



Colloquial English / Level 3

Unit 5 - Culture



About this eBook

This eBook goes together with the audio that you can download free from Zappenglish.com. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please visit our website – we always value your opinion. Good luck! Katie, Tom & Mark



Introduction

In this unit you're going to learn colloquial expressions using words related to culture and cultural differences. Remember, colloquial expressions are informal – use them with your friends, but not in more formal situations.

Colloquial Expressions Task 1

KATIE: So I'm sitting in Tom's living room, talking to Amanda.

AMANDA: Hello.

KATIE: And Amanda's job is to try and guess...which colloquial words or expressions I'm describing.

AMANDA: Right.

KATIE: And in this unit they're all about erm...culture, cultural differences or...erm...things that you might do in one culture and not do in another.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm...OK.

KATIE: And the first one I think is probably the most famous saying...about culture. And it means that um, when you go to a different place...you should...do things in the same way the people in that place do.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm.

KATIE: So you don't behave as your own culture, you behave as the culture of the place that you're in.

AMANDA: I'm thinking of a saying. I don't know if this is the...

KATIE: Yes. Yeah. A saying is a better description.

AMANDA: Yeah, so...and is it using a capital city?

KATIE: It is.

AMANDA: Right. OK.

(laughter – unclear)

AMANDA: A European capital city. **When in Rome...**

KATIE: Yes.

AMANDA: ...do as the Romans do.

KATIE: Yep. Absolutely.



AMANDA: So when you go to the country, you should follow their...ways, their...yep.

KATIE: Hmm. And we sometimes shorten it don't we? I mean the whole expression is...

AMANDA: **When in Rome, do as the Romans do.** But, **when in Rome.**

KATIE: Yep. Often just, **when in Rome...**

AMANDA: Yes. When in Barcelona... (laughter)

KATIE: Well, what would be an example of something, if...if...if I said oh here I have to do things differently and you said oh **when in Rome...**

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: What's something that I might have to do differently here?

AMANDA: Eat a little bit later. Maybe...

KATIE: Yes, exactly.

AMANDA: ...if you want to actually find something to eat.

KATIE: Yeah.

AMANDA: You have to wait a bit longer.

KATIE: So, for example, if...when I first arrived here I was hungry by about 6pm.

AMANDA: Yeah.

KATIE: And there are no restaurants open, I might say, *"Oh God, I've got to eat really late,"* and you would say to me...

AMANDA: **When in Rome...**

KATIE: Mmm hmm. I'm used to it now.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: Just for your information.

AMANDA: Have a snack.

(laughter)

KATIE: OK. Er the second expression is er...is also something involving a country. Erm and it's a way of erm...telling people about things...when maybe you shouldn't. And, the information starts off with one person, goes to the next person, the next person and the next person and by the time it gets to the last person...the information has completely changed.



AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: What would we call this?

AMANDA: Oh...erm...used to play this game.

KATIE: Well, what's this? (whispers)

AMANDA: A whisper, yeah, erm...we used to whisper in a circle.

KATIE: Yeah.

AMANDA: To pass the information on, but I can't think of the exact...the expression.

KATIE: Very, very big Asian country.

AMANDA: Oh **Chinese whispers**! Of course.

(laughter)

AMANDA: **Chinese whispers**, yes.

KATIE: **Chinese whispers**.

AMANDA: It was a really fun game actually. (laughter)

KATIE: So what does it mean? I mean you can play the game, but if I say, "*Oh God it's like **Chinese whispers**...*"

AMANDA: Good question. I just think of it as the...the...the transferral of information...that...you have to live something firsthand.

KATIE: Yeah, well it's, it's mainly about the fact that when you say *Oh it's like **Chinese whispers***, it means, the information you get, is not the same as...it was originally, it's been changed, as it's been passed on...

AMANDA: Right. Right. OK. Yeah.

KATIE: Right. Good, good. OK, the next couple of expressions are things about erm, face. Your face. And in some cultures...your...your face is your sort of...your reputation, what people think of you.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm. Yes.

