, методы, средства и формы обучения. В полной мере это относится к разработке средств – пособий нового поколения, построенных по принципу межкультурного образования и имеющих целью формирование межкультурной компетенции.

Межкультурное обучение чтению следует закономерностям традиционного коммуникативного обучения чтению на иностранном языке и должно, кроме того, соответствовать требованиям межкультурного образования. Межкультурное чтение представляет собой когнитивно-продуктивную деятельность при чтении и на основе текста. Эта деятельность включает когнитивные действия восприятия, распознавания, сопоставительной интерпретации феноменов другой культуры, а также продуктивные действия применения результатов такой интерпретации в последующей речевой и неречевой деятельности.

Таким образом, это, с одной стороны, понимание текста, а с другой стороны, это действия с использованием извлекаемой при чтении информации, которые являются продолжением процессов понимания.

Дидактическая цель чтения в межкультурном плане и заключается в формировании межкультурных когнитивно-продуктивных умений,

соответствующих основным названным действиям: умений восприятия и распознавания феноменов другой культуры с их особенностями (умения межкультурного наблюдения), умений межкультурного сравнения, умений применения нового межкультурного знания. К этим группам умений относятся навыки и умения понимания языковых единиц с национально-культурной спецификой.

Традиционно обучение чтению происходит на материале классических и современных художественных произведений, прецедентных текстов, способствующих обогащению фоновых знаний обучающихся и развитию их филологической компетенции [1; 2; 3; 4; 7; 8; 18]. В русле межкультурного обучения следует также использовать монокультурные тексты научно-популярного характера, раскрывающие особенности менталитета британцев, их стратегии речевого поведения, ценностные ориентации. Монокультурные тексты с потенциальной межкультурной направленностью это «характерологические» тексты, описывающие интракультурные феномены, которые признаются для культур характерными (традиции и обычаи, ритуалы, национальный характер/ментальность и т.п.); это обычно научные, научно-популярные и публицистические тексты.

Данное пособие разработано на основе именно монокультурного текста - знаменитой книги британского антрополога Кейт Фокс «Наблюдая за англичанами» (‘Watching the English. The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour’ by Kate Fox) [19], что обеспечивает аутентичность и идиоматичность изучаемого материала и языковых единиц. Выбор данной книги обусловлен тем, что монокультурные характерологические тексты обладают наибольшей вероятной межкультурной информативностью.

Эффективное освоение иностранного языка студентами невозможно без развития их общекультурных, межкультурной и профессиональной компетенций, без воспитания обучающихся в духе патриотизма и уважения к представителям изучаемых культур и языков [5; 9]. Развитие иноязычной коммуникативной компетенции обучающихся тесно связано с формированием представлений об англоязычной концептуальной и языковой картинах мира [14; 15], развитием ценностной автономии студентов, умений лингвокультурной рефлексии [12; 20]. Именно на решение данных задач нацелено данное пособие. В связи с этим ряд заданий направлены на развитие навыков и умений, входящих в профессиональную компетенцию будущих учителей английского языка и переводчиков. К ним относятся умение учитывать социокультурный контекст в процессе межкультурного общения; умение адекватно интерпретировать англоязычные речевые стратегии и другие.

При разработке заданий авторы опирались на работы по межкультурному обучению чтению [6; 11; 13; 17]. В основе заданий межкультурно-коммуникативных упражнений лежат межкультурно-коммуникативные задачи, направленные на формирование межкультурных когнитивно-продуктивных умений. В соответствии с этими умениями определяются следующие виды межкультурных упражнений при чтении на иностранном языке: упражнения в понимании лексических и грамматических единиц с национально-культурной спецификой; упражнения в

межкультурном чтении-наблюдении; упражнения в межкультурном сравнении; упражнения в применении нового межкультурного знания.

Известно, что одной из главных причин непонимания при межкультурном общении является не различие языков, а различие национальных сознаний коммуникантов. В основе мировидения и мировосприятия лежит своя система предметных значений и социальных стереотипов, поэтому сознание человека всегда этнически обусловлено. С особой яркостью мировидение проявляется в коммуникативном поведении представителей различных лингвокультур. В особенностях коммуникативного сознания лежит проблема различий в поведении. Трудности в межкультурной коммуникации возникают из-за того, что коммуниканты оценивают поведение друг друга исходя из своих норм и традиций, а также, общаясь на иностранном языке, как правило, пользуются этим языком, находясь под влиянием своего коммуникативного сознания. Другими словами, они переносят национально-культурные стереотипы поведения, характерные для родной лингвокультуры, на процесс общения с представителями других лингвокультур, что может привести к серьезным коммуникативным ошибкам и неудачам. Данное положение было учтено нами при отборе тем для изучения.

Пособие включает в себя четыре темы, содержание которых раскрывает такие аспекты англоязычных концептуальной и языковой картин, как обсуждение погоды, светская беседа, английский юмор и разговоры по мобильному телефону. По каждому разделу разработаны упражнения и практические задания, цель которых развивать умения межкультурного чтения, формировать межкультурные грамматические и лексические навыки, а также развивать умения коммуникативного поведения в межкультурной ситуации общения.

Учебное пособие характеризуется высокой степенью освещения практических вопросов коммуникативного поведения в англоязычной культуре и актуальностью материала, подлежащего изучению. Освоение данного материала соответствует профессиональным и личностным интересам обучающихся, а также содержанию учебных программ. Это создает оптимальные условия для организации личностного общения и тренировки в межкультурном общении в процессе обучения английскому языку [16].

Данное пособие может быть использовано на занятиях по дисциплинам «Практический курс первого иностранного языка (английский язык)», «Практикум по культуре речевого общения (английский язык)», «Иностранный язык в профессиональной деятельности», для организации самостоятельной работы обучающихся в соответствии с программой по дисциплине «Межкультурная коммуникация в профессиональной деятельности» и др. Также оно может быть полезно для широкого круга лиц, желающих улучшить свое владение английским языком, а именно совершенствовать умения межкультурного чтения и расширить социокультурные знания.

UNIT 1
THE WEATHER

WEATHER

Pre-reading

Exercise 1.

What do you know about the weather in the British Isles? Do you know what conversations about the weather are really about? What rules of etiquette do English people observe when they talk about the weather?

Exercise 2.

Study the following words and expressions:

blizzard – a snowstorm with very strong winds

hailstorm – a storm during which hail falls from the sky

reserve – the quality that somebody has when they do not talk easily to other people about their ideas, feelings, etc.

a breach of etiquette - an action that breaks the formal rules of correct or polite behavior in society

Discourteous –having bad manners and not showing respect for other people

reciprocity – a situation in which two people, countries, etc. provide the same help or advantages to each other

quirks – an aspect of somebody's personality or behavior that is a little strange

coarse - rude and offensive

distasteful – unpleasant or offensive

inhibition – a shy or nervous feeling that stops you from expressing your real thoughts or feelings

ingenious – (of a person) having a lot of clever new ideas and good at inventing things

dismissive – showing that you do not believe a person or thing to be important or worth considering

put something down to something – to consider that something is caused by something

to override – to be more important than something

deliberately – intentionally

to belittle – to make somebody or the things that somebody does seem unimportant

to be sniffy about something –(informal)not approving of somebody/something because you think they are not good enough for you

to reciprocate – to behave or feel towards somebody in the same way as they behave or feel towards you

Reading

Exercise 3. What is special about the weather in Britain? What are the rules of English weather-speak? Why do foreigners think that the English are obsessed with the subject of the weather? If you need some information to answer these questions, read the following article.

THE WEATHER

Any discussion of English conversation, like any English conversation, must begin with The Weather. I shall, like every other writer on Englishness, quote Dr Johnson's famous comment that 'When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather', and point out that this observation is as accurate now as it was over two hundred years ago.

This, however, is the point at which most commentators either stop, or try, and fail, to come up with a convincing explanation for the English 'obsession' with the weather. They fail because their premise is mistaken: they assume that our conversations about the weather are conversations about the weather. In other words, they assume that we talk about the weather because we have a keen (indeed pathological) interest in the subject. Most of them then try to figure out what it is about the English weather that is so fascinating.

Bill Bryson, for example, concludes that the English weather is not at all fascinating, and presumably that our obsession with it is therefore inexplicable: 'To an outsider, the most striking thing about the English weather is that there is not very much of it. All those phenomena that elsewhere give nature an edge of excitement, unpredictability and danger – tornadoes, monsoons, raging blizzards, run-for-your-life hailstorms – are almost wholly unknown in the British Isles.'

Jeremy Paxman takes umbrage at Bryson's dismissive comments, and argues that the English weather *is* intrinsically fascinating:

‘Bryson misses the point. The English fixation with the weather is nothing to do with histrionics – like the English countryside, it is, for the most part, dramatically undramatic. The interest is less in the phenomena themselves, but in *uncertainty* . . . one of the few things you can say about England with absolute certainty is that it has a *lot* of weather. It may not include tropical cyclones but life at the edge of an ocean and the edge of a continent means you can never be entirely sure what you’re going to get.’

My research has convinced me that both Bryson and Paxman are missing the point, which is that our conversations about the weather are not really about the weather at all: English weather-speak is a form of code, evolved to help us overcome our natural reserve and actually talk to each other. Everyone knows, for example, that ‘Nice day, isn’t it?’, ‘Ooh, isn’t it cold?’, ‘Still raining, eh?’ and other variations on the theme are not requests for meteorological data: they are ritual greetings, conversation-starters or default ‘fillers’. In other words, English weather-speak is a form of ‘grooming talk’.

THE RULES OF ENGLISH WEATHER-SPEAK

The Reciprocity Rule

Jeremy Paxman cannot understand why a ‘middle-aged blonde’ he encounters outside the Met Office in Bracknell says ‘Ooh, isn’t it cold?’, and he puts this irrational behaviour down to a distinctively English ‘capacity for infinite surprise at the weather’. In fact, ‘Ooh, isn’t it cold?’ – like ‘Nice day, isn’t it?’ and all the others – is English code for ‘I’d like to talk to you – will you talk to me?’, or, if you like, simply another way of saying ‘hello’. The hapless female was just trying to strike up a conversation with Mr Paxman. Not necessarily a long conversation – just a mutual acknowledgement, an exchange of greetings. Under the rules of weather-speak, all he was required to say was ‘Mm, yes, isn’t it?’ or some other equally meaningless ritual response, which is code for ‘Yes, I’ll talk to you/greet you’. By failing to respond at all, Paxman committed a minor breach of etiquette, effectively conveying the rather discourteous message ‘No, I will not exchange greetings with you’. (This was not a serious transgression, however, as the rules of privacy and reserve override those of sociability: talking to strangers is never compulsory.)

‘Nice day, isn’t it?’ is not a real question about the weather. Comments about the weather are phrased as questions (or with an interrogative intonation) because they require a response – but the *reciprocity* is the point, not the content. Any interrogative remark on the weather will do to initiate the process, and any mumbled confirmation (or even near-repetition, as in ‘Yes, isn’t it?’) will do as a response.

The Context Rule

A principal rule concerns the contexts in which weather-speak can be used. In fact,

there are three quite specific contexts in which weather-speak is prescribed. Weatherspeak can be used:

- as a simple greeting
- as an ice-breaker leading to conversation on other matters
- as a 'default', 'filler' or 'displacement' subject, when conversation on other matters falters, and there is an awkward or uncomfortable lull.

Admittedly, this rule does allow for rather a lot of weather-speak – hence the impression that we talk of little else. A typical English conversation may well start with a weather-speak greeting, progress to a bit more weather-speak ice-breaking, and then 'default' to weather-speak at regular intervals. It is easy to see why many foreigners, and even many English commentators, have assumed that we must be obsessed with the subject.

The changeable and unpredictable nature of the English weather makes it a particularly suitable facilitator of social interaction.

The Agreement Rule

The English have clearly chosen a highly appropriate aspect of our own familiar natural world as a social facilitator: the capricious and erratic nature of our weather ensures that there is always something new to comment on, be surprised by, speculate about, moan about, or, perhaps most importantly, *agree* about. Which brings us to another important rule of English weather-speak: always agree. This rule was noted by the Hungarian humorist George Mikes, who wrote that in England 'You must never contradict anybody when discussing the weather'. We have already established that weather-speak greetings or openers such as 'Cold, isn't it?' must be reciprocated, but etiquette also requires that the response express agreement, as in 'Yes, isn't it?' or 'Mmm, very cold'.

