Talk a Lot

Hotel

Role Play with Non-Literal English

*1. Practise the role play with a partner. Find and underline **nine** examples of non-literal English* and match each one to a category below:*

1. nicknames	**2. exaggeration**	**3. idioms**
4. discourse markers	**5. phrasal verbs**	**6. sayings / proverbs**
7. similes	**8. swearing**	**9. understatement**

* For more information about each category, please see pp.36-38.

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Tina works in a hotel as a receptionist. Her friend Carrie phones her…

Carrie:	Hi Tina, how's it going?
Tina:	I'm fine? You?
Carrie:	Fine. Are you still coming to the party tomorrow night?
Tina:	I can't. I've got to work. The duty manager's changed my shifts.
Carrie:	What? That's bloody stupid! It's JT's birthday!
Tina:	I know.
Carrie:	That's absolutely the worst thing that could've possibly happened!
Tina:	And I'm really sorry, but I can't go out on Friday night either.
Carrie:	That's great.
Tina:	I'm sorry.

Pause

Carrie:	Can't you, y'know, try and sort something out with your manager?
Tina:	I'm too scared of him. Today he was walking around like a bear with a sore head.
Carrie:	Right, but maybe you can speak to him…?
Tina:	He told us today that if we don't get more customers the hotel could close next month.
Carrie:	Really? It never rains but it pours!

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2. Replace each example of non-literal English with one of the literal words or phrases below. Practise the role play using only literal English, then using non-literal English. What differences do you notice? Which version sounds more natural? Why? Which do you prefer?

a) that is not very good	b) really [intensifier]	c) arrange
d) behaving in an angry way	e) how are you?	f) that is disappointing
g) pause	h) John Timpson	i) a lot of bad things seem to be happening at once

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Answers:

Feature of Non-Literal English:	Example in this Text:	Literal Translation:
1. nicknames	JT	h) John Timpson
2. exaggeration	That's absolutely the worst thing that could've possibly happened!	a) that is not very good
3. idioms	how's it going?	e) how are you?
4. discourse markers	y'know	g) pause
5. phrasal verbs	sort something out [to sort out]	c) arrange
6. sayings / proverbs	It never rains but it pours!	i) a lot of bad things seem to be happening at once
7. similes	walking around like a bear with a sore head	d) behaving in an angry way
8. swearing	bloody	b) really [intensifier]
9. understatement	That's great.	f) that is disappointing

Note: in general, using non-literal English will help students' spoken English to sound more natural, because native speakers of English often favour non-literal forms – such as idioms, phrasal verbs, and slang – to the more literal, "dictionary definition" words and phrases that they replace.