



ESL Podcast 724 – Being Impolite in Conversation

GLOSSARY

to ignore – to not pay attention to something or someone; to act as if something does not exist or is not happening

* If we ignore our leaking roof, the problem will keep getting worse.

to sneer – to smile in a mean way while saying something that is very unkind

* Greg sneered at the other team's players as he wished them good luck in the game.

imagination – the ability to think of new things and view images in one's mind of things that do not actually exist

* Adele has an active imagination and likes to pretend she's flying in a spaceship.

perfectly – a word used to emphasize what one is saying, especially when something has been doubted or questioned

* I don't understand why you're so nervous about this business deal. It's perfectly legal.

to cut (someone) off – to interrupt someone; to begin speaking before another person has been able to finish what he or she was saying

* I'm sorry to cut you off, but someone's knocking at my door. Can I call you back in a few minutes?

to be short with (someone) – to provide very short answers that seem unfriendly

* Mitsumi is always so short with me. If I ask her how she's doing, she just says, "fine," and then walks away.

to talk over (someone) – to speak while someone else is speaking in a rude, disrespectful way

* Gustavo likes to be the center of attention, so he often talks over everyone else.

to look down (one's) nose at (someone) – to believe that one is better than another person; to think one is superior to another person

* Kai looks down his nose at anyone who hasn't gone to college.

threatened by (someone) – feeling challenged in one's job, social standing, or other position by someone who wants to replace or remove one

* Jim feels threatened by the new hires who are younger and better educated than he is.



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How so? – A question asked when one wants someone to provide more information and especially examples of what he or she is speaking about

- * - Cell phones are changing the ways people interact with each other.
- How so?

after – wanting to have, to get, or to do something

- * Do you think Andrea really loves him, or is she just after his money?

to have designs on – to be planning to have, to get, or do something, often with secret and/or dishonest plans to acquire it

- * This chemical company has had designs on that land for years, and is willing to do anything to get it.

to have a thing for (someone) – to be interested in another person romantically; to want to start a romantic relationship with someone

- * Slobodan has had a thing for Becky for years, but she has never shown any interest in him.

standoffish – very formal and unfriendly, not welcoming or open

- * James is normally very friendly, but he is always standoffish with his students because he doesn't want to have a personal relationship with them.

to stand in (one's) way – to prevent someone from doing something; to try to stop someone from doing something

- * If you really want to go skydiving, I won't stand in your way. But I won't join you, either!

never mind – a phrase used when someone does not want to repeat or explain what he or she has said, usually because it is not important or because one thinks the other person will not understand it

- * - What did you say?
- Never mind. It isn't important.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would Rebecca look down her nose at Angela?
 - a) Because Rebecca thinks she's better than Angela.
 - b) Because Rebecca is taller than Angela.
 - c) Because Rebecca is smarter than Angela.
2. Why does Ronny say, "Never mind"?
 - a) Because he's frustrated that Angela isn't a good listener.
 - b) Because he doesn't want to explain what he meant.
 - c) Because he wants Angela to stop worrying about Rebecca.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

perfectly

The word "perfectly," in this podcast, is a word used to emphasize what one is saying: "This dinner is perfectly eatable, even if it is a little burnt." The phrase "picture-perfect" describes something that is beautiful, has the right appearance, and looks like it is supposed to look: "Their wedding was picture-perfect." The phrase "perfect pitch" describes the ability to sing or hum any note when asked, or to identify the note of any sound, without using an instrument: "Yumiko has perfect pitch, so she can tune a guitar without using a piano." Finally, the phrase "perfect timing" is used when something happens exactly when it should: "Oh, what perfect timing! You came into the meeting right when we were going to talk about your division."

after

In this podcast, the word "after" means wanting to have, to get, or to do something: "Most people think the governor is after the presidency, but she hasn't made an official announcement yet." The phrase "after you" is a polite way to invite someone to do something first, before one does it oneself: "He held the door open for everyone else and said, 'After you.'" The phrase "one after another" indicates that a series of things are happening, first one, then another, then another: "All of their home appliances are breaking down, one after another." Finally, the phrase "to take after (someone)" means to act like someone or have a similar appearance to someone: "I'm amazed by how much Alessandro takes after his father."



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CULTURE NOTE

Suggestions for Small Talk

Sometimes it can be difficult to “strike up” (start) a conversation with people we don’t know well, but it is even more “awkward” (uncomfortable) to stand “in silence” (without saying anything). So here are some suggested “conversation starters” (phrases or questions that can be used to start a conversation) that might help generate “small talk” (unimportant conversation used to pass time).

A lot of small talk is about the weather. A conversation starter like, “Isn’t it a beautiful day?” or, “How much longer do you think it will rain like this?” can help people relax and begin to talk about the weather.

