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# English Revisited:

## Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

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### Glossary

Invoke:  
(here) activate

alike:  
used after two nouns to  
show that both are being  
referred to

confounded: surprised and  
confused

leap: jump

## Editorial

On March 28 Theresa May invoked Article 50 thereby officially triggering Brexit negotiations. Many Brits and Germans alike are still confounded by the result of the Brexit referendum last year.

In this issue's article on intercultural communication and competence we focus on a concept that might help our readers better understand—at least partially—the thinking behind this leap into the unknown.

In our vocabulary section we will take a look at sayings. Idioms or sayings are used frequently in spoken English, so any advanced learner of English should strive to expand their knowledge of common sayings in English.

Lastly, our grammar section is devoted to reported speech, a necessity for academics and researchers who refer to other scholars and sources.

John Nixon

### Upcoming Issues :

- modal verbs and hedging
- diversity and language on US campuses
- e-mails



Comments

Do you have any ideas for future issues?  
Please contact us.



Subscription

## Currently on Offer

If you are interested in any of the following, please **contact us**.

- **Free English Workshops for Teaching Staff and Researchers (July 2017)**  
Registration online [here](#) starting mid-May. New workshops include “Writing Reader Friendly Texts in English” and “Effective Teaching in English”.
- **Free Application Editing and Assistance for Students:**  
Are your students applying to study or work abroad and need help editing their English résumés and cover letters? If so, we are pleased to announce our new free application editing service for students. Your students can book an appointment by sending an e-mail to [applicationediting@sz.uni-stuttgart.de](mailto:applicationediting@sz.uni-stuttgart.de). Unfortunately, this service is currently only available to students and not to University employees.
- **Editing Service and Coaching:** Do you have a paper, abstract or other document that needs to be looked over by a native English speaker before it is published? If so, we can help.

## Grammar

### Reported Speech

Reported or indirect speech is the form of discourse we use when we wish to report what other people have told us. Although it is, above all, a regular feature of spoken English, there are quite a number of contexts in academic English where you need to report on either your own work or on work done by other researchers (e.g. literature reviews). Here are some examples from everyday English.

Peter **says**, 'The head of department **is thinking** it over.'<sup>1</sup>

Peter **says** (that) the head of department **is thinking** it over.'<sup>2</sup> (reported speech)

Here the introductory verb is in the present tense, which makes the reporting easy as we stick to the same tenses in the indirect speech. The same applies when the reporting verb is in the present perfect.

#### Backshifting<sup>3</sup>

However, the most natural tense for the introductory verb is the past tense, which means we have to backshift. If we take our first example above, we have the following:

Peter **told me** (that) the head of department **was thinking** it over.'<sup>4</sup>

You don't have to backshift past simple to past perfect (which is a tense that is not used often in English) if the relationship is clear. *Would, should, could, might, used to* do not change either.

Sue **said**, 'I **might attend** the meeting at 4.'

Sue **told me** she **might attend** the meeting at 4.

Paul **said**, 'I **flew** first class to London.'

Paul **said** that he **flew (had flown)** first class to London.

Backshifting is not necessary if the statement is generally true or still true at the time of reporting.

Helen **said**, 'One **needs** money to be the market leader.'

Helen **mentioned** one **needs** money to be the market leader.

#### Future Reference in the Past and Expressions of Time

If the statement made in the past refers to a point later in the future (i.e. *will*), the future form changes to *would*.

He **declared**, 'I **will definitely win** top prize next year.'

He **declared** he **would definitely win** top prize the following year.'<sup>5</sup>

Notice how the expression of time was also changed (next year ► the following year)

yesterday ► the day before or the previous day  
last week ► the week before or the previous week  
tomorrow ► the next day or the following day  
today ► that day this morning ► that morning  
next week ► the following week  
now ► then here ► there

#### Overview of Verb Tenses

Direct Speech	Indirect Speech
simple present	simple past
present continuous	past continuous
simple past	past perfect
past continuous	past perfect continuous
present perfect	past perfect
present perfect continuous	past perfect continuous
will / can	would / could

#### Reporting Questions

When reporting questions the word order is not inverted as in a question. Again, do not put a comma before indirect questions!

Fred **asked**, 'Did Mary read your essay?'

Fred **asked** me whether/if Mary **had read** my essay.

Roland **asked**, 'What's the time?'

