**English weather-speak**

‘When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather’. This observation is as accurate now as it was over two hundred years ago.

Most commentators, however, **fail to come up with a convincing explanation** for the English ‘obsession’ with the weather as they assume the English talk about the weather because they **have a pathological interest in the subject**. So, what it is about the English weather that is so fascinating.

In fact, **weather-speak** is a code, evolved to help the English overcome their natural reserve and actually talk to each other. Everyone knows, for example, that *‘Nice day, isn’t it?’*, *‘Ooh, isn’t it cold?’*, *‘Still raining, eh?’* and other variations on the theme are not requests for meteorological data.

*‘Nice day, isn’t it?’* and all the others – is the English code for *‘I’d like to talk to you – will you talk to me?’*, or simply another way of saying *‘hello’*. Under the rules of weather-speak, all you have to answer is *‘Mm, yes, isn’t it?’* or give some other equally meaningless ritual response, which is code for *‘Yes, I’ll talk to you/greet you’.*

It is not always quite that obvious, but all English weather conversations follow the same unmistakable ritual. These phrase-exchanges are conducted **according to unwritten but universally accepted rules**.

There are three quite specific contexts in which weather-speak is prescribed:

* as a simple greeting
* as an ice-breaker leading to conversation on other matters
* as a ‘filler’ when conversation on other matters fails, and there is an awkward or uncomfortable lull.

The English have clearly chosen a highly appropriate aspect of their own familiar natural world as a social facilitator: the capricious and erratic nature of English weather ensures that there is always something new to comment on, be surprised by, speculate about, **moan about**, or, perhaps most importantly, *agree* about. (This rule was noted by the Hungarian humorist George Mikes, who wrote that in England ‘You must never contradict anybody when discussing the weather’).

If you deliberately break this rule of agreement, you will find that the **atmosphere becomes rather tense and awkward**, and possibly somewhat huffy. There may be an **uncomfortable silence**, and most likely, the guests will continue talking about the weather among themselves, politely, if frostily, ignoring your *faux pas*.