

02 CULTURE AND IDENTITY

In this unit, you learn how to:

- talk about different aspects of culture and society
- politely disagree with people's opinions
- express feelings and opinions more emphatically
- talk about useful objects in the home
- discuss your own personal / national identities

Grammar

- Emphatic structures

Vocabulary

- Society and culture
- Household objects
- Expressions with *thing*

Reading

- Foreign objects
- National and individual identity

Listening

- Society and culture in different countries
- Feelings about British culture



VOCABULARY Society and culture

A Work in pairs. Discuss how you feel about your country with regard to each of the categories below. Explain your ideas.

bureaucracy	religion	crime
climate	cultural life	family / community life

B Match each of the categories above to two sentences.

- 1 It's a very **close-knit** town. Everyone knows everyone.
- 2 Most people I met there seemed to be very **devout**.
- 3 A lot of companies are trying to **cut red tape** a bit.
- 4 They are **cracking down on** fraud.
- 5 The winters are incredibly **mild**.
- 6 We **got burgled** three times last year!
- 7 It's managed to remain a **secular** state.
- 8 Doctors are too busy **filling in forms** to do their job properly.
- 9 We get month after month of **damp** and **drizzle**.
- 10 There's a really **thriving** music scene.
- 11 It's still a very **male-dominated** society, in my opinion.
- 12 There's still a lot of **censorship** in the media.

C Which sentences in exercise B do you think describe positive things and which describe negative aspects? Why? What might be the possible causes and / or results of each sentence?



14 OUTCOMES

LISTENING

You are going to hear two conversations about society and culture in two different countries.

A 2.1 Listen and take notes on what you hear about each place. Compare what you heard with a partner.

B Decide if these sentences are true or false. Listen again to check your ideas.

Conversation 1

- 1 She thinks it must be a dangerous country to visit.
- 2 People lead very isolated lives there.
- 3 The power balance in families perhaps wasn't what some people might expect.
- 4 He agrees that there's some truth in one of the stereotypes about the country.
- 5 He found the traffic absolutely infuriating.

Conversation 2

- 6 He was surprised at how quiet people were at concerts.
- 7 There's a healthy artistic community there.
- 8 The films are all heavily censored.
- 9 One recent film dealt with some controversial issues.
- 10 The economy is in recession.

C Work in groups. Discuss these questions.

- Do you think your country is similar to either of the two places discussed? In what way?
- What do you think are the common stereotypes of your area / country?
- How much truth do you think there is in these stereotypes?

DEVELOPING CONVERSATIONS

Disagreeing

We use several different expressions to disagree. We usually then explain why we have a different opinion.

- A: It's a very male-dominated society, isn't it?
 B: *I don't know about that.* It may have that reputation, but that wasn't really my experience of the place.

A Put the words in the correct order to make expressions.

- 1 not that I'm about sure
- 2 exaggeration isn't that of a bit an?
- 3 far that I go wouldn't
- 4 isn't over that's a top the it bit?
- 5 looking well at way of things that's one
- 6 of that's overstatement a bit it an isn't?
- 7 really I see don't like it myself that

B 2.2 Listen and check your answers. Practise saying the expressions.

C Work in pairs. Take turns giving the opinions below and disagreeing with them. Explain why you disagree.

- 1 Films have a duty to tackle socially sensitive issues.
- 2 There should be no censorship of anything.
- 3 Income tax should be completely abolished.
- 4 Wars are often good for the economy.
- 5 Corrupt government officials should get life in jail.
- 6 The police don't do anything about most crimes!



GRAMMAR Emphatic structures

To emphasise a feeling or opinion, we often use these structures:

What			that ...
The thing that	verb	be	the fact that ...
One thing that	phrase		the amount of ...
			the lack of ...
			the number of ...
			the way that ...
			etc.

To show we don't share someone's opinion – and that we have a different opinion – we can use this structure:

- A: Do they really drive as badly as the stereotype has it?
 B: To be honest, *it wasn't that* that really bothered me. *It was more* just the total lack of any decent public transport.

A Look at audioscript 2.1 on page 161. Find examples of emphatic structures in conversations 2.

B Write full sentences using the ideas below.

