



ESL Podcast 156 – Rumors and Secrets

GLOSSARY

to mean – to be talking about; to refer to

* Who are you talking about? Do you mean Brian?

to guess – to think; to believe, but not be completely sure of something

* Stephanie is pretty nice, I guess.

mysterious circumstances – a situation where no one understand how something came to be or happened; something that is not clear, with reasons not known to everyone

* There were a lot of mysterious circumstances, which made the police officer believe the death to be a murder, not a suicide.

hush-hush – secret; not talked about

* Clarice was hush-hush about the baby until she was six months pregnant.

to gossip – to talk about someone or something when they are not there, usually without knowing any facts

* After a long day at work, my coworkers and I like to go to a cafe and gossip about their love lives.

unlike some people... – a phrase used to criticize someone, showing that that person does not have good intentions or show good behavior that other people have shown

* Monique helped me a lot when I first started working here, unlike some people...

rumor – a story created by someone about someone else, without know the truth or the facts

* High school students are always starting rumors about their teachers.

to give (someone) a chance – to let someone prove that they are good or good at something before judging them

* Give me a chance and I will show you that I can do the job.

to cut (someone) some slack – to give someone some time or space to make mistakes without punishing them for it, usually because they have a good reason for making those mistakes

* Daisy may have lost the files, but cut her some slack. This is her first day on the job.



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skeletons in the closet – secrets that one is ashamed of; bad things or behaviors from one’s past that one does not want others to know about

* I bet the new mayor has a lot of skeletons in his closet.

take it from me – listen to me; believe me; I assure you

* Take it from me: Charlie is a great guy.

dirty little secrets – things hidden from other people about one’s shameful past; things related to bad circumstances or behaviors that no one else knows

* Melanie likes to find out people’s dirty little secrets and tell others about them.

to make an enemy of – to make someone angry at one; to cause someone to distrust one

* He may have gotten a better job in the company, but he also made an enemy of his old boss.

in the process – during; while something else is happening

* In the process of cleaning the house, I found my old cell phone.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who likes to gossip?
 - a) Kate.
 - b) Libby.
 - c) Jack.

 2. Why does Kate want to find out more about Bernard?
 - a) She wants to find out what secrets he's hiding.
 - b) Libby likes him and wants her to find out if he has a girlfriend.
 - c) Jack is jealous of Bernard.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

mean

The word “mean,” in this podcast, means to be talking about or to refer to someone or something: “When you said that you’d like to go to the concert did you mean that you’d like to go with me?” The word “mean” is also commonly used to describe behavior or actions that are unkind and meant to cause hurt: “Why is your big brother so mean to you all the time?” Used informally, “mean” can actually refer to something that is excellent or fantastic: “I’m really looking forward to eating dinner at Manuel’s house. He’s a mean cook!” Finally, “to mean well” means to have good intentions, even though the result of one’s actions are not helpful: “Michaela means well, but with her help, the project may take even longer to complete!”

to take it from (one)

In this podcast, “take it from me” means believe me or trust me, or I assure you that something is true: “You can take it from me: If you try to drive this car with those brakes, you’re sure to get into an accident.” “To take it” means to be able to tolerate or accept something, even though it is difficult or unpleasant: “This house is always cold and damp. I can’t take it anymore.” Or, “When the boss yelled at Sarah in front of the entire office, she just stood there and took it.” Finally, “to take it or leave it” is a phrase used to tell someone that the offer one made is not negotiable and that one does not care if he or she accepts it: “My final offer for the used car was \$2,000, and I told the owner to take it or leave it.”



CULTURE NOTE

Banning Office Gossip

Office gossip is often a problem for companies. “Gossip” is casual talk about other people and things that may or may not be true. Gossip can reduce “productivity” (how much work people do), and it is often bad for “morale” (people’s confidence and enthusiasm). Anyone who has worked in an office knows how much time can be spent passing information or “speculating” (guessing without any facts) about other employees, and the effects of such talk on those co-workers.

Because of these “negative” (bad; not good) effects, some companies are banning gossip. “To ban” is to not allow something, usually by creating a rule or law. For example, in one Chicago company, the employees agreed that when an employee says something about someone else “behind their back” (without them knowing), that employee has to repeat the gossip to that person’s face. The result was that one employee who was seen by other employees as being “unproductive” (not doing much work) got a chance to explain that she “negotiated” (reached an agreement for) fewer work hours because she was still going to school.

Another “rumor: (story that is often untrue) was that one employee was dating another employee. This wasn’t true, and in fact, that employee had recently become “engaged” (promised to marry) someone else not working in the office.

