

# Grooming talk

Kate Fox “Watching the English”:

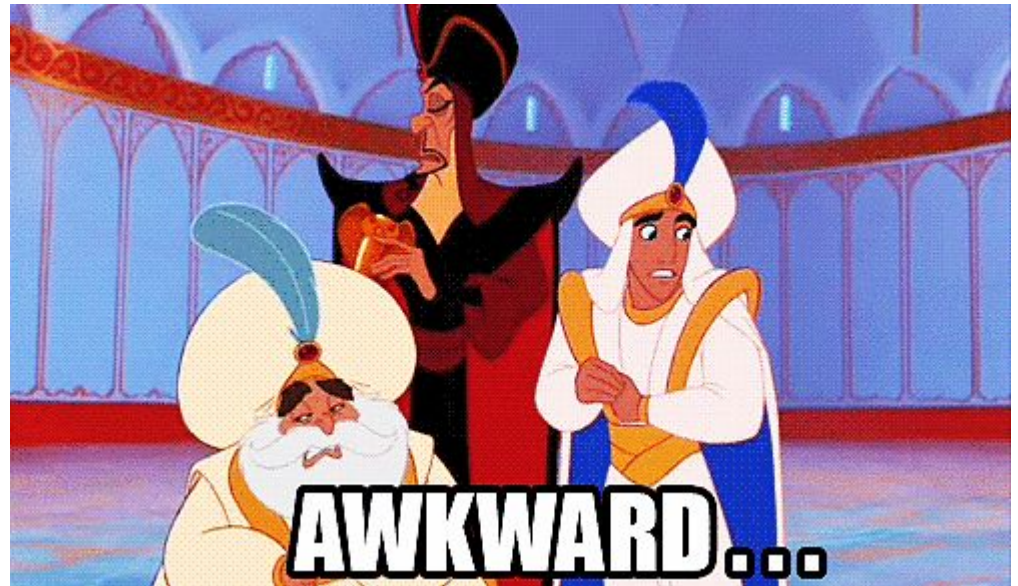
A verbal equivalent  
of picking fleas off  
each other.



# Introduction

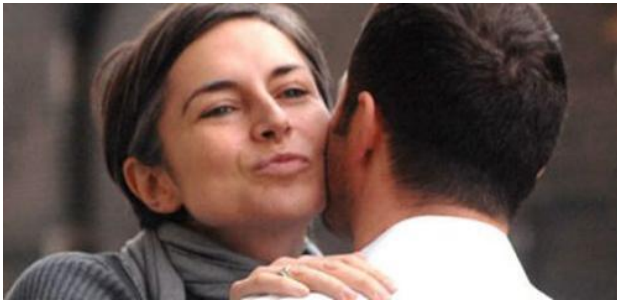
Since elimination of a universal introduction ***How do you do?*** the beginning of a conversation is very awkward.

People don't know what to say.



# Awkwardness rules

- Upper-middle and middle class took a French custom of kissing both cheeks.



- Air-kissing (“Mwah-mwahs”) – only women.

- Others



are still not sure about the right greeting.

# Handshake

- Business introduction of people meeting for the first time.
- If it's not the first time...



# No-name rule

- At a very informal meeting (like a party) introducing yourself by giving your name is for the English very inappropriate.



Hello, I'm John Smith!



They don't give their name.

**Weather comments** – a good conversation starter.

# No-name rule

They try hard to start and have a conversation in a very casual way. A chance to introduce may occur naturally:



Goodbye, nice to meet you, er,  
oh – I didn't catch your name?



I'm Bill, by the way.

# Pleased to meet you

A “common” solution to the problem of greeting.

Pleased to meet you

Plstmye...

It's alright

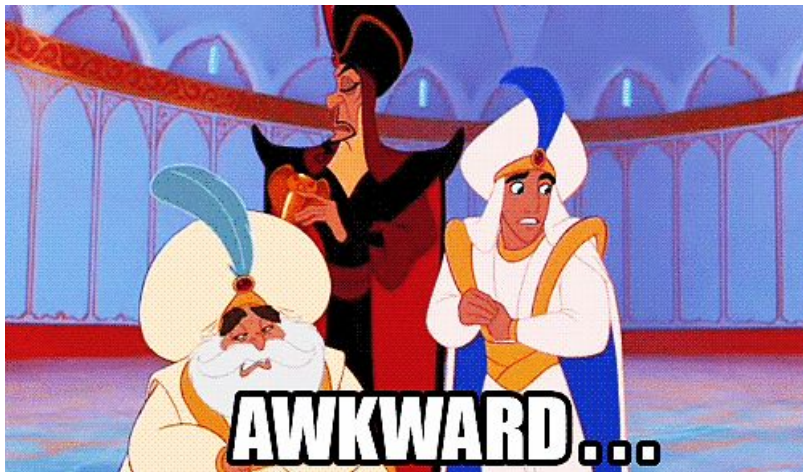
It's wrong, because it's a lie. I don't know if I am really pleased.



# So, greeting

## English

- Stiff
- Awkwardly
- Embarrassed



## Non-English

- Smoothly
- Confidently





# Gossip

- The most common form of grooming-talk among friends.
- 2/3 of conversation time is devoted to it:
  - (-Who is doing what with whom*
  - who is 'in', who is 'out' and why*
  - how to deal with difficult social situations*
  - behaviour and relationships of friends*
  - family and celebrities*
  - friends, lovers, neighbours)*
- It is “the process of informally communicating value-laden information about members of a social setting”.
- Has an evaluating nature.



# Privacy rules

- Privacy for the English is the most important.
- Personal information (name, occupation, family) is hard to get.
- But learning about others' private life is very interesting.

