

## Can you put up with it?

Much as I love Japan, if I'm honest, I would have to say that it does have its occasional irritations. Chief among which for me must be the infuriating jingles that JR chooses to broadcast endlessly over its public address system at its larger stations for reasons best known to itself. I have nothing but respect for the efficiency, cleanliness and punctuality of Japan's rail system but the last thing I want to hear when I am wending my weary way to work on a cold Saturday morning is a tinny, jolly melody invading the precious bubble of privacy I have managed to create for myself in my Sobu line carriage. But, being British, I do what we British do best – I put up with it. (Gaman shimasu).

The British, like the Japanese, are a nation renowned for their stoic acceptance of discomfort. We don't like to complain, seeing it as a last resort to be employed only when all other avenues have been explored. Indeed complaining is viewed as something of an admission of defeat which is shown by the way we often preface our (rare) complaints with an apology, as in: 'I'm sorry but.....(there's a cockroach in my shepherd's pie)'.

'To put up with (something)' is what is known by grammarians as a phrasal verb, of which the English language has innumerable examples. Phrasal verbs can be tricky as the meaning can be difficult to infer from the context but a clue is often to be found in the preposition. In this case 'up' suggests a positive connotation. We can see this by looking at some other examples: dress up – put on your best clothes, tidy up – make the room look respectable and cheer up – stop looking so miserable (being Scottish and possessed of a naturally gloomy demeanour I hear this last one about 10 times a day which irritates me but.....I put up with it). We also have an expression Things are looking up which means things are getting better. So putting up with life's irritations and not complaining about them is seen as an admirable quality.

This tendency to endure coupled with typical British understatement and modesty reveals itself in some other interesting phrases. If a British person is asked about the state of his affairs or his life in general he is apt to reply 'I can't complain.' or more casually 'mustn't grumble' which could mean anything from fine to fantastic.

The up side (advantage) of all this is that the UK is a fairly comfortable and stress free place to visit. Generally speaking you can relax secure in the knowledge that angry, embarrassing scenes are unlikely to be enacted before your eyes, people will queue patiently and visitors to London will find that although the Underground may not be quite as efficient as its counterpart in Tokyo at least there are none of those awful jingles to put up with.