
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Lie detecting



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello. This is 6 Minute English. I'm Rob.

Sam

And I'm Sam.

Rob

In this programme, we're talking about biscuits.

Sam

Really? That's not what I was told... oh hold on, you're lying.

Rob

Yes, you're right, Sam. I am lying simply to demonstrate our topic – lying and how to detect it. You detected my lie very easily, Sam!

Sam

I could tell by the smirk on your face that you were telling a fib – that's the word for a small, inoffensive lie.

Rob

To be honest, talking about lie detecting will be much more interesting than biscuits. But first, let's start with a question for you to answer. A competition is held in Cumbria in the UK every year to find and award the title of "The Biggest Liar in the World". But which type of people are not allowed to take part?

- a) Farmers
- b) Lawyers
- c) Estate agents

What do you think, Sam?

Sam

I'd be lying if I said I knew – but based on personal experience I'd say estate agents – they'd find it too easy!

Rob

Ha – well that’s your opinion but I’ll let you know if you’re right at the end of the programme. So, lying is something I’m sure a lot of us do – sometimes to avoid trouble, sometimes to cheat people, or sometimes just to impress someone – did you know I can speak seven languages, Sam?

Sam

That’s just a barefaced lie, Rob! But I can see how easy lying can be, and that’s what neuroscientist Sophie Scott thinks. Here she is on BBC Radio 4’s ‘Seriously’ podcast, explaining how we sometimes lie just to be nice!

Sophie Scott, neuroscientist

Often what we mean by lying is someone setting out to deceive us with their words or their actions but actually normal conversation probably can only happen because we don’t actually say all the time exactly what we really think and what we really mean. And that kind of cooperation is at the heart, I think, of a lot of social interactions for humans and I think that’s one of the strong pushes to make conversation polite and therefore frequently not actually truthful.

Rob

So Sophie mentions two types of lying. There’s the one when we try to **deceive** someone – so that’s trying to hide something by tricking someone to gain an advantage.

Sam

Hmm, that’s like you getting me to pay £10 for a cinema ticket when actually they were only £5. That’s just dishonest, but there are also what I like to call **white lies** – small lies we tell to avoid upsetting someone. Those are lies that aren’t intended to give you an advantage.

Rob

Yes, Sophie Scott says we use them in normal conversation – when we don’t say what we really mean.

Sam

So, we want to make conversation polite because we want to cooperate with each other – she says cooperation is **at the heart**. Something that’s **at the heart** is the most important or essential part.

Rob

Now telling lies is one thing but how do you know if we’re being lied to? Sometimes there are telltale signs, such as someone’s face turning red or someone shuffling their feet.

Sam

But if you really want to know if someone is lying, maybe we should listen to Richard Wiseman, a psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire. Here he is speaking on the ‘Seriously’ podcast...

Richard Wiseman, psychologist, University of Hertfordshire

Liars in general say less. They tend to have a longer what's called **response latency**, which is the time between the end of the question and the beginning of the answer. And there also tends to be an emotional distance in the lie – so the words 'me', 'my', 'I' – all those things tend to drop away in lies and it's much much harder for liars to control what they're saying and how they're saying it, so focus your attention there, you become a better lie detector.

Rob

Some good advice from Richard Wiseman. So to detect lies we need to listen out for the **response latency** – a term used in psychology to describe the time taken between a stimulus or question and a response to it. The bigger the gap, the more chance there is that someone is lying. Is that a good summary, Sam?

Sam

Sort of, Rob. Richard also suggests we focus on – or concentrate on – what and how people are saying things too. There's probably more to it than just that.

Rob

Well now you know how to detect my lies, Sam, maybe honesty is the best policy – as they say. So I'm now going to give you an honest answer to the question I asked earlier. A competition is held in Cumbria, in the UK, every year to award the title of "The Biggest Liar in the World". But which type of people are not allowed to take part?

- a) Farmers
- b) Lawyers
- c) Estate agents

Sam

I guessed c) estate agents.

Rob

And you are wrong, I'm afraid. Lawyers, as well as politicians, are not allowed to enter the competition. It's claimed "they are judged to be too skilled at telling porkies" – **porkies** is an informal word for 'pork pies' and that rhymes with 'lies'.

Sam

Fascinating stuff, Rob and that's no lie! But now, shall we recap some of the vocabulary we've heard today?

Rob

Why not? A fib is a small inoffensive lie.

Sam

A **white lie** is also a small lie, told to avoid upsetting someone.

Rob

When you **deceive** someone, you try to hide something by tricking them to gain an advantage.

Sam

When something is **at the heart** of something, it is the most important or essential part of it. And we heard about **response latency** – a term used in psychology to describe the time taken between a stimulus or question and a response to it.

Rob

OK, thank you, Sam. That's all from 6 Minute English. We look forward to your company next time. Goodbye!

Sam

Bye everyone!

Vocabulary**fib**

small inoffensive lie

white lie

small lie, told to avoid upsetting someone

deceive

try to hide something by tricking people to gain an advantage

at the heart

most important or essential part

response latency

a term used in psychology to describe the time taken between a stimulus or question and a response to it

porkies

informal word for lies