

Greetings, everyone! My name is Laurence, and this is *English in Practice*!

MUSIC

Welcome to the fifth episode of *English in Practice*. The protagonist for this episode is the English singer-songwriter Adele, and I think the excerpt I have chosen presents a few challenges, since Adele speaks quickly and colloquially. However, what she has to say is also very interesting and may be helpful to any painters, writers, musicians, or indeed any other artists who put themselves under pressure to produce good work. There are certainly a few lessons I could learn from what Adele says in this interview.

Before we start, I'd like to mention that you are more than welcome to write in and ask any questions related to the English language or culture. You can also make requests regarding the protagonists of future episodes. I'm not sure, perhaps you would really like to hear what a certain scientist or sportsperson has to say, or maybe you find a particular actor's accent difficult to understand and would like me to do an episode on them. The reason is irrelevant. If you would like to make a request, simply get in contact.

The best way of reaching me is via the following email address: englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com. Otherwise, you can message me through the Facebook page, 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' As always, a 'like' there would also be greatly appreciated – thank you Margareta from Sweden, who liked the Facebook Page last week. Remember, if you enjoy this episode, then you would do me a big favour by liking it on whatever platform you use, sharing it on social media, or spreading it by any other means.

For those who wish to download the transcript, simply visit my website: www.jamesfable.com. The link is in the description. There you will also find the link to the Facebook page of *English in Practice* as well as to that of *Se Habla Español*, the podcast for Spanish learners by Felipe Galán.

That's all for the announcements. Let's learn a little about Adele!

MUSIC

Adele Laurie Blue Adkins, which is a fabulous name, was born in Tottenham, London, on the 5th of May 1988; that makes her 32 years of age. Adele's father left the family when she was only two, leaving her mother to raise her alone.

Adele's mother was passionate about music, and Adele recalls that she went to her first concert when she was only three or four years old, as her mother snuck her into the Brixton Academy under her coat. It was around this age that Adele also began to sing, and she asserts that she was obsessed with voices as a child.

As one might expect, Adele dedicated much of her youth to playing the guitar, singing, and writing songs, and she went on to study at the BRIT School for Performing Arts and Technology. Four months after graduating, she made a three-song demo, which her friend published on the social media platform Myspace. The popularity of this led the boss of XL Recordings to phone Adele and invite her to a meeting. Adele didn't believe the offer was real at first and actually took a friend along to the meeting, but soon enough she signed on with the music label.

Two years later, in 2008, Adele released her debut album, *19*, named after the fact that she wrote many of the songs on there when only 19 years of age. The album was an enormous success, certifying eight times platinum in the UK and three times in the US. Although due to tour the USA later that year, Adele cancelled her tour dates to be with her boyfriend – a decision which she later ascribed to her heavy drinking at the time, though Adele is also known to have a fear of flying and to suffer from homesickness when away from London.

Now, if Adele was taken aback by the enormous success of *19*, then she was in for even more of a shock with her second album, *21*, which was released in January 2011. By December that year, *21* had sold over 3.1 million copies in the UK alone, becoming the bestselling album of the 21st century, and in the 2012 Grammy Awards she won Album of the Year, Record of the Year, and Song of the Year. Her third album, *25*, was equally successful.

However, life has not always been easy for Adele. She has been forced to cancel tours on a few occasions because of a vocal-chord haemorrhage, for which she has since had surgery. Nor have things run all that smoothly in her personal life. In 2013, she and her ex-husband sued a photo agency for publishing intrusive images of their son during a family outing. And Adele has stated she has suffered from postnatal depression, anxiety, and panic attacks, including before concerts.

Unlike many musicians, Adele is also very outspoken. She received a backlash after complaining about having to pay taxes considering the poor quality of Britain's trains and its state schools, and she is critical of the ruling Conservative Party. Also, four days after the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, in which 72 people lost their lives, Adele told her fans not to waste their money on 'overpriced wine', but to donate to help the victims of the blaze.

The following audio clip comes from an interview from December 2015 and was uploaded to YouTube by the interview's channel, Skavlan. Adele has just been asked if she felt confident that she would be able to follow up the success of her second album, *21*, with another great album:

'I mean... I wouldn't say I'm, like, out of the woods or anything with it, but, like, I – for a little while I was a bit, like, I don't know if I'm ever gonna have to follow this up with anything that I like, that I feel was good enough to put out.

'Umm, but that only lasted for about a month, where I was, like, I don't know if I can do this. And then I just realised that I can't top *21*, but once I let go of that, and also once I realised that I don't wanna be in the same state of mind I was when I wrote *21* (coz it was a miserable one)... umm – that I let go and I was just, like, writing music for fun.

