

BBC Learning English

Talk about English

English Makeover

Part 7 – Mohammed Ibrahim Gafari



bbclearningenglish.com

This programme was first broadcast in 2003.

This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript of the programme.

ANNOUNCER:

It's time for English Makeover from BBC World Service.

In this series, learners of English from around the world tell us their language problems. And there's advice for them and you, from experienced teacher of English, Karen Adams.

Clip: Karen Adams

Hi, I'm Karen Adams and I'm an English language teacher and teacher trainer. The English Makeover learners will be telling me about their problems and well...I'll see what I can do to help.

ANNOUNCER:

Our learner today is Mohammed Ibrahim who comes from Afghanistan, and lives in the UK. Presenter Vicki Sullivan went to meet him at work, to find out how we could help him to improve his English.

Clip: Mohammed Ibrahim

My name is Mohammed Ibrahim. My surname is Gafari. I'm from Afghanistan. I have been living in the United Kingdom for the last three years.

I go to college and have a job of taxi driver. I go to college in the days in the morning. In the evening at 6 o'clock I begin my work as a taxi driver.

Vicki: Ibrahim is at college in London where he studies economics. But in the evenings he works as a taxi driver. I visited him at the taxi rank.

Clip: Vicki interviews Mohammed Ibrahim about his English language skills

VICKI: Obviously you're driving around, picking up people, taking them places and you do this job, presumably, just as a way to earn some money?

IBRAHIM: Yes, the main thing is that I don't want to depend on social welfare. As a young man I have the energy and power to work and earn money and support myself and my family.

VICKI: When you first came here and first started working and studying here, did you find it difficult using English all of the time? Did you think that your English wasn't good enough?

IBRAHIM: When I entered in this business I must say that it's the most complicated job for foreigners. Some problems for finding the place and communicate with different people, different background. The majority of our customers are English people. We communicate in English.

VICKI: How long have you been learning English? Did you learn English before you came to Britain or only when you came?

IBRAHIM: I've had some English knowledge in my country, in Afghanistan, just the basic things. But when I came here I started learning from the beginning because the accent and the procedure of learning English in my country was too much different.

VICKI: Ok, so you really started to learn properly and to improve when you came here. Do

you think you have any specific problems with your English that you would like help with?

IBRAHIM: As far as I know my written and reading English is, I don't feel, any sort of problem. But my spoken English is a bit poor. Maybe that because I never socialised with English people, but with customers during my work almost all the time they use slang words which is very difficult for a foreigner to understand. They don't pronounce fully a word so the majority of people they use different terminology. And the other thing is they use abbreviations, they don't use the full word, which is very hard for a foreigner to understand the meaning. Sometime if you just repeat it or frequently ask the same thing they get annoyed and they disappointed.

VICKI: OK. So you have a problem with understanding people when they use informal language, slang language and maybe when they speak very fast if they speak informally. And what about your own speaking? Do you think you have enough knowledge of slang to speak informally? Or would you like to increase your knowledge of that?

IBRAHIM; Well honestly I want to improve it much more than the stage which I am at right now.

Vicki: You've just heard Mohammed Ibrahim from Afghanistan talking about his problems with English slang and abbreviations. Time to consult expert teacher, Karen Adams.

Clip: Vicki talks to Karen Adams about Mohammed Ibrahim's language problems

KAREN: Well Ibrahim is in a very special position - in fact he's sitting in the front of a taxi, so very often he's not looking at the people who are speaking. And this learning to listen to people, when you can't see their mouths move, is very, very difficult. This is where listening to the radio can actually help a lot. So I would actually recommend that Ibrahim starts listening to

the radio more, and try to work out, try to follow the sense of what he's listening to. The second thing I would recommend him to do is to watch soap operas. Now this may sound a little bit strange, but in British soap operas you actually hear a lot of slang language, a lot of colloquial language. And this will help him to understand the people sitting in his cab, a lot more. So really listening to the radio, so that he can understand without seeing; and watching soap operas so that he can understand all of this informal language that he hears around him.

VICKI: So if Ibrahim is watching soap operas and hearing slang and colloquial language used on TV, what happens if he makes a note of it but he still doesn't understand what it means - what can he do then?

KAREN: Well I would recommend that he ask somebody that he's working with because I'm sure they will be able to help out. People generally, when learners find colloquial language, people generally like to help out and help them understand. If there's something that he doesn't quite understand and he has no-one to ask, he should listen for it again. If he hears it coming up very often, then he knows that this is something quite important. He should try to pay attention to the situation in which he hears the language. So for example, if he hears someone say 'I'm off now', and then the person leaves, then he can work out that this means 'goodbye', but in a very informal sort of way. I think this is a very important point though, because, quite often learners are exposed to very neutral or very formal language, and it's sometimes quite difficult to hear and understand, real, live English. So I would really recommend people, wherever they're learning, to try to access different accents, and different forms of language. Don't feel that there is one British English - there are lots and lots of accents to understand.

VICKI: And watching a wide variety of TV programmes will help with that. And will also give him the context of where the words are being used.

KAREN: Yes certainly it will, and as I say listening to the radio will help him to access lots of different accents.

ANNOUNCER:

Advice there from teacher Karen Adams, which you can also try out to help you with your English. And what about Ibrahim? Vicki went back to ask him what he thought of Karen's suggestions.

Vicki interviews Ibrahim about the advice

Ibrahim explains how he got on with the advice. How did it work for him? (Transcript is not available.)

ANNOUNCER:

We're nearly at the end of today's English Makeover. Here's a quick summary of Karen's advice.

Well, most of Karen's advice today is to watch TV and listen to the radio! This might not sound like study advice, but in fact doing both these things can help improve many different skills in English.

If you need to practise listening without seeing someone, try listening to radio programmes in English – like this one!

To improve your knowledge of slang and colloquial language, watch soap operas or chat shows on TV. Make a note of new expressions. If you don't understand them, try to guess the meaning from the context, or ask English-speaking friends to explain.

Watching a variety of TV programmes will also help you to understand different accents in English.

Try out that advice and see if it works for you. Join the English Makeover team again next time, for more advice to improve your English.
