

Chatterbox #85 – Interview with a Brit living in Canada: Helen

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone.

Helen: Hi.

Maura: This is Maura, with your Culips English Learning Podcast. Don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And that's where you can become a member. And when you're a member, you help support us at Culips, which is how we keep making these great episodes for you. You also get the transcripts to all of our episodes, more detailed explanations, and a quiz. So if you haven't been to our website, check it out. And if you're on Facebook, come on over and say hi, because Harp and I always love to hear from you. Now today, we are going to do a Chatterbox episode, and if you're a regular Culips listener, you know what that means. Sometimes we chat about all different kinds of topics and we also interview people. And that's what is happening today. So, I'm going to interview a good friend of ours named Helen. Say hi.

Helen: Hi.

Maura: She is originally from Liverpool, in England, and she's been living in Canada for about 8 years now, and she has spent some time learning French as well, because we're living in the province of Quebec. And that is actually where we met. Isn't that right?

Helen: That's right.

Maura: Yeah. I think it was about 5 or 6 years ago that I was taking a French class with Harp, and we had some other friends who had taken a class with you. Right?

Helen: That's right.

Maura: And how has your French come along since then?

Helen: It's been about 6 years since I started learning French. And I think in Montreal it can be easy to speak English, because not everybody speaks to you in French or answers you in French. My French is pretty good, I would say. You need **to keep it up**, you need to speak a language every day to improve, to be better at it. But overall it's good. It's pretty good.

- Maura: Good. Nice. And I know it's a different experience for people who come from other countries because in Canada, **no matter** where we are in Canada, when you're young and you grow up here, you take French classes, so you at least have a basic understanding if you want to learn. But when you came to Quebec, did you have any knowledge of French before?
- Helen: In England we have to take French for 6 years in school, in high school, and I forgot most of it by the time I arrived in Canada and then I ended up in Banff, in Alberta, where it's mostly English speaking, but I made friends with some Quebecois people and just wanted to practice my French a little bit so that kind of gave me a good base before moving to Montreal.
- Maura: So you did have a pretty good base when you got here then.
- Helen: Yeah, not bad. I found, though, that the French that we learned in England is from France, so it's a completely different accent. When I first arrived, I couldn't understand Quebecois at all. I didn't think it sounded like French. But now that I've been here for 7 years, it's the opposite. I find I can only understand the Quebecois and the French seems completely different.
- Maura: I had exactly the same experience. When I was in France and I knew a little bit of French, I could understand the French there and not the French from Canada, and now it's the same experience.
- Helen: That's it. But now I think that the Quebecois French... It sounds more American in a way, because we're surrounded by North American culture, so in that way, it's just easier to pick up, I find. The French accent from France is a little bit harder to pronounce sometimes.
- Maura: Yeah, I agree. Another question, which I think is interesting, is how did you end up coming from England to Canada?
- Helen: I have some family in Canada, from Alberta, so I decided to come... to go to Banff, to learn to snowboard. And I felt it was really beautiful over there and when I was there, I fell in love with a guy from Montreal so then we ended up moving to Montreal about a year later.
- Maura: And to name another coincidence, I also worked in Banff, just like Helen did, almost around the same time. So we know that if you go out and you live in the Rockies, especially when you're in your 20s, it's a really, really fun time.
- Helen: Yeah, absolutely. It's funny that we were there at the same time, but in just towns **next door** to each other.