Sometimes it is helpful to talk about “current events” (things that are happening in the news), as long as the news stories aren’t too “controversial” (with people having very strong opinions and disagreements). A conversation about sports might begin with a question like, “Did you see the Lakers game last night?” Or a conversation about the local news could start with, “I read a story about how....”

At a social event, it can be easy to start a conversation by asking how people know the “host” (the person who is organizing the party). “So, how do you know Karl?” Or the conversation can “turn to” (begin to talk about) the “refreshments” (food and drink) with a phrase like, “These appetizers are delicious. Have you tried the stuffed mushrooms?”

To start a conversation with a “co-worker” (colleague; someone one works with), we can ask about their plans for the weekend: “Do you have anything planned for the weekend?” Or we can talk about things that affect everyone in the organization: “What do you think of the new vacation policy?”

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 724: Being Impolite in Conversation.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 724. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This episode, like all of our current episodes, has a Learning Guide that will help you understand it much better. Go to eslpod.com, become a member of ESL Podcast, and download the Learning Guide.

This episode is called "Being Impolite in Conversation." It's a dialogue between Angela and Ronny talking about someone who is not very nice when they are having a conversation with someone else. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Angela: Ugh! I hate talking to Rebecca. Every time I ask her a question, she ignores me or sneers at me.

Ronny: Are you sure it's not your imagination? She's perfectly nice to me.

Angela: It's not my imagination. When I try to tell her something, she cuts me off. When I try to explain something to her, she's short with me or talks over me. I always get the feeling that she's looking down her nose at me.

Ronny: Maybe she feels threatened by you.

Angela: How so?

Ronny: You're younger, smarter, and better educated. She might feel like you're after her job.

Angela: But I'm not! I just started here and I don't have any designs on replacing her.

Ronny: And you're prettier than she is.

Angela: What does that have to do with anything, even if it were true?



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Ronny: Well, she's had a thing for me for a while and...

Angela: And she thinks I'm her competition. No wonder she's so standoffish with me. I'll just make it clear that I won't stand in her way.

Ronny: You won't?

Angela: Huh?

Ronny: Never mind.

[end of dialogue]

Angela begins by saying to Ronny, "Ugh! I hate talking to Rebecca. Every time I ask her a question, she ignores me or sneers at me." "To ignore (someone)" is not to pay attention to them, not to talk to them or even act as if they are there with you. "To sneer" (sneer) means to smile in a mean way, or to make an expression with your face – with your mouth that indicates that you are being mean or unkind.

Ronny says, "Are you sure it's not your imagination?" "Imagination" is our ability to invent new things in our mind, to think of new things. Ronny is asking if perhaps Angela is imagining what Rebecca is doing, meaning Rebecca isn't really doing it, it's just Angela who thinks she is. Ronny says, "She (Rebecca) is perfectly nice to me." "Perfectly," here, is used to emphasize what you are saying, especially when something is in doubt or is in question. "Perfect" has a number of meanings in English however; take a look at our Learning Guide for some more of those.

Angela says, "It's not my imagination. When I tell her something, she cuts me off." "To cut (someone) off" is a phrasal verb meaning to interrupt someone, to start speaking before they are finished speaking. We use this expression, "to cut (someone) off," in conversation; we also use it, perhaps a little more commonly, in driving. To cut someone off when you are driving is to drive right in front of them, to go from one lane to another and cause them to have to slow down because you have gone right front of their car, or you have come very close to their car, too close for safety. That's to cut someone off on the freeway or on a road. It happens every day here in Los Angeles, and in every city where there are cars I would guess.

Angela says, "When I try to explain something to her, she's short with me or talks over me." Not only does Rebecca cut her off – interrupt her conversation, when



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Angela is trying to explain something to Rebecca, “she is short with me.” “To be short with (someone)” means to give very short answers that seem unfriendly. Someone says to you, “So, how was your weekend?” and you say, “Fine.” And they say, “Oh. Tell me what you did?” and you say, “Nothing.” That would be, perhaps, being short with someone, or saying something in a way that is slightly angry – that you are angry at that person or upset. “To talk over (someone)” means to talk while the other person is still talking. “To cut (someone) off” means to interrupt them, to make them stop talking so that you can talk. “To talk over (someone)” is to talk often at a higher volume – louder – while that person is still talking. You’re trying to get them to stop talking, but if they don’t stop talking you just continue talking yourself; you talk over them. This happens on political discussion shows on television all the time now in the United States, something that became popular about, oh, 30 years ago I would guess, and now everyone talks over everyone else. And of course, if you are talking and the other person is talking, there’s nobody listening!

Angela says, “I always get the feeling (I always think) that she’s looking down her nose at me.” “To look down your nose at (someone)” means to think that you are better than the other person, to think that you are superior to another person. Ronny says, “Maybe she (Rebecca) feels threatened by you.” “To feel threatened by (someone)” in this case means to feel challenged, as though someone wants to remove you or replace you. This could be especially true if the person you are talking to is your boss or someone above you in position in the company. If they feel threatened by you, they think that maybe you will come and take their job or their position.