The owner of the company said that since he “instituted” (started) this policy, business had improved “significantly” (a lot; greatly). He said that his employees were less “distracted” (thinking of other things) and could “communicate” (exchange information, news, and ideas) better with each other.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 156: Rumors and Secrets.

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast episode 156. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This podcast is going to be about two people, talking about one of their fellow workers and talking about rumors that they have heard. Let's get started!

[start of dialog]

Jack: So, what do you think of the new guy?

Kate: Oh, you mean Bernard? He's okay, I guess. Why?

Jack: Well, I heard that he left his last company under mysterious circumstances. I tried to find out more from Libby, but she was very hush-hush about it.

Kate: I'm not surprised. Libby doesn't like to gossip, unlike some people...

Jack: I'm not gossiping. I just like to know more about the people I work with.

Kate: Okay, but don't start any rumors. Bernard seems nice and I think we should give him a chance.

Jack: Don't worry. I'll cut him some slack, but I want to know what skeletons are in his closet.

Kate: Take it from me. You won't find any dirty little secrets and you may make an enemy of Bernard in the process.

Jack: You're probably right but I wonder what Nathan knows...

[end of dialog]

On this podcast, we heard a dialog between Jack and Kate. And they are talking at work about one of their new co-workers, or new fellow employees. The dialog begins by Jack saying, "So, what do you think of the new guy?" "The new guy"



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would be the new person, in this case. And we use that expression, sort of as a joke when you have someone new join your company or your organization. And people will say, “Oh, yeah. He’s the new guy.” He’s the new person. The old expression for this was “the new kid on the block.” A “block,” of course, is part of a city where people live. You have streets and in between the streets are blocks, where the houses and the buildings are. So, the expression “a new kid on the block” means that someone had just moved there and all the other kids – all the other children – would refer to him as “the new kid on the block.” Well, here it’s a similar idea, except we just say, “The new guy.”

Kate says, “Oh, you mean Bernard?” – that is, you are talking about Bernard. She says, “He’s okay, I guess. Why?” The use of “I guess” here means I think so. She’s not actually trying to guess what this person is like. We use that expression to mean, “I think.” But usually, when you’re not quite sure, you don’t have a strong opinion.

Jack says that he heard that the new guy left his company “under mysterious circumstances.” In other words, Jack heard a “rumor.” And a “rumor” (rumor) is what someone says about someone else and you’re not quite sure if it’s true or not. “Rumors” get started frequently about, for example, celebrities, or movie stars. One of the most famous rumors is that Elvis, the singer Elvis Presley, isn’t really dead – that he’s living somewhere on some small island. Well, that’s a rumor – a false rumor, I think. Who knows? But in this case, the rumor is about how Bernard, the new guy, left his previous company – his old company, his last company – “under mysterious circumstances.”

“Mysterious” is an adjective. The noun is “mystery. And when we say something is a “mystery” we mean we don’t know what the answer is. We don’t understand it. And “mysterious” would be the adjective. “Well, it’s a mysterious circumstance.” A “circumstance” is a situation – what happens – that’s circumstance. We use that word “circumstance” a lot to say, for example, “Under difficult circumstances,” meaning under a situation that would be difficult, or “In these circumstances, I would recommend that you find another job,” meaning in this situation, I would recommend that.

Well, Bernard left his job under mysterious circumstances, according to Jack – that’s Jack’s opinion – what he heard from someone else. He says that he tried to find out more from Libby, one of his other co-workers, but she was very “Hush-hush” about it. “Hush” (hush) – “hush” (hush) – “to be hush-hush” means not to talk about it, to be secretive, to not want to tell anyone else. Someone says, “Oh, he’s very hush-hush about his new girlfriend” means he doesn’t want to talk about his new girlfriend – that’s to be “hush-hush.”



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Kate says that she isn't surprised that Libby, her co-worker, "doesn't like to gossip, unlike some people." "To gossip" (gossip) means to tell rumors to other people about someone else or to talk about someone else when they aren't there. This, of course, is a very popular thing that we do. We talk about our friends or our family members and the word, in this case, the verb "to gossip" is a negative – has a negative meaning in English. "To gossip" is considered a bad thing, but even so, people, of course, do gossip.

We can also use "gossip" as a noun. "I heard some gossip," for example, or "Did you hear the gossip about Tom Cruise?" Did you? Well, Kate says in our story that "Libby doesn't like to gossip, unlike some people." That expression "unlike (unlike) some people" means that she is telling Jack that he likes to gossip. We use this expression as something of an insult to someone else. Usually, it's not serious. What we are saying is that this person is doing something wrong, something that he or she shouldn't do and you are telling them that by using this indirect expression. For example, my friend is complaining about his brother. And I say, "Well, my brother doesn't like to complain, unlike some people." And if I say that to him, I mean, "unlike you." So, we are telling someone that they are like that – negative – they have that negative characteristic. Kate says that "Libby doesn't like to gossip, unlike some people," meaning "Unlike you, Jack, who likes to gossip."

