



ESL Podcast 689 – Listening to a Political Speech

GLOSSARY

to talk out of both sides of (one's) mouth – to say different things to different people; to present different opinions about a single thing when speaking with different people

* Libby often talks out of both sides of her mouth, telling one person she plans to go to college while telling another person she plans to get a job.

to fight for the little guy – to try to improve the situation for poor or powerless people; to do or say things that will help people who do not have very much power or influence

* Nancy has dedicated her life to fighting for the little guy, working for nonprofit organizations that help the world's poorest people.

champion – someone who leads a cause; someone who is recognized by others by fighting for other people's rights or needs

* Who was the greatest champion for women's right to vote in American history?

politician – a person who works in politics; someone who works in the public sector and must be elected to his or her job

* If I hope to work in politics, I need to improve my public speaking skills.

sincere – truthful, honest, and direct, without hiding anything

* Please accept our sincere thanks for your hospitality.

double-talk – a way of speaking that can have more than one meaning, used to confuse or mislead people

* We won't listen to any more of your double-talk. Please answer the question.

to not trust (someone) any farther than (one) can throw (him or her) – a phrase used to show that one does not trust someone at all and thinks he or she is very untrustworthy and unreliable

* You're going to loan money to Desiree? I wouldn't trust her any farther than I can throw her, and there's no way I would lend her even a little money.

to cut – to reduce or decrease

* They're cutting expenses by taking the bus instead of driving.

to pull (something) off – to be able to do something successfully, especially when it seems very difficult or impossible

* Ahmed is a full-time student, works 30 hours a week, and takes care of his younger sister. How do you think he pulls it off?



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campaign promise – something a politician promises to do while trying to be elected and asking people to vote for him or her

* One of Akihiro's campaign promises was to double funding for education, but after he was elected, he realized it would be impossible.

to renege – to take back a promise; to not do what one has promised to do

* But you promised to take him to the ballgame! You can't renege again.

same old, same old – referring to something that is ordinary, normal, and expected, happening the same way it has always happened

* A: What did your boss say when you asked him for a raise?

B: It was the same old, same old. He said there isn't room in the budget, but maybe there will be next year.

to put up with – to tolerate; to continue to live with something that is unpleasant or undesirable

* They live next to a pig farm, but I don't know how they can put up with the smell.

to run for office – to try to be elected for a position or job; to ask people to vote for oneself; to participate in elections as a candidate

* Hayashi is running for office because he thinks that's the best way he can make real changes in his community.

not on your life – a phrase used to show strong refusal or a complete lack of interest in doing something

* A: Do you want to go bungee jumping with me next weekend?

B: Not on your life! I would be too scared.

to sit back – to observe something, but not become involved or participate

* A: Aren't you going to tell the kids to stop fighting?

B: No, let's just sit back and see what happens.

to dig (one's) own grave – to do something that will have negative consequences for oneself in the future

* You can do that if you want to, but it's a bad idea. You're digging your own grave.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean for the politician to be “talking out of both sides of his mouth”?
 - a) He’s saying conflicting things.
 - b) He’s speaking too quickly.
 - c) He’s speaking in a second language.

2. According to Ramis, what does the politician propose to do?
 - a) He will eliminate taxes.
 - b) He will increase taxes.
 - c) He will reduce taxes.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to cut

The verb “to cut,” in this podcast, means to reduce or decrease: “Fierce storms cut the supply of fresh oranges.” The phrase “to cut (someone) off” can mean to stop providing financial support: “His parents cut him off once he graduated from college.” The phrase “to cut (someone) off” can also mean to change lanes while driving very quickly, immediately in front of another car, so that the other driver has to apply the brakes: “Did you see how that car just cut me off? He could have caused an accident!” The phrase “to cut (something) short” means to end something earlier than planned, usually before it has finished: “The workday was cut short due to a power outage.” Finally, the phrase “to cut both ways” means to have advantages and disadvantages: “Lowering taxes can cut both ways: people have more money to spend, but there are fewer government services.”

to sit back

In this podcast, the phrase “to sit back” means to observe something, but not become involved or participate: “The manager wants to sit back for a few days and see what happens before making any decisions.” The phrase “to sit back” can also mean to sit down and relax: “I want a vacation where I can just sit back and relax on the beach.” The phrase “to sit tight” means to not move or to not take any action: “Please sit tight for just a few minutes and wait for your turn.” Finally, the phrase “to be sitting pretty” means to be in a very good situation, comfortable and possibly with a lot of money: “He sold his Internet business for almost \$2 million, and now he’s sitting pretty.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Political Debates

In the United States, many political “candidates” (people who are running for office) participate in “debates,” which are official opportunities for people to present their differing opinions on one or more issues. Most political debates are “televised” (shown on television), often “live” (showing actions when they are actually happening; not shown from a recording).

