Neil
Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute English, I'm Neil. And joining me it's Rob.

Rob
Hello.

Neil
Today, we'll be discussing whether wearing high heeled shoes is a fashion statement or a sign of oppression – and by that I mean something you have to wear because someone has told you to.

Rob
Now Neil, whatever style of shoe you choose to wear, it's good to polish them and keep them looking shiny and new – but one man from India called Vickrant Mahajan, set the Guinness World Record for polishing the most shoes. Do you know how many pairs he polished in eight hours? Was it…

a) 151 pairs

b) 251 pairs, or

c) 351 pairs?

Neil
Well, if it was me, it would be no more than one pair – but as it's a world record, I'm going to go for 351 pairs. Hopefully you'll give me the answer later! But let's focus now on high heels.

Rob
Yes. It's a style of shoe worn by women around the world. But why do millions of people choose to walk on strange, stilt-like shoes?

Neil
Studies have suggested wearing high heels can lead to damage to the muscles and skeleton. But despite this, they are worn to look professional in the workplace or for glamour – a word to describe the quality of looking fashionable and attractive.
Rob
And of course, they are associated with female glamour, which is something Tim Edwards, Honorary Fellow in Sociology at the University of Leicester, has been talking about on the BBC Radio 4 programme, Thinking Allowed. Here he is describing why he thinks that is...

Tim Edwards, Honorary Fellow in Sociology at the University of Leicester
Women's shoes in particular kind of have this kind of transformative or even magical quality - they can do something for a woman, and it's quite difficult to kind of draw parallels quite like that with men in a sense of which it almost becomes something slightly otherworldly... however one views it... as something which is a kind of act of subordination or an act of empowerment etc, there is a sense in which your experience is changed - you are suddenly raised 3-4-5-6 inches higher, your balance is altered, your experience is transformed.

Neil
So, he describes high heels as having a magical quality. He uses the word transformative – meaning a great improvement or positive change – so they transform or improve how someone looks.

Rob
Well, they do make you taller and that can make you feel more powerful or important. Tim even said it becomes otherworldly – an adjective to describe belonging to an imaginary world rather than the real world.

Neil
Magical shoes do sound otherworldly but Tim also mentioned that wearing high heels could be seen as an act of subordination – that's making someone do something to give them less authority or power.

Rob
Well I guess that's only if you are forced to wear them. But there's another interesting point here – men don't have a style of footwear that can define them.

Neil
Yes, it's just sandals for you and sports trainers for me. In fact Tim Edwards says it's difficult to draw parallels with men's shoes. When you draw parallels between two distinct things, it means you highlight the similarities – but here he's saying it's difficult to find similarities. – men have nothing special to wear on their feet.

Rob
Of course there is nothing to stop men wearing high heels – although personally I don't think I'd be able to keep my balance – but Tim Edwards suggests it would be viewed with suspicion. Let's hear what he has to say...

Tim Edwards, Honorary Fellow in Sociology at the University of Leicester
I think the issue with men and footwear is that if you think of more contemporary culture - I mean the guy who kind of wears overly-flamboyant shoes or shoes which are not black,
brown or flat is viewed with a degree of suspicion - either in terms of his sexuality, or in terms of his work ethic - or in terms of his kind of general moral, well, you know, his moral standards in other kinds of ways.

Neil
He says that if you don't wear a regular, ordinary black, brown or flat style of shoe, you might be viewed with suspicion. Men who wear shoes that are flamboyant – that's brightly coloured and that attracts attention – have their sexuality or their attitude to work judged.

Rob
He mentions someone's work ethic – that's the belief that working hard is morally right. A man who wears flamboyant shoes may have a different attitude to work. It sounds like quite an old-fashioned view.

Neil
It does, and let's hope people don't judge you when you go out wearing your sandals and socks! But now, how about giving us the answer to the question you set earlier.

Rob
Yes. I told you about Vickrant Mahajan, who set the Guinness World Record for polishing the most shoes. I asked if you knew how many pairs he polished in eight hours.

Neil
And I guessed 351 pairs. Was I right?

Rob
I'm afraid not, Neil. The answer was 251 pairs. It's still quite a lot – that's 502 individual shoes and I'm not sure if he actually got paid for doing it.

Neil
Right, let's polish up some of our English vocabulary and remind ourselves of some of the words we've discussed today, starting with oppression.

Rob
Oppression is when you are forced to do something by someone more powerful.

Neil
We talked about glamour – a word to describe the quality of looking fashionable and attractive.

Rob
Our next word was transformative – meaning a great improvement or positive change.

Neil
Otherworldly is an adjective to describe belonging to an imaginary world rather than the real world – it's magical or special.
Rob
We also discussed an act of subordination – that's making someone do something to give them less authority or power. To draw parallels is an idiom meaning to highlight the similarities between two distinct things.

Neil
And we mentioned flamboyant – that describes someone or something brightly coloured and that attracts attention.

Rob
Finally, we talked about work ethic -that's the belief that working hard is morally right. Something that both Neil and I have!

Neil
And that brings to the end of the programme. Don't forget to visit our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Bye for now.

Rob
Bye bye.