- 1 thing / disturbs me / lack of democracy
- 2 worries / most / amount / censorship
- 3 thing / annoys / way / president talks to everyone
- 4 one / drives me mad / the traffic / the city
- 5 thing / scares / amount / money spent / weapons
- 6 bothers / lack / investment / art and culture
- 7 concerns me / power / judges have
- 8 one / gives / hope / future / fact / young people / so much more tolerant nowadays

► Need help? Read the grammar reference on page 137.

C Work in pairs. Take turns saying your sentences from exercise B.

If you agree with a sentence, respond by saying *I know* and then give an example. If you disagree, say *Really? It's not that that ... me. It's ...* – and explain your own ideas.

CONVERSATION PRACTICE

You are going to have a conversation about the place where you live now.

A Make a list of things that you like about the place and another list of things that annoy you.

B Work in groups. Explain your ideas. Agree or disagree with your partners. Use as much language from these pages as you can.

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SPEAKING

A Work in groups. Discuss these questions.

- In what ways do you think homes / rooms / household objects can reflect a person's culture or identity?
- Have you ever been in any homes in other countries? If yes, did you notice anything unusual about them?
- What do you think a foreigner might find unusual about your home or about other homes in your country?

VOCABULARY Household objects

A Check you know the objects in the box.

bucket	toilet	sink	nail
needle	cloth	ladder	tap
pin	string	oven	pan
glue	drill	dishwasher	

B Decide which objects in exercise A you usually do the actions in the box below to.

stick in	thread	climb	cut
cover	knot	hit	turn off
unblock	heat	load	plug in
spread	flush	run	wring out

C Take turns to act or draw the actions. Your partner should say the action and the noun.

- D Discuss the difference between:**
- rope** and **string** a **mop** and a **brush**
 - wire** and **cable** a **nail** and a **screw**
 - a **cloth** and a **sponge** a **ladder** and **stairs**
 - a **bucket** and a **bowl** a **knee pad** and a **bandage**
 - a **drill** and a **hammer** **soap** and **washing-up liquid**

E Decide if the following are problems or solutions.

spill some water	protect yourself
rip your jeans	sweep the floor
soak your jeans	drop my glass
stain a shirt	rinse my glass
mend your shirt	wipe the table

F Work in groups. Take turns thinking of an object you want. Then say sentences like this:

I've spilt my drink. OR *I need to wipe the table.*

Your partner should offer the object:

Do you want a mop and bucket / cloth?

See who guesses the most objects correctly.

READING

You are going to read an article about objects people noticed when they travelled or lived in other countries.

A Read the introduction and discuss these questions.

- How far do you agree with the writer?
- Can you think of anything that:
 - you take for granted?
 - you've reacted to with bemusement or disgust?
 - your culture has adopted from abroad?

Foreign objects

In our globalised world, we can often take it for granted that the things that surround us are universal, sensible or normal. So when we travel or live abroad and discover new objects or the absence of things we're familiar with, it can be surprising. We may react with bemusement or disgust, but at such times we should bear in mind that visitors travelling to our country would no doubt have the same experience and that what we see as extraordinary or ridiculous today, we may adopt as our own tomorrow. Take an English aristocrat's comment on seeing a bizarre instrument in 17th century Italy: "Why should a person need a fork when God had given him hands?"

NATIVE SPEAKER ENGLISH

take for granted

If you *take* something (or someone) *for granted*, you assume it will never change and you don't value it as you should.

We often take it for granted that it's universal.

We take running water for granted and often waste it.

I don't take anything for granted.

My boss will realise he took me for granted when I leave.



B Now read the four people's accounts and decide:

- if any of the things are usual in your country.
- if you think any of them will become common in the future. Why? / Why not?

C Read again and decide who:

- 1 expresses annoyance.
- 2 found something they liked a lot.
- 3 is impressed by someone.
- 4 couldn't adapt to something.
- 5 has adopted a foreign taste.
- 6 could be overstating how common something is.
- 7 felt restricted by something.
- 8 is reminded of something.
- 9 didn't agree with someone.

D Work in groups. Discuss the following.

