



Video 10 – Real Vocabulary: what does *momentarily* mean?

Hi there! For speakers of British English, *momentarily* means “just for a moment” or “for a very short time”, and you would use it in a sentence like this:

“Reaching the door, she paused momentarily, then knocked.”

But what about a sentence like this one:

“Please remain in the waiting room. The doctor will see you momentarily.”

This is clearly a different use of *momentarily*: it means that the doctor will see you very soon or in a short time from now. This second use of *momentarily* is typical of American English, It’s rarely (if ever) used in British English.

So although the sentence is not “wrong”, it wouldn’t be appropriate in a context where British English is the standard variety, because the people you are talking to might misinterpret what you are saying. The same point applies to words that are typical of a particular *register*: there’s nothing wrong with describing something as “really cool”, but an informal expression like this wouldn’t be a good one to use in a court of law, for example.

You will sometimes hear people criticizing a usage simply because it belongs to a different variety of English or to a particular register. Some British speakers, in particular, will often talk about Americanisms as if they were mistakes. But such criticisms are misinformed. The key is “appropriacy” – matching the words and expressions you use to the situation you’re using them in.

In my next video I will discuss when to use the word *less*, and when to use *fewer*.

Thanks for watching!