- Maura: Tell us about Banff. What did you like about it? Obviously there are the mountains and you learned to snowboard, but what else did you find fun about living there?
- Helen: I mean, the most important thing for me, the most fun thing, was how beautiful it was, and how you can travel. The drives there, when you're up in the mountains, it's amazing. The town itself, you're surrounded by all this nature. Everything. You know, you can encounter a bear walking home at night. You're more likely to be attacked by a bear than you are by a person there. It's the most beautiful place that I've ever been in my life, I find. I was there for a year, just over a year, too, so it's enough time to get to know the place and it's hard to leave. It was hard to leave there, but then moving to Montreal, it's a completely different environment. It's a city, but it still feels like a small town, and it still feels very Canadian even though it's French-Canadian, it's still such a part of Canada.
- Maura: I agree. Montreal is a great city. What's one of your favorite things about Montreal?
- Helen: My favourite thing has to be the culture and the festivals and that there's something always going on. Montreal is probably the best place to be in summer, anywhere that I've been. And there's always something going on, but even in winter and in autumn right now, Halloween's coming up and Halloween is, like, a major party in Montreal. They have ghost tours, and just everybody decorates their houses and it's a really fun time. So every time of the year, there's always a festival or opening or some kind of cultural thing to go to.
- Maura: And I have to ask you, what do you think about the cold Canadian winters?
- Helen: It's got so much milder now. When I first arrived 7 years ago, it was freezing. I remember it being minus 30 degrees, probably, you know, **a good 2 weeks** of the year, of the winter, which is cold. And last year we had one snowfall, I think, right? And it was maybe minus 15 at the coldest, so it's getting better. I think you can cope with it more if you ski or snowboard or do outdoor activities to get through the winter.
- Maura: Yeah, that's true. It has not been so bad the past couple of years. So hopefully this winter again, it won't be so cold.
- Helen: Yeah, that's it. Although the snow is nice, it's nice to snow at Christmas, you want it to snow then. The snow is fine. I think the hardest thing to get used to is the dark nights, the long dark days. But that's what makes summertime so special in Montreal, because you look forward to it so much.

- Maura: That's true. When it becomes spring, people are so happy. Everyone's in the streets smiling, jackets are off. It's a good time.
- Helen: Exactly.
- Maura: So, you've been in Canada for a while now.
- Helen: Yup.
- Maura: What is your current status? Are you a Canadian citizen yet, or what?
- Helen: I'm a permanent resident and I just applied for my citizenship. If I get it, it should be in the next couple of months and you have to sing the national anthem in French and pass a little test about the history of Canada, so that's going to be fun.
- Maura: Is it any easier, being a citizen of England or **the Commonwealth**, to become a Canadian citizen? Because I hear stories from other people, from other countries, who have to go through a really long process and fill out all this **paperwork**.
- Helen: I think, like anywhere else in the world, it depends where you're from. France and England, I think, definitely have an advantage; French for Quebec and England for Canada. I have some Mexican friends and Argentinian friends and things like that, who've had a hard time integrating so easily. But I think yeah, we're pretty lucky in Europe that we can... we can move here pretty easily.
- Maura: Mmhmm. So did you ever think that when you came to learn snowboarding in Banff, that you would end up staying here for so many years?
- Helen: No! My plan was to go and teach English in Japan, and then I met somebody, so we decided... I decided to follow him. And it was a really good decision and I'm really happy to live in Canada and live in Montreal and... and to have taken that **path**.
- Maura: And how often do you get to go back and visit your family?
- Helen: I go home once every 2 years, and then my friends and family come visit me the other year. Or I meet my family. Last year we met in France, the year before in Italy. So we kind of try to mix it up, because sometimes going back to England isn't the nicest holiday, because it rains so much, so we try to go to warmer countries and meet there.
- Maura: So that stereotype about England always raining is true?