'And which – it felt a lot like I was making my first album again, because I was just doing it because I wanted to, rather than like, "Oh, let's try and follow it up with something," you know? You know?

‘So, I got over it and I’m... I’m fine. And I was not expecting – this is, like, madder than 21.’

It isn’t easy for me to gauge as a native speaker, but I imagine that was one of the most challenging excerpts to have appeared on this podcast so far. Adele speaks quickly, changing her mind very often, and also uses plenty of slang, informal language. In particular, she says the filler word *like* a lot and also speaks with a London accent. You might have noticed, for example, that Adele hardly pronounces the *ts* at the end of words. Instead of saying ‘lot’ or ‘bit’, she says ‘lo-’ and ‘bi-.’ In linguistics we call this a glottal stop, and it is a hallmark of the London accent. Similarly, you perhaps heard Adele say ‘wif,’ rather than ‘with’. Pronouncing that *th*-sound as an ‘f’ is also typical of the London accent.

All in all, Adele certainly isn’t the easiest person to understand, but I’m sure things will be clearer by the end of the episode. And with that said, let’s start the analysis of the first fragment, in which Adele begins her response to the question of whether she was confident that she would be able to produce another album as successful as *21*:

‘I mean... I wouldn’t say I’m, like, out of the woods or anything with it, but, like, I – for a little while I was a bit, like, I don’t know if I’m ever gonna have to follow this up with anything that I like, that I feel was good enough to put out.’

‘I mean... I wouldn’t say I’m, like, out of the woods or anything with it, but, like, I – for a little while I was a bit, like, I don’t know if I’m ever gonna have to follow this up with anything that I like, that I feel was good enough to put out.’

Very well. Let’s start with Adele’s first words, ‘I mean.’ This phrase is also typical of the London dialect and is similar to the filler words *umm* and *err*, as it grants the speaker more time to think. People usually say *I mean* in a *concessional* sense, often before conceding or admitting to, for example, the validity of a contrasting viewpoint. Imagine someone says: ‘Social media is bad for democracy. I mean, it has helped to engage young people in politics, but it has greatly weakened the integrity of democracy.’ They are saying ‘I mean’ there because they are conceding that social media has had some positive impacts on democracy, even though they believe that social media has affected

democracy negatively overall. Another example: ‘People should not drive jeeps because they are bad for the environment. I mean, if you live somewhere in the country where the roads are poor, then maybe you need one. But if you live in the city, you definitely don’t need a jeep.’

It becomes clearer why Adele starts her response with ‘I mean’ when we look at what she says after this: ‘I wouldn’t say I’m, like, out of the woods or anything with it.’ *Out of the woods* is a common saying and means that you are out of uncertainty or danger. It is usually used in the negative. For example, ‘Denis’ surgery went well, but he isn’t out of the woods yet. His blood pressure is still high.’ That means, ‘the most dangerous part of Denis’ treatment is over, namely the surgery, but some risk still remains because his high blood pressure is high.’ Another example: ‘The number of new corona cases in the UK has dropped significantly since April, but the country isn’t out of the woods yet.’ Since there is the chance of a second wave of infections, the UK is not yet out of danger, though it is over the worst of the pandemic.

In the case of Adele, she is responding to the interviewer’s inference that she can relax now because her new album, *25*, has already enjoyed great success. Adele is not so sure this is the case, for *25* had only been out for around one month at this point. That’s why she says, ‘I mean,’ suggesting the interviewer isn’t entirely correct, and then, ‘I wouldn’t say I’m, like, out of the woods or anything with it.’ To put it simply, the interviewer essentially says, ‘You’ve managed to produce an album as great as *21*, so you can relax now,’ and Adele replies, ‘Hmm, I’m not certain. *25* has certainly gone down well, but it’s a little early to say if it will be as successful as *21*.’ I hope that’s clear. It wasn’t the easiest thing to understand and certainly not the easiest to explain.

After this, Adele starts to speak about how she felt following the release of her second album, *21*. I expect this part doesn’t present too many problems. Adele says *21* was such a success that it made her uncertain of whether she would be able to make more music that she is happy to put out. This last phrase, *to put out*, means ‘to publish’, ‘to make available’, ‘to release.’ It’s a concern that many artists have, especially ones who have enjoyed great success early on in their careers. This is especially true of musicians, as they do not wish to become *one-hit-wonders*, meaning they become known for only one

hit song. The pop duo Los del Río, for example, is considered a one-hit-wonder, because their dance song *Macarena* achieved global fame, but none of their other songs ever became so successful.