KATIE: So erm imagine something...erm, really bad or sad, happened to me...

AMANDA: Mmm hmm.

KATIE: ...and then you say "How are you?", and I say, "I'm fine, I'm fine, no problem." What am I doing?

AMANDA: You are pretending that things are all OK...and so you're being very courageous...



KATIE: And what's the expression to describe this?

AMANDA: So you would be **putting on a brave face**.

KATIE: That's the one.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm.

KATIE: Yes. And the...and a lot of cultures, English...England included I think, we tend to...

AMANDA: Oh yeah. Stiff upper, **stiff upper lip**.

KATIE: Yeah, **stiff upper lip** is another good one. And put on a brave face.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm.

KATIE: So, "How are you?"... "Oh I'm fine."

AMANDA: "Yeah. Everything's good yeah."

KATIE: When really it's not.

AMANDA: I've just lost my job, split up with my husband and...(laughter) Everything's fine!

KATIE: OK, and er, the next one with face, we said it's your reputation, and again, in some cultures, erm the worst thing you can do is to make somebody look silly or stupid, in front of other people. Erm...and if this happens, we can say, that person has...

AMANDA: Erm...

KATIE: Again, it's about face.

AMANDA: Yes. Or **lose face**.

KATIE: Yeah. Yeah. So they've **lost face**.

AMANDA: Yes. Their appearance, their...image in front of everybody else, yeah.

KATIE: Mmm.

AMANDA: Don't **lose face**.

KATIE: No. It can be very bad. Especially if it's your boss and you make your boss **lose face**.

AMANDA: In...in Japan...I know that's really important.

KATIE: Yeah, yeah. And, so...erm...what would be the opposite of that, so, erm...if someone's er, maybe in a situation where they could look a bit silly, and then I say something to erm, to stop that happening. So **lose face** and the opposite would be...

AMANDA: Mmm. **To save face**.



KATIE: Yeah.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: Exactly. So erm...if for example I did lose my job...erm...and er...I don't want everyone to know how bad it is, I don't want everyone to think that I've lost my job, and now I've got to...I might say erm *but I've got a couple of interviews next week.*

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: So that I don't look so bad, so I'm trying to **save face**.

AMANDA: Mmm, yeah.

KATIE: And last one.

AMANDA: That's very English isn't it?

KATIE: Yeah, think...I think a lot of cultures...because we're not...most people aren't that direct...

AMANDA: Yeah.

KATIE: ...nobody likes to look silly do they?

AMANDA: No.

KATIE: OK and the last one, which is a little bit like, erm **saving face**, erm...we...we want to make sure everybody thinks that we are still OK, and we still have the things that we've always had, erm...so we say, to **keep...up**

AMANDA: ...**appearances**.

KATIE: Mmm. So going back to the...the job example...

AMANDA: Mmm.

KATIE: ...if I lost my job, but I didn't want anybody to know, I might, erm, go out at the same time every day...

AMANDA: With your suit on.

KATIE: Yeah.

AMANDA: And get on the metro, and then turn around and come back home.

KATIE: Just to keep up exp..er...**keep up appearances**.

AMANDA: Oh I've heard of stories of that. Of people doing that sort of thing.

KATIE: Bit extreme isn't it?



AMANDA: Yes. Yes. Yes. It's pressure.

Meaning and Pronunciation 1

OK. Now we need to see what you can remember. I'm going to say a word. You need to try and remember and say the expression that has that word in it. So for example, if I said 'Rome', you would need to say 'When in Rome'. Each time you hear a , you need to repeat something. Here we go.

appearances

to keep up appearances

to keep up appearances **Keeping up appearances** is important in some cultures.

whispers

Chinese whispers

Chinese whispers It was like **Chinese whispers**. No one knew what was going on.

face

to lose face / to save face

to lose face

to save face

It's important your boss doesn't **lose face**.

brave

to put a brave face on things

to put a brave face on things



He **put a brave face on things**, but I knew he was upset.

