
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Butter up

The logo for BBC Learning English, featuring the letters 'BBC' in a white box above the words 'LEARNING ENGLISH' in white text on a teal background.

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

Finn

Hello Feifei. I didn't know you shopped at this supermarket too.

Feifei

Hi Finn. Usually I don't. But it's close to the office and I have to rush home to welcome an important guest.

Finn

Who is it? Someone I know?

Feifei

No, it's my landlady. She's coming to collect some of her post and... well, I want to make her like me because next month the contract on my flat is due to be renewed and she might want to increase the rent.

Finn

Yeah, I see what you mean. So you'd better butter her up then!

Feifei

Butter? Oh, yes. But I'm a pretty bad cook. If I bake a cake it would probably be horrible!

Finn

No. I don't mean butter for a cake. In English when you say you'll 'butter someone up' you mean you'll be especially nice to them in the hope they'll do something good for you in return.

Feifei

Oh, I see. So I'll be nice to her and pay her compliments so that she likes me and keeps the rent low. I'll 'butter her up'! But isn't it a bit insincere?

Finn

Well, it can have a negative connotation, yes. Let's hear some examples of how to use 'to butter someone up' or 'to butter up someone', which is today's expression in The English We Speak.

INSERT

Johnny: I was very impressed with your presentation, Mrs Beany. You are really intelligent and perceptive and...

Mrs Beany: Don't waste your time buttering me up, Johnny. I'm not raising your salary anytime soon.

The director was always ready to butter up Angelina Jolie. He knew she was looking for her next role and he wanted her in his movie.

Feifei

Oh, look. It's 6pm already. I'm very late. I might not be on time to meet my landlady and she'll be angry with me. She's a very busy woman.

Finn

Yeah, well, then you are in a jam!

Feifei

Jam?!

Finn

In English when you say someone 'is in a jam' you mean they are in a difficult situation – but that's a different kind of jam!

Feifei

All these expressions about food!

Finn

I know. We have a huge appetite for food expressions. But let's leave some for another day. Bye!

Feifei

Bye!