- Helen: It's true.
- Maura: Hmm. Maybe because there's also not very much sun. I have this memory of when I went to England when I was 17 years old and it was the end of summer, and I'd spent a full Canadian summer almost so I had a nice tan, and I went to England for 2 weeks at the end of August and I came back totally pale.
- Helen: It's... There is no summer, that's the thing about England, and actually Northern Europe, is there's one season pretty much **all year round**. Now we've started to have snow, actually, the last few years, but the rest of the three seasons blend into each other. This is another great thing about Canada is you have four defined seasons.
- Maura: So how do you feel when you go home again? It's an interesting experience to grow up your whole life in one place and then not live there anymore and just visit. Do you feel like you might ever want to live there again? Or do you feel like you miss some things about England?
- Helen: I miss friends and family. I miss... The sense of community in England is really different. But I wouldn't live there again because I feel like I spent 20 years there already, and the world's kind of too big to stay in one place too long. Montreal is probably the first place I feel like I could actually live and settle down in, though.
- Maura: OK. So you're not planning to leave any time soon?
- Helen: No, just on trips.
- Maura: Trips are important.
- Helen: Yes.
- Maura: Another question I have is: I was wondering if there are any cultural differences that you notice between Canada and England, because, of course they're different, because they're different countries and they're far away from each other, but because we speak the same language, we end up having things in common as well.

- Helen: Yeah. Well, it depends if you're talking about Canada or Montreal. I think Montreal... There's definitely cultural differences between here and England, one of the biggest ones being people's love of food here. In England, it's not so much of an issue, people aren't really raised to appreciate food as much, but in Montreal it's a very big thing. In the rest of Canada, in you know, English-speaking Canada, I think it's just more of a North American culture, like, the media is very North American and you're kind of surrounded by what's going on America a lot more; the music, the television, and things, the movies, whereas in England, it's more European focused. We know more about European politics and what's going on nearer to us.
- Maura: Right. And no one seems to know that much about Canada, even Canadians sometimes.
- Helen: No.
- Maura: As I'm sure you have noticed if you're listening to this podcast, Helen speaks with an accent from England, of course, because she grew up there. I'm wondering, again because you've been here for a number of years, if you feel you've lost some of your accent or you've picked up Canadians expressions instead of using the English expressions you used to know.
- Helen: I think I have lost my accent a lot, but if you ask my friends in Canada, they say, "No, you still sound English." But there are some words in British English that we use that they just don't understand here, for example, the trunk of a car, in England, we call **the boot**. Or in Canada, what you would call a van, we call **a lorry**. Or in Canada, they say *garage* and we'll say *garage*. Another example is we would say in England... We call a pharmacy **a chemist**, so that's another big difference. When I say, "I'm going to **the chemist**" to my friends here, they have no idea what I mean. It's a really old word for pharmacy.
- Maura: Maybe they start to think that you're going to see some scientist who's going to mix some chemicals for you.
- Helen: Yeah, like an alchemist. Yeah, it's an **old-school** word, but we still have them. And in England, we still measure ourselves, body weight and things like that, in **stones**, which is a really ancient system. There are 14 pounds in **a stone**, whereas in Canada this doesn't exist. So when I get on the scales to weigh myself, let's say, or, you know, you weigh yourself at the gym, half of the time I don't understand. I have to still convert back to **stones**, because everything is just in pounds.
- Maura: So you haven't gotten used to pounds yet?

- Helen: I'm getting used to it.
- Maura: It's true, though, that the system of measurement that we use, we just get so used to it, that it's hard to change.
- Helen: Yeah, exactly.
- Maura: It's interesting here, too, because technically we're supposed to use **the metric system**, and we do for some things, but we still use **the imperial system**. For example, when we talk about people's height, we usually say, "I know someone who's 6 foot 2," or "I'm 5 foot 4," but on our driver's licence and identification, it measures us in centimetres.
- Helen: Yeah. And I think it's hard for people to switch, as well. Another difference between England and Canada is that we have miles per hour when you're driving and here it's kilometres per hour. So that's another difference.
- Maura: Oh, I had thought that **you guys** had kilometres, just like in Canada.
- Helen: No, we use miles and it takes some getting used to to drive on the other side of the road, as well, because in England we drive on the left side of the road and here it's on the right.
- Maura: I have to admit I feel like I would be terrified to try driving on the other side of the road. I've been in countries where they do it and I've never wanted to try because it just seems too frightening.
- Helen: And that the steering wheel is on the opposite side and the gear stick is on the opposite side, so yeah, it was funny. But now I'm used to it. Now it's weird when I go home to England and drive.
- Maura: But you didn't have any serious accidents, I hope?
- Helen: No.
- Maura: So Helen, I have one last question for you that we like to ask all of our guests. Do you have any tips for learning another language?
- Helen: I think it's easier when you're living in the country of the language that you're supposed to be learning. And if you are or if you're not, either way, I find... Read a newspaper every day, listen to TV in that language as much as you can, listen to music in that language as much as you can, and just kind of immerse yourself, at least an hour a day in that language.