Failure to agree in this manner is a serious breach of etiquette. In the same way, it would be very rude to respond to 'Ooh, isn't it cold?' with 'No, actually, it's quite mild'. Such responses are extremely rare, almost unheard of. Nobody will tell you that there is a rule about this; they are not even conscious of following a rule: it just simply isn't done.

If you deliberately break the rule, you will find that the atmosphere becomes rather tense and awkward, and possibly somewhat huffy. No one will actually complain or make a big scene about it, but they will be offended, and this will show in subtle ways. There may be an uncomfortable silence, then someone may say, in piqued tones, 'Well, it feels cold to *me*,' or '*Really*? Do you think so?' – or, most likely, they will either change the subject or continue talking about the weather among themselves, politely, if frostily, ignoring your *faux pas*.

Exceptions to the Agreement Rule

This sort of gracious fudging is possible because the rules of English weather-speak are complex, and there are often exceptions and subtle variations. In the case of

the agreement rule, the main variation concerns personal taste or differences in weather-sensitivity. You must always agree with 'factual' statements about the weather (these are almost invariably phrased as questions but, as we have already established, this is because they require a social *response*, not a rational answer), even when they are quite obviously wrong. You may, however, express personal likes and dislikes that differ from those of your companions, or express your disagreement in terms of personal quirks or sensibilities.

An appropriate response to 'Ooh, isn't it cold?', if you find you really cannot simply agree, would be 'Yes, but I really rather like this sort of weather – quite invigorating, don't you think?' or 'Yes, but you know I don't tend to notice the cold much – this feels quite warm to me'. Note that both of these responses start with an expression of agreement, even though in the second case this is followed by a blatant self-contradiction: 'Yes . . . this feels quite warm to me.' It is perfectly acceptable to contradict oneself in this manner, etiquette being far more important than logic, but if you truly cannot bring yourself to start with the customary 'Yes', this may be replaced by a positive-sounding 'Mmm' accompanied by a nod – still an expression of agreement, but rather less emphatic.

Even better would be the traditional mustn't-grumble response: 'Yes [or Mmm-with-nod], but at least it's not raining.' If you have a liking for cold weather, or do not find it cold, this response virtually guarantees that you and your shivering acquaintance will reach happy agreement. Everyone always agrees that a cold, bright day is preferable to a rainy one – or, at least, it is customary to express this opinion.

The Weather-as-family Rule

While we may spend much of our time moaning about our weather, foreigners are not allowed to criticize it. In this respect, we treat the English weather like a member of our family: one can complain about the behaviour of one's own children or parents, but any hint of censure from an outsider is unacceptable, and very bad manners.

Although we are aware of the relatively undramatic nature of the English weather – the lack of extreme temperatures, monsoons, tempests, tornadoes and blizzards – we become extremely touchy and defensive at any suggestion that our weather is therefore inferior or uninteresting. The worst possible weather-speak offence is one mainly committed by foreigners, particularly Americans, and that is to belittle the English weather. When the summer temperature reaches the high twenties, and we moan, 'Phew, isn't it *hot*?', we do not take kindly to visiting Americans or Australians laughing and scoffing and saying 'Call *this* hot? This is *nothing*. You should come to Texas [Brisbane] if you wanna see *hot*!'

Not only is this kind of comment a serious breach of the agreement rule, and the weather-as-family rule, but it also represents a grossly *quantitative* approach to the weather, which we find coarse and distasteful. Size, we sniffily point out, isn't everything, and the English weather requires an appreciation of subtle changes and

understated nuances, rather than a vulgar obsession with mere volume and magnitude.

Indeed, the weather may be one of the few things about which the English are still unselfconsciously and unashamedly patriotic.

WEATHER-SPEAK RULES AND ENGLISHNESS

The rules of English weather-speak tell us quite a lot about Englishness. We see clear signs of reserve and social inhibition, but also the ingenious use of 'facilitators' to overcome these handicaps. The agreement rule and its exceptions provide hints about the importance of politeness and avoidance of conflict – and the precedence of etiquette over logic. The moderation rule reveals a dislike and disapproval of extremes, and the weather-as-family rule exposes a perhaps surprising patriotism.

Exercise 4.
Complete the following sentences with the words from the text.

1. English weather-speak is a form of code, evolved to help us overcome our natural ___ and actually talk to each other. (the quality that somebody has when they do not talk easily to other people about their ideas, feelings)
2. The rules of privacy and reserve ____ those of sociability: talking to strangers is never compulsory. (be more important than something)
3. Comments about the weather are phrased as questions because they require a response – but the ___ is the point, not the content. (a situation in which two people, countries, etc. provide the same help or advantages to each other)
4. The changeable and ___ nature of the English weather makes it a particularly suitable facilitator of social interaction. (that cannot be predicted because it changes a lot or depends on too many different things)
5. You must never ___ anybody when discussing the weather. (say that something that somebody else has said is wrong, and that the opposite is true)
6. If you ___ break the rule, you will find that the atmosphere becomes rather tense and awkward. (intentionally)
7. Everyone always agrees that a cold, bright day is preferable to a rainy one – or, at least, it is ___ to express this opinion. (typical)
8. The worst possible weather-speak offence is one mainly committed by foreigners, particularly Americans, and that is to belittle the English weather. (to make somebody or the things that somebody does seem unimportant)
9. Size, we ___ point out, isn't everything, and the English weather requires an appreciation of subtle changes. (in a disapproving way)
10. Although we are aware of the relatively undramatic nature of the English weather – the lack of extreme temperatures, monsoons, tempests, tornadoes and ___ – we become extremely touchy and defensive at any suggestion that our weather is therefore inferior or uninteresting. (snowstorms with very strong winds)

Exercise 5.

Fill in the blanks with the prepositions where necessary.

1. Most commentators assume that we talk about the weather because we have a keen interest __ the subject.
2. ___ the rules of weather-speak, all he was required to say was ‘Mm, yes, isn’t it?’
3. You may, however, express personal likes and dislikes that differ ___ those of your companions
4. You may express your disagreement __ terms of personal quirks or sensibilities.
5. If you have a liking ___ cold weather, or do not find it cold, this response virtually guarantees that you and your shivering acquaintance will reach happy agreement.
6. Failure to agree in this manner is a serious breach ___ etiquette.
7. Any interrogative remark ___ the weather will do to initiate the process.
8. The English weather requires an appreciation of subtle changes and understated nuances, rather than a vulgar obsession ___ mere volume and magnitude.
9. The weather may be one of the few things ___ which the English are still unselfconsciously and unashamedly patriotic.
10. Not only is this kind of comment a serious breach of the agreement rule, and the weather-as-family rule, but it also represents a grossly *quantitative* approach ___ the weather.

Exercise 6.
Fill in the blanks with the articles where necessary.

1. They try to figure out what it is about ___ English weather that is so fascinating.
2. By failing to respond at all, Paxman committed a minor breach of etiquette, effectively conveying __ rather discourteous message ‘No, I will not exchange greetings with you’.
3. Talking to ___ strangers is never compulsory.
4. Everyone always agrees that __ cold, bright day is preferable to ___ rainy one – or, at least, it is customary to express this opinion.
5. In this respect, we treat the English weather like ___ member of our family: one can complain about ___ behaviour of one’s own children or parents, but any hint of censure from ___ outsider is unacceptable.
6. In ___ case of the agreement rule, ___ main variation concerns personal taste or differences in weather-sensitivity.
7. The rules of __ English weather-speak tell us quite a lot about __ Englishness.
8. ___ capricious and erratic nature of our weather ensures that there is always something new to comment on.

Exercise 7.

Read the following statements. Decide whether each statement is true or false. Compare your answers with those of a classmate

1. Most commentators think that the English talk about the weather because they have an unflagging interest in the subject.
2. Foreigners usually fail to explain the English obsession with the subject of the weather.
3. Bill Bryson thinks the English obsession with the weather is easy to explain.
4. Such natural phenomena as tornadoes, blizzards and hailstorms are common in the British Isles.
5. Talking about the weather helps the English to overcome their natural reserve.
6. 'Nice day, isn't it?' is a question about the weather.
7. Etiquette requires that the response to comments about the weather express agreement.
8. When you hear a remark like 'Cold, isn't it?', you should reciprocate with a remark of your own.
9. The English are likely to complain loudly if you deliberately break the agreement rule.
10. There are no exceptions or variations to the agreement rule when talking about the weather.

Exercise 8.
Discuss the following questions with your partner.

1. Why are comments about the weather phrased as questions?
2. What should a response to a comment about the weather be like?
3. What makes many foreigners think that the English are obsessed with the subject of the weather?
4. What aspects of the English weather make it a good facilitator of communication?
5. What are the etiquette rules of English weather-speak?
6. In what ways is it possible to respond politely to statements about the weather if you feel you cannot give a reciprocating response?
7. What is the suitable way of responding to a statement about the weather if the statement is obviously wrong?
8. What is more important when talking about the weather: being polite or being logical?
9. Do the English like it when foreigners criticize the weather? Why? Why not?
10. What is the worst possible weather-speak offence committed by foreigners?

Exercise 9. Compare the etiquette rules of talking about the weather in England and in Russia. Complete the table.

Rules to be compared	England	Russia
weather-speak agreement rule		
the context rule		
the reciprocity rule		
the weather-as-family rule		

Exercise 10.

1. Look at the following picture. Imagine that you are talking to an Englishman about the weather and you can't simply agree. Respond to the statement about the weather:

'Nice day, isn't it?'

2. Look at the following picture. Work in pairs. Imagine that you are talking to an Englishman about the weather and you can't simply agree.

Student 1: Project yourself into the skin of the person in the picture and begin the weather-speak.

Student 2: Respond to the statement about the weather to keep up the conversation.

3. Look at the following picture and imagine that you talking to the person in the picture. Respond to the statement about the weather:

'Cold, isn't it?'

Exercise 11.

Read the following information about the way the British speak about the weather. Comment on the card below. Why is it funny?

Get around in **ENGLISH**

Lesson Forty-four
How to Start a Conversation

Use this handy card whenever you want to start a conversation with a British person. Just look them in the eye and say the conversation starter for your level. It's as easy as that!*

Elementary

It's a nice day today, isn't it?

Intermediate

Bit of a cold wind today, isn't there?
Looks like we're in for some rain later.

Advanced

A trough of low pressure is sweeping down from south-east Iceland, bringing fog and frost to low-lying areas, with scattered thunderstorms in the west and a belt of rain, which may fall as sleet or snow over the Pennines, moving across the whole country by tomorrow lunchtime.

*Don't worry if you can't understand their reply — just keep smiling!

Tourists like you are ruining this place!

Yes, it is, isn't it?

UNIT 2
GROOMING – TALK

THE RULES OF INTRODUCTION

Pre-reading

Exercise 1.

What do you know about the English rules of introduction, greeting and leave-taking? Do you know what conversations about the weather are really about? What rules of etiquette do English people observe when they talk about the weather?

Exercise 2.

Study the following words and expressions:

Setting – a set of surroundings, the place at which something happens.

Omission–a thing that has not been included or done.

Prejudice – an unreasonable dislike of or preference for a person, group, custom, etc., especially when it is based on their race, religion, sex, etc.

Dithering – the state of not being able to decide what you should do.

Glib – (disapproving) of speakers and speech) using words that are clever, but are not sincere, and do not show much thought.

Gossip - (disapproving) informal talk or stories about other people's private lives, that may be unkind or not true.

Evaluation – forming an opinion of the amount, value or quality of something after thinking about it carefully.

Innocuous - (formal) not intended to offend or upset anyone; not harmful or dangerous.

To overstate the importance – to say something in a way that make it seem more important than it really is.

To wince–to suddenly make an expression with your face that shows that you are feeling pain or embarrassment

Obliging – very willing to help.

Explicit – said, done or shown in an open or direct way, so that you do not doubt what is happening; (of a statement or piece of writing) clear and easy to understand.

To be bandied about – (usually passive) to be mentioned frequently by many people.

To sneer at – to show that you have no respect for somebody on your face or by the way you speak.

Disclosure – (formal) the act of making something known or public that was previously secret or private.

To divulge - (formal) to give somebody information that is supposed to be secret.

Feedback – advice, criticism or information about how good or useful something or somebody's work is.

At random – without thinking or deciding in advance what is going to happen.

