

Better@ English

Real English Conversations: Cultural differences (1 of 3)

Hi! Lori here with another edition of Real English conversations from Better at English dot com. This is my first podcast in a while because the computer I use for podcasting broke down a couple of weeks ago. Unfortunately, it's still broken, but today I managed to *MacGuyver* enough hardware and software together to prepare some new podcasts for you.

Since the previous podcast, several people have been kind enough to send donations to support Better at English. Thanks so much to Hiroyuki from Japan, Matteo and Antonio from Italy, Franz from Germany, and to Pietro, Patrik, Ted, and Mirko. I **really** appreciate your generosity! Donations from listeners are enormously helpful and encouraging. If you would like to donate, just follow the link in the sidebar at the website, www.betteratenglish.com. On the website you'll also find the full transcript for this podcast, as well as the audio and transcripts of all previous Better at English listening podcasts.

In today's conversation, Michael and I discuss how native speakers use fillers such as "umm" and "uh" and "mmm hmm" in conversations, and how these fillers are not always the same in different cultures. This is the first part of a series of three: in parts two and three we go on to discuss some rather amusing pronunciation and vocabulary differences between British and American English. Here is part one: Enjoy!

Conversation Transcript

Lori: I got some e-mails from people saying that they wanted to have more of the British English guy because they like hearing the difference between British and American English.

Michael: Oh well, that's very kind of them; **I'd be happy to oblige you.**

L: Yeah, but there was also one guy [who complained], do you remember when I **transcribed** all of the *umms* and *uhs* and stuff like that?

M: Oh yes! Yeah, I try not to do that too much, to say umm and ah and uh, like so many people do, it's something I'm very **conscious** of, so instead of doing that I just **tend to** repeat what I just said instead.

L: You know that's really **hard** to transcribe.

M: I'm really sorry about that, but it's something that I think I **get from my father**. He speaks that way. It's a family thing.

L: So you don't think it's just a British English thing?

M: I don't think so, but now that you mention it I'll start to listen out for things like that. I just... you can be very conscious of the pauses, the gaps in a conversation, and people I think find that kind of awkward. As you're thinking of the next thing to say, it's better to be making some noise than just have a complete silence. So I think maybe that's why I do it; it's **subconscious** really.

L: And what about, you know, I've had some of my students say that they think that it's really weird that if you're listening to a speaker, you make these little **encouraging** noises like "Mmm hmmm, mmm hmmm"?

M: Oh yes. Yeah. Well, do you know I think that people tend to do that because it would be completely rude to interrupt somebody when they're in the middle of a sentence and saying, "Oh yes I agree." But you want to give the other person **confirmation** that you are agreeing, and encouragement. And also I think when you're on the telephone or using Skype or something like that, you want to let them know that you're actually still on the other end of the phone...That you haven't lost the collec- the connection.

L: Some of my students have said that they think that would be really **annoying**, you know, some of my Swedish students, particularly.

M: Is that something that Swedish people don't do then when you're speaking to them on the phone?

L: They make this weird sound instead of, of "Mmm hmmm," "Uh huh," "Oh, right," they do this thing where they sort of suck in air. They **go** [imitates **gasping** sound]

M: Oh yes, I've heard of this, OK. Yeah, I'd think that they were gasping for air.

L: Yeah, when I first moved to Sweden and I heard people like that on the phone when I couldn't hear the other end of the conversation, that's the sound that we make in...where I'm from in southern California, anyway...we make that sound when we've heard something really horrible and surprising, like if you'd heard there'd just been a terrible accident, that's the sound you would make. So I was always thinking that, "Oh my God! What had...what has happened? What has happened?" And it **turns out...**

M: Well, I think that would be the same for me if someone was just a sharp intake of breath like when you take your car, to the garage, and you say, and they tell you how much it's going to cost to have your exhaust fixed. And you respond with [gasps], that's what you would do.

L: Exactly. It's funny, you said *garage*!

Final words

In the next podcast in this series, Michael and I talk about some funny pronunciation and vocabulary differences between British English and American English. Well, I think they are funny, anyway! But then again, I don't watch TV, so I'm easily amused...

Thanks for tuning in, and thanks again for your donations and supportive emails and comments! It makes my day to hear that Better at English is useful for your language learning. You can email me at info AT BetterAtEnglish DOT com, or call the voice mail line at 1 for the USA, 206 350 2283. Bye for now!

Vocabulary list

I'd be happy to oblige you

[I'd = I would] This is a phrase you can use to show that you are eager and willing to help someone. To *oblige* someone means to help them or do something that pleases them.

Transcribed

To transcribe something means to write down something that was spoken (or played or written in another form). Lori transcribes [writes down] the spoken conversations so that Better at English listeners can read along as they listen to the podcasts.

Conscious

If you are *conscious of* something, you are *aware of* it.

Tend to

If you tend to do something, you are likely to do it (but you don't necessarily ALWAYS do it).

Hard

If something is *hard* to do, it is *difficult* to do.

Something...I get from my father

In this case, get means *inherited* or *learned*. Michael means that his own speaking style has been influenced by his father's style.

Subconscious

If something is subconscious, it means that you are not conscious or aware of it. Something that is subconscious can influence your actions even if you are not aware of it.

Encouraging

Something that is *encouraging* makes you feel more confident, or makes you more likely to want to do something.

Confirmation

If you give someone *confirmation* of something, you show them that it is certain or that you understand.

Annoying

Something that is annoying makes you feel angry or irritated (annoyed).

Go

In informal conversation, native speakers often introduce reported speech with the verb *go*. Many careful users of English disapprove of using *go* in this way, so you should not copy it.

Gasping

If someone *gasps*, they breathe in very quickly and sharply through their mouth.

Turns out

In this case, *to turn out* means to happen in a certain way or have a particular result. Lori didn't finish her sentence, but she meant to say: "It turns out that the gasping sound means something different than I thought it did."