

# Talk a Lot

## Media

### Features of Non-Literal English – Part 3

#### 1. PLAY-FIGHTING or VERBAL SPARRING

An informal part of a conversation when the participants pretend to have an argument and say unkind things to each other, but don't mean what they say. It is just for fun.

Example:

[Peter's girlfriend comes in and shuts the front door. They appear to be very much in love. Peter says:]

"Hi piggy [nickname]. Did you pick up my dry cleaning?"

"No, I forgot." (They kiss)

"You dozy muppet!" [dozy muppet = offensive slang for "silly idiot"]

(She laughs and hits him in the face with a cushion)

He says: "Come here, I'm going to have to sort you out." [euphemism for "I'm going to kiss and cuddle you". In a different context, e.g. a nightclub brawl, "sort you out" could also mean "beat you"]

"Oh, please don't!" (her face and body language indicate that she is enjoying the interchange) "You're such a naughty boy! I'm going to call the police...!"

"Po-lice do!" ["po-lice" is a pun on the word "please" – both have similar sounds]

[etc.]

When:

When you want to tease somebody that you are close to and interact with them in a way that is spontaneous, fun, and perhaps a little challenging, because there may be a grain of truth there beneath the pretend insults and joking. For example, although they are joking and clearly in love, the fact that he calls her "You dozy muppet!" may betray the fact that deep down he doesn't really respect her. The context of the play-fighting gives him licence to say what he *really* feels, either consciously or subconsciously.

#### 2. IDIOMS

See Unit 1: *Hotel – Features of Non-Literal English – Part 1*

#### 3. JARGON

Jargon (an uncountable noun) is technical language that is specific to a particular job or field of interest. It is characterised by long words and/or unfamiliar words and expressions (often including acronyms, e.g. FCE) that cannot be understood by a person outside of the related job or field of interest, i.e. a layman – one who has not been initiated in this area, and therefore lacks specialist knowledge. Fields that typically have a lot of jargon are: technology, computing, the military, and, of course, education – including EFL and ESL. (The acronyms prove the point!)

Example:

[Phil is in a computer shop with his mum, who wants to buy a new PC:]

Mum: "I just need to be able to use email, and perhaps buy something online."

Phil: "What about this new HP laptop? It's equipped with the AMD Athlon II Dual-Core Processor P320, which is brilliant, and features a widescreen 1366x768 resolution LED-backlit display, plus an ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4250 Graphics card – which means it's good."

Mum: "What was that, love? You lost me after 'laptop'..."

[Phil believes the laptop to be good, because he understands the jargon. His mum, on the other hand, will have to take his word for it, or take time to learn the meaning of the jargon.]

When:

When you want to communicate technical information quickly to people who are able to decode what you mean. Or when you want to deliberately exclude people who are not part of the group.

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### 4. PHRASAL VERBS

See Unit 1: Hotel – Features of Non-Literal English – Part 1

### 5. IRONY

Irony is a way of speaking where we say something that is obviously not true, and the listener realises that we mean something else, even the opposite of what we have just said. This is an effective way of drawing attention to what we really mean, which is the thing that we don't say.

Example:

[It's raining. You say to your friends:] "What a lovely day!" [Everybody smiles]

When:

When you want to draw attention to something that you think is important by highlighting how much it differs from the way in which it wants to present itself, e.g. if a male politician wanted to present an image of himself as a family man, it would be ironic to point out that he has had many affairs in the past. The use of irony often results in humour. It is similar to the comic technique of reversing the expectations of the listener – we say what the listener is not expecting to hear, which provokes a laugh. Because we have been surprised – or even shocked – by the reversal, we laugh as a form of relieving the tension, and hiding our surprise, so as not to lose face in the eyes of the speaker.

### 6. SLANG

See Unit 2: Problems – Features of Non-Literal English – Part 2

### 7. CLICHÉ

An unoriginal and corny phrase which has lost its power to be relevant in a situation, because it has been used too many times before.

Example:

Mandy: "I really miss my boyfriend. I wish we could have stayed together."

Mandy's grandma: "Don't worry, my dear. *Time heals all wounds.*" ["*In the future you will feel less pain*"]

When:

When you can't think of anything more original to say. People tend not to like clichés – such as over-used sayings and idioms, rhymes in greetings cards, or lyrics to cheesy pop songs – because using them shows a lack of originality of thought on the part of the speaker. It's as if they can't be bothered to even *paraphrase* the cliché. Using clichés can betray a certain amount of insincerity, and indicate that the speaker is not really listening to you – and definitely not empathising with you [putting themselves in your place]. Clichés can also be used in an ironic way. For example, when both speaker and listener know that the *opposite* of what is being said is – or will be – true.

### 8. HYPERBOLE

A statement that something is bigger, better, or more positive than it really is.

Example:

[Your new girlfriend invites you to her home and cooks dinner for you for the first time:]

"This is the best meal I've ever had!" [What he means: "I'm glad that you invited me here and I want to impress you with my good behaviour and attitude. The meal is actually quite average, as meals go."]

When:

When you want to please somebody (see above), or show off about something (e.g. "I've got the best trainers in my whole town!"). It can often be seen in advertising, e.g. "Our prices are out of this world!"

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### 9. COLLOQUIALISMS [DIALECT WORDS OR PHRASES]

A colloquialism is an informal word or phrase that originates from – and is mainly used in – a particular place. Instead of the standard dictionary word for something, local people use their own local word or phrase.

Example:

Mum: “Do you want a cheese and tomato cob for lunch?” [cob = bread roll in parts of the Midlands and northern England]

Tom: “Yes please, mum.”

When:

When you want to show that you come from a particular part of the country; to show allegiance to your home town and area; or because it’s the word for something that you’ve grown up using – that you’ve always used.