Roland **asked** what the time **was**.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>In German a colon (:) introduces direct speech. Inverted commas always "go up" in English, i.e. also at the beginning of the statement.

<sup>2</sup>Do not place a comma before the that-clause!

<sup>3</sup>Backshifting means the verb of the reported speech "goes back" a tense in the past.

<sup>4</sup>Remember that the introductory verb *tell* always needs a direct object, in this case "me".

<sup>5</sup>Note that also personal pronouns sometimes need to be changed. Here I ► he.

#### Reporting Verbs

Here is a list of other reporting verbs so that depending on the context you can vary your vocabulary and not overuse **said** and **wrote** in your academic writing.

argue  
assert  
claim  
comment  
contend  
declare  
demonstrate  
describe  
emphasize  
highlight  
imply  
maintain  
mention  
note  
notice  
observe  
point out  
propose  
put forward  
remark  
report  
show  
state  
stress  
suggest

Sylvia Grade



Exercises

## Intercultural Communication

### Uncertainty Avoidance: A Critical Incident

#### **Intercultural incident: the flashing green man and what he could tell us about uncertainty avoidance**

I have lived in Germany since 1988. Moreover, I have fully immersed myself in the German way of life acquiring a German husband, two German children and even a mortgage along the way. At the Wertstoffhof, I now instruct others on the appropriate recycling bin to use and my speedy, queue-swapping skills at Aldi are second to none.

Last week I was, however, accosted by an angry young mother with toddler in tow for jaywalking at the pelican crossing without waiting for the green man to start flashing. On a factual level, I was certainly guilty as charged.

Of course I know (as a naturalised German) that one should never set a poor example to young children by jaywalking in front of them. In this particular case, however, I believe there were mitigating circumstances: for one I was running for a bus at the time. Had I missed it, I would have missed an important appointment, hence committing a further faux pas. For another, I had ascertained that the little girl in question was completely absorbed in her game and was looking in the opposite direction at the point that I dashed across.

#### **So what was my reaction to this conflict?**

In a completely knee-jerk reaction, I of course apologized to the young mum in question even though I did not feel remotely in the wrong. British to the core!

As Henry Hitchings writes in his aptly-titled 'Sorry! The English and their Manners', "The readiness of the English to apologise for something they haven't done is remarkable..." (John Murray Publishing, 2013)

#### **Critical incidents**

As I dashed on to my appointment, I tried to analyse the differences which had led to this conflict situation or critical incident as such cases are called in intercultural contexts.

For one, young children in Germany are always taught to wait at the crossing until the green man flashes. In the UK, even very young children are taught The Highway Code, a kind of chant which begins, "Look right, look left and right again, when it is safe go straight across." (It is important to remember here that the Brits drive on the left and not on the right!)

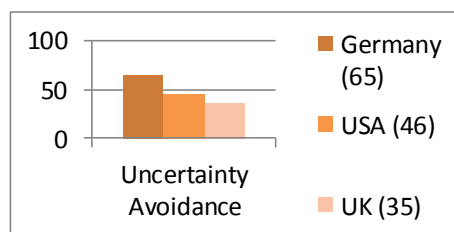
The under-fives are always escorted across the road by parents or sometimes so-called lollipop ladies/lollipop men, another British tradition. However, what British children are NOT taught is to rely on the technology of the red/green man being infallible.

#### **So what is at the root of these intercultural differences?**

One concept or dimension which was put forward several decades ago is the dimension of **uncertainty avoidance**, first coined by Geert Hofstede as part of a global study based on questionnaire responses from a large number of IBM employees working worldwide. Countries scoring strongly on the uncertainty avoidance index will seek to minimise ambiguity and hence uncertainty which could go some way to explaining the traffic rules which German children are expected to adhere to. The Brits, on the other hand, are not overly risk-averse and would appear to go through life with the cheery optimism that things will somehow work out for the best, either with or without rules. Perhaps Brexit comes to mind?

#### **Excerpt from <https://geert-hofstede.com>**

"Germany is among the uncertainty avoidant countries (65); the score is on the high end, so there is a slight preference for Uncertainty Avoidance. In line with the philosophical heritage of Kant, Hegel and Fichte there is a strong preference for deductive rather than inductive approaches, be it in thinking, presenting or planning: the systematic overview has to be given in order to proceed. This is also reflected by the law system. Details are equally important to create certainty that a certain topic or project is well-thought-out."