Minute - very detailed, careful and thorough.

Abhorrence – (formal) a feeling of strong hatred, especially for moral reasons.

Hypocrisy – behavior in which somebody pretends to have moral standards or opinions that they do not actually have.

Reading

Exercise 3.

Are there etiquette rules to follow in initial introductions? What is the only correct way to introduce yourself in social situations? How do the English treat the phrase 'Pleased to meet you'? What are the rules of English gossip? If you need some information to answer these questions, read the following article.

GROOMING – TALK

Grooming-talk starts with greeting-talk. Weather-speak is needed in this context partly because greetings and introductions are such an awkward business for the

English.

Awkwardness Rules

Our introductions and greetings tend to be uncomfortable, clumsy and inelegant. Among established friends, there is less awkwardness, although we are often still not quite sure what to do with our hands, or whether to hug or kiss. The French custom of a kiss on each cheek has become popular among the chattering classes and some other middle- and upper-middle-class groups, but is regarded as silly and pretentious by many other sections of society, particularly when it takes the form of the 'air-kiss'. Women who use this variant (and it is only women; men do not air-kiss) are disparagingly referred to as 'Mwah-Mwahs'. Even in the social circles where cheek-kissing is acceptable, one can still never be entirely sure whether one kiss or two is required, resulting in much awkward hesitation and bumping as the parties try to second-guess each other.

Handshakes are now the norm in business introductions – or rather, they are the norm when people in business are introduced to each other for the first time. Ironically, the first introduction, where a degree of formality is expected, is the easiest. (Note, though, that the English handshake is always somewhat awkward, very brief, performed 'at arm's length', and without any of the spare-hand involvement – clasping, forearm patting, etc. – found in less inhibited cultures.)

At subsequent meetings, particularly as business contacts get to know each other better, a handshake greeting often starts to seem *too* formal, but cheek-kisses would be too informal, and in any case not allowed between males, so we revert to the usual embarrassed confusion, with no-one being quite sure what to do. This is excruciatingly English: over-formality is embarrassing, but so is an inappropriate degree of informality (that problem with extremes again).

The No-name Rule

In purely social situations, the difficulties are even more acute. There is no universal prescription of handshakes on initial introduction – indeed, they may be regarded as too 'businesslike' – and the normal business practice of giving one's name at this point is also regarded as inappropriate. You do not go up to someone at a party (or in any other social setting) and say 'Hello, I'm John Smith,' or even 'Hello, I'm John.' In fact, the only correct way to introduce yourself in such settings is not to introduce yourself at all, but to find some other way of initiating a conversation – such as a remark about the weather.

The 'brash American' approach: 'Hi, I'm Bill from Iowa,' particularly if accompanied by an outstretched hand and beaming smile, makes the English wince and cringe. The English do not want to know your name, or tell you theirs, until a much greater degree of intimacy has been established. Rather than giving your name, you should strike up a conversation by making a vaguely interrogative comment about the weather (or the party or pub or wherever you happen to be). This must not be done too loudly, and the tone should be light and informal, not earnest or intense.

Eventually, there may be an opportunity to exchange names, providing this can be achieved in a casual, unforced manner, although it is always best to wait for the

other person to take the initiative. Should you reach the end of a long, friendly evening without having introduced yourself, you may say, on parting, 'Goodbye, nice to meet you, er, oh – I didn't catch your name?' as though you have only just noticed the omission. Your new acquaintance should then divulge his or her name, and you may now, at last, introduce yourself – but in an offhand way, as though it is not a matter of any importance: 'I'm Bill, by the way.'

The 'Pleased to Meet You' Problem

In a small social gathering such as a dinner party, the host may solve the name problem by introducing guests to each other by name, but these are still awkward moments. 'How are you?', despite having much the same meaning, and being equally recognised as a non-question (the correct response is 'Very well, thank you' or 'Fine, thanks' whatever your state of health or mind), will not do in initial introductions, as custom dictates that it may only be used as a greeting between people who already know each other. Even though it does not require an honest answer, 'How are you?' is far too personal and intimate a question for first-time introductions.

The most common solution, nowadays, is 'Pleased to meet you' (or 'Nice to meet you' or something similar). But in some social circles – mainly upper-middle class and above – the problem with this common response is that it is just that: 'common', meaning a lower class thing to say.

The prejudice against 'Pleased to meet you' is still quite widespread, often among people who do not know why it is that they feel uneasy about using the phrase. They just have a vague sense that there is something not quite right about it. Formality is embarrassing. But then, informality is embarrassing. Everything is embarrassing.

The Embarrassment Rule

In fact, the only rule one can identify with any certainty in all this confusion over introductions and greetings is that, to be impeccably English, one must perform these rituals *badly*. One must appear self-conscious, ill at ease, stiff, awkward and, above all, embarrassed. Smoothness, glibness and confidence are inappropriate and unEnglish. Hesitation, dithering and ineptness are, surprising as it may seem, correct behaviour. Introductions should be performed as hurriedly as possible, but also with maximum inefficiency. If disclosed at all, names must be mumbled; hands should be tentatively half-proffered and then clumsily withdrawn; the approved greeting is something like 'Er, how, um, plstm-, er, hello?'

THE RULES OF ENGLISH GOSSIP

Following the customary awkward introductions and uncomfortable greetings, and a bit of ice-breaking weather speak, we move on to other forms of grooming-talk. ('One must speak a little, you know,' as Elizabeth said to Darcy, 'It would look odd to be entirely silent.')

Strangers may stick to The Weather and other relatively neutral topics almost indefinitely (although actually The Weather is the only topic that is entirely). But the most common form of grooming-talk among friends, in England as elsewhere, is gossip. The English are certainly a nation of gossips. Recent studies in this country have shown that about two-thirds of our conversation time is entirely devoted to

social topics such as who is doing what with whom; who is 'in', who is 'out' and why; how to deal with difficult social situations; the behaviour and relationships of friends, family and celebrities; our own problems with family, friends, lovers, colleagues and neighbours; the minutiae of everyday social life – in a word: gossip.

Researchers have found that about half of 'gossip time' is taken up with discussion of the activities of the speaker or the immediate audience, rather than the doings of other people. Although it has been shown that criticism and negative evaluations account for only about five per cent of gossip time, gossip does generally involve the expression of opinions or feelings. Among the English, you will find that these opinions or feelings may often be implied, rather than directly stated, or conveyed more subtly in the tone of voice, but we rarely share details about 'who is doing what with whom' without providing some indication of our views on the matter.

Privacy Rules

Gossip may be particularly important to the English, because of our obsession with privacy. When I conducted interviews and focus-group discussions on gossip with English people of different ages and social backgrounds, it became clear that their enjoyment of gossip had much to do with the element of 'risk' involved. Although most of our gossip is fairly innocuous (criticism and negative evaluations of others account for only five per cent of gossip time), it is still talk about people's 'private' lives, and as such involves a sense of doing something naughty or forbidden.

The 'invasion of privacy' involved in gossip is particularly relevant for the reserved and inhibited English, for whom privacy is an especially serious matter. It is impossible to overstate the importance of privacy in English culture. George Orwell observes that: 'The most hateful of all names in an English ear is Nosy Parker.'

We are taught to mind our own business, not to pry, to keep ourselves to ourselves, not to make a scene or a fuss or draw attention to ourselves, and never to wash our dirty linen in public. It is worth noting here that 'How are you?' is only treated as a 'real' question among very close personal friends or family; everywhere else, the automatic, ritual response is 'Fine, thanks', 'OK, thanks', 'Oh, mustn't grumble', 'Not bad, thanks' or some equivalent, whatever your physical or mental state. If you are terminally ill, it is acceptable to say 'Not bad, considering'.

The English may not gossip much more than any other culture, but our privacy rules significantly enhance the *value* of gossip. 'Private' information is not given away lightly or cheaply to all and sundry, but only to those we know and trust.

This is one of the reasons why foreigners often complain that the English are cold, reserved, unfriendly and stand-offish. In most other cultures, revealing basic personal data – your name, what you do for a living, whether you are married or have children, where you live – is no big deal: in England, extracting such apparently trivial information from a new acquaintance can be like pulling teeth – every question makes us wince and recoil.

The Guessing-game Rule

It is not considered entirely polite, for example, to ask someone directly 'What do you do?', although if you think about it, this is the most obvious question to put to

a new acquaintance, and the easiest way to start a conversation. But etiquette requires us to find a more roundabout, indirect way of discovering what people do for a living.

A comment about traffic problems in the local area, for example, will elicit the response 'Oh, yes, it's a nightmare – and the rush hour is even worse: do you drive to work?' The other person knows exactly what question is really intended, and will usually obligingly answer the unspoken enquiry as well as the spoken one, saying something like: 'Yes, but I work at the hospital, so at least I don't have to get into the town centre.' The questioner is now allowed to make a direct guess: 'Oh, the hospital – you're a doctor, then?' (When two or three possible occupations are indicated, it is polite to name the highest-status one as a first guess – doctor rather than nurse, porter or medical student; solicitor rather than secretary. Also, even though an explicit guess is permitted at this stage, it is best expressed as an interrogative statement, rather than as a direct question.)

When the person's occupation is finally revealed, it is customary, however boring or predictable this occupation might be, to express surprise. The standard response to 'Yes, I am a doctor [or teacher, accountant, IT manager, secretary, etc.]' is 'Oh, *really*?!' as though the occupation were both unexpected and fascinating. This is almost invariably followed by an embarrassed pause, as you search desperately for an appropriate comment or question about the person's profession – and he or she tries to think of something modest, amusing, but somehow also impressive, to say in response.

Similar guessing-game techniques are often used to find out where people live, whether they are married, what school or university they went to, and so on. Some direct questions are more impolite than others. It is less rude, for example, to ask 'Where do you live?' than 'What do you do?', but even this relatively inoffensive question is much better phrased in a more indirect manner, such as 'Do you live nearby?' It is more acceptable to ask whether someone has children than to ask whether he or she is married, so the former question is generally used as a roundabout way of prompting clues that will provide the answer to the latter. (Many married English males do not wear wedding rings, so the children question is often used by single females to encourage them to reveal their marital status. This can only be done in an appropriate conversational context, however, as asking the children question 'out of the blue' would be too obvious an attempt to ascertain a male's availability.)

The English privacy rules ensure that any more interesting details about our lives and relationships are reserved for close friends and family. This is 'privileged' information, not to be bandied about indiscriminately. The English take a certain pride in this trait, and sneer at the stereotyped Americans who 'tell you all about their divorce, their hysterectomy and their therapist within five minutes of meeting you'. This cliché, although not entirely without foundation, probably tells us more about the English and our privacy rules than it does about the Americans.

The Distance Rule

Among the English, gossip about one's own private doings is reserved for intimates; gossip about the private lives of friends and family is shared with a slightly wider social circle; gossip about the personal affairs of acquaintances, colleagues and

neighbours with a larger group; and gossip about the intimate details of public figures' or celebrities' lives with almost anyone. This is the distance rule. The more 'distant' from you the subject of gossip, the wider the circle of people with whom you may gossip about that person.

The distance rule allows gossip to perform its vital social functions – social bonding; clarification of position and status; assessment and management of reputations; transmission of social skills, norms and values – without undue invasion of privacy.

If, for example, you want to find out about an English person's attitudes and feelings on a sensitive subject, such as, say, marriage, you do not ask about his or her own marriage – you talk about someone else's marriage, preferably that of a remote public figure not personally known to either of you. When you are better acquainted with the person, you can discuss the domestic difficulties of a colleague or neighbour, or perhaps even a friend or relative. (If you do not happen to have colleagues or relatives with suitably dysfunctional marriages, you can always invent these people.)

The Reciprocal Disclosure Strategy

If you are determined to find out about your new English friend's own marital relations, or any other 'private' matter, you will probably have to resort to the Reciprocal Disclosure Strategy. There is a more or less universal rule whereby people almost unconsciously try to achieve some degree of symmetry or balance in their conversations, such that if you tell them something about your own 'private' life, the other person will feel obliged, if only out of reflex politeness, to reciprocate with a comparably personal disclosure.

Among the English, however, you would be advised to start with a very minor, trivial disclosure – something that barely counts as 'private' at all, and that can be dropped into the conversation casually – and work up, step by step, from this innocuous starting point.

