

**Kirsten** – Hi Flor. Thank you so much for joining me today. How are you?

**Flor** – I'm good thank you. Hi Kirsten.

**Kirsten** – It's been a while. I haven't spoken to you for, well face to face, on camera, for a long time now.

**Flor** – No, probably ten years.

**Kirsten** – Probably has.

**Flor** – Yeah, I think it has been 10 years. We've been chatting sporadically, but, yeah.

**Kirsten** – Yeah, not recorded on podcasts anyway.

**Flor** – no, no.

**Kirsten** – So. Thank you so much for agreeing to have this chat with me. Um. KI already mentioned that I would have described your English as fluent when you arrived in Australia, but you were placed in North Queensland, in Australia, who are very famous for having very strong, regional, Australian accents. So why don't you talk to me a little bit about how you found that.

**Flor** – Well, when I first came to Australia, I actually flew to Perth and I stayed here for a week. And I didn't have any issues with the English Language here. Basically, I can't even tell accents too much. Like, for now, if you show me, if you show me someone speaking in English in a different accent, I cannot tell where they came from. So probably in Perth it was the same, like I just couldn't tell. But going to North Queensland was a different story. It was just the weird... I felt like they were speaking a completely different language than English. And they were speaking English, I just couldn't understand the accent. Either they were very fast, or they were drawling. Um, and it was a drawl that I wasn't familiar with. I can't really describe it, it's just drawling some of the words. So probably I understood like 75% of what most people were saying and then like 20% of what some of the other people were saying, especially operators. Not that I... but yeah.....

**Kirsten** – Yeah, so like the older men who have been working in the industry have perfected that accent and I find them, or I found them hard to understand at times as well. Not being a North Queenslander.

**Flor** – And I think I've got this perpetually confused look when I was talking to operators. They'd just repeat it, but they repeated it at the same speed and the same accent, so it was just trying to pick, okay, that was the word he said. Yeah.

**Kirsten** – So, what did you do to try and overcome those communication difficulties. Did you have to rely on written communication more, or?

**Flor** – Written was actually better. I think that was why I started to prefer emails in terms of communication because there's no accent in emails, you can just understand it. Spoken though, you can't really get away with it when you're talking to operators. Most of the time they're quite patient. I think it helped that I was a graduate during that time and they knew I was learning and they knew I came from another country. Most of them were just surprised that I could actually speak English and they could understand me.

**Kirsten** – Your English was very good.

**Flor** – so I think that helped a bit. The problem was I understood half of what everyone else was saying. So, they were quite patient. There were a few that were just like not that patient, but in general a lot of people were quite good in trying to explain what they'd just said. And like, over a year, or two years, I got used to the accent and I just started understanding everyone and I forgot that they've got a different accent. It's only when I moved back to Perth that I realised that Oh my god, North Queensland really has a different accent.

**Kirsten** – Yeah. That's for sure. I ahh... My accent changes when I move from one place to another. If I'm speaking with someone from the north part of Australia, and Darwin's another place that's quite similar to Townsville for accent, then my accent changes. It's very different to my accent in Melbourne.

**Flor** – Oh wow.

**Kirsten** – I don't even think about it. It just happens. Excellent. No now you've terrified everyone who is considering relocating to North Queensland in Australia,

**Flor** – It's not as terrifying as the drop bears, so it's okay.

**Kirsten** – Ah, the drop bears! Why don't you share with people what drop bears are. They're quite funny.

**Flor** – oh, apparently it's um. They live in North Queensland and if you go through the woods or something, you're just going to get drop bears falling. And I'm very gullible so I thought that was actually true until someone said no, they're just like pulling your leg (making a joke).

**Kirsten** – it's a joke that Australians play on foreigners. Koalas that fall out of trees on people. They're not real, that's for sure.

**Flor** – Yeah.

**Kirsten** – So what advice would you give someone who was considering coming to Australia, maybe in a regional area. Because, let's be honest, most people who get visas for working in mining in Australia will be in regional areas and experiencing these accents.

**Flor** – Um, I don't really have any advice except for just don't be shy in asking people to repeat what they've said if you don't understand it. And just be honest about it. Most people are actually quite accommodating. It's very rare that you'll find someone who would get annoyed at you for trying to clarify something. Especially if they know that English is not your first language. Because even for example, even here in Perth, I use that excuse a lot and you know, say English is my second language, so just deal with it. Um, and they just laugh because....

**Kirsten** – We're Australian, we laugh at everything.

**Flor** – So, I think it's just that. Just be patient. You will get used to it. And the other one is make sure you ask for clarification and don't try to, um, just live in a world where you didn't understand 60% of what everyone else was saying.

**Kirsten** – And you came out with, you were one of the very first people to come out, but there was a whole group of you. So, by the end, I think the graduates, um, it was a graduate program that was sponsored with BHP Billiton. There was, oh, I was trying to count the other day, I think about 10 of you.

