

## ENGLISH, BUT WHICH ENGLISH?

### BRITISH PHRASES

by Nick Clowes

<http://naukabezgranic.pl/podcasty/english-language/>

We may technically speak the same language, but use one of our multitude of bizarre idioms in conversation with a person born and raised in the U.S. and you'll be met with a, "Huh?" or a, "Sorry, could you repeat that?" These are some British phrases guaranteed to make Americans google what you just said.

"Bob's your uncle"

This silly slice of British slang is impenetrable to the uninitiated. In essence, it's a tongue-in-cheek fanfare used to draw attention to something notable that has happened. Translation: "Ta-da!", or 'Voila' Curiously, its use is in no way dependant on you the recipient having an uncle, or any other relative, named Bob.

"Knees up"

Synonymous with "party" and sometimes prefixed with "Right ol'," this turn of phrase is, I suspect, nodding at what revellers do with their knees when they dance. Quite possibly "Shindig", another leg-centric British expression meaning merrymaking event, was coined in response to all that uncoordinated Anglo foot flailing.

"Chin wag"

Meaning to talk to someone in an intense, gossipy manner, this expression alludes to the involuntary chin wiggling that can accompany full-on yakking. I ran this one past an American friend the other day and she said it made her picture a dog's tale coming out of a human chin. Ten out of 10 on the baffle-ometer, Brits!

"Get stuffed"

If we're annoyed with someone, but not quite annoyed enough to tell them to f\*\*\* off, we might suggest they do this instead. It's unclear who should perform the stuffing or what materials they should use. Still, it sounds unpleasant enough for the person on the receiving end to get the idea.

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Americans would be forgiven for thinking this was some kind of turkey-related jab.

“A total cock up”

If we Brits perform a job badly, this is the go-to phrase to describe our efforts. It has nothing to do with boy chickens (unless your badly executed task was somehow poultry related) or, erm, anything else male. To American ears, however, this sounds like the title of a DVD you’d hide under the mattress.

“Nice one”

Do something to my satisfaction and I might offer up this underwhelming compliment in return. When Brits say something is “nice”, we generally mean, “It is good.” Use it on an American and they’ll react like they do when you say “cheers” instead of “bye.”

“I’m chuffed to bits”

Read: “I am pleased with what’s happened”. As far as I’m aware, the word “chuffed” doesn’t exist in American vernacular. But it onomatopoeically suggests the release of trapped air, so will likely lead Americans to think you’re confessing to a recent gassy episode. Fittingly, “chuffed” is also British slang for “farted.”

“I’m not being funny but...”

The “funny” here means peculiar rather than hilarious. We Brits use this phrase to soften the complaint or insult that will inevitably come after it.

“I’ve got the hump”

This beauty is probably the most stupendously British phrase in existence. It says so much about us as a people. Rather than tell people outright, “I’m mildly annoyed,” we cloak our feelings in silliness. Still, what a criminally underused and funny word “hump” is. If you like, America, we’ll lend it to you.

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