Exception to the Privacy Rules

There is a curious exception to the privacy rules. I call it the 'print exception': we may discuss in print (newspapers, magazines, books, etc.) private matters that we would be reluctant or embarrassed to talk about with, say, a new acquaintance at a party. It may seem strange or even perverse, but it is somehow more acceptable to divulge details of one's personal life in a book, newspaper column or magazine article than to do so in the much less public arena of a small social gathering.

Actually, this is one of those 'exceptions that proves the rule'. A newspaper or magazine columnist may tell millions of complete strangers about her messy divorce, her breast cancer, her eating disorder, her worries about cellulite, or whatever, but she will not take kindly to being asked personal questions about such matters by an individual stranger at a private social event. Her taboo-breaking is purely professional; in real life, she observes the English privacy and distance rules like everyone else, discussing private matters only with close friends, and regarding personal questions from anyone outside this inner circle as impertinent and intrusive.

The 'print exception' is sometimes extended to cover other media such as television or radio documentaries and chat-shows.

There are, of course, in England as elsewhere, some people who will do or say or reveal almost anything, anywhere, to achieve their 'fifteen minutes of fame', or to score points off someone, or to make money. But those who break the privacy rules (and these are clearly breaches, not exceptions) in this blatant manner are a tiny minority, and their antics are generally reviled and ridiculed by the rest of the population, indicating that observance of these rules is still the norm.

Sex Differences in English Gossip Rules

Contrary to popular belief, researchers have found that men gossip just as much as women. Men were certainly found to be no more likely than women to discuss 'important' or 'highbrow' subjects such as politics, work, art and cultural matters – except (and this was a striking difference) when women were present. On their own, men gossip, with no more than five per cent of conversation time devoted to non-social subjects such as work or politics. It is only in mixed-sex groups, where there are women to impress, that the proportion of male conversation time devoted to these more 'highbrow' subjects increases dramatically, to between 15 and 20 per cent.

In fact, recent research has revealed only one significant difference, in terms of content, between male and female gossip: men spend much more time talking about themselves. Of the total time devoted to conversation about social relationships, men spend two thirds talking about their own relationships, while women only talk about themselves one third of the time.

Despite these findings, the myth is still widely believed, particularly among males, that men spend their conversations 'solving the world's problems', while the womenfolk gossip in the kitchen. In my focus groups and interviews, most English males initially claimed that they did not gossip, while most of the females readily admitted that they did. On further questioning, however, the difference turned out to be more a matter of semantics than practice: what the women were happy to call 'gossip', the men defined as 'exchanging information'.

In my gossip research, I found that the main difference between male and female gossip is that female gossip actually sounds like gossip. There seem to be three principal factors involved: the tone rule, the detail rule and the feedback rule.

The Tone Rule

The English women I interviewed all agreed that a particular tone of voice was considered appropriate for gossip. The gossip-tone should be high and quick, or sometimes a stage whisper, but always highly animated. 'Gossip's got to start with something like [quick, high-pitched, excited tone] "Oooh – Guess what? Guess what?"' explained one woman, 'or "Hey, listen, listen [quick, urgent, stage-whisper] – you know what I heard?"' Another told me: 'You have to make it sound surprising or scandalous, even when it isn't really. You'll go, "Well, don't tell anyone, but . . ." even when it's not really that big of a secret.'

Many of the women complained that men failed to adopt the correct tone of voice, recounting items of gossip in the same flat, unemotional manner as any other piece of information, such that, as one woman sniffed, 'You can't even tell it's gossip.' Which, of course, is exactly the impression the males wish to give.

The Detail Rule

Females also stressed the importance of detail in the telling of gossip, and again bemoaned the shortcomings of males in this matter, claiming that men 'never know the details'. 'Men just don't do the he-said-she-said thing,' one informant told me, 'and it's no good unless you actually know what people said.' Another said: 'Women tend to speculate more . . . They'll talk about *why* someone did something, give a history to the situation.' For women, this detailed speculation about possible motives and causes, requiring an exhaustive raking over 'history', is a crucial element of gossip, as is detailed speculation about possible outcomes. English males find all this detail boring, irrelevant and, of course, un-manly.

The Feedback Rule

Among English women, it is understood that to be a 'good gossip' requires more than a lively tone and attention to detail: you also need a good audience, by which they mean appreciative listeners who give plenty of appropriate feedback. The feedback rule of female gossip requires that listeners be at least as animated and enthusiastic as speakers. The reasoning seems to be that this is only polite: the speaker has gone to the trouble of making the information sound surprising and scandalous, so the least one can do is to reciprocate by sounding suitably shocked. English men, according to my female informants, just don't seem to have grasped this rule. They do not understand that 'You are supposed to say "NO! *Really*?" and "Oh my GOD!"'

BONDING-TALK

English bonding-talk, another form of grooming-talk, is also largely sex-specific: male bonding-talk looks and sounds very different from female bonding-talk – although some of the underlying rules turn out to reflect the same basic values, which may qualify as 'defining characteristics' of Englishness.

Female Bonding: the Counter-compliment Rules

English female bonding-talk often starts with a ritual exchange of compliments. In fact, this ritual can be observed at almost every social gathering of two or more female friends.

Observing the many variations of this ritual, and often participating as well, I noticed that the compliments are not exchanged at random, but in a distinctive pattern, in accordance with what I came to call the 'counter compliment rule'. The pattern is as follows. The opening line may be either a straight compliment, such as 'Oh, I like your new haircut!' or a combination of a compliment and a self-critical remark: 'Your hair looks great; I wish I had gorgeous hair like you – mine's so boring and mousy.' The counter-compliment rule requires that the response to either version contain a self-deprecating denial, and a 'counter-compliment', as in 'Oh no! My hair's terrible. It gets so frizzy – I wish I could have it short like you, but I just don't have the bone structure; you've got such good cheekbones.' This must be countered with another self-critical denial, and a further compliment, which prompts yet another self-deprecating denial and yet another counter-compliment, and so the ritual continues. There are social 'points' to be gained by making amusing, witty self-critical remarks – some English women have turned this kind of humorous self-

deprecation into an art form, and there can almost be an element of competitiveness in their one-downmanship.

The conversation may jump from hair to shoes to thighs to professional achievement, fitness, social skills, dating success, children, talents and accomplishments – but the formula remains the same. No compliment is ever accepted; no self-denigrating remark ever goes unchallenged. When a compliment is too obviously accurate to bereceived with the customary flat or humorous denial, it is deflected with a hasty, embarrassed 'Well, thank you, er . . .' often followed by a self-effacing qualification of some sort, and the inevitable counter-compliment, or at least an attempt to change the subject.

I asked English women how they would feel about someone who just accepted a compliment, without qualification, and didn't offer one in return. The typical response was that this would be regarded as impolite, unfriendly and arrogant – 'almost as bad as boasting.' Such a person would also be seen as 'taking herself a bit too seriously.' One woman replied, and I swear this is true and was not prompted in any way, 'Well, you'd know she wasn't English!'

Male Bonding: the Mine's Better Than Yours Rules

The counter-compliment ritual is distinctively English, but it is also distinctively female. One cannot even imagine men engaging in such an exchange. English men have different means of achieving social bonding, which at first glance would appear to involve principles diametrically opposed to those of the counter-compliment ritual. While English women are busy paying each other compliments, English men are usually putting each other down, in a competitive ritual that I call the Mine's Better Than Yours game.

'Mine', in this context, can be anything: a make of car, a football team, a political party, a holiday destination, a type of beer, a philosophical theory – the subject is of little importance. English men can turn almost any conversation, on any topic, into a Mine's Better Than Yours game.

The rules of the game are as follows. You start either by making a statement in praise of your chosen 'Mine'(electric razors, Manchester United, Foucault, German cars, whatever) or by challenging someone else's assertion, or implication, or hint, that his 'Mine' is the best. Your statement will always be countered or challenged, even if the other male (or males) secretly agrees with you, or could not rationally disagree.

Although these exchanges may become quite noisy, and much swearing and name-calling may be involved, the Mine's Better Than Yours game will none the less seem fairly good-natured and amicable, always with an undercurrent of humour – a mutual understanding that the differences of opinion are not to be taken too seriously. Swearing, sneering and insults are allowed, even expected, but storming off in a huff, or any otherexhibition of *real* emotion, is not permitted. The game is all about mock anger, pretend outrage, jokey one upmanship. However strongly you may feel about the product, team, theory or shaving method you are defending, you must not allow these feelings to show. Earnestness is not allowed; zeal is unmanly; both are unEnglish and will invite ridicule. And although the name I have given the game

might suggest boastfulness, boasting is not allowed either. The merits of your car, razor, politics or school of literary theory can be glowingly extolled and explained in minute detail, but your own good taste or judgement or intelligence in preferring these must be subtly implied, rather than directly stated. Any hint of self-aggrandizement or ostentation is severely frowned upon, unless it is done 'ironically', in such an exaggerated manner as to be clearly intended as a joke.

It is also universally understood that there is no way of actually winning the game. No-one ever capitulates, or recognises the other's point of view. The participants simply get bored, or tired, and change the subject, perhaps shaking their heads in pity at their opponents' stupidity.

The two examples of bonding-talk – counter-compliment and Mine's Better Than Yours – at first appear very different. But these bonding-talk rituals also have certain important features in common, in their underlying rules and values, which may tell us a bit more about Englishness. Both, for example, involve proscription of boasting and prescription of humour. Both also require a degree of polite hypocrisy – or at least concealment of one's real opinions or feelings (feigned admiration in the counter-compliment ritual, and fake light-heartedness in Mine's Better Than Yours) – and in both cases, etiquette triumphs over truth and reason.

AND FINALLY . . . THE LONG GOODBYE RULE

Our leave-takings tend to be every bit as awkward, embarrassed and incompetent as our introductions. Again, no-one has a clear idea of what to do or say, resulting in the same aborted handshakes, clumsy cheek-bumping and half-finished sentences as the greeting process. The only difference is that while introductions tend to be hurried – scrambled through in an effort to get the awkwardness over with as quickly as possible – partings, as if to compensate, are often tediously prolonged.

The initial stage of the parting process is often, deceptively, an unseemly rush, as no-one wants to be the last to leave, for fear of 'outstaying their welcome' (a serious breach of the privacy rules). Thus, as soon as one person, couple or family stands up and starts making apologetic noises about traffic, baby-sitters, or the lateness of the hour, everyone else immediately looks at their watch, with exclamations of surprise, jumps totheir feet and starts hunting for coats and bags and saying preliminary goodbyes. (It is acceptable to say 'It was nice to meet you' at this point, if you are parting from people to whom you have recently been introduced – even if you have exchanged no more than a few mumbled greetings.) If you are visiting an English home, be warned that you should allow a good ten minutes –and it could well be fifteen or even twenty – from these initial goodbyes to your final departure.

Just when you think that the last farewell has been accomplished, someone always revives the proceedings with yet another 'Well, see you soon, then . . .', which prompts a further chorus of 'Oh, yes, we must, er, goodbye . . .', 'Goodbye', 'Thanks again', 'Lovely time', 'Oh, nothing, thank you', 'Well, goodbye, then . . .', 'Yes, must be off – traffic, er . . .' 'Don't stand there getting cold, now!', 'No, fine, really . . .', 'Well, goodbye . . .' Then someone will say, 'You must come round to us next . . .' or 'So, I'll email you tomorrow, then . . .' and the final chords will begin again.

Those leaving are desperate to get away, and those hovering in the doorway are dying to shut the door on them, but it would be impolite to give any hint of such feelings, so everyone must make a great show of being reluctant to part. Even when the final, final, final goodbyes have been said, and everyone is loaded into the car, a window is often wound down to allow a few more parting words. As the leavers drive off, hands may be held to ears with thumbs and little fingers extended in a phone-shape, promising further communication. It is then customary for both parties to wave lingering, non-verbal goodbyes to each other until the car is out of sight. When the long-goodbye ordeal is over, we all heave an exhausted sigh of relief.

As often as not, we then immediately start grumbling about the very people from whom, a moment earlier, we could apparently hardly bear to tear ourselves. 'God, I thought they were never going to go!' 'The Joneses are very nice and all that, but she does go on a bit . . .' Even when we have thoroughly enjoyed the gathering, our appreciative comments following the long goodbye will be mixed with moans about how late it is, how tired we are, how much in need of a cup of tea/strong drink – and how nice it is to have the place to ourselves again (or to be going home to our own bed).