- Maura: I think that's good advice. Thank you again for coming in. I think it was a really interesting episode and hopefully the listeners, who are used to our boring Canadian accents, will enjoy your fun and interesting English accent.
- Helen: Thanks for having me.
- Maura: And don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, become a member, and say hi to us on Facebook and Twitter. We'll talk to you again soon. Bye!
- Helen: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

To keep it up

To keep it up is another way of saying to continue or to keep going without stopping. In this episode, Maura and Helen discuss learning a new language, and Helen tells Maura that it is important **to keep it up**. What Helen means is that you need to keep speaking a new language continuously without stopping in order to learn it well.

Here's an example with **to keep it up**:

John: I'm getting so sick of running! I can't believe I agreed to run this entire marathon!

Susie: You're doing so well though! You can finish it I'm sure. Just **keep it up**!

No matter

No matter is a phrase that can be used in place of *it doesn't make any difference* or *it's not important*. In this episode, Maura tells Helen that **no matter** where you live in Canada, you have to take French lessons when you are young. What Maura means is that it doesn't make a difference or it doesn't matter where you live in Canada, you still have to take French lessons.

Here is an example with **no matter** in a couple of different ways:

Karen: I'm going to go to that concert, **no matter** what my mom says.

Todd: I don't think that's a good idea. They're going to film the whole thing so why don't you just watch it online after the concert's done?

Karen: Well, I guess that would be all right.

Todd: Sure it will be. **No matter** how you see the concert, it's still going to be great.

Next door

Next door means right beside. People can mean this literally when they talk about their **next-door** neighbours, which refers to the people that live right beside them, at the door next to their door. Or people can use it when they are talking about things or places that are beside each other.

In this episode, Helen talks to Maura about how they were **next door** to each other when they lived in towns that were beside each other in Alberta. Usually, people only use the expression **next door** when referring to a place, whether that place is a house, a town, or even a school desk.

Here is an example with **next door**:

Jane: Did you see the seating chart for class? Looks like we're going to be right **next door** to each other!

Tracey: That's so funny! Even our lockers are right **next door** to each other.

A good 2 weeks

In this episode, Helen talks about the winter in Canada and what it was like trying to get used to it when she first moved here. She mentions that when she first arrived, she remembers it being very cold for **a good 2 weeks** of the year. When someone talks about a time period and uses the words *a good* or *a full* in front of it, they are usually emphasizing how long something is. You would never talk about how short something was and use *a good* or *a full* in front of it. So, when Helen says that the cold lasted **a good 2 weeks**, she means that it seemed like a very long 2 weeks, probably because it was so cold!

Here is an example with **a good** _____:

Tammy: How was your trip?

Devon: It was great! We had **a good month and a half** for vacation, so we were able to do everything we wanted to do.

Tammy: That's great! It must have been nice to have that much time off.

The Commonwealth

A commonwealth is a union of countries or states that have a political, social, or economic union or affiliation. **The Commonwealth** that is referred to nowadays is officially called **the Commonwealth of Nations**, and their common goal is to have equality, democracy, and peace in their political, social, and economic status.

The Commonwealth of Nations actually involves 54 countries, some of which are not even in Britain—Canada is one of them! All but two of the countries (Mozambique and Rwanda) that are in **the Commonwealth** were former colonies of England. This means that they were formerly owned by England and were governed by their rules.