The debaters must agree to follow the rules that establish the “format” (how something appears and is organized) of the debate. The rules vary among debates, so it can be difficult to “generalize” (make a statement that is true for every situation). For example, the U.S. presidential election debates do not allow the candidates to ask each other questions, but this is allowed in other types of debates. Each debate also “allots” (gives; assigns) a specific amount of time for the responses on each topic.

A debate has a “moderator,” or a person whose job is to guide or control the debate. The moderator presents the “prompt,” or the statement or question that the debaters are supposed to react to. The moderator also indicates whose turn it is to speak, and for how long. If the debater “exceeds” (goes over) the allotted time, the moderator will “cut him or her off” (interrupt to make someone stop speaking).

In general, the moderator presents the prompt and then one debater has an opportunity to speak. Then the second debater has an opportunity to speak. Then there may be an opportunity for “rebuttals,” where each debater has an opportunity to react to what the other debater has said, but this is usually for a much shorter period of time.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 689: Listening to a Political Speech.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 689. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website, you know it, it's eslpod.com. You know also that you can become a Learning Guide member to help support this podcast and to help you improve your English even faster. Go to our website for more information.

This episode is called "Listening to a Political Speech," when a politician, someone in the government typically, gives an address – a speech to a group of people. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Kylie: Can you understand a word he's saying?

Ramis: I doubt if anyone can. He's talking out of both sides of his mouth. First he says he's fighting for the little guy, and then he says he's a champion for businesses.

Kylie: I thought he'd be different, but he's just like any other politician.

Ramis: He looks sincere and he sounds sincere, but when you actually listen to what he says, it's nothing but double-talk.

Kylie: You've got that right. I wouldn't trust him any farther than I could throw him. Now what is he saying?

Ramis: He says that he can cut taxes and increase government services. Now how do you suppose he could pull that off?

Kylie: He can't. These are just campaign promises. Once he gets into office, he'll renege on every one of those promises.

Ramis: Year after year it's the same thing – broken promises and the same old same old. Why do we put up with it?



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Kylie: Why? I have an answer for you. Do you want to run for office?

Ramis: Me?! Are you kidding? Not on your life.

Kylie: Right. That's how I feel. I'm willing to sit back and let somebody else do the job. I guess we've dug our own graves.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue has lots of good, commonly used vocabulary in talking about politics, the sort of thing you will read in the newspaper. Kylie begins by asking, "Can you understand a word he's saying?" Ramis says, "I doubt if anyone can (meaning I don't think anyone understands what this person is saying). He's talking out of both sides of his mouth." This is a wonderful expression, "to talk out of both sides of your mouth" means to say different things to different people, often the opposite things, or to try to have an opinion on both sides of an issue. "I'm for nuclear power, but I'm also against nuclear power." If you talk to one group you say one thing, if you talk to another group you say something else. That's to talk out of both sides of your mouth. There's another expression, "to talk out of your..." I can't say it on ESL Podcast, but it's a word that refers to what you sit on, your butt. That expression means to invent something, to make something up, to pretend like you know what you're talking about even if you don't. Well, this is a case of talking out of both sides of your mouth. Ramis says, "First he says he's fighting for the little guy, and then he says he's a champion for businesses." The "he" is the politician who is giving this talk – this speech. First, the politician says he's fighting for the little guy – the little person, the little man. "Little" here doesn't mean someone who is short, "little" means someone who is poor, who doesn't have a lot of power in society. Politicians often talk about "fighting for the little guy," meaning they're going to try to help people who are poor who don't have a lot of power. Ramis says that's what this guy says, but he also says he's a champion for businesses. A "champion" can be someone who wins something. Here, however, it means someone who is fighting for a particular group, who is in front of a group or a cause trying to help people. In American history, Susan B. Anthony was a champion for the women's right to vote; she was one of the people who fought for that particular idea. The politician says he's a champion for businesses, people who one presumes have money, but he's also fighting for the little guy, people who don't have money.

Kylie says, "I thought he'd be different, but he's just like any other politician." A "politician" is a person, of course, who works usually for government, someone who is involved often in elected government. A representative, a senator, a president, a governor, these would all be politicians. The term is often used



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negatively – and you can understand why! People sometimes become very disappointed with their politicians.

