

Real English Conversations: 20 questions game

Introduction

Hi! Lori here, welcoming you to another episode of Real English Conversations from BetterAtEnglish.com. My English friend Michael and I are back and ready to rock after our long-overdue vacations. In today's conversation we talk about a fun electronic game that I found out about while on vacation in the States. But before we start with the conversation, I have a really cool tip for you. If you like what we do here at Better at English, you're sure to enjoy Andrew and Addison's ESL podcast at [China232.com](http://www.china232.com). Just like me, Andrew and Add are tired of the typical boring English learning material and podcasts, and have reacted by creating a fun and free conversational podcast. You can find it at <http://www.china232.com>. If you're keen on improving your English in a fun and entertaining way, you definitely should check it out.

OK, let's get on with today's conversation. As always, you can find the full transcript and vocabulary notes on our website, www.BetterAtEnglish.com. Here we go!

Conversation Transcript

- Lori: OK, you know, every time I go back to the States, it's usually been a few years since my last visit, and there's always some new **gadget** or some new thing that's come along that I just for some reason hadn't heard about in Sweden.
- Michael: Mm hmm.
- Lori: And this time it was that 20Q game.
- Michael: Oh yeah (laughs), that's...it's a great little thing. I think you should tell our listeners a little bit more about that.
- Lori: Yeah it's this unbelievable little game; you just hold it in your hand and it's computerized...and the idea is for you to think of an object and then the...the little game asks you 20 questions, and more often than not, it's actually able to guess what you're thinking about.
- Michael: Right, I mean, I've never seen anything like this before. It's the kind of thing that you know...you play this as a party game, you know, "I'm thinking of something" and then get everybody to ask a question.
- Lori: Right.
- Michael: Isn't that what you call "20 questions?"
- Lori: Yeah, 20 questions.
- Michael: OK.
- Lori: And usually, I think -- at least when I played 20 questions with my students -- the questions have to be "yes or no" questions.
- Michael: Sure, yeah you can't...umm...say, you know, "What color is it?" and you have to say "green" or "blue" or something like that.
- Lori: Exactly.
- Michael: But yeah, on this little thing, there's a *yes* and a *no* button, and then...but also there's a *don't know* and a *sometimes* button, so umm...the kind of questions that this little thing will ask is something like...umm...well, it asks you, "Is it an animal?" or umm..."Is it a mineral?" or a vegetable or something, and...
- Lori: Right.



Michael: And obviously you have to say yes or no.

Lori: Exactly. But it asks some kind of...some questions that are kind of hard to answer. Like if I'm thinking of a guitar, one of the questions might be "Does it bring joy to people?" And you know, a lot of people get really happy playing guitar or...

Michael: Yeah, or listening to guitar, yeah.

Lori: Right, but maybe it's...it's hard, so I guess for a question like that I would tend to put "sometimes."

Michael: Well, yeah because...I mean my father, for example, hates it when I play the guitar. He really...[growls]...it **drives him up the wall**.

[laughter]

Michael: I like to think that that's actually more to do with...umm...you know, my father's...umm...dislike of guitar than my inability to play the guitar!

Lori: Yeah, let's...

[laughter]

Lori: One can always hope!

Michael: Yes, that's right.

Lori: Just kidding! Anyway it's such a cool little, yeah, little gizmo, and I was...the thing is that I think...if you're going to try it, it's really most impressive if it guesses the first thing that you think about. Because the first time I tried it, it was my little **niece** came up to me to show me this cool thing, and she said, "Here, it'll guess what you're thinking!" And I was thinking, "**Yeah, right**" – like it's really going to guess.

Michael: Right!

Lori: What I thought would be this really hard word -- I picked "telephone pole" -- And the darn thing guessed it!

[laughter]

Lori: I couldn't believe it! I thought from the questions, you know, sometimes you can tell from the questions it asks that "Oh, oh — it's going to guess." But from the questions it asked me I couldn't understand how it could possibly know that I was thinking of a telephone pole.

Michael: Because you remember last night when we were...err...playing with it, and what was it that we had? **Meerkat**? That it **got**?

Lori: Yeah.

Michael: Then...errr...sea horse

Lori: Yeah.

Michael: As well, I mean, that's fairly **obscure**.

Lori: Yeah.

Michael: I mean, I have to say I did manage to beat it...

Lori: Uh huh.

Michael: I think...two or three times. One was "string."

Lori: Oh, right.

Michael: It couldn't get that.

Lori: Uh huh.

Michael: Let me think. The other one was "titanium."