And yet, if for any reason the long goodbye has been cut short, we feel uncomfortable, dissatisfied – and either guilty, if we have committed the breach of the rule, or somewhat resentful, if the other parties have bit hasty in their farewells. We may not be explicitly conscious of the fact that a rule has been broken, but we feel a vague sense of incompleteness; we know that somehow the goodbyes have not been said 'properly'. To prevent such malaise, English children are indoctrinated in the etiquette of the long-goodbye ritual from an early age: 'Say goodbye to Granny, now.' 'And what do we say? We say thank you Granny!' 'And say goodbye to Auntie Jane.' 'No, say goodbye NICELY!' 'And say bye-bye to Pickles.' 'We're leaving now, so say goodbye again.''Come on now, wave, wave bye-bye!'

The English often refer to this ritual not as 'saying goodbye' but as 'saying our goodbyes', as in 'I can't come to the station, so we'll say our goodbyes here'. I discussed this with an American visitor, who said, 'You know, the first time I heard that expression, I didn't really register the plural – or I guess I thought it meant you said one each or something. Now I know it means a LOT of goodbyes'.

GROOMING-TALK RULES AND ENGLISHNESS

The rules of introduction confirm the weather-speaking findings on problems of reserve and social inhibition, and show that without 'facilitators', we are quite unable to overcome these difficulties. A tendency to awkwardness, embarrassment and general social ineptitude must now be incorporated into our 'grammar' – an important factor, as this tendency must surely have a significant effect on all aspects of English social relations.

The no-name rule highlights an English preoccupation with privacy, and a somewhat unsociable, suspicious, standoffishness. The 'Pleased to meet you' problem provides our first evidence of the way in which class consciousness pervades every aspect of English life and culture, but also exposes our reluctance to acknowledge this issue.

The gossip rules bring to light a number of important characteristics, the most striking of which is, again, the English obsession with privacy. The sex differences in gossip rules remind us that, in any culture, what is sauce for the goose is not always sauce for the gander. The normal rules of restraint and reserve, in this case, apply only to gossiping males.

The rules of male and female bonding-talk reinforce the goose-and-gander point, but beneath striking (potentially dazzling) surface differences, they turn out to have critical features in common, including prohibition of boasting, prescription of humour and abhorrence of 'earnestness', polite hypocrisy and the triumph of etiquette over reason.

Finally, the long goodbye rule highlights (again) the importance of embarrassment and ineptitude in English social interactions – our apparently congenital inability to handle simple matters such as greeting and parting with any consistency or elegance – but also provides a remarkable example of the irrational excesses of English politeness.

Exercise 4.
Complete the following sentences with the words from the text.

1. English introductions and greetings tend to be uncomfortable and ___. (doing things in a very awkward way)
2. The only correct way to introduce yourself in social ___ is not to introduce yourself at all, but to find some other way of initiating a conversation – such as a remark about the weather. (a set of surroundings, the place at which something happens)
3. If you didn't introduce yourself, you may say, on parting, 'Goodbye, nice to meet you, er, oh – I didn't catch your name?' as though you have only just noticed the ___. (a thing that has not been done)
4. The ___ against 'Pleased to meet you' is still quite widespread, often among people who do not know why it is that they feel uneasy about using the phrase. (an unreasonable dislike of or preference for a person, group, custom, etc., especially when it is based on their race, religion, sex, etc.)
5. Hesitation, ___ and ineptness are, surprising as it may seem, correct behaviour. (the state of not being able to decide what you should do)
6. The English are certainly a nation of ___. (people who enjoy talking about other people's private lives)
7. The most common form of grooming-talk among friends, in England as elsewhere, is ___. (informal talk or stories about other people's private lives, that may be unkind or not true)
8. Although most of our gossip is fairly___, it is still talk about people's 'private' lives, and as such involves a sense of doing something naughty or forbidden. (not intended to offend or upset anyone; not harmful or dangerous)

9.The information about our lives and relationships is reserved for close friends and family and is not ___ indiscriminately. (to be mentioned frequently by many people)

10. The English take a certain pride in this trait, and ___ at the stereotyped Americans who ‘tell you all about their divorce, their hysterectomy and their therapist within five minutes of meeting you’. (to show that you have no respect for somebody on your face or by the way you speak)

Exercise 5.
Fill in the blanks with the prepositions where necessary.

1. The French custom of a kiss on each cheek has become popular ___ the chattering classes and some other middle- and upper-middle-class groups

Gossip may be particularly important ___ the English, because of our obsession ___ privacy.

In a small social gathering such as a dinner party, the host may solve the name problem by introducing guests___ each other by name, but these are still awkward moments.

4. Contrary ___ popular belief, researchers have found that men gossip just as much as women.

5. A ritual exchange of compliments can be observed ___ almost every social gathering of two or more female friends.

6. No-one wants to be the last to leave, ___ fear of ‘outstaying their welcome’.

7. We may not be explicitly conscious ___ the fact that a rule has been broken, but we feel a vague sense of incompleteness;

8. There is a curious exception ___ the privacy rules.

9. The counter-compliment ritual is distinctively English, but it is also distinctively female. One cannot even imagine men engaging ___ such an exchange.

10. The no-name rule highlights an English preoccupation ___ privacy, and a somewhat unsociable, suspicious, standoffishness.

Exercise 6.
Fill in the blanks with the articles where necessary.

1. ___ handshakes are now the norm in ___ business introductions.

2. ___ first introduction, where a degree of formality is expected, is the easiest.

3. ___ only correct way to introduce yourself in such settings is not to introduce yourself at all, but to find some other way of initiating ___ conversation – such as a remark about the weather.

4. ___ most common form of grooming-talk among friends, in England as elsewhere, is ___ gossip.

5. The ‘invasion of privacy’ involved in gossip is particularly relevant for ___ reserved and inhibited English, for whom ___ privacy is ___ especially serious matter.

6. Of ___ total time devoted to conversation about social relationships, ___ men spend two thirds talking about their own relationships, while ___ women only talk about themselves one third of the time.

7. ___ main difference between male and female gossip is that female gossip actually sounds like gossip.

8. ___ females also stressed the importance of detail in ___ telling of gossip, and again bemoaned the shortcomings of ___ males in this matter, claiming that ___ men 'never know the details'.

9. ___ initial stage of ___ parting process is often, deceptively, an unseemly rush, as no-one wants to be ___ last to leave, for fear of 'outstaying their welcome'.

10. If you are visiting ___ English home, be warned that you should allow a good ten minutes –and it could well be fifteen or even twenty – from these initial goodbyes to your final departure.

Exercise 7.
Read the following statements. Decide whether each statement is true or false. Compare your answers with those of a classmate.

1. English introductions and greetings are based upon established customs.
2. The first introduction, where a degree of formality is expected, is the hardest.
3. There is an established rule of handshakes on initial introduction.
4. In purely social situations (for example, at a party), you can go up to someone and introduce yourself. In fact, this is the only correct way of introduction.
5. After giving your name, you should strike up a conversation by making a vaguely interrogative comment about the weather.
6. For the English smoothness, glibness and confidence are appropriate when they are introduced to each other.
7. The English know exactly why they dislike the phrase 'Pleased to meet you'.
8. Relatively inoffensive questions like 'Where do you live?' are much better phrased in a direct manner.
9. There are no exceptions to the privacy rules among the English.
10. It seems as if the English hesitate to talk to people whom they do not know until they are sure that they want to talk to them.
11. The compliments are not exchanged without thinking.
12. Accepting a compliment without offering one in return would be regarded as impolite, unfriendly and arrogant.
13. The English leave-takings tend to make one feel embarrassed.
14. The parting process is often rush.
15. English children are taught from an early age that other people want their privacy.

Exercise 8.

Discuss the following questions with your partner.

1. What is the most appropriate way to introduce yourself in social settings?
2. What is the English handshake like?
3. How do the English treat the American way of introduction?
4. Why do the English feel uneasy about using the phrase 'Pleased to meet you'?
5. What is the most common form of grooming-talk among friends in England?
6. Why is gossip particularly important to the English?
7. How do the English about revealing basic personal information?
8. What social functions does gossip perform?
9. What are the sex differences in gossip rules?
10. Why do the English make a show of being reluctant to part?

Exercise 9.

Compare the Russian and English rules of initial introduction and leave-taking.

Exercise 10.

You have been asked to give a talk on the English grooming-talk rules. Make a plan of your talk. As you speak, try to include as many aspects as you can.

Exercise 11.

Read the following information about long good-byes. Comment on the card below. Speak about the way the British part. Why is the card funny?

31 ***Ta-ta For Now***

In Britain, why does so long take *so long*? For the True Brit, parting is every bit as complicated and fraught with risk as greeting. We find it difficult to say Hello, and we find it hard to say Good-bye. And the bit in the middle is none too easy, either. We have to decide whether to kiss, shake hands, or execute one of those stiff, short-armed waves that we use to fend off unwelcome intimacies. We need time to select from an extensive repertoire of leave-taking expressions from *Well, I'll be on my way then* to a final faint *Cheers!* before disappearing over the brow of the hill.

Above all, we must try to avoid the awkwardness that can occur in extricating ourselves from a social encounter. One way is to order a taxi in advance: in the moments of flustered haste after the doorbell rings, the normal rules of leave-taking are waived and the long farewell amputated to a breathless, *Oh dear! Well! Thanks a lot! Bye!*

Expressions to learn
My goodness! Is that the time? We really must start thinking about making a move.
Don't do anything I wouldn't do!

Avoid saying
Are you still here?
Close the door on your way out.


Well, good-bye then!
Bye bye!
Maisie, have you said bye-bye to Ben?
Say ta ta to Maisie, Ben
Great to see you again.
Yes, really nice!
That'd be lovely!
You must come to us next time.
Well, we really must be off.
Let's not leave it for months this time.
No, let's speak soon.
Mind how you go.
All the best, then.
Cheers!
Take care.
Bye again.
Cheerio
Wave, Maisie
Bye bye!
Wave, Ben!
Er, hi! Sorry. It's us again. Ha, ha. Ahem, I think I left my scarf in the hall. Ha, ha.

UNIT 3
HUMOUR RULES

Exercise 1.

What do you know about the English sense of humour? Do you know what role it plays in everyday life?

Exercise 2.

Study the following words and expressions:

Pervasive – existing in all the parts of a place or thing

Omnipotent – (formal) having total power, able to do anything

Omnipresent - (formal) present everywhere

Permeate – to affect every part of something

Undercurrent – a feeling, especially a negative one, that is hidden but whose effects are felt

Banter – friendly remarks and jokes

Understatement – the practice of making things seem less impressive, important, serious, etc. than they really are

To grasp – to understand something completely

Impeccable – without mistakes or faults, perfect

Arrogance – the behavior of a person when they feel that they are more important than other people, so that they are rude to them and do not consider them

Catchphrase – a popular phrase that is connected with the politician or entertainer who used it and made it famous

Fad –something that people are interested in for only a short period of time

Earnest – very serious and sincere

Self-deprecating – done in a way that makes your own achievements or abilities seem unimportant

Hindrance – a person or thing that makes it more difficult for somebody to do something

Renowned for – famous and respected

Unseemly – (old-fashioned or formal) not polite or suitable for a particular situation

Ardent – (written) very enthusiastic and showing strong feelings about somebody or something

To be ingrained in somebody/something – (of a habit, an attitude, etc.) that has existed for a long time and is therefore difficult to change

Self-effacing – not wanting to attract attention to yourself or your abilities

Charitable – kind in your attitude to other people, especially when you are judging them.

To take something at face value – to believe that something is what it appears to be, without questioning it

Reading

Exercise 3. What important rule should a foreigner remember to feel or appear entirely at home in conversation with the English? Do you know what is the most defining characteristic of English humour? If you need some information to answer these questions, read the following article.

HUMOUR RULES

This heading can be read both in the straightforward sense of 'rules about humour' and in the graffiti sense of 'humour rules, OK!' The latter is in fact more appropriate, as the most noticeable and important 'rule' about humour in English conversation is its dominance and pervasiveness. Humour rules. Humour governs. Humour is omnipresent and omnipotent. |It permeates every aspect of English life and culture.

There is an awful lot of guff talked about the English Sense of Humour, including many patriotic attempts to prove that our sense of humour is somehow unique and superior to everyone else's. Many English people seem to believe that we have some sort of global monopoly, if not on humour itself, then at least on certain 'brands' of humour – the high-class ones such as wit and especially irony. My findings indicate that while there may indeed be something distinctive about English humour, the real 'defining characteristic' is the *value* we put on humour, the central importance of humour in English culture and social interactions.