Colloquial Expressions Task 2

KATIE: So we're going to continue with our...phrases about culture. And, a few of them this time, are about erm, being direct, or not being direct.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm.

KATIE: OK. So er, in some cultures...it takes me a long time to say something. To say the exact thing that I want to say. I might talk about, several different things first. And maybe even the listener is going, *yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, come on, come on, come on.*

AMANDA: Yes, you want, the listener wants the person to arrive to the place, or **to get to the point.**

KATIE: Yes. **To get to the point.**

AMANDA: Mmm.

KATIE: So if I'm going *bleuh, bleuh, bleuh, bleuh, bleauh...*

AMANDA: Yes, yes.

KATIE: *Come on, I need to leave soon.*

AMANDA: *Yes, yes, I need to catch my train. Yes, yes.*

KATIE: **Get to the point.**

AMANDA: I do that, ordinarily. (laughter)

KATIE: What, **get to the point?**

AMANDA: I never **get to the point.**

KATIE: Oh, you don't **get to the point.**

AMANDA: I was really bad at summarising at school. I used to use...a thousand words instead of a hundred.

KATIE: So the teacher would be writing on the bottom...

AMANDA: The teacher would be reading this, going, *right, right...*

KATIE: **Get to the point!**



AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: Well there's a very similar one to...well...it's kind of the opposite of **to get to the point**. So it means that, you know...and we often...do this, when we've got something to say but maybe it's a little bit difficult to say.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: So we, talk about this, and talk about that, talk about the other, erm...and so we are...

AMANDA: I would say, that you're going around in circles. But I don't know if that's...

KATIE: Possibly. That's...that can be something, where you say the same thing again and again, and don't get to the end.

AMANDA: Just going around it, avoiding it.

KATIE: Mmm hmm. Well, the expression I'm thinking of means the same thing, it's to beat...

AMANDA: Oh, **to beat about the bush**.

KATIE: Mmm.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: So are you being direct?

AMANDA: You're **beating about the bush**. (laughter)

KATIE: No. The opposite. So if you **beat about the bush**...

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: I might say...

AMANDA: **Get to the point!**

KATIE: Yes!

(laughter)

KATIE: OK. Erm, and one more. About erm...sort of being direct, but it is telling you what the situation is, and being clear about it.

AMANDA: Hmm.

KATIE: So erm...I might, for example if I'm...erm...selling...selling something, and you come and you say, "Well, how much do you want for it?" And I say, "Well, you know, I'm looking for a good price." ...and you say, "OK, well look. Just..."

AMANDA: **Come out with it.**



KATIE: Yes. That's one good way, just **come out with it**.

AMANDA: Yeah.

KATIE: Mm, mm, mm on the table.

AMANDA: **Put your cards on the table.**

KATIE: Yes.

AMANDA: Yes. Lay it down. Tell me as it is.

KATIE: Exactly.

AMANDA: Mmm hmm.

KATIE: OK perfect.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: I think...we've only got two more in this little section. Erm...and, this is not specifically about culture, but it's about erm, having two separate things, and it means to have two things at the same time. So for example, if I had erm...er, let's say a mother who is Spanish...

AMANDA: Mm hmm.

KATIE: ...and a father who is English...I would...in some ways I would have the benefit of, the Spanish culture and language, and I'd have the benefit of the English culture and language.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: So we could say, *oh you've got...*

AMANDA: **The best of both worlds.**

KATIE: Exactly.

AMANDA: I'm very envious of that situation.

KATIE: Me too.

AMANDA: Imagine...naturally bilingual.

KATIE: That really would be...

AMANDA: As a child.

KATIE: ...**the best of both worlds** wouldn't it?

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: Because you could choose...



AMANDA: Yeah. The language and the culture and everything. Yes definitely.

KATIE: That was a quick one.

AMANDA: Yes, that was a quick one. (laughter)

KATIE: Last one. What do you call somebody, who...erm...is very, very interested in things like the arts, cinema, theatre? And they go and experience them a lot, so they're always at the theatre or the cinema or the art gallery. You could say, *Oh they're a real...*

AMANDA: I'm thinking of a...the image of a bird...