- Which household objects do you think most reflect your national culture? In what way?
- Say three objects that remind you strongly of other countries or places.
- Have you seen anything in someone's house which you really liked? What? Why?
- What crazes did you have at school / when you were younger?
- Which objects would you miss the most if you went to live abroad? Why?

LANGUAGE PATTERNS

Write the sentences in your language. Translate them back into English. Compare your English to the original.

At times, it's not nearly as straightforward as it sounds!

It's far easier than it looks.

He's really not quite as laid-back as he seems.

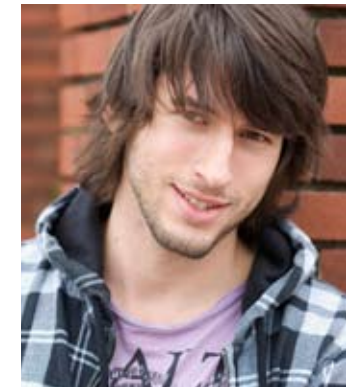
It was nowhere near as bad as I expected.

It was miles better than I thought it'd be.



IN-HA, SOUTH KOREA

I got used to many odd things I found in Britain, but one thing I still struggle to understand is why so many places still use separate hot and cold taps at the sink rather than a mixer tap. You have to fill the basin to get the water at the right temperature, but then you can't rinse your face properly because the soap stays in the water. It's much better with the mixer tap because you can leave it running. In fact, what drives you mad even more is if there's no plug. Then you end up either getting freezing hands, or burning them, or trying to move between the two. Useless!



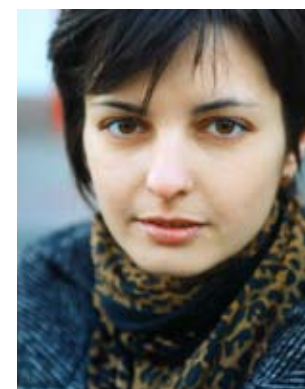
BOB, CANADA

There are, of course, loads of things you notice in Germany, which are different to back home like *steins*, litre jugs of beer which people drink, not to mention the waitresses that sometimes carry three or four in each hand. Those women have wrists and forearms of iron. However, the thing which always comes up sooner or later in conversation with foreigners is German toilets. Unlike our traditional bowl with steep sides down to the water, most German toilets have a shelf so that you can check everything is as it should be. You then flush it all away – something which at times is not nearly as straightforward as it sounds! I had a friend who used to really rant about them – but they never bothered me.



ED, UK

I don't know how widespread some of these things are because Chinese people don't tend to invite you to their home that much – you arrange to meet out somewhere. The flat I rented when I lived there was furnished and there were a couple of things that struck me. The first was that there wasn't an oven, which somewhat reduced the scope of my cooking. I also found a massive meat cleaver, which was a bit disconcerting as I associate it more with a butcher or with serial killers! One thing I really took to, though, was the rice cooker. I should've brought one back.



MAGGIE, IRELAND

I was staying with a friend, Sheila, and she had this thing. It was like a tall mug, but without a handle, and made out of horn. It also had this metal straw. It was lovely. She told me she'd picked it up when living in Uruguay. You brew this tea called *mate* in it and then drink it together. She's fallen in love with the thing and has taken to using it quite a lot, but she didn't persuade me to have much, though – it was a weird taste. The other thing I saw while I was with her was her son playing with a spinning top. It really took me back. At school there was a mad craze for them. It only lasted about six months, but we were all really into it.

SPEAKING

Work in groups. Discuss these questions.

- What do you know about British culture? Think about: literature, theatre, music, broadcasting, visual arts, fashion, religion, cuisine, sport, buildings, monuments, etc.
- How much do you know about the things in the box below?
- How do you think each might be connected to British culture?
- How important is British culture in the world? In your country? For you personally?

God Save the Queen	Shakespeare
fish and chips	Islam
curry	punk
kilts	cricket
the Costa del Sol in Spain	Harrods
ballet	car boot sales
hip-hop	St George's Day
football	Easter
bowler hats	Jamaica



LISTENING

You are going to hear three people talking about their feelings about British culture.