In other cultures, there is 'a time and a place' for humour; it is a special, separate kind of talk. In English conversation, there is always an undercurrent of humour. We can barely manage to say 'hello' or comment on the weather without somehow contriving to make a bit of a joke out of it, and most English conversations will involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, humorous self-

deprecation, mockery or just silliness. Humour is our 'default mode', if you like: we do not have to switch it on deliberately, and we cannot switch it off. For the English, the rules of humour are the cultural equivalent of natural laws – we obey them automatically, rather in the way that we obey the law of gravity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT BEING EARNEST RULE

At the most basic level, an underlying rule in all English conversation is the proscription of 'earnestness'. Although we may not have a monopoly on humour, or even on irony, the English are probably more acutely sensitive than any other nation to the distinction between 'serious' and 'solemn', between 'sincerity' and 'earnestness'.

This distinction is crucial to any kind of understanding of Englishness. I cannot emphasize this strongly enough: if you are not able to grasp these subtle but vital differences, you will never understand the English – and even if you speak the language fluently, you will never feel or appear entirely at home in conversation with the English. Your English may be impeccable, but your behavioural 'grammar' will be full of glaring errors.

The Importance of Not Being Earnest rule is really quite simple. Seriousness is acceptable, solemnity is prohibited. Sincerity is allowed, earnestness is strictly forbidden. Pomposity and self-importance are outlawed. Serious matters can be spoken of seriously, but one must never take *oneself* too seriously. The ability to laugh at ourselves, although it may be rooted in a form of arrogance, is one of the more endearing characteristics of the English.

The 'Oh, Come Off It!' Rule

The English ban on earnestness, and specifically on taking oneself too seriously, means that our own politicians and other public figures have a particularly tough time. And we are just as hard on each other, in ordinary everyday conversation, as we are on those in the public eye. In fact, if a country or culture could be said to have a catchphrase, I would propose 'Oh, come off it!' as a strong candidate for England's national catchphrase.

Among the young and others susceptible to linguistic fads and fashions, the current response might be the ironic 'Yeah, right' rather than 'Oh, come off it!' – but the principle is the same.

IRONY RULES

The English are not usually given to patriotic boasting – indeed, both patriotism and boasting are regarded as unseemly, so the combination of these two sins is doubly distasteful. But there is one significant exception to this rule, and that is the patriotic pride we take in our sense of humour, particularly in our expert use of irony. The popular belief is that we have a better, more subtle, more highly developed sense

of humour than any other nation, and specifically that other nations are all tediously literal in their thinking and incapable of understanding or appreciating irony.

Humour is universal; irony is a universally important ingredient of humour: no single culture can possibly claim a monopoly on it. My research suggests that, yet again, the irony issue is a question of degree – a matter of quantity rather than quality. What is unique about English humour is the pervasiveness of irony and the importance we attach to it. Irony is the dominant ingredient in English humour, not just a piquant flavouring. Irony rules.

It must be said that many of my foreign informants found this aspect of Englishness frustrating, rather than amusing: 'The problem with the English,' complained one American visitor, 'is that you never know when they are joking – you never know whether they are being serious or not'.

I found in my interviews with foreign visitors that the English predilection for irony posed more of a problem for those here on business than for tourists and other pleasure-seekers. Our humour-friendly atmosphere is all very well if you are here on holiday, but when you are negotiating deals worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, this hazy, irony-soaked cultural climate can clearly be something of a hindrance.

For those attempting to acclimatize to this atmosphere, the most important 'rule' to remember is that irony is a constant, a given, a normal element of ordinary, everyday conversation. The English may not always be joking, but they are always *in a state of readiness* for humour. We do not always say the opposite of what we mean, but we are always alert to the *possibility* of irony. When we ask someone a straightforward question (e.g. 'How are the children?'), we are equally prepared for either a straightforward response ('Fine, thanks.') or an ironic one ('Oh, they're delightful – charming, helpful, tidy, studious . . .' To which the reply is 'Oh dear. Been one of those days, has it?').

The Understatement Rule

Understatement is a form of irony, rather than a distinct and separate type of humour. It is also a very English kind of irony. Understatement is by no means an exclusively English form of humour, of course: again, we are talking about quantity rather than quality. The English are rightly renowned for their use of understatement, not because we invented it or because we do it better than anyone else, but because we do it so *much*.

The reasons for our prolific understating are not hard to discover: our strict prohibitions on earnestness, gushing, emoting and boasting require almost constant use of understatement. Rather than risk exhibiting any hint of forbidden solemnity, unseemly emotion or excessive zeal, we go to the opposite extreme and feign dry, deadpan indifference. The understatement rule means that a debilitating and painful chronic illness must be described as 'a bit of a nuisance'; a truly horrific experience is 'well, not exactly what I would have chosen'; a sight of breathtaking beauty is 'quite pretty'; an outstanding performance or achievement is 'not bad'; an act of abominable cruelty is 'not very friendly', and an unforgivably stupid misjudgement is

'not very clever'; the Antarctic is 'rather cold' and the Sahara 'a bit too hot for my taste'; and any exceptionally delightful object, person or event, which in other cultures would warrant streams of superlatives, is pretty much covered by 'nice', or, if we wish to express more ardent approval, 'very nice'.

Needless to say, the English understatement is another trait that many foreign visitors find utterly bewildering and infuriating (or, as we English would put it, 'a bit confusing'). 'I don't get it,' said one exasperated informant. 'Is it supposed to be funny? If it's supposed to be funny, why don't they laugh – or at least smile? Or *something*. How the hell are you supposed to know when "not bad" means "absolutely brilliant" and when it just means "OK"? Is there some secret sign or something that they use? Why can't they just say what they mean?'

This is the problem with English humour. Much of it isn't actually very funny – or at least not obviously funny, not laugh-out-loud funny, and definitely not crossculturally funny. Even those foreigners who appreciate the English understatement, and find it amusing, still experience considerable difficulties when it comes to using it themselves. We are not taught the use of the understatement, we learn it by osmosis. The understatement 'comes naturally' because it is deeply ingrained in our culture, part of the English psyche.

The Self-deprecation Rule

Like the English understatement, English self-deprecation can be seen as a form of irony. It usually involves not genuine modesty but saying the opposite of what we really mean – or at least the opposite of what we intend people to understand.

When I speak of 'modesty rules', I mean exactly that – not that the English are somehow naturally more modest and self-effacing than other nations, but that we have strict rules about the *appearance* of modesty. These include both 'negative' rules, such as prohibitions on boasting and any form of self-importance, and 'positive' rules, actively prescribing self-deprecation and self-mockery. The very abundance of these unwritten rules suggests that the English are *not* naturally or instinctively modest: the best that can be said is that we place a high value on modesty, that we *aspire* to modesty. The modesty that we actually display is generally false – or, to put it more charitably, ironic.

To show how it works, however, I will take a relatively blatant example. My fiancé is a brain surgeon. When we first met, I asked what had led him to choose this profession. 'Well, um,' he replied, 'I read PPE [Philosophy, Politics and Economics] at Oxford, but I found it all rather beyond me, so, er, I thought I'd better do something a bit less difficult.' I laughed, but then, as he must have expected, protested that surely brain surgery could not really be described as an easy option. This gave him a further opportunity for self-deprecation. 'Oh no, it's nowhere near as clever as it's cracked up to be; to be honest it's actually a bit hit-or-miss. It's just plumbing, really, plumbing with a microscope – except plumbing's rather more accurate.' It later emerged, as he must have known it would, that far from finding the

intellectual demands of Oxford 'beyond him', he had entered with a scholarship and graduated with a First. 'I was a dreadful little swot,' he explained.

So was he being truly modest? He was simply playing by the rules, dealing with the embarrassment of success and prestige by making a self-denigrating joke out of it all, as is our custom. And this is the point, there was nothing extraordinary or remarkable about his humble self-mockery: he was just being English. We all do this, automatically, all the time. Even those of us with much less impressive achievements or credentials to disguise.

Among ourselves, this system works perfectly well: everyone understands that the customary self-deprecation probably means roughly the opposite of what is said, and is duly impressed, both by one's achievements and by one's reluctance to trumpet them. The problems arise when we English attempt to play this game with people from outside our own culture, who do not understand the rules, fail to appreciate the irony, and therefore have an unfortunate tendency to take our self-deprecating statements at face value. We make our customary modest noises, the uninitiated foreigners accept our apparently low estimate of our achievements, and are duly unimpressed. We cannot very well then turn round and say: 'No, hey, wait a minute, you're supposed to give me a sort of knowingly sceptical smile, showing that you realize I'm being humorously self-deprecating, don't believe a word of it and think even more highly of my abilities and my modesty'. They don't know that this is the prescribed English response to prescribed English self-deprecation. They don't know that we are playing a convoluted bluffing game. They inadvertently call our bluff, and the whole thing backfires on us. And frankly, it serves us right for being so silly.

HUMOUR RULES AND ENGLISHNESS

What do these rules of humour tell us about Englishness? I said that the value we put on humour, its central role in English culture and conversation, was the main defining characteristic, rather than any specific feature of the humour itself.

The Importance of Not Being Earnest rule is not just another way of saying 'humour rules': it is about the fine line between seriousness and solemnity, and it seems to me that our acute sensitivity to this distinction, and our intolerance of earnestness, are distinctively English. There is also something quintessentially English about the nature of our response to earnestness. The 'Oh, come off it!' rule encapsulates a peculiarly English blend of armchair cynicism, ironic detachment, a squeamish distaste for sentimentality, a stubborn refusal to be duped or taken in by fine rhetoric, and a mischievous delight in pinpricking the balloons of pomposity and self-importance.

We also looked at the rules of irony, and its sub-rules of understatement and humorous self-deprecation, and I think we can conclude that the sheer extent of their use in English conversation gives a 'flavour' to our humour that is distinctively English. And if practice makes perfect, the English certainly *ought* to have achieved a somewhat greater mastery of irony and its close comic relations than other less

compulsively humorous cultures. So, without wanting to blow our own trumpet or come over all patriotic, I think we can safely say that our skills in the arts of irony, understatement and self-mockery are, on the whole, not bad.

Exercise 4.
Complete the following sentences with the words from the text.

1. The most noticeable and important ‘rule’ about humour in English conversation is its dominance and ___. (existence in all the parts of a place or thing)
2. Humour ___ every aspect of English life and culture. (affects every part of something)
3. In English conversation, there is always an ___ of humour. (a feeling that is hidden but whose effects are felt)
4. Most English conversations will involve at least some degree of ___, teasing or irony. (friendly remarks and jokes)
5. Your English may be ___ , but your behavioural ‘grammar’ will be full of glaring errors. (perfect)
6. The English ___ is another trait that many foreign visitors find utterly bewildering and infuriating. (the practice of making things seem less impressive, important, serious, etc. than they really are)
7. The understatement ‘comes naturally’ because it is deeply ___ in our culture. (that has existed for a long time and is therefore difficult to change)
8. Not that the English are somehow naturally more modest and___ than other nations, but that we have strict rules about the *appearance* of modesty. (not wanting to attract attention to yourself or your abilities)
9. The modesty that we actually display is generally false – or, to put it more __, ironic. (in a kind way, especially when you are judging somebody)
10. The problems arise when we English attempt to play this game with people from outside our own culture, who do not understand the rules, fail to appreciate the irony, and therefore have an unfortunate tendency to ___ our self-deprecating statements ___. (believe that something is what it appears to be, without questioning it)

Exercise 5.
Fill in the blanks with the prepositions where necessary.

1. We can barely manage to say ‘hello’ or comment ___ the weather without somehow contriving to make a bit of a joke out of it.
2. For the English, the rules of humour are the cultural equivalent ___ natural laws.
3. Serious matters can be spoken ___ seriously, but one must never take *oneself* too seriously.
4. What is unique ___ English humour is the pervasiveness of irony and the importance we attach ___ it.

5. But there is one significant exception ___ this rule, and that is the patriotic pride we take __ our sense of humour, particularly in our expert use of irony.

6. We do not always say the opposite ___ what we mean, but we are always alert ___ the *possibility* of irony.

7. He was simply playing ___ the rules, dealing with the embarrassment of success and prestige by making a self-denigrating joke out of it all.