Just a couple more notes before we move on. Adele says that she wasn't sure if she was (quote) 'ever gonna have to follow [21] up with anything that [she] likes.' This is grammatically correct, though it doesn't make much sense, for 'have to' denotes obligation, not ability. What Adele meant to say was that she wasn't sure if she was ever gonna *be able* to follow 21 up with anything that she likes. Similarly, Adele should have said at the very end, 'that I feel is good enough to put out', not '*was* good enough to put out'. This is because she has moved into the present tense here, for she is speaking about her thoughts at the time.

In the second fragment, Adele elaborates on how she felt about the prospect of trying to produce an album as good as her second, 21:

'Umm, but that only lasted for about a month, where I was, like, I don't know if I can do this. And then I just realised that I can't top 21, but once I let go of that, and also once I realised that I don't wanna be in the same state of mind I was when I wrote 21 (coz it was a miserable one)... umm – that I let go and I was just, like, writing music for fun.'

'Umm, but that only lasted for about a month, where I was, like, I don't know if I can do this. And then I just realised that I can't top 21, but once I let go of that, and also once I realised that I don't wanna be in the same state of mind I was when I wrote 21 (coz it was a miserable one)... umm – that I let go and I was just, like, writing music for fun.'

So, Adele says that she spent roughly one month worrying that she wouldn't be able to write any more songs as good as those on her second album. However, she then realised that she couldn't 'top 21', which means she concluded that she couldn't produce a new album better than 21, and so she let go of this fear. When Adele says, 'top 21', she is not referring to the music charts, to the most popular 21 songs at any one time; she is using the verb *to top*, which means 'to do better than.'

Adele goes on to say that she realised she did not want to be in the same ‘state of mind’ while writing her third album, *25*, as she was when she wrote *21*. *State of mind* is a common way of referring to someone’s current psychological condition, how someone is feeling at a particular time. For example, ‘Tim was drinking a lot last week because he was in a bad state of mind.’ Another example, this time positive: ‘Diane was in a great state of mind after winning the race.’

Now, Adele explains that she didn’t wish to re-enter this previous state of mind (quote) ‘coz it was a miserable one.’ *Coz* is a shorthand, colloquial form of *because* and is written c-o-z. Therefore, Adele was miserable, unhappy, while writing her second album, and so she was pleased to realise that she did not wish for the same to happen again while producing her third album. In fact, it was a liberating, freeing, feeling, as Adele says that she started ‘writing music for fun.’ That means she no longer felt under pressure to produce award-winning music; she was simply making music because she wanted to. As any artist will tell you – whether musician, painter, writer, or otherwise – artists usually produce their best work when they do not feel under pressure and when they are enjoying the very act of creation. This attitude, this liberated state of mind, surely enabled Adele to follow up *21* with another album of such high quality.

In the third and penultimate fragment, Adele expands on how she felt while writing her third album, *25*:

‘And which – it felt a lot like I was making my first album again, because I was just doing it because I wanted to, rather than like, “Oh, let’s try and follow it up with something,” you know? You know?’

‘And which – it felt a lot like I was making my first album again, because I was just doing it because I wanted to, rather than like, “Oh, let’s try and follow it up with something,” you know? You know?’

Excellent. Adele gives us more details here on what she said at the end of the second fragment. After saying, ‘And which,’ she changes her mind and begins to explain that

writing 25 with this liberated state of mind, without feeling the need to produce another bestselling album, felt a lot like writing her first album again. And why is that? Because she was (quote) ‘doing it because [she] wanted to’. Now, people will often use the verb *do* in informal conversation when it is obvious what they mean from the context. In this instance, we already know that Adele is speaking about producing her third album, and so it is clear that *doing it* refers to ‘making music.’

Adele then contrasts this attitude of making music for the fun of it to making music for the sake of achievement. She says that she was writing her third album simply because she wanted to, rather (quote) ‘than like, “Oh, let’s try and follow it up with something,” you know? You know?’ Once again, Adele uses very colloquial language here, and technically she should have said: ‘rather than *being* like, “Oh, let’s try and follow it up with something.”’ This is because she is speaking as though she held a certain attitude; and it is for this reason that she effectively inserts a quote. She is imagining here that she held the attitude of trying to produce one great album after another for the sake of consistent achievement. Essentially, Adele says here: ‘I was making music for the fun of it, rather than trying to follow up 21 with another great album.’ However, she speaks quickly and informally in this interview, which is why she doesn’t express herself as clearly as she perhaps could.