When Helen and Maura refer to **the Commonwealth** in this episode, Maura asks Helen whether it will be easier for her to become a Canadian citizen because she is a member of **the Commonwealth**. What Maura means is that because both England and Canada are in the same **Commonwealth**, it may be easier for Helen to get Canadian citizenship.

Paperwork

Paperwork is a term that refers to any sort of work that involves filling out forms, signing things, or doing anything else administrative, whether it is with actual paper or whether it is on a computer.

Usually, the term **paperwork** is used negatively to describe a task that involves a lot of writing and record-keeping, which takes up a lot of time and can get boring. The term **paperwork** almost always refers to routine administrative work that is a boring but necessary part of a bigger, more important task. For example, when people do very big, important things like buying a house, there is a lot of **paperwork** to be done because they have to sign a lot of agreements and forms.

In this episode, Maura asks Helen whether it was difficult to apply for Canadian citizenship, because she often hears of people having to fill out a lot of **paperwork**. Getting citizenship is a very important task, and it requires a lot of routine **paperwork** that has to be done, such as filling out forms.

A path

In this episode, Helen tells Maura that she is happy that she decided to follow her partner to Canada to live in Montreal and that she is happy with **the path** she took. The word **path**, when used like Helen used it, means the decision you took that got you to where you are. It is a metaphor, meaning it is a symbolic representation.

In the literal sense, a path is a road that people walk down. But when people talk about **paths** in life, they are talking about symbolic roads they decide to take that get them to another part of their life. Helen took **a path** that led her to Montreal, and she is happy that she did.

Here is another example with the metaphor **a path**:

Don: How's your new job?

Tess: I love it. I wasn't sure that going back to school for another degree was a good idea, but I'm so glad I chose that **path**. It was definitely the right decision.

All year round

All year round means all year long, for the entire year. It doesn't necessarily refer to something that is constant, but just something that happens for an entire year. For example, if somebody does something only once a month, but they do it 12 months out of the year, they could say that they do it **all year round**. **All year round** usually refers to something that is consistent, scheduled, or routine.

In this episode, Helen tells Maura about England's weather, and that there is basically only one season and it is **all year round**. What Helen means is that the weather is consistent and doesn't change all year.

Here is an example with **all year round**:

Pat: It's flea season again! I have to start giving my dog flea medication. What about your dog?

Derek: Oh, my dog gets flea medication **all year round**. It's just safer that way because we live in a neighbourhood that has a lot of fleas.

A boot

Even though the language that Canadians speak is the same language that people from England speak—English, there are small variations or differences in certain words.

Sometimes, even people living in the same country but from different provinces or states have different words for different things. For example, people from Newfoundland use some words that people from Ontario do not. *Gandy* in Newfoundland means *pancake* in Ontario. These different ways of saying things within the same language are called dialects. In this episode, Helen talks about some words from the dialect of England. She talks about how the word **boot** in England means the trunk of a car in Canada.

Here is an example with the word **boot** as it is used in England:

Tom: You're moving this weekend, right? Do you need to rent a van?

Nancy: No, I only have a few things left to move, and they can all fit in **the boot** of my car.

Tom: Oh, that's good. I hate moving. It's such a headache!

Nancy: For sure! I'll probably have to stop at the pharmacy on the way to the new place for some aspirin!

A lorry

A lorry is another example of British dialect. It refers to the same vehicle that we call a van or a truck here in Canada. **A lorry** is any vehicle that carries cargo or transports goods. Both words, *truck* and **lorry**, are most likely derived from verbs meaning to carry or pull.

Here's the same example from earlier, changed just a little bit to show how **lorry** can be used in a sentence:

Tom: You're are moving this weekend, right? Do you need to rent **a lorry**?

Nancy: No, I only have a few things left to move, and they can all fit in the boot of my car.

Tom: Oh, that's good. I hate moving. It's such a headache!

Nancy: For sure! I'll probably have to stop at the pharmacy on the way to the new place for some aspirin!

A chemist

A chemist is a word in British dialect that means the same thing as a *pharmacy* or a *drugstore* in Canada.