Angela says to Ronny’s statement, “How so?” “How so?” is a question meaning please give me more examples of what you are talking about, or give me more information. When you don’t understand what someone is saying, and you want them to tell you more you might use this question. You may hear someone say, for example, “That is a terrible grocery store,” and you say, “How so?” And they say, “Well, they don’t have any good fruit. The meat department never has enough chicken. The people there are not friendly.” Those are reasons why it is such a bad grocery store. So, “How so?” tells the person to do give you more information.

Ronny then gives Angela more information about why he thinks Rebecca feels threatened by her. He says, “You (Angela) are younger, smarter, and better educated. She might feel like you’re after her job.” “To be after (something)” means to want to get it, to try to do something to get something. “He is after his best friend’s girlfriend.” He wants to get the girlfriend to be his girlfriend, kind of like that song in the 1980s by The Cars: “She’s my best friend’s girlfriend / And



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she used to be mine.” That’s a little different story; see, it used to be his girlfriend, and now the girlfriend is the girlfriend of his best friend. Not really a good situation I think, if you want to stay friends with someone!

Anyway, we’re talking about Angela and Rebecca. Rebecca feels threatened by Angela because, Ronny says, Angela is smarter, younger, and better educated. Angela says she’s not after Rebecca’s job. She says, “I just started here and I don’t have any designs on replacing her.” “To have designs on (something)” means to plan to do or get something, often by doing something secret or dishonest – not honest. “I have designs on my best friend’s girlfriend.” I want to try to get her away from him, and I’m going to do something tricky or secret to make that happen.

Ronny says, “And you’re prettier than she is.” That is, Angela is prettier than Rebecca. Angela says, “What does that have to do with anything, even if it were true?” meaning why is that important that I may be prettier than she is. Ronny says, “Well, she’s had a thing for me for a while and...” “To have a thing for (someone)” means to be interested in someone romantically. “I have a thing for my best friend’s girlfriend.” See, we keep coming back to that example! So, that’s one reason why Rebecca doesn’t like Angela, because Angela is prettier, and Rebecca likes Ronny and Rebecca thinks that Ronny will become interested in Angela instead of in her.

Angela understands now. She says, “And she (Rebecca) thinks I’m her competition,” meaning the two of them are trying to get Ronny, and Angela is going to compete against Rebecca. She’s going to fight against Rebecca, if you will, to get Ronny. Angela then says, “No wonder (meaning it is no surprise, it is not surprising) she’s so standoffish with me.” “To be standoffish” (standoffish – one word) means to be very unfriendly, to be very formal with someone when you should be, perhaps, informal and friendly with them. “To be standoffish” means to be not very welcoming of another person.

Angela says, “I’ll just make it clear (that is, I’ll explain to Rebecca clearly) that I won’t stand in her way.” “To stand in (someone’s) way” means to prevent them from doing something, to try to stop them from doing something. Angela is going to tell Rebecca that she, Angela, will not stand in her way, meaning she is not going to try to get Ronny interested in her romantically.

Ronny says, “You won’t?” Ronny, of course, is surprised; he wants Angela to be interested in him, obviously. Angela says, “Huh?” She doesn’t understand. When we don’t understand something, an informal way of expressing that is with the following sound: “Huh?” spelled (huh). Ronny says, “Never mind.” “Never



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mind” is a phrase we use when someone doesn’t want to repeat or explain something he has just said, either because it isn’t very important or because you think the other person won’t understand it. Ronny is disappointed when he finds out that Angela isn’t really romantically interested in him, so when Angela doesn’t understand what Ronny is really saying, he says, “Never mind.” He doesn’t want to explain it to her; of course, that would be somewhat embarrassing to Ronny.

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

[start of dialogue]

Angela: Ugh! I hate talking to Rebecca. Every time I ask her a question, she ignores me or sneers at me.

Ronny: Are you sure it’s not your imagination? She’s perfectly nice to me.

Angela: It’s not my imagination. When I try to tell her something, she cuts me off. When I try to explain something to her, she’s short with me or talks over me. I always get the feeling she’s looking down her nose at me.

Ronny: Maybe she feels threatened by you.

Angela: How so?

Ronny: You’re younger, smarter, and better educated. She might feel like you’re after her job.

Angela: But I’m not! I just started here and I don’t have any designs on replacing her.

Ronny: And you’re prettier than she is.

Angela: What does that have to do with anything, even if it were true?

Ronny: Well, she’s had a thing for me for a while and...

Angela: And she thinks I’m her competition. No wonder she’s so standoffish with me. I’ll just make it clear that I won’t stand in her way.

Ronny: You won’t?

Angela: Huh?



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Ronny: Never mind.

[end of dialogue]

I don't have any designs on the job of scriptwriter here at ESL Podcast. That's because it's done by someone younger, smarter, and better educated than I am, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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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