
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

How do you say sorry?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth.

Neil

In English there are many ways to apologise, depending on the situation. In formal situations you could say, "Please forgive me," while to a friend you might say, "My bad." And of course there's the most common phrase of all: "I'm sorry." Can you remember a time when you had to apologise, Beth?

Beth

Erm... Oh, I had to apologise this morning because I stepped on someone's toes on the tube.

Neil

OK. Well, apologising depends on what you've done, so 'sorry' is fine if you accidentally step on someone's toes, like you did this morning, Beth. But what if you do something really serious, like the Ghanaian journalist, Afia Pokua, who publicly criticised the King of the Ashanti tribe? Here's BBC World Service programme, The Fifth Floor, covering the story:

Faranak Amidi

I guess **it's not every day that** you end up offending a king, but let's say you did. Would you know how to apologise to him? Recently in Ghana, a journalist made some comments on television about the King of the Ashanti tribe, and soon she found herself at his palace apologising.

Beth

The presenter says, "**It's not every day that** you offend a king." The phrase, **it's not every day that**, highlights that what's happened is very unusual. So, how do

apologies change from culture to culture? Well, that's what we'll be finding out in this episode, along with some useful new words and phrases.

Neil

And remember, you'll find all the vocabulary from this episode on our website, bbclearningenglish.com. Now, I have a question for you, Beth. We know that people from different countries apologise in different ways, but what might someone do to say sorry if they were from India? Would they:

- a) offer a gift,
- b) pull their earlobes, or
- c) bow down?

Beth

Ooh, I am going to guess c) bow down.

Neil

OK. Well, we'll find out if you're right at the end of the programme. Let's return to Afia Pokua, the journalist who criticised the King of the Ashanti tribe. Her comments divided opinion in Ghana, but eventually Afia decided to say sorry to the King, following strict traditional rules, that she dress in black and apologise kneeling down on her knees.

Beth

Afia's story shows the influence of culture on how people say sorry. Let's listen now as three BBC journalists from different countries explain to World Service programme, The Fifth Floor, how to say sorry in their culture:

Ahsan Mahmood

I would say that Pakistanis generally – they're not really **expressive**, and we're also very **cheeky** so what we generally do is we would slide an apology in the middle of a conversation, and then very quickly move on to a new topic so that we don't have to, sort of, **be very upfront about** it.

Liza Fokht

In Russia, we also have a tradition called Forgiveness Sunday, which happens on the last Sunday before Easter. The tradition is that you call your family and friends and apologise for any **sorrows** you've caused.

Son Hun We

In Korea, the way of saying sorry varies depending on the relationship between the speaker and the listener, due to the complex **honorific** system in the language. In many cases we say, "*Che song ham ni da.*" This is used in formal situations or with people we don't know well, and we often bow when saying, "*Che song ham ni da.*"

Neil

Journalist Ahsan Mahmood thinks apologising in Pakistan is different because people are not **expressive** – they don't usually show what they think or feel. Rather, he says, Pakistanis tend to be **cheeky**, an adjective meaning slightly rude but in a funny, playful way.

Beth

In Pakistan, people sometimes avoid **being upfront about** what they've done. If you're **upfront about** something, you speak openly about it, so everyone knows your feelings and intentions.

Neil

Moving now to Russia, the journalist Liza Fokht describes a tradition called Forgiveness Sunday, when people apologise to friends and family for **sorrows** they have caused. **Sorrows** are sources of sadness or regret.

Beth

And finally, in Korea, how you say sorry depends on who you're apologising to. Korea has a complicated **honorific** system dictating how people above you in the social order should be addressed. **Honorific** means showing respect and honour to someone.

Neil

Well, there's a saying that 'sorry is the hardest word', but who knew there were so many ways to say it!

Beth

Yes. And it's not just words – if you're really sorry, you do something to make things right, like giving a small gift. So, Neil, what do people in India do? What's the answer to your question?

Neil

Yes. Well, I asked what people in India do to apologise, and what answer did you give me, Beth?

Beth

I said bow down. Is that right?

Neil

I'm afraid that was the wrong answer – you should apologise to me for that. It is in fact b) – in India, it's common to tug your ear lobes when apologising. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with the idiom, **it's not every day that**, which is used to say that something is very unusual.

Beth

An **expressive** person shows what they think or feel.

Neil

The adjective **cheeky** means slightly rude in a funny, playful way.

Beth

When you are **upfront about** something, you speak openly and clearly so people know your true intentions.

Neil

Sorrows are sources of sadness or regret.

Beth

And finally, the adjective **honorific** means showing respect and honour to someone. Well, I'm sorry to say that once again our six minutes are up, but if you are ready for more, just head over to our website bbclearningenglish.com for a quiz and a worksheet for this episode. Bye for now!

Neil

Goodbye.

VOCABULARY

it's not every day (that)

(idiom) used to say that something is unusual or rare

expressive

showing what you think or feel

cheeky

slightly rude or disrespectful in a funny, playful way

be upfront about (something)

act or speak openly so people know your feelings or intentions (about something)

sorrow

source of sadness or regret

honorific

showing respect and honour to someone