- A** 2.3 Listen and find out which of the things in *Speaking* they mention – and what they say about them.
- B** Listen again and decide which speaker:
- 1 has a fairly global world view.
 - 2 was surprised to find out what acquiring British nationality involved.
 - 3 has sometimes had to deal with abuse.
 - 4 seems a bit confused about the whole issue of cultural identity.
 - 5 retains a sense of family roots.
 - 6 is annoyed by a common false assumption.
- C** Work in pairs. Discuss these questions.
- Did anything the speakers said surprise / amuse / interest you? What? Why?
 - Are there strong regional differences in your country?
 - Do you think it's good for regions to have a lot of autonomy from central government?

VOCABULARY

Expressions with *thing*

In the listening, the speakers said:
it's no big thing and *it's a personal thing*.

There are many expressions with the word *thing* in English.

- A** Translate the expressions with *thing*. Are any the same in your language?
- 1 Don't make a fuss. *It's no big thing*.
 - 2 It's rude. *It's not the done thing* in our society.
 - 3 I'd love to do it, but *chance would be a fine thing!*
 - 4 *It's the furthest thing from my mind* at the moment.
 - 5 I always do it *first thing in the morning*.
 - 6 *It's the sort of thing* that makes you glad to be alive.
 - 7 It's difficult, *what with one thing and another*.
 - 8 I didn't plan it – just *one thing led to another*.
- B** Work in pairs. Discuss what 'it' could be in each of 1–8 above.

READING

You are going to read an extract from an article in a sociology journal about identity.

- A** Before you read, discuss with a partner how far you agree with each of the statements below. Explain why.
- 1 Globalisation has led to an increase in nationalism.
 - 2 Individuals in any society are likely to share many common cultural characteristics.
 - 3 Our cultural identities are not fixed; they change over time.
 - 4 The Internet and big multi national companies have an influence on the kind of people we become.
 - 5 The different kinds of roles we play and identities we have in life often lead us to feel conflicted.
 - 6 National cultures are rooted in history and tradition.
 - 7 All nations consist of a diverse range of peoples.
 - 8 Nations are partly founded on negatives.
- B** Now read the extract below and decide which four sentences above best summarise the points it makes.
- C** How would you summarise the main message of the extract? Compare your ideas with a partner – and discuss whether or not you agree with this message.



The notion of a unified national culture which all those who inhabit a particular land share and participate in is a comforting one, especially in times of global uncertainty. It is, however, something of a myth.

The individual cultural identity of those living in any given society will vary so widely as to make the extraction of common features very difficult indeed. Furthermore, identity is not static: it emerges through our interactions with others, and in an increasingly globalised world driven by commerce, such interactions are becoming ever more complex and multi-layered.

Through our relationships with others, we grow into the many distinct roles we play in life. Each role may well be negotiated separately from the others, and may involve interacting only with those affected by the role in question. Given this, it is clearly quite possible for one person to be, say, a mother, a wife, a ballet lover, Welsh, British, Jamaican, black, and a marketing manager without any contradiction.

Where does all this leave national identity? Historian Eric Hobsbawm has argued that a nation's so-called traditions are not based in historical fact, but rather are propagated through certain kinds of education, public ceremonies and monuments, for the purposes of the ruling elite.

Perhaps the final word, though, should go to William Ralph Inge, a priest and Cambridge professor, who claimed that 'a nation is a society that nourishes a common delusion about its ancestry and shares a common hatred for its neighbours!'

SPEAKING

A Work in groups of three. Choose ONE of the speaking activities below to do.

- 1 Write down the top eight cultural icons from your country. They could be people, cultural / youth movements, kinds of food / drink, special days, places, sports, etc.
- 2 What eight things do you think people should know about your country as a minimum to gain citizenship? Think about:
 - history
 - the law
 - art, music and culture
 - facts and figures about the country
 - religions, traditions and special days
 - politics and the government
 - public services like schools, healthcare, etc.
- 3 Make a list of your own eight personal cultural markers. The list should include people, historical events, books, films, music, kinds of food / drink, places, sports and sporting events, etc. These can come from anywhere in the world, but should be important for you personally.

B Work on your own. Spend a few minutes preparing for the activity. Then present your lists to your group and explain them. Your partners should comment or ask questions to find out more.