

Lecture 4: The British Identity

1. Some Patterns of the British identity

1.1 Ethnic identities:

The table below outlines the main ethnic identities in the UK and their particular aspects.

<i>The ethnic identity</i>	<i>Distinct aspects of identity</i>
<i>Scotland</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Scottish have a separate educational system, legal and welfare system. • Their way of speaking English is very distinctive and different. • They speak ‘Scots’ in their daily life which is a dialect that could not be understood by the English and the Welsh. • The Western Isles of Scotland sustain the Gaelic sense of identity and use Gallic while communicating with each other (Scottish Gaelic). • Celebrating ‘<i>Burns Supers</i>’: on 25th of January. The Scottish wear kilts, sing traditional songs, dance reel, drink Scottish whisky, read poems of Robert Burns and eat haggis.
<i>Wales</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wales’ structure and organisation of social life are practically similar to those of England. • The Welsh language is the only prominent symbol that determines ‘Welshness’. • All Welsh speak Welsh. It is a language that is taught in schools and used by Welsh media. Additionally, even signs and public notices are written in both Welsh and English. • Owen Glendower is one of the very few Welsh national heroes. In the 15th century, he took control over all castles built by the English to rule Wales. Also, he founded a parliament. Five years later, he was defeated. The Welsh are celebrating the 16th September (revolt of Glendower) as a national day.
<i>England</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to symbols mentioned in lecture one, the English found their anthem ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ instead of the British anthem ‘God Save the Queen’
<i>Northern Ireland</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This part of the UK is entirely different from the others. • It is a society that contains the two extreme polarisations. Indeed, in Northern Ireland, two ethnic and religious categories live: Protestants from lowland Scotland and England and Catholics whose origin is Irish • Respectively, the first category supports the idea of being part of the UK. Whereas, the second wants to become part of the Republic of Ireland.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the fact that both groups belong to Northern Ireland, they do live separately. They have a different way of life. They do not go to the same schools, neither do they listen and watch the same programs. Furthermore, they commemorate differently various days and specific occasions. • In 1984, a wall that segregates those two groups was built. Although the relationship between the two has been improved, the wall still exists for economic gains and touristic reasons.
<i>Black Caribbeans</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are Jamaicans and Trinidadians who immigrated to Britain in 1948 for one main reason: fighting for Britain in the second world. • They worked in transportation. • They share some cultural practices with the British like religion background (Catholic). • They have their own Creole (language variety). • Their music has (calypso, reggae, ska) a significant impact on the British.
<i>Indian Subcontinent 'Asian'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These immigrants founded a community. • <u>They have sustained their religion, languages, music dress and food.</u> • <u>Their education level is higher than the British one.</u> • They occupy valuable posts which enable them to have significant roles in society. • Some of their descendants tend to strictly practice their religion which makes them distinct from the British. • On the other hand, some Bangladeshi and Pakistani tend to develop a hybrid identity as British-Asian.

1.2 The notion of family:

Like the northern European countries, people in Great Britain give less importance to family. Events like weddings and funerals do not necessitate the attendance of a vast number of relatives. The British appoint specific people to play a specific role in a given occasion. For instance, selecting someone to be the godfather or the godmother of the newly born child. In fact, the British family members gather very rarely and in a specific occasion like the Christmas. Additionally, it is very unlikely to find people of different ages living together in the same house.

Furthermore, the number of nuclear families of married parents tend to decrease. The fact that leads to a high portion of children born out of marriage and increases the number of 'single -parent families'.

1.3. Class

People in Great Britain belong to different social classes. Therefore, they are supposed to act, behave and display attitudes according to their social class. Indeed, they eat, value things, read and talk differently.

The social class attributed to a tranche of people is not only related to the wealth they possess. Although, clothes, cars and money are good indicators of wealth, but they could not demonstrate the appropriate social class unless the person speaks. Indeed, speakers' attitudes and way of acting are the main British parameters that could tell about the social class.

Likewise, the English accent used can refer to the social class. For example, RP 'Received Pronunciation' is the most prestigious British accent. People speaking RP are supposed to belong to the upper or upper-middle class. Whereas, people having a regional accent are assumed to be working class.

1.4. The perception of men and woman

Certainly, it is illegal to oppress or discriminate woman in Great Britain. Although the British woman is freer than it used to, she is still supposed to act in specific ways. For example, it is unacceptable for the woman to look untidy or scruffy. On the other hand, the British man who displays his emotion in public is perceived as a bizarre and strange person.

Concerning domestic and public roles, man and woman are equal, and the relation between them is based on collaboration. At home, for instance, taking care of children is not the responsibility of woman only. The man has to serve and aid the woman in doing domestic work. In public, the woman becomes freer to occupy the post that fits her capabilities. Also, she is supposed to help the man in revitalising the family incomes.

Respectively, the role of man and woman in Great Britain are complementary. There is no shame if the man helps his wife and vice versa.

1.5. Social relationships

The British value social interactions and daily contact. The British establish and found new relationships with those whom they share the same interests. They meet in pubs and clubs to pass their free time together. However, with the spread of internet, the British spend their free time at home.

1.6. Religion and politics

To the exception of Scotland, neither politics nor religion is important for the British. Hence, the British do not consider religion and politics as part of their British identity. They do not give importance to your religion nor your favourite political party.

1.7. Sense of humour

The sense of humour is highly valued by the British. In fact, the worst quality that could be attributed to a British is the 'lack of sense of humour'. It is not necessary to tell jokes in order to be humorous. All you need is mentioning a funny remark, raising smile or laugh,

especially at yourself. Additionally, the British prize other qualities like bravery in confronting economic crisis and misfortune 'stiff upper lip' and modesty.

Suggested homework 4:

- Look for further patterns that demonstrate "Britishness".

Further readings

Introduction to British civilisation by T.Abdou; M. Bertrand;C. Crowley; M.I. Ducrocq; L. Dubois; D. Foliard;C. Kohler; T. Labica; S. Parageau and C. Prunier