8. We place a high value ___ modesty, that we *aspire* ___ modesty.

9. There was nothing extraordinary or remarkable ___ his humble self-mockery: he was just being English.

10. Our strict prohibitions ___ earnestness, gushing, emoting and boasting require almost constant use of understatement.

Exercise 6.

Fill in the blanks with the articles where necessary.

1. ___ Importance of Not Being Earnest rule is really quite simple.

2. The problem with ___ English,' complained one American visitor, 'is that you never know when they are joking

3. ___seriousness is acceptable, ___ solemnity is prohibited.

4. ___ ability to laugh at ourselves, although it may be rooted in a form of arrogance, is one of ___ more endearing characteristics of the English.

5. ___ English are not usually given to __ patriotic boasting.

6. The understatement 'comes naturally' because it is deeply ingrained in our culture, part of ___ English psyche.

7. __ Antarctic is 'rather cold' and __ Sahara 'a bit too hot for my taste'.

8. ___ very abundance of these unwritten rules suggests that the English are *not* naturally or instinctively modest.

9. Among ourselves, this system works perfectly well: everyone understands that ___ customary self-deprecation probably means roughly the opposite of what is said.

10. __ modesty that we actually display is generally false – or, to put it more charitably, ironic.

Exercise 7.

Read the following statements. Decide whether each statement is true or false. Compare your answers with those of a classmate.

1. Humour permeates every aspect of English life and culture.

2. In English culture humour is a special, separate kind of talk.

3. If your English is impeccable, you will always understand the English and English humour.

4. Earnestness is acceptable.

5. Irony is the dominant ingredient in English humour.

6. When the English ask someone a straightforward question, they expect a straightforward response.

7. Understatement is a very English kind of irony.

8. The understatement rule means that an outstanding performance or achievement is ‘not bad’.

9. English self-deprecation involves genuine modesty.

10. The customary self-deprecation really means what is said.

Exercise 8.

Discuss the following questions with your partner.

1. What do most English conversations involve?

2. What is the popular belief of the English regarding their sense of humour?

3. Why do many foreign visitors find the English understatement utterly bewildering and infuriating?

4. What rules about the *appearance* of modesty may be called ‘negative’ rules?

5. What rules about the *appearance* of modesty may be called ‘positive’ rules?

6. What is the modesty that the English display really like?

7. What does the customary self-deprecation roughly mean?

8. What problems arise when the English display self-deprecation and self-mockery when dealing with people from outside their own culture?

9. What do the English rules of humour tell foreigners about the English?

10. How does Kate fox assess the English skills in the arts of irony, understatement and self-mockery?

Exercise 9. Compare the rules of humour in England and in Russia. Complete the table.

Points to be compared	England	Russia
the rules of using irony		
the rules of using self-deprecation		
the rules of using understatement		
aspects of life and culture that humour permeates		

Exercise 10.

You have been asked to give a talk on the English sense of humour. Make a plan of your talk. As you speak, try to include as many details as you can. What other facts and examples might you give if you were asked many questions about the English skills in the arts of irony, understatement and self-mockery?

Exercise 11.

Read the following information about the British sense of humour. Comment on the card below. How does the British sense of humour reflect the British mentality?

11 *Sense of Humour*

What makes the British laugh? Can a foreigner ever learn to enjoy and to share the British sense of humour? It's not easy and may take some time, but it can be done. The eager visitor should first become acquainted with the following and their place in our national collective consciousness: toilets; trousers (when they fall down); restaurant diners with flies in their soup; little men (usually called Willy) with very large wives; doctors and patients with strange things wrong with them.

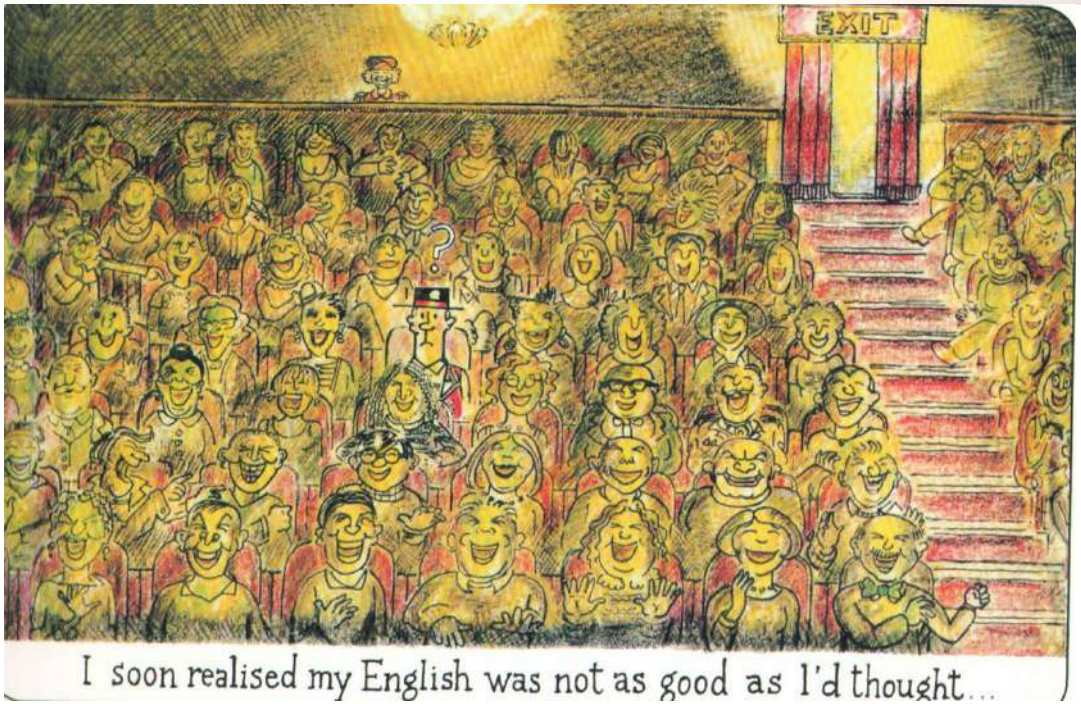
Understanding and telling jokes is an important part of social life in this country, and one that can cause frustration and embarrassment to the foreign visitor. Slowly build up your skills in this area. Practise laughing at a few of the best known British jokes; start with very simple examples, and as you gain in confidence, try some even simpler ones. Here is an example to start you off.

PATIENT: Doctor. Every time I have a cup of tea, I get a stabbing pain in my eye.

DOCTOR: Well, try taking the spoon out.

Expressions to learn
Have you heard the one about...

Avoid saying
Oh dear — I've forgotten the punchline.



UNIT 4
THE MOBILE PHONE

Pre-reading

Exercise 1.

What do you know about the general etiquette rules of using mobile phones? What rules of etiquette should people observe when they use the mobile phone in public places?

Exercise 2.

Study the following words and expressions:

Inconsiderate – not giving enough thought to other people's feelings or needs

Inhibition – a shy or nervous feeling that stops you from expressing your real thoughts or feelings

Offender – a person that does something wrong

Inappropriate – not suitable or appropriate in a particular situation

Ostentatious – (dispproving)behaving in a way that is meant to impress people by showing how rich, important, etc. you are; (of an action) done in a very obvious way so that people will notice it

Convey the message – to make ideas, feelings known to somebody

Overtly – (formal) done in an open way and not secretly

Disguise – to hide something or change it, so that it cannot be recognized

Genuine - sincere and honest; that can be trusted

Self-deprecating – done in a way that makes your own achievements or abilities seem unimportant

Subtle – (often approving) not very noticeable or obvious; (of a person or their behaviour) behaving in a clever way, and using indirect methods, in order to achieve something

Reassuring – making you feel less worried or uncertain about something

Village green - an area of grass, especially in the middle of a village in Britain

On the move – to be travelling between one place and another

Negotiate – to try to reach an agreement by formal discussion

Reading

Exercise 3.

Are there set rules of etiquette in Britain regarding when, how and in what manner mobile phones should be used? Are there special aspects of 'emerging' mobile-phone etiquette? Are there agreed rules of etiquette on the use of mobile phones during business meetings in Britain? If you need some information to answer these questions, read the following article.

EMERGING TALK-RULES: THE MOBILE PHONE

Suddenly, almost everyone in England has a mobile phone, but because this is new, unfamiliar technology, there are no set rules of etiquette governing when, how and in what manner these phones should be used. We are having to 'make up' and negotiate these rules as we go along.

For example: I have found that most English people, if asked, agree that talking loudly about banal business or domestic matters on one's mobile while on a train is rude and inconsiderate. Yet a significant minority of people still do this, and while their fellow passengers may sigh and roll their eyes, they very rarely challenge the offenders directly – as this would involve breaking other, well-established English rules and inhibitions about talking to strangers, making a scene or drawing attention to oneself. The offenders seem oblivious to the effects of their behaviour, in the same way that people tend to pick their noses and scratch their armpits in their cars, apparently forgetting that they are not invisible.

How will this apparent impasse be resolved? There are some early signs of emerging rules regarding mobile phone use in public places, and it looks as though loud 'I'm on a train' conversations – or mobiles ringing in cinemas and theatres – may eventually become as unacceptable as queue jumping, but we cannot yet be certain, particularly given English inhibitions about confronting offenders. Inappropriate mobile-phone use on trains and in other public places is at least a social issue of which everyone is now aware. But there are other aspects of 'emerging' mobile-phone etiquette that are even more blurred and controversial.

There are, for example, as yet no agreed rules of etiquette on the use of mobile phones during business meetings. Do you switch your phone off, discreetly, before entering the meeting? Or do you take your phone out and make a big ostentatious *show* of switching it off, as a flattering gesture conveying the message 'See how

important you are: I am switching off my phone for you'? Then do you place your switched-off phone on the table as a reminder of your courtesy and your client's or colleague's status? If you keep it switched on, do you do so overtly or leave it in your briefcase? Do you take calls during the meeting? My preliminary observations indicate that lower-ranking English executives tend to be less courteous, attempting to trumpet their own importance by keeping phones on and taking calls during meetings, while high-ranking people with nothing to prove tend to be more considerate.

Then what about lunch? Is it acceptable to switch your phone back on during the business lunch? Do you need to give a reason? Apologize? Again, my initial observations and interviews suggest a similar pattern. Lowstatus, insecure people tend to take and even sometimes make calls during a business lunch – often apologizing and giving reasons, but in such a self-important 'I'm so busy and indispensable' manner that their 'apology' is really a disguised boast. Their higher-ranking, more secure colleagues either leave their phones switched off or, if they absolutely must keep them on for some reason, apologize in a genuine and often embarrassed, self-deprecating manner.

There are many other, much more subtle social uses of mobile phones, some of which do not even involve talking on the phone at all – such as the competitive use of the mobile phone itself as a status-signal, particularly among teenagers, but also in some cases replacing the car as a medium for macho 'mine's better than yours' displays among older males, with discussions of the relative merits of different brands, networks and features taking the place of more traditional conversations about alloy wheels, nought-to-sixty, BHP, etc.

I have also noticed that many women now use their mobiles as 'barrier signals' when on their own in coffee bars and other public places, as an alternative to the traditional use of a newspaper or magazine to signal unavailability and mark personal 'territory'. Even when not in use, the mobile placed on the table acts as an effective symbolic bodyguard, a protector against unwanted social contact: women will touch the phone or pick it up when a potential 'intruder' approaches. One woman explained: 'You just feel safer if it's there – just on the table, next to your hand . . . Actually it's better than a newspaper because it's real people – I mean, there are real people in there you could call or text if you wanted, you know? It's sort of reassuring.' The idea of one's social support network of friends and family being somehow 'inside' the mobile phone means that even just touching or holding the phone gives a sense of being protected – and sends a signal to others that one is not alone and vulnerable.

This example provides an indication of the more important social functions of the mobile phone. The mobile phone has, I believe, become the modern equivalent of the garden fence or village green. The space-age technology of mobile phones has allowed us to return to the more natural and humane communication patterns of preindustrial society, when we lived in small, stable communities, and enjoyed frequent 'grooming talk' with a tightly integrated social network of family and friends. In the fast-paced modern world, we had become severely restricted in both

the quantity and quality of communication with our social network. Most of us no longer enjoy the cosiness of a gossip over the garden fence. We may not even know our neighbours' names, and communication is often limited to a brief, slightly embarrassed nod, if that. Families and friends are scattered, and even if our relatives or friends live nearby, we are often too busy or too tired to visit. We are constantly on the move, spending much of our time commuting to and from work either among strangers on trains and buses, or alone and isolated in our cars. These factors are particularly problematic for the English, as we tend to be more reserved and socially inhibited than other cultures; we do not talk to strangers, or make friends quickly and easily.