KATIE: That's the one.

AMANDA: ...that preys on dead animals. (laughter)

KATIE: Yes.

AMANDA: As in, yes, **a culture vulture**.

KATIE: That's the one, that's the one.

AMANDA: Yes.

KATIE: So, you really, you know you're always there...

AMANDA: Yeah. Yeah.

KATIE: ...if there's a new opening at an art gallery, you'll be there.

AMANDA: Yeah.

Meaning and Pronunciation 2

So again, let's see what you can remember. I'll say a word, you give the expression and remember to repeat after the beep.

point

to **get to the point**

to **get to the point** It takes him ages to **get to the point**.



bush

to **beat around the bush**

to **beat around the bush** Stop **beating around the bush** and tell me what she said.

worlds

to **have the best of both worlds**

to **have the best of both worlds**

He has a house in the country and the city so he gets the **best of both worlds**.

cards

to **put your cards on the table**

to **put your cards on the table** It's time everyone **put their cards on the table**.

culture

a **culture vulture**

a **culture vulture** She goes to the theatre twice a week. She's a real **culture vulture**.

Summary

You should feel a lot more confident in understanding and using ten new colloquial expressions on the topic of culture. That's great.



Extra Materials

Glossary

1 = Informal but could be used in speech with most people and in most situations.

2 = Informal and would be best used in very informal situations with people you know well.

3 = Be very careful! Very informal and may upset or offend some people. Don't use this with your mother-in-law!!!

When in Rome... (1) – when you are in another country and culture, you should try to do things the way the people in that place do.

Chinese whispers (1) – a situation where information is passed from person to person and becomes more and more confused / incorrect.

to **put** a **brave face** on things (1) – to pretend you are OK in a bad situation.

to **save / lose face** (1) – to stop your image in front of other people from becoming worse / for your image in front of other people to become worse

to **keep up appearances** (2) – to hide any financial or personal problems so that other people think everything is the same for you as usual.

to **beat** around the **bush** (1) – to take a long time to say something, to be indirect, or not talk about what is important.

to **put** your **cards** on the **table** (2) – to say what you really feel, think or are going to do.

to **get** to the **point** (2) – to say the most important thing in the discussion/situation.

a **culture vulture** (2) – someone very interested in culture – perhaps too much.

to have the **best of both worlds** (1) – to enjoy two things (often opposites) at the same time.

a **stiff upper lip** (1) – British people are said to have a stiff upper lip, it means to not show that you are sad and upset.

to come **out** with something (1) – to say something, usually directly or suddenly and with no introduction to the subject.



Practice Exercise 1

Write a new sentence that means the same as the one given, using one of the expressions from this unit. We have done number 1 for you as an example.

1. She never tells you directly. She beats around the bush.
2. He told everybody very honestly what the situation was. _____
3. He looked silly in front of the whole office. _____
4. She always wants people to think everything is perfect even when it isn't. _____

5. Just tell me! _____

Practice Exercise 2

Put all the vowels back into the expressions.

1. s _ v _ f _ c _
2. b _ t _ r _ nd th _ b _ sh
3. _ c _ lt _ r _ v _ lt _ r _
4. p _ t _ br _ v _ f _ c _ _ n th _ ngs
5. wh _ n _ n R _ m _
6. h _ v _ th _ b _ s t _ f b _ t h w _ r lds
7. Ch _ n _ s _ wh _ sp _ rs
8. g _ t t _ th _ p _ _ nt



Extra Materials - Answers

Practice Exercise 1

1. *She beats around the bush*
2. *He put his cards on the table.*
3. *He lost face.*
4. *She always tries to keep up appearances.*
5. *Get to the point.*

Practice Exercise 2

1. *Save face*
2. *Beat around the bush*
3. *A culture vulture*
4. *Put a brave face on things*
5. *When in Rome*
6. *Have the best of both worlds*
7. *Chinese whispers*
8. *Get to the point.*