Lori: Right. I wonder if you...I mean, do you know enough about the **properties** about titanium to give it good answers?

Michael: I think so, yeah. I mean, it's something that err...you know that's...err...it...I'd be impressed if it picked any other kind of metal.

Lori: Uh huh.

Michael: I'd be thinking, "Well, it got pretty close." But it...it didn't get anywhere near, so...

Lori: OK right. OK. So it didn't pick "platinum" or "gold" or something like that.

Michael: No. I have to say...How long have you had this thing? You got it when you were over...

Lori: In the States, yeah.

Michael: OK.

Lori: So I think I opened the package about 2 weeks ago.

Michael: OK -- have you tried guessing anything **rude** with it?

Lori: Yeah, we did. We took it camping with us, see...to help keep the little girls entertained, who were with us. And us too, I mean sometimes it's...we couldn't have camp fires where we were camping, so that **makes for** kind of long evenings when you can't have the camp fire. And at one point after several glasses of wine, we did go through the rude words stage!

[laughter]

Michael: OK, I was just wondering, yeah.

Lori: Yeah, but I don't think it has rude words in its database.

Michael: Well, I think there is a gap in the market there!

Lori: [Laughs]

Michael: For an **adult** version...

Lori: Right!

Michael: ...of 20Q.

Lori: Yeah, exactly!

Michael: Where the objective is to think of a rude thing, you know, perhaps parts of the body or a rude action or something.

Lori: Oh yeah, definitely! But that...that vocabulary is so limited though; you would have to make it...make it an addition to the normal 20Q.

Michael: Yeah, but it's so much fun!

Lori: [Laughs] It's...it's fun when you're easily amused, like we are.

Michael: So we certainly recommend this...this little toy to our listeners.

Lori: Yeah.

Michael: It's lots and lots of fun.

Lori: Yeah, in fact I've ordered some extra ones because I think it'd be really good to use in my English classes.

Michael: Yeah, well...

Lori: It'd be fun for the students, and that you can practice question forms and things, so...

Michael: Right.

Lori: Yeah.

Michael: Good idea.

Lori: OK!

Final Words

Thanks for tuning in to this episode of Real English Conversations at BetterAtEnglish.com. An additional thanks goes out to those of you who have generously donated in support of Better at English since our last podcast. We really appreciate your support. If you'd like to help us keep Better at English free, you can help us out immensely by making a donation, or even just telling your friends about our website. Posting links on forums and blogs is also really helpful.

Before I go, there's a favor I'd like to ask. I have gotten lots of email from people who want to improve their writing. The best way to improve your writing is to do LOTS of it, but it's also important to get feedback and suggestions from others. So I'm wondering: should we create a forum for our listeners to make it easier for us all to work together and help each other get better at English? I envision it as a place where Michael and I can answer your questions and help you, but also where you can help each other. It sounds like fun! There's only one problem: there's nothing more pathetic than a forum with little or no participation. So I would like to hear from you listeners – would you like a forum where you can get free help with your English? If I get a yes from at least 50 people before July 5, I will create one. You can let me know in several ways: you can send an email to info [AT] betteratenglish [DOT] com, you can go to the website and post a YES comment on this episode, or you can vote in the poll in the sidebar of our website. If you want a forum, make sure to let us know! OK then, I hope you'll let us know about the forum, and that you'll visit our friends at China232.com. We'll see you next time here at betteratenglish.com.

Vocabulary notes

gadget	A <i>gadget</i> is a small machine or device that is used for a particular purpose. (Compare <i>gizmo</i> below).
drives him up the wall	If you <i>drive somebody up the wall</i> , you make them feel very angry or irritated.
gizmo	A small (clever) device or machine that has a particular purpose. Synonymous with <i>gadget</i> .
niece	Your <i>niece</i> is the daughter of your brother or sister. The son of your brother or sister is your <i>nephew</i> .
Yeah, right	The expression " <i>Yeah, right</i> " is used to indicate that you don't believe something that you or somebody else has said.
Meerkat	<u>Meerkats</u> are small mongoose-like animals that live in Africa.
got	In this context, to <i>get</i> something means to solve a puzzle or answer a question.
obscure	If something is <i>obscure</i> , it is unclear and difficult to understand or know.
properties	A substance's <i>properties</i> are its characteristics or qualities.
rude	In this context, <i>rude</i> means words or things that are related to sex or going to the toilet, as well as other naughty words or swear words.
to make for	To <i>make for</i> something in this context means to contribute to something or to help something to happen.
adult	In this context, the adjective <i>adult</i> means things that have to do with sex or other topics that are not considered suitable for children.