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No Introductions Necessary

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Believe me. Just because you know someone from Ireland or England, it doesn't mean that I want to meet them. I emigrated, remember? I do not necessarily have something in common with a stranger just because they speak English. There are 350,000,000 English speakers in the world. I don't need to meet them all.

Some time ago my friends and I were having a drink in a sawdust¹ floored bar in Donostia. The barman called us over and introduced us to a tourist family who were at another table. My friends and I are Irish Catholics. This tourist was an ex British soldier who had served in Northern Ireland.

He was terribly embarrassed. We were embarrassed for him. The barman was confused. In the end we had a good chat and a few drinks with him and we all wished each other well. But what on earth was the barman thinking?

In a previous job I used to work with a north American. He was from Seattle. Although we shared a language I had more in common with my Spanish colleagues.

His head was so much in 'cloud cuckoo land'² that it didn't matter what came out of his mouth. He once suggested an 'Employee of the Month' award. When we stopped laughing, the rest of us pointed out that we were not working for MacDonalds. He didn't understand. He probably still doesn't.

I have more in common with a Basque farmer or a Madrid traffic policeman than I do with a worshipper of corporate America. The common language is irrelevant.

I live in Madrid now and I meet all sorts of people. Australian surfers, the Canadian hippies, the Little Englanders³ and the insatiable Irish and the soporific New Zealanders. I don't mind helping with directions and the odd translation in a shop - but that's where it ends.

The English speaking world reaches from Botany Bay in Australia to the Canadian Rocky Mountains. We can all listen to the BBC but we can't all get on with each other.

For conversations I have my friends Dana, Iuliana, Charlotte, Estelle, Charo, Carmen and Sara. I do not work for the Madrid Tourist Authority and I am not the Irish ambassador.

So next time you meet an English speaker, remember he's visiting here to meet people like you. Not people "like" him. (who probably aren't like him at all.)

¹ Sawdust is what they put on the floor in small bars. It looks like sand but it really wood dust.

² Hopelessly out of touch with reality (from Aristophanes' The Birds)

³ This means English people who still think England has an empire.