
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

The meaning of clothes



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Rob...

Will

... and I'm Will. Hello.

Rob

Hi there, Will. I have to say, I like that shirt you're wearing today. I haven't seen that one before.

Will

Yes, I got it at the weekend. But, to be honest, I don't give my clothes much thought. I just throw on the first thing I see. What about you?

Rob

Well, I try to look presentable. I wouldn't want to appear too **scruffy**. Clothes say an awful lot about us, don't they Will?

Will

A lot depends on the job you do. In a bank, you're supposed to look pretty smart all the time.

Rob

But if you work for a design company, say, a suit would look **out of place** – that means unsuitable. People in the creative industries tend to **dress down** – that means dress casually – you know jeans and t-shirts.

Will

Yes. Then there's the whole question of what to wear to an interview. I reckon if you put on something smart you can't go far wrong.

Rob

Yes. But the meaning of clothes goes far deeper than what you should or shouldn't wear in

the workplace, Will. It can really influence what people think of us. Now, rightly or wrongly, they can **make snap judgements** - or quick decisions - about us.

Will

Yes, you're right. It's a cultural issue. It's about how we see ourselves, too.

Rob

Now, take the sari. It's been around for centuries and is still the main form of dress for millions of women in the Indian subcontinent.

Will

That's that very long garment with all those amazing colours and designs, isn't it? It always looks so elegant.

Rob

Yes, it does. So Will, can you answer this question: what is the maximum length of a sari? Is it ...

- a) 12 metres
- b) 9 metres
- or c) 7 metres

Will

Surely it can't be 12 metres long! I'm going to say 9 metres.

Rob

Okay. Well, we'll find out if you're right or wrong later on. But now let's listen to Dr Shahidha Bari talking about the sari. She uses a word that means "covered". Can you hear what it is?

Dr Shahidha Bari, Queen Mary, University of London

Saris encircle the waist, are often pleated and then swept across the upper body with folds and fabric **draped** over the shoulder or veiling the head. There are more than 80 different ways of wearing a sari and they've been worn in the Indian subcontinent since the first millennium. It's a **garment** woven into the histories of the countries from which it comes.

Will

So **draped** means "covered". Then she used the word **garment**. That's another word for a piece of clothing. And then she said there are 80 ways of wearing a sari, Rob. Amazing!

Rob

It is, isn't it? Some Asian women in the West wear saris just for **ceremonial occasions** – that means special events like weddings. I suppose, in a sense, it's not that practical for day-to-day use. But it certainly makes a beautiful **splash of colour** – or a display of colour - when they do wear it.

Will

What she said has got me thinking about English traditional dress. And, to be honest, Rob, I can't recall anything **off the top of my head**.

Rob

Off the top of your head, Will? That's because you're not wearing a hat.

Will

Don't be ridiculous, Rob. Off the top of my head. It's an idiom and it means I can't think of anything immediately.

Rob

Yes, Will. I *do* know that actually. It was my attempt at a joke. But you're right: the British dress sense has become **a bit samey** (it looks the same) – apart from the fashion industry, which is highly regarded throughout the world.

Will

Well, you wouldn't catch me wearing most of the men's gear you see on the catwalk.

Rob

But, seriously, Will, clothes are undoubtedly an important business. Let's listen to Dr Shahidha Bari again as she reflects on her mother's use of the sari.

Dr Shahidha Bari, Queen Mary, University of London

And yet the sari makes me feel safe too because I associate it with her body and the world she made for me. And now, as I **struggle** to keep hold of the sari, the rituals and the memories around it, I fear losing the world it **signifies** – and her, too.

Will

She talked about the way she **struggles** - that means she finds it difficult - to make the sari important in her life.

Rob

And she uses the word **signifies**, which means giving the meaning of something. The sari obviously has an emotional attachment for her.

Will

And when you think just how much money people spend on clothes, it shows how vital it is.

Rob

And let's not forget football shirts, Will. Fans want to be seen in their team's latest shirt design, don't they? I know I do.

Will

By the way, what team do you support, Rob?

Rob

Ah, well, it's Chelsea, of course. Come on, you Blues. What about you, Will?

Will

Tottenham Hotspur.

Rob

Never mind, someone has to. Now, remember at the beginning of the show I asked you: what is the maximum length of a sari? Is it ...

- a) 12 metres
- b) 9 metres
- or c) 7 metres

Will

Yes. And I said 9 metres.

Rob

Well, you know your saris well because that is the right answer. Well done! Now, before we go, it's time to remind ourselves of some of the vocabulary that we've heard today. Will.

Will

scruffy
out of place
dress down
make snap judgements
draped
garment
ceremonial occasions
splash of colour
off the top of my head
struggle
signifies

Rob

Thank you, Will. Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. You can listen to more programmes on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Please join us again soon.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

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untidy

out of place

that means unsuitable

dress down

that means dress casually

make snap judgements

make quick decisions

draped

covered

garment

a piece of clothing

ceremonial occasions

special events like weddings

splash of colour

a display of colour

off the top of your head

someone who can't think of something immediately

struggle

to fight and find something difficult

signify

gives the meaning of something