**Flor** – there was 11 yeah.

**Kirsten** – 11. Oh, okay. Sorry. Someone, I've missed someone there.

**Flor** – So, there was an Indonesian, two Russian, and then the rest were Colombians.

**Kirsten** – were they all Colombians? Or where they all throughout South America, I can't remember.

**Flor** – I think they were all Colombians. Yeah maybe South Americans maybe, yeah.

**Kirsten** – Yeah. And I noticed that, um, that some of the languages had more difficulty with English, than others. And now I understand why. So, um. There's two different types of languages, one is the stress timed language and one is a syllable timed language. So, English, the way we put our words together is syllable timed (incorrect – it is stress timed, my apologies for my mistake here) It's very rhythmic, some words we drop off, some words we lengthen to keep a rhythm and some languages are not like that at all. And Spanish is one of the big ones. I did notice that the graduates from Latin America seemed to struggle with English a little bit more than the others. Do you, did you.. I mean, you were in the inside, I was not inside with you guys, do you think that as well?

**Flor** – I think it was similar. I mean, for the Russian graduates, the South American graduates, it was similar level of difficulty. Um. You could tell that some of them were struggling with trying to translate what they were thinking in their head in their native language to English. And I think it's more just exposure to the language. If you weren't speaking it in your country, prior to that, you will always struggle. Because, as with everything, it just comes with practise. Um, those people now, who used to struggle initially in their first year in Australia, now speak perfect English, because it's been a couple of yeah.

**Kirsten** – And they're all senior people in very high places, offering me jobs.

**Flor** – Yeah.

**Kirsten** – So they've leapfrogged and off they go. And yeah, they've got amazing careers. And most of them are still in Australia.

**Flor** – Yeah.

**Kirsten** – I know of one who's gone returned back home, two maybe. They've all stayed in Australia, which is great for Australia.

**Flor** – so I really just think it's time and practise. And just like with everything else, you get used to it when you're um, doing it for a longer time.

**Kirsten** – and do you think there's something they can do in order to prepare themselves before they come?

**Flor** – Well, obviously trying to get some English language lesson would probably be good if that is not your first or second language, if you can't speak it fluently or write it well. Um, taking tutorial lessons as well would be good. Because I'm going to use my experience in studying French for this one, I wanted to study in France when I was in the Philippines and to be able to learn the language and actually be fluent in it, I had to take classes in the Philippines. And they were weekly classes. So not just written classes, they were

conversational ones as well. Um, so trying to do studies and then practise with native speakers of the language is absolutely helpful.

**Kirsten** – Okay. And did you do anything while you were learning French, like watching movies in French, or.... Listen to the radio....

**Flor** – yes. Watching movies, going to restaurants that basically have....

**Kirsten** – That's a good idea!

**Flor** – yeah, going to restaurants, like French restaurants, where the menus are French, you order in French. Yeah, so really just trying to incorporate it in to your life. Obviously not 100% if you're not in that position, but as much as you can. Yep.

**Kirsten** – Yeah. Awesome. And do you still speak any French? Do you still practise, or...

**Flor** – No. It's been twelve years. I can understand some of it. So when we went to Paris, I can speak basic French, and I can understand most of what everyone is saying but speaking it is a completely different.... Umm, yeah. It's completely different. Because I haven't spoken it in twelve years.

**Kirsten** – Excellent. I'm going to make an observation. Your English is so different. Like we said, there's been maybe 10 years since.... Normally we talk on electronic means. We don't normally talk face to person...

**Flor** – in person

**Kirsten** – and your English is, your accent is so much different.

**Flor** – is it?

**Kirsten** – yeah.

**Flor** – I thought it was still the same.

**Kirsten** – No. You're words, I would guess I would say, it's faster. But you're connecting your speech, you've picked up all of the native speech patterns from English, which you didn't have before. But I've been listening, and I don't hear the slang.

**Flor** – Oh, I was wondering... Oh. No I don't think I've picked up any Australian, umm, accent or slang. Umm, because when I first came here, to Australia, the first thing that the HR guy from Queensland Nickel was saying to me was, oh are you from America? Because you sound American?

**Kirsten** – I said that to you as well.

**Flor** – You know where I came from. So, I've always had an American accent. No one's even said anything about an Australian accent, so yeah. But I didn't realise that it had actually changed.

**Kirsten** – Yeah. I not even, I mean you still have that slight American sound to it, but umm, but yeah, your speech patterns have become significantly more native Australian.

**Flor** – oh, okay. Probably because I don't even speak to any Filipinos now.

**Kirsten** – When you're back in the Philippines, is it just as easy to speak in Tagalog?

**Flor** – Yes, it is still. But I haven't been to the Philippines in three years because of COVID.

**Kirsten** – Covid, mm.

**Flor** – Yep, so I haven't been able to practise my Filipino, but it's very easy because obviously when I see my friends here, but it's only every quarter or every few months that I see my Filipino friends. If Jess was with us, like my partner, we would still have, we would still be speaking in English, because obviously she can only speak English.