Data from <https://geert-hofstede.com>

Cheryl Stenzel

#### **Glossary**

*acquire*: get

*swap*: exchange/change

*accost* s.o.: stop s.o. to speak to them (often negative)

*jaywalk*: cross the street 'unlawfully', e.g. at a red light or outside of the zebra stripes

*pelican crossing*: pedestrian crossing with traffic lights

*naturalised*: eingebürgert

*set an example*: (collocation)

*mitigating circumstances*: (collocation) facts that help explain a mistake, crime, etc.

*ascertain*: determine

*dash*: run, hurry

*knee-jerk reaction*: without thinking

*infallible*: incapable of being wrong

*adhere to sth.*: stick to sth.

## Vocabulary

### Say it with a Saying (advanced level)

Just as a picture speaks a thousand words, so too can a saying or idiom help you get across your message in a more vivid and expressive manner, while making your language more efficient. Having a few sayings at your fingertips will allow you to avoid roundabout ways of explaining what you mean and convey an emotional connotation as well. If something is clear as day, it means that the listener has understood everything. However, if something is clear as mud, the speaker is indicating in a humorous way that he/she did not understand.

Of course, there are thousands of sayings in English, so learners of English cannot possibly learn all of them in a short span of time. Yet, sayings are very important as they are used with great frequency in English. Let me show you by telling you a little story, albeit somewhat corny.

Do not be discouraged if you do not understand all of the sayings. At the end of the article there is a link to an exercise explaining the meaning of the various sayings in this short piece. Try your best to understand the gist of the story.

#### A Keen Researcher

Once there was a researcher who was brought on board to carry out experiments with cutting-edge technology. She was the type of employee who did not shy away from challenges and always took the bull by the horns. At the beginning of her tenure, she was in her supervisor's good books. You really couldn't hold a candle to her. Not only was she highly qualified, but she was a Jack-of-all-trades. I don't think there was a job she couldn't do. In any case, she took to her work in the lab like a duck to water. Diligent and hard-working, she often burnt the candle at both ends.

Soon, however, the tables started to turn. She tried to cut through all the red tape at her institute, which was admirable enough, but she inadvertently put her foot in her mouth at a crucial meeting with her research associates and then it was all downhill from there. Her supervisor flew off the handle and reprimanded her for overstepping clear-cut boundaries. To add fuel to the flames, she was accused of sitting on her laurels. She was at a loss as to how to make amends. She thought everyone in her institute was making a mountain out of a molehill.

Not to be deterred, our determined and dynamic researcher put on a brave face, knowing full well that everything had been a big misunderstanding. She knew there was something fishy about the whole situation and set about to restore her otherwise good reputation.

With great resolve she tried to turn the tide in her favour in her office. Granted, she had burned a few bridges along the way and wouldn't be able to win over everyone right away. She now understood that the unwritten motto in her institute was "don't rock the boat." Her parents and teachers had always taught her to confront adversity without getting upset, to grin and bear it. This wasn't her style, though. She liked to tackle problems head on and believed in being upfront and honest. She didn't want to pull a fast one on her colleagues and supervisor.

Our fearless researcher approached the problem with methodological precision and left no stone unturned in trying to find out what was really going on. In the end she succeeded not only in clearing up the misunderstandings but also managed to get a pay rise, thereby killing two birds with one stone. How you might ask was this possible given the terrible predicament she was in. Who knows? When it comes to office politics it's all Greek to me!

Test your understanding of this story, by clicking on the following link (Exercise 2 on ILIAS) and matching some of the sayings from the story with their German equivalents. Good luck!



#### Exercises

For more sayings in English, please see *The Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms* or *Bildliche Redensarten: Deutsch/Englisch/Französisch* (Klett Verlag)

It's all Greek to me!

John Nixon

#### Glossary

saying:  
Redensart

roundabout:  
indirect

corny (colloquial):  
silly, sentimental (often said of jokes)

gist:  
main idea

keen:  
motivated and dedicated

inadvertently:  
by mistake

make amends:  
make up for a mistake  
wiedergutmachen

deterred:  
discouraged

resolve:  
determination

adversity:  
difficult situation; misfortune

It's all Greek to me:  
Es kommt mir Spanisch vor. / Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof.