

END OF YEAR TEST (Units 1–12)

EOY Track 1 | Listening, Exercises 1 and 2

Interviewer: Good afternoon. Today we're going to be talking to Dr Elizabeth Brooks who is head of English Language at the University of Lincolnshire. Welcome to the show, Dr Brooks.

Dr Brooks: Thank you, Richard.

Interviewer: Now, a lot of people are very critical of the way English is used nowadays, saying that literacy standards are falling, mainly as a result of our increasing use of digital communications. I know you've done a lot of research into this, so I wonder if you could tell me whether reading and writing skills really used to be better?

Dr Brooks: I think the answer to that question is probably 'no'. Newspapers love to say that young people have lost the ability to spell because of all the abbreviations they use in written communications like text messages, but it seems that just isn't the case.

Interviewer: Really?

Dr Brooks: Yes. Evidence from recent studies suggests that using shortened forms of words actually requires language skills. That's because in order to shorten a word, you have to know which letters to remove. That means you need to know how to spell it properly first!

Interviewer: Interesting. So what you're saying is that most people who write the word 'later' with an L followed by the number 8 and then R are aware of the correct spelling?

Dr Brooks: Exactly – and as long as they're writing it in a text message and not an academic essay, it's perfectly OK to use an abbreviation like this. The idea is to get your message across quickly after all. In fact, research shows that being able to use this kind of language is a sign of creativity rather than a lack of literacy skills.

Interviewer: But won't these strange spellings actually become part of the English language because we use them so much?

Dr Brooks: Maybe, but why is that a problem? Language is always changing – and if you don't believe me, go and read a Shakespeare play and you'll see how different 16th century English was from the English we speak now!

Interviewer: Mmm, I take your point.

Dr Brooks: Some short forms have already become part of English, anyway. Think of words like 'fridge' and 'exam', for example. They actually refer to 'refrigerator' and 'examination'. When they first became popular, there was a great deal of fear about the effect such words would have on English and now they're used by everyone without a second thought. You may also be surprised to learn that 'cos', which is a widely used abbreviation for 'because', was used as early as 1828 when it first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary!

Interviewer: Unbelievable! Another trend in British English in the last decade or two is the use of Americanisms such as 'How's it going?' instead of 'How are you?' Is this likely to continue do you think?

Dr Brooks: Yes, I guess so – actually using 'guess' instead of 'think' as I just did is another example of this. But yes, as long as we continue to be influenced by American culture through films, music and TV, I think British and American English will become more similar. More recently we have also seen the influence of Australian English on British English. You may have noticed that people often use the phrase 'See you later!' to mean 'Goodbye', which is thought to be related to the popularity of Australian soap operas in this country!

Interviewer: I'd never thought of that! Well, unfortunately we're running out of time now, but thank you, Dr Brooks, for giving us some fascinating insights into the English language.

Dr Brooks: It was my pleasure.