Ramis says, “He looks sincere and he sounds sincere.” The politician looks “sincere” (sincere), meaning he looks truthful, he looks honest, he’s not hiding anything. We use this word – the adverb of this word “sincerely” when we are ending a message or a letter: “sincerely yours,” or sometimes simply “sincerely,” and then you put your name down below. That’s how you might end a letter or end an email, especially a slightly more formal email. Ramis says this guy “looks sincere and sounds sincere, but when you actually listen to what he says, it’s nothing but double-talk.” “Double-talk” is a way of speaking that can have more than one meaning used to confuse people, to say things that are opposite in order to not express clearly what you really think. You’re trying to confuse people; you’re trying to get them to think something is true that you don’t really believe often.

Kylie says, “You’ve got that right (meaning you are correct). I wouldn’t trust him any farther than I could throw him.” Here we have another common expression; “to not trust someone any farther than you can throw him or her” means that you don’t trust someone at all, you think this person is lying to you or is very untrustworthy, unreliable. “I wouldn’t (I would not) trust this man any farther than I could throw him.” The idea is that you can’t throw a person very far, and therefore you can’t trust this person very much. “I wouldn’t trust him any farther than I could throw him.” You could also say “I don’t trust him any farther than I can throw him,” you can say it without using the conditional “would” and “could.” The idea, then, is that you don’t trust this person very much.

Kylie says, “Now what is he saying?” Ramis says, “He says that he can cut taxes and increase government services.” “To cut” (cut) here means to decrease or to reduce. There are several meanings of this verb, however. Take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. So he says he can lower your taxes – he can cut your “taxes,” the amount of money you pay to the government, and he can increase government services. This is a common theme in American politics, people say that they can cut your taxes and give you more. Well, it sounds good, right? But it’s very difficult to do. Ramis, in fact, asks, “how do you suppose he could pull that off?” “To pull (something) off” is a phrasal verb meaning to be able to do something difficult successfully, it was difficult but you are able to do it.

Kylie says, “He can’t (he cannot, he cannot pull it off). These are just campaign promises.” A “campaign promise” is something that a politician promises to do in order to get people to vote for him in an election, but then when he or she is “in



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office,” that is after he or she gets elected nothing happens, they don’t do what they said they were going to do. That’s kind of the way politics works in most countries, I think! Kylie says, “Once he gets into office, he’ll renege on every one of those promises.” “To renege” (renege) means to promise to do something and then say, “Oh, no. I’m not going to do that.” That’s exactly what happens with campaign promises!

Ramis says, “Year after year it’s the same thing – broken promises and the same old same old.” A “broken promise” is a promise that is not kept, something that you say you will do but you do not. The expression “same old same old” refers to the way things are always done, the typical, expected, ordinary, normal way in which things operate – in which things happen. Ramis says, “Why do we put up with it?” “To put up with (something)” means to tolerate, to continue to live with something that is unpleasant, undesirable, but you still do it. That’s “to put up with.” “I’m not going to put up with your shouting.” “I’m not going to stand” would be another way of saying it, I’m not going to tolerate. Or, “He puts up with a lot of difficulties being married to her.” “He puts up with them,” he tolerates them, he allows it to happen and continues to be part of that relationship in this case.

Ramis asks why he and others put up with the same old same old they get from politicians. Kylie says, “Why? I have an answer for you. Do you want to run for office?” “To run for office” means to try to get elected to some government position or other organizational position. There’s an election and the winner becomes the governor, the mayor, the president, and so forth. The process is “running for office.” Ramis says, “Me?! Are you kidding? Not on your life.” “Not on your life” is a phrase used indicate that you are absolutely not interested; it’s a very strong way of saying no.

Kylie says, “Right. That’s how I feel. I’m willing to sit back and let somebody else do the job.” “To sit back” is a phrasal verb meaning to observe something, not to become involved, not to participate. Kylie says, “I guess we’ve dug our own graves.” “Dug” (dug) is the past tense of the verb “to dig.” “To dig” means to create a hole in something, usually something large like the ground – the earth. Your “grave” is where your body is put after you die. So, “to dig your own grave” means to do something that will have negative consequences for you in the future; you’re doing something that is hurting yourself.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Kylie: Can you understand a word he’s saying?



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[end of dialogue]

Dr. Lucy Tse, our scriptwriter, never lets us down, by providing excellent scripts for our ESL Podcast. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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