In this episode, Helen talks about using the word **chemist** instead of pharmacy, and how her friends get confused when she does. All pharmacies and pharmacists used to be called **chemists** at one point, so the term that Helen uses is actually the original word for pharmacist.

Here's the same example from earlier, changed just a little bit to show how **chemist** can be used in a sentence:

Tom: You're moving this weekend, right? Do you need to rent a lorry?

Nancy: No, I only have a few things left to move, and they can all fit in the boot of my car.

Tom: Oh, that's good. I hate moving. It's such a headache!

Nancy: For sure! I'll probably have to stop at **the chemist** on the way to the new place for some aspirin!

Old-school

In this episode, when Helen talks to Maura about how she calls a pharmacy a chemist, she says that it is an **old-school** word for pharmacy. **Old-school** is a popular casual expression that means older, original, or traditional. It began as a religious term in the 19th century, when traditional religious views and modern religious views became seen as different religions. Traditional views were called **old school** and the modern views were called **new school**.

The expression **old-school** has gained popularity in recent years because the music industry started using it as a word for classic genres and rhythms, especially in hip hop and rap. Now, people use it in casual conversation as another way to say traditional or to describe something from an earlier era.

Here is an example with the adjective **old-school**:

Ted: Have you been watching all the new series that have been coming out on television? There's so many of them, and they're all great!

Meredith: No, I like **old-school** television better. I only watch television from the 1970s and 1980s!

The imperial system vs. the metric system, and stones

The units that people use to measure things such as the size of something varies from country to country. In Canada, we mostly use **the metric system** while Britain and the US primarily use **the imperial system**.

This makes a difference in the units people use to talk about the size, speed, volume, weight, or any other measurement of something.

In this episode, Helen and Maura talk about weight measurements. Here in Canada, we use pounds (imperial) or sometimes kilograms (metric) to measure people. In Britain, they use something called **stones**. A British **stone** is about 14 pounds. Here in Canada, we use kilometres (metric) to talk about speed, and Britain uses miles (imperial).

You guys

You guys is a very common English expression used to directly refer to a group of people in a casual way. Traditionally, the word **guys** only referred to men. And sometimes it still does. But if you are speaking to a group of people, you can say **you guys** whether they are men or women.

It can be difficult to tell when it's okay to use the word **guys** to refer to a group of people of any gender, and when you should only use it to mean males. For example, it would be okay to say, "Those **guys** look bored" when talking about a mixed group, but if you said, "That group of **guys** looks bored," a native English speaker would probably assume you were talking about a group of men. This is one of those things that you just have to get used to by listening to and reading a lot of English!

Maura often says **you guys** or **hey guys** in Culips episodes. This is a casual and friendly way for Maura to talk to you as a group, even though you are a group of both men and women.

Quiz

1. What does the expression *to keep it up* mean?
 - a) to be up in the air on an airplane or a helicopter
 - b) to continue without stopping
 - c) to successfully fly a kite
 - d) to fail at something

2. Which phrase means that it doesn't make any difference?
 - a) nothing doing
 - b) no business
 - c) no bother
 - d) no matter

3. If someone is next door to you, where are they?
 - a) behind you
 - b) in front of you
 - c) beside you
 - d) in a different country

4. What is a commonwealth?
 - a) a group of countries that have a common social goal
 - b) a country that doesn't speak English
 - c) a group of people who are learning a new language
 - d) a courthouse

5. What is a British word that means the same thing as *a truck* or *a van* in Canada?
 - a) a chemist
 - b) a boot
 - c) a lorry
 - d) a commonwealth

6. What are the two measurement systems for body weight that Canada and Britain use, respectively?

- a) pounds and stones
- b) imperial and metric
- c) kilometres and miles
- d) states and provinces

7. What does the adjective *old-school* mean?

- a) original or traditional
- b) old and rotten
- c) current music
- d) new and modern

Answers:

1.b 2.d 3.c 4.a 5.c 6.a 7.a