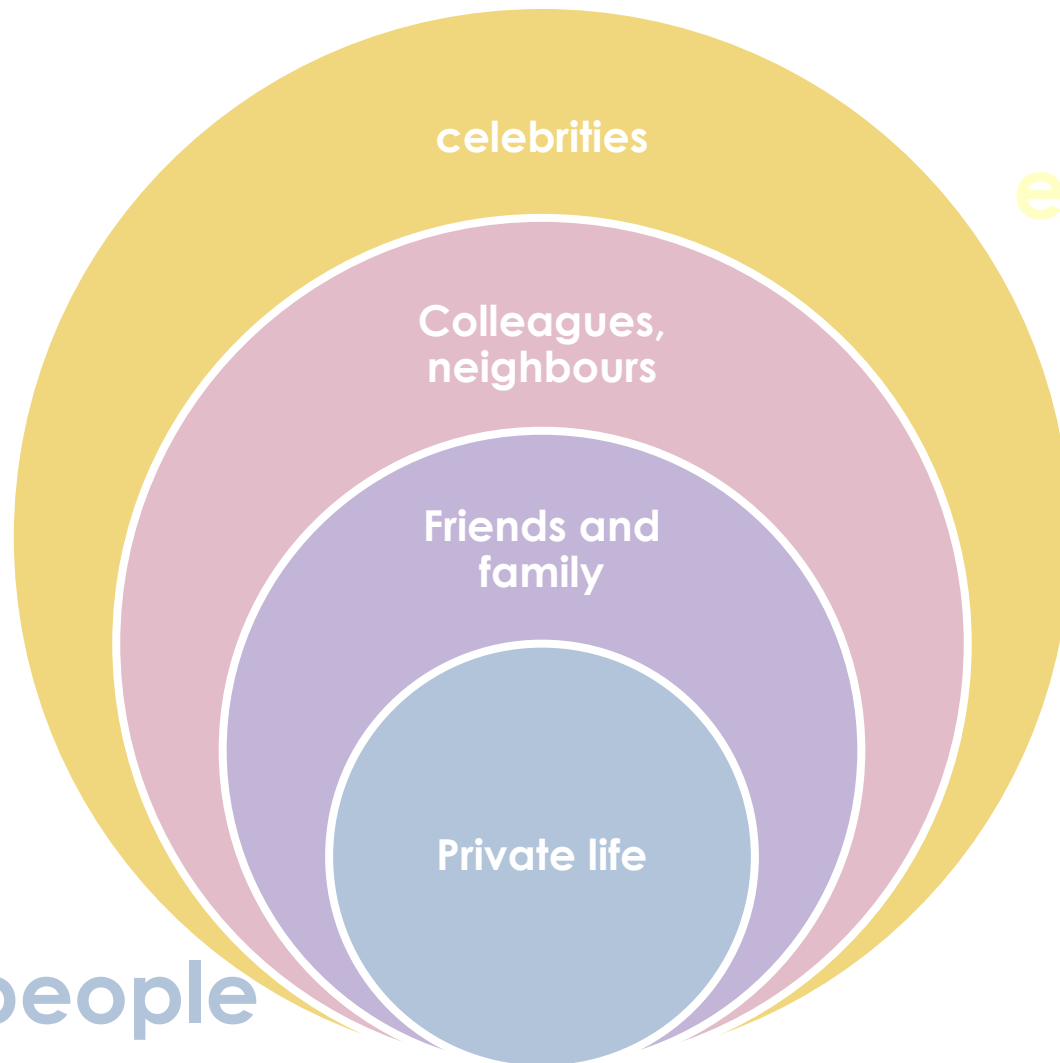


So, gossiping is a kind of 'risk'.

# The guessing-game rule

- The traffic is very hard here.
- Oh, yes, it's a nightmare – and the rush hour is even worse: do you drive to work?
- Yes, but I work at the hospital, so at least I don't have to drive into the town centre.
  - Oh, the hospital – you're a nurse, then?
- Not really.
  - So you must be the doctor.
- Yes, I'm a doctor.
  - Oh, really?!

# Distance rule



Nearly  
everybody

Closest people

# Sex Differences



## Female

- Gossip is 65% of speech;
- Talk about themselves 1/3 of time;
- Admit that they gossip;
- Gossip sound interesting.



## Male

- Gossip is 55% (football);
- “important” topics (politics, culture, work) **only** in company of women (rise to 15-20%);
- Talk about themselves 2/3 of time;
- They don't gossip, they ‘exchange information’;
- It **sounds** like something else

# Sex Differences



**Female**



**Male**

- “Ooooh – Guess what?”; “Hey, listen, you know what I heard?”; “Well, don’t tell anyone but...”
- Stress on details, history of the situation, causes.
- Need good listeners: “NO! Really?”, “Oh my GOD!”
- *Women*: “You can’t even tell it’s gossip!”
- Find details boring, irrelevant, un-manly.
- Strong reaction is unacceptable.

# Female talk: The counter-compliment rule

- Oh, I like your new haircut! Your hair looks great; I wish I had gorgeous hair like you – mine's so boring.
- Oh, no. *My hair's terrible. I wish I could have it short like you, but I just don't have the bone structure; you've got such good cheekbones.*
- Etc. etc.

# Saying goodbyes

- Goodbye.
- See you soon, then...
- Oh, yes, we must, er, goodbye...
- Thanks again.
- Lovely time.
- Oh, nothing, thank you.
- Well, goodbye, then...
- Yes, must be off - traffic, er...



— God, I thought they were never going to go.