If you listened to the last episode (on David Attenborough), you will now that the rhetorical questions at the end of this fragment, *You know? You know?*, are a way of appealing for agreement. Adele is saying: ‘I was just making music because I loved it, not because I was trying to produce another successful album, do you know what I mean? Can you understand what I mean?’

I hope you do know what I mean, otherwise this podcast isn’t achieving its aim. Here comes the final fragment:

‘So, I got over it and I’m... I’m fine. And I was not expecting – this is, like, madder than 21.’

‘So, I got over it and I’m... I’m fine. And I was not expecting – this is, like, madder than 21.’

Okay. *To get over something* is ‘to come to terms with something’, ‘to recover from something.’ In this case, Adele got over the realisation that she was not going to produce another album as good as *21*; she accepted this as truth and was okay with it. That’s why she says she’s ‘fine’ now.

However, Adele was not entirely correct about this, as she subsequently explains: ‘And I was not expecting – this is, like, madder than *21*.’ Although she changes her mind midsentence, it is clear that Adele was going to say something like, ‘And I was not expecting *25* to be so successful.’ In fact, she does express exactly this sentiment, this idea, only in a more colloquial way. She says, ‘This is, like, madder than *21*,’ referring to her album *25*, which had been out for roughly three weeks at this point.

Now, what does Adele mean by ‘madder’? Well, *mad* is a derogatory, rude, pejorative, way of saying that someone is clinically insane, psychologically unstable. However, in British slang *mad* means ‘unbelievable in a good way’, ‘astounding’, a little like how Spaniards might say they are ‘loco’ for something. *Insane* has the exact same meaning.

British English, however, has many ways of saying ‘mad,’ such as *insane*, *crazy*, *bonkers*, *nuts*. As a general rule – and only a general rule – *mad* and *insane* are used as slang to mean ‘unbelievable in a good way’, ‘astounding’, while *crazy*, *bonkers* and *nuts* mean ‘mad’ in a negative or neutral way. For example, ‘Hayden is crazy if he thinks he can climb a mountain without any training.’ Or, ‘I met someone in the supermarket today who was completely nuts. They kept asking me if I had seen their pet octopus.’

So, why was the release of Adele’s third album, *25*, madder than the release of her second album? Well, let me read out the numbers to you: *25* broke first-week sales records in the UK, the US, and other countries. The lead single, ‘Hello’, became the first song in the US to sell over a million digital copies within a week of release. And *25* became the bestselling album of 2015. All in all, Adele was certainly correct in saying that the release of *25* was ‘madder’ than that of her second album.

Splendid. Let's have another listen to the whole excerpt, shall we? Remember, Adele is responding to the question of whether she felt confident that she would be able to produce another album as excellent as *21*:

'I mean... I wouldn't say I'm, like, out of the woods or anything with it, but, like, I – for a little while I was a bit, like, I don't know if I'm ever gonna have to follow this up with anything that I like, that I feel was good enough to put out.

'Umm, but that only lasted for about a month, where I was, like, I don't know if I can do this. And then I just realised that I can't top *21*, but once I let go of that, and also once I realised that I don't wanna be in the same state of mind I was when I wrote *21* (coz it was a miserable one)... umm – that I let go and I was just, like, writing music for fun.

'And which – it felt a lot like I was making my first album again, because I was just doing it because I wanted to, rather than like, "Oh, let's try and follow it up with something," you know? You know?

'So, I got over it and I'm... I'm fine. And I was not expecting – this is, like, madder than *21*.'

The number of downloads I get on this podcast may not be as mad as Adele's sales records, but *English in Practice* did recently reach the landmark of 750 downloads, which pleased me greatly indeed. So, thank you to anyone who has helped to spread this podcast, whether that is by telling friends, sharing it on social media, or simply by liking each episode. As always, I'm very grateful to people who do any of those things and would appreciate it enormously if you would do the same for this episode as well.

Even more than that though, I would love to hear from you, so please do get in contact to tell me a bit about yourself and to give some feedback. Once again, the email address is englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com, and the Facebook page is called 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' If you would like to watch the whole interview with Adele, you can find the link at the bottom of the transcript.

On another brief note, I'm working hard on the sound quality and have bought new equipment. I'm still getting my head round the program Audacity and apologise for any issues with the audio.

That's all from me for today. I hope you have enjoyed this episode of *English in Practice*. Look out for a short story episode next week, and for another interview episode the week after. All the best. Over and out.

Watch the whole interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16cH5a16Oig&t=202s>
Se Habla Español: <https://www.facebook.com/sehablaespanolpodcast/>