Jack says, "I'm not gossiping. I just like to know more about the people I work with." Kate says that Jack should not start any rumors. Notice we use the verb "to start" with a rumor. "I'm going to start a rumor" means I'm going to make something up, or I'm going to tell other people something. I'll be the first one to tell them.

"Bernard," Kate says, "seems nice and I think we should give him a chance." "To give someone a chance" (chance) means to give them an opportunity. There's a similar expression which is to give someone a "break" (break). You give someone a break when they do something wrong and you're not going to yell at them or be angry at them or think badly of them. You say, "Well, give me a break" means – can mean – that you did something wrong, but now you want to be able to do it correctly. We also use the expression "Give me a break," when we don't believe someone or we think something that we are being told is wrong. Someone will say, "Did you hear that Elvis is living in Los Angeles?" and you say, "Give me a break" – means I don't believe that.

Well, in the dialog, Kate says that she thinks they should give Bernard a chance. Give him an opportunity. Jack says, "Don't worry. I'll cut him some slack." "I will



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cut (cut) him some slack (slack)” – “to cut someone some slack” is similar to give someone a break – means that we aren’t going to worry about that person doing everything right all the time. We usually use this expression for someone who’s just beginning a job or beginning a project. And you are giving them the opportunity to learn and to do better. So, you cut them some slack. The word “slack” (slack) actually is when you have a rope, or a string, and it’s tight – meaning two people are pulling on it, for example, from different directions. Well, if you stop pulling on it, there’ll be some loose string or loose rope. And that’s called “slack,” when the rope isn’t tight. But “to cut someone some slack” means to give them a break, to give them a chance, to give them an opportunity. Jack says that he wants to know “what skeletons are in Bernard’s closet.” A “skeleton” (skeleton) is, of course, the bones in your body but without the skin, without the blood, without the organs. When you die, for example, you will lose those things, and you will have nothing but a skeleton. Well, you often see a skeleton, for example, as a symbol on Halloween in the United States. And it’s just the bones of a person.

Now, the expression – you want to see what skeletons are in your closet or are hidden in your closet – the idea is that if you kill someone and you don’t want anyone to know, you may put their body in a closet and eventually, after time passes, there will be just their skeleton – not a very pleasant, nice idea, but it is a common expression. People say, “I think he has some skeletons in his closet,” meaning something happened in his past that was bad. We often look for skeletons in the closets of politicians. For example, a politician will be running for president – trying to become president or prime minister in a country – and someone will go back and talk to their old friends and find out if they did anything wrong when they were younger – that’s looking for skeletons in someone’s closet.

Well, Kate says, “Take it from me. You won’t find any dirty little secrets.” The first expression “take it from me” means believe me, listen to what I’m saying because I know more than you do. “Take it from me. You do not want to visit Minnesota in December. It’s much too cold.” In other words, I know because I have some knowledge or some experience. Kate also says that “You won’t find any dirty little secrets.” Well, a “secret,” you know, of course, is something that you are hiding from someone else, something you are not telling someone else. “Dirty little secrets” is an expression which means some very bad secrets, some secrets about something negative that happened in this person’s life.

Kate says that “You may make an enemy of Bernard in the process.” “To make an enemy of someone” means that you get that other person angry – mad at you and then they will not like you if you do that. So, “to make enemies” means to do



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something that will get other people mad at you. The expression “in the process” – Kate says, “You may make an enemy of Bernard in the process” – means while you are doing that. And usually, the expression “in the process” is used when a person doesn’t realize or doesn’t intend for the other thing to happen. So, for example, in this dialog, Jack wants to find out what skeletons are hidden in Bernard’s closet. But if he tries to do that, Bernard may become angry with him. That isn’t why Jack is looking for skeletons, he’s not trying to make Bernard angry, but in the process, that will happen – meaning because he’s doing the other thing – looking for skeletons in his closet – that may make Bernard unhappy. The dialog ends with Jack saying, “You’re probably right but I wonder what Nathan knows” – means he’s still looking for rumors and secrets and he’s now going to talk to another one of his co-workers, Nathan.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue this time at a native rate of speech.

[start of dialog]

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Jack: You’re probably right but I wonder what Nathan knows...

[end of dialog]



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The script for today's podcast was written by our own Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy! If you want to read the script for our dialog, or get more information on our podcasts, remember to visit our website at www.eslpod.com. And if you have suggestions about topics for our ESL Podcast, please email us at eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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