Mobile phones – particularly the ability to send short, frequent, cheap text messages – restore our sense of connection and community, and provide an antidote to the pressures and alienation of modern urban life. They are a kind of 'social lifeline' in a fragmented and isolating world.

Think about a typical, brief 'village-green' conversation: 'Hi, how're you doing?' 'Fine, just off to the shops – oh, how's your Mum?' 'Much better, thanks' 'Oh, good, give her my love – see you later'. If you take most of the vowels out of the village-green conversation, and scramble the rest of the letters into 'text-message dialect' (HOW R U? C U L8ER), to me it sounds uncannily like a typical SMS or text exchange: not much is said – a friendly greeting, maybe a scrap of news – but a personal connection is made, people are reminded that they are not alone. Until the advent of mobile text messaging, many of us were having to live without this kind of small but psychologically and socially very important form of communication.

But this new form of communication requires a new set of unspoken rules, and the negotiations over the formation of these rules are currently causing a certain amount of tension and conflict – particularly the issue of whether mobile text is an appropriate medium for certain types of conversation. Chatting someone up, flirting by text is accepted, even encouraged, but some women complain that men use texting as a way of avoiding talking. 'Dumping' someone by text-message is widely regarded as cowardly and absolutely unacceptable, but this rule has not yet become firmly established enough to prevent some people from ending relationships in this manner.

I'm hoping to get some funding to do a proper study on mobile-phone etiquette, monitoring all these emerging rules as they mature and become unwritten laws. For now, I hope that identifying more general, stable 'rules of Englishness' or 'defining characteristics' will help us to predict, to some extent at least, the most likely future developments in this process.

Exercise 4.
Complete the following sentences with the words from the text.

1. Most English people agree that talking loudly about banal business or domestic matters on one's mobile while on a train is rude and___. (not giving enough thought to other people's feelings or needs)

2. Most English people rarely challenge the ___ directly. (a person that does something wrong)

3. Most English people rarely challenge the offenders directly – as this would involve breaking other well-established English rules and ___ about talking to strangers or drawing attention to oneself. (a shy or nervous feeling that stops you from expressing your real thoughts or feelings)

4. ___ mobile-phone use on trains and in other public places is at least a social issue of which everyone is now aware. (not suitable or appropriate in a particular situation)

5. The children were shy at first, but soon lost their ___. (a shy or nervous feeling that stops you from expressing your real thoughts or feelings)

6. Do you switch your phone off, discreetly, before entering the meeting? Or do you take your phone out and make a big ___ *show* of switching it off. (done in a very obvious way so that people will notice it)

7. If you keep your mobile phone switched on, do you do so ___ or leave it in your briefcase? (in an open way and not secretly)

8. There are many other, much more __ social uses of mobile phones. (not very obvious)

9.She couldn't ___ the fact that she felt uncomfortable. (to hide something or change it, so that it cannot be recognized)

10. I need a mobile phone as I'm always ___. (travelling between one place and another)

Exercise 5.
Fill in the blanks with the prepositions where necessary.

1. The offenders seem oblivious ___ the effects of their behavior.

2. Inappropriate mobile-phone use ___ trains and in other public places is at least a social issue of which everyone is now aware.

3. There are as yet no agreed rules of etiquette ___ the use of mobile phones during business meetings.

4. Is it acceptable to switch your phone back on ___ the business lunch?

5. Their higher-ranking, more secure colleagues either leave their phones switched off or, if they absolutely must keep them on ___ some reason, apologize ___ a genuine and often embarrassed, self-deprecating manner.

6. Even when not __ use, the mobile placed on the table acts as an effective symbolic bodyguard, a protector __ unwanted social contact.

7. The mobile phone has, I believe, become the modern equivalent ___ the garden fence or village green.

8. Most of us no longer enjoy the cosiness of a gossip ___ the garden fence.

9. We are constantly on the move, spending much of our time commuting __ and __ work either among strangers on trains and buses, or alone and isolated in our cars.

10. This rule has not yet become firmly established enough to prevent some people ___ ending relationships in this manner.

Exercise 6.

Fill in the blanks with the articles where necessary.

1. It looks as though loud 'I'm on ___ train' conversations – or mobiles ringing in cinemas and theatres – may eventually become as unacceptable as queue jumping.
2. Do you take ___ calls during the meeting?
3. Is it acceptable to switch your phone back on during ___ business lunch?
4. Many women now use their mobiles as ___ 'barrier signals' when on their own in coffee bars and other public places, as ___ alternative to ___ traditional use of a newspaper or magazine to signal unavailability and mark personal 'territory'.
5. Most English people, if asked, agree that talking loudly about ___ banal business or domestic matters on one's mobile while on ___ train is rude and inconsiderate.
6. These factors are particularly problematic for ___ English, as we tend to be more reserved and socially inhibited than other cultures;
7. We do not talk to ___ strangers, or make friends quickly and easily.
8. Mobile phones – particularly the ability to send short, frequent, cheap text messages – restore our sense of ___ connection and community, and provide ___ antidote to the pressures and alienation of modern urban life.
9. Until ___ advent of mobile text messaging, many of us were having to live without this kind of small but psychologically and socially very important form of communication.
10. But this new form of communication requires ___ new set of unspoken rules, and the negotiations over the formation of these rules are currently causing ___ certain amount of tension and conflict.

Exercise 7.

Read the following statements. Decide whether each statement is true or false. Compare your answers with those of a classmate

1. Most English people, if asked, agree that talking loudly about banal business or domestic matters on one's mobile while on a train is permissible.
2. If someone talks loudly about banal business or domestic matters on one's mobile while on a train, their fellow passengers may challenge the offenders directly.
3. There are set rules regarding mobile phone use in public places, and loud 'I'm on a train' conversations – or mobiles ringing in cinemas and theatres – have become as unacceptable as queue jumping,
4. The English are known for their inhibitions about talking to strangers, making a scene or drawing attention to themselves.
5. There are set rules of etiquette on the use of mobile phones during business meetings.

6. Some people in a business meeting give a big ostentatious *show* of switching off their mobile phone conveying the message 'See how important the business is'.

7. Many questions arise when it comes to 'making up' the rules of using mobile phones in business meetings.

8. The author's observations show that insecure people never make calls during a business lunch.

9. The author's observations show that the higher-ranking, more secure colleagues leave their phones switched on during a business lunch.

10. The author's observations show that insecure people often make calls during a business lunch to show how indispensable they are.

Exercise 8.
Discuss the following questions with your partner.

1. If you were asked about the social uses of mobile phones by teenagers, what would you say?

2. If you were asked about the social uses of mobile phones by women, what would you point out?

3. What social functions of the mobile phone does Kate Fox point out?

4. How has the quantity and quality of communication changed in modern time?

5. How can mobile phones help to restore our sense of connection and community?

6. What is a typical, brief 'village-green' conversation like?

7. What is the point of a typical, brief 'village-green' conversation?

8. What is the point of a typical SMS or text exchange?

9. How do most English people react when someone talks loudly loudly about banal business or domestic matters on their mobile phone in public places?

10.What deters English people from challenging those people who loudly loudly about banal business or domestic matters on their mobile phone in public places?

Exercise 9. Compare the emerging mobile phone talk-rules in England and in Russia. Complete the table.

Points to be compared	England	Russia
the social uses of mobile phones by teenagers		
the social uses of mobile phones by women		
the emerging rules of talking on the mobile phone in public places		
the emerging rules of using the mobile phone in		

business meetings		
the emerging rules of using the mobile phone during the business lunch		

Exercise 10.

1. Imagine the time before the mobile phone was invented. Would you like to have lived then? Give your reasons.

2. Make up a list of general etiquette rules of using the mobile phone in public places.

Exercise 11.

Read the following information about the traditional British telephone box. Comment on the card below. What British values is it about?

3 *The Telephone Box*

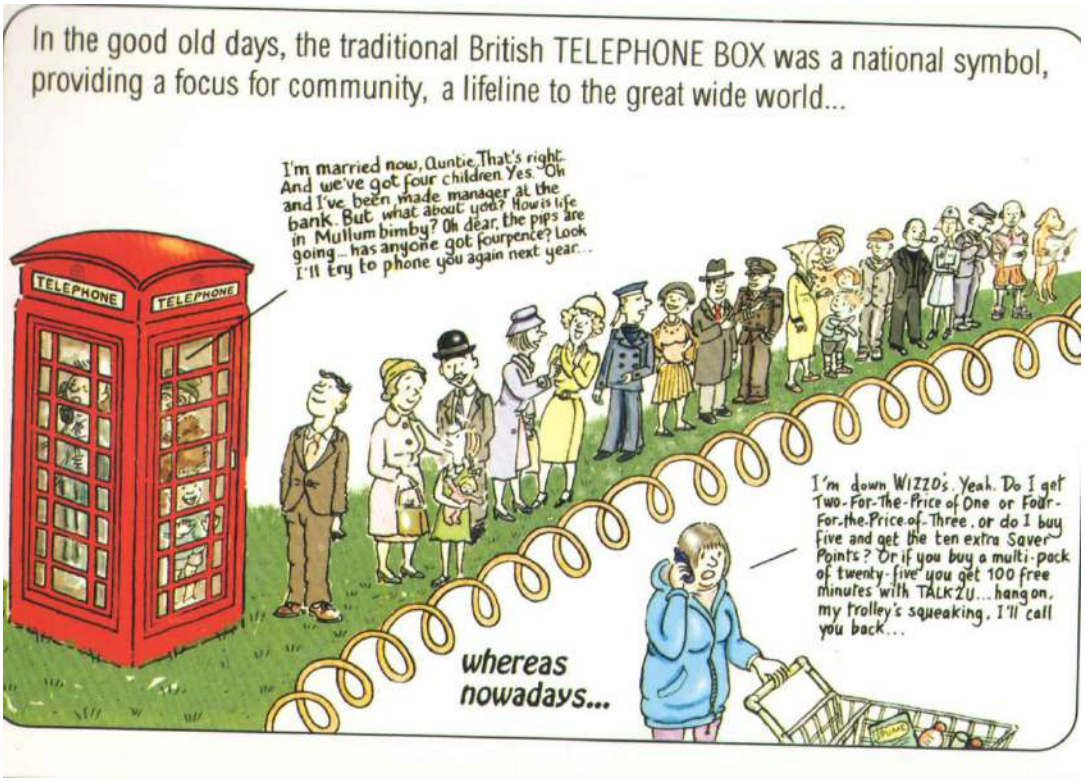
Before mobile phones made everything so easy, the public telephone box was an important focus for community life. People of all types and classes would form an orderly queue outside its red iron door, clutching their pennies and waiting patiently for their turn to be linked up to the great wide world. For a shy people like the British it was an opportunity to meet and exchange news and gossip with neighbours and to get some fresh air. And what's more, once you were inside that box everything you said was *private*. Everybody uses mobiles nowadays, but talking loudly in public places with unseen faces, about personal feelings or secret dealings...well it's not something our *true Brit* feels comfortable about! Now there's a new generation of phone boxes which can link you up to the Internet, receive e-mails, take payment by phone card or credit card. Impressive, perhaps, but where is the romance?

Expressions to learn

Just popping out to the phone box — I'll be back tomorrow night.

Avoid saying

It's me. I'm on the train.


In the good old days, the traditional British TELEPHONE BOX was a national symbol, providing a focus for community, a lifeline to the great wide world...
I'm married now, Auntie. That's right. And we've got four children. Yes. Oh and I've been made manager at the bank. But what about you? How is life in Mullum bimby? Oh dear, the pips are going... has anyone got fourpence? Look I'll try to phone you again next year...
TELEPHONE
TELEPHONE
whereas nowadays...
I'm down WIZZO's. Yeah. Do I get Two-For-The-Price of One or Four-For-the-Price-of-Three, or do I buy five and get the ten extra Saver Points? Or if you buy a multi-pack of twenty-five you get 100 free minutes with TALK2U... hang on, my trolley's squeaking. I'll call you back...

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