**Kirsten** – Mmm. And in the Philippines, English is very broadly spoken. Very common. When I went back to Australia, I have not been back for three years as well, thank you COVID, and my parents, who are Australian and very direct. The first things they said to me, we just got back from the airport, we just got back to their house and we were having a coffee, and my step mother said to me, What's happened to your accent? And I was like, what? What do you mean what's happened to my accent? I still sound Australian. But my speech patterns have changed as well. After living in non-native English speaking countries for so long, I've had to disconnect my words and take all of the speech patterns out of my communication. And I've just noticed you've put them in. So it's very easy in time to adapt.

**Flor** – Yeah. Ah, I didn't even notice it. But my partner does tell me that when I speak to the dogs, I have a very different English accent.

**Kirsten** – they're non native English speaking apparently.

**Flor** – No, no. She said when you speak to the dogs in English, it's a completely different accent. And it's probably the Filipino accent, because I try to speak to them in Filipino as well. So, I don't know. You just like switch very quickly without noticing it.

**Kirsten** – Alright. There's one other thing that I want to, to touch on. And that is, um, cultural communication. And I can remember very, very clearly, when you arrived in Australia, I probably teased you a little bit about how direct Australians are and how indirect Filipinos are.

**Flor** – I know.

**Kirsten** – And. You remember how I would challenge you to say no?

**Flor** – Yeah. I know I have a problem saying no. Although not as much as before, but yeah.

**Kirsten** – I was going to ask you. So, Filipinos are very indirect communicators, very polite, very gentle with their language and Australians are....not.

**Flor** – blunt.

**Kirsten** – Very blunt. Often considered rude in other cultures, cause we are so blunt, although we would hate to think we were being rude. How are you finding the cultural communication now? Are you an effective no-sayer yet?

**Flor** - At work, I'm a very effective no-sayer.

**Kirsten** – Excellent, good!

**Flor** – That's been switched, yep. I think again, it comes with experience and practise and because of the type of job you need to do you can't just accept everything or be very indirect about things. Especially if you're managing a lot of people. Um yeah. But initially. It was quite a struggle because I felt that people were, not just being very rude but just very blunt.

**Kirsten** – okay.

**Flor** – Which is kind of good in a way, because I'm kind of like that. I just don't say it out loud. I'm just nicer in person. But I'm like, yeah, but I'm still not going to do it. But yeah, not direct enough. But I kind of appreciated that now, because it saves a lot of time and effort in trying to figure out what someone is trying to say and what they're willing and capable of doing. So I've got a better appreciation of it. Rather than waste time with conversations that go nowhere because someone just doesn't want to say no. Or is just trying to be nice about it.

**Kirsten** – Yeah. It's actually one of the struggles I had when I left Australia and went to work in Asia. I was offending everyone, because I was being direct. And they didn't understand our direct communication. So I had to learn very quickly to be less direct to be effective. But also, the people who would work on my team, I would have a very honest conversation and ask them to be more direct with me. Because I couldn't understand. I didn't know whether they didn't want to do something, or were not able to do something and I needed to know that to be able to help them.

**Flor** – Yeah.

**Kirsten** – I couldn't help them if I didn't understand.

**Flor** – Yeah, like the directness has now removed any ambiguity. Unlike before when it's like you don't know whether, you're right, whether it's a capability or a willingness issue. Umm, yeah.

**Kirsten** – Yeah. It's interesting that's umm been the hardest thing for me, about living in Asia. Is how to be indirect and effective. I really had to work hard at that.

Excellent. So, that's probably taken up enough of your very, very busy schedule. But before we finish, is there anything last minute advice or tips that you want to share about people who might be considering moving overseas, well your experience is Australia, but anything to give, advice?

**Flor** – No, nothing I think that I haven't said before. One is obviously be, try to be prepared before going overseas. Like learn the basics of the language. People are always, I've found, always helpful when your trying and you're asking for help. Rather than closing off and not even attempting to help or attempting to learn the language. And over time, with practise, and in time, it will get better. That's really just it, I think.

**Kirsten** – Would you recommend people do it?

**Flor** – Absolutely! Like right now I'm considering moving to Italy and I don't know Italian.

**Kirsten** – That sounds awesome! When you're there, I'm not too far away in Egypt, let me know and I will come and visit and drink coffee.

**Flor** – yup. I've already gotten Jess on board with the Europe, with the moving to Europe thing. So I just have to choose a country.

**Kirsten** – Excellent. None of us sit still very long, do we.

**Flor** – No.

**Kirsten** – Well, thank you again. It was super awesome to catch up with you.

**Flor** – thank you.

**Kirsten** – And best of luck with these potential moves overseas again. Maybe we'll see each other face to face again somewhere outside of Australia.