



ESL Podcast 282 – Offending Someone

GLOSSARY

to grab – to quickly reach out and hold something in one’s hand

* When Bala slipped on the ice, he grabbed his friend’s shoulder so that he wouldn’t fall.

off-color – in poor taste; not appropriate; inappropriate; not acceptable to other people

* All through the party, Dion made off-color comments to the other guests and the host finally asked him to leave.

to be offended – to be angry, shocked, and upset about something that another person does or says

* Claudia was offended when she heard her coworkers laughing about her work.

to intend – to mean to do something; to do something on purpose and intentionally; to want to do something

* We intended to buy an apartment in Dupont Circle, but then we found one that we liked in Adams Morgan and decided to buy it instead.

to insult (someone) – to say or do something that makes another person angry, shocked, and upset; to say or do something that offends another person

* Izzy was insulted when his friend told him that he wasn’t good enough at math to become an engineer

a tough time – difficulty; having problems

* Keisha is having a tough time finding a job after getting fired from her last one.

to fit in – to be a part of something, especially a social group; to make friends and be comfortable with other people in a particular group

* Teenagers are under a lot of pressure to fit in during high school.

the butt of a joke – the person that other people make jokes about; the thing that jokes are made about

* Kristoff became very angry when his friends made him the butt of a joke.

ethnic joke – a joke that is funny because it is about a person’s race (skin color) or nationality

* In the United States, comedians tell ethnic jokes about many of the cultural groups in the country.



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stereotype – something that is believed to be true about an entire group of people, but that are not necessary true about the individuals; the belief that a person or a group of people will be a certain way, even though one doesn't know them

* We shouldn't be hiring employees based on stereotypes. We're turning away good applicants and hiring unqualified people.

oversensitive – too easily offended by what other people say or do; too sensitive; very easy to be hurt by what other people say or do

* Kim is oversensitive about his apartment and he gets angry if anyone says it's too small, because he doesn't have enough money to move to a larger one.

leprechaun – an imaginary, small, magical person who wears green clothes and protects pots of gold at the end of rainbows in Irish stories

* Do you believe that there is a leprechaun at the end of every rainbow?

insensitive – not concerned about other people's feelings; not realizing how other people will be affected by what one says or does

* I stupidly made an insensitive comment about Janessa's weight and I felt horrible when she started crying.

to accept (one's) apology – to believe another person when he or she says that he or she is sorry for what was said or done, and to stop being angry with that person

* Did you accept his apology for forgetting your birthday?

to take (one) at (one's) word – to believe what one says without asking for any additional proof or evidence

* I took Clark at his word that he didn't steal the money, but then we saw him do it on the security video. I shouldn't have believed him.

to shake – to shake hands; to face another person and hold each other's right hands while gently moving the arms up and down, usually to show agreement or to say hello or goodbye

* The two representatives from their companies shook after signing the contract.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Gina grab Eileen’s arm?
 - a) Because Gina didn’t want to hear Eileen’s joke.
 - b) Because Gina was shaking her head.
 - c) Because Gina didn’t want Colin to hear Eileen’s joke.

 2. Why does Eileen say, “I’m really sorry,” to Colin?
 - a) Because she had insulted him.
 - b) Because he is from Ireland.
 - c) Because she was offended.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to grab

The verb “to grab,” in this podcast, means to quickly reach out and hold something in one’s hand: “The thief grabbed her purse and ran away.” The phrase “to grab (one’s) attention” means to get someone’s attention, or to get someone to pay attention to oneself: “The new store signs really grabbed our attention when we drove by.” The phrase “to grab some food” means to eat something quickly and the phrase “to grab some sleep” means to sleep for a short period of time: “I’m going to grab some food at the cafeteria and then go home to grab some sleep before going to work tonight.” The phrases “to grab an opportunity” or “to grab a chance” mean to take advantage of something, or to do something while one still can: “Grab the opportunity to travel while you’re single, because once you have kids, it becomes more difficult.”

to shake

In this podcast, the verb “to shake” means to shake hands, or to face another person and hold each other’s right hands while gently moving the arms up and down: “Instead of shaking, when I saw Lisa, I gave her a hug since had been friends for years.” The phrase “to shake (one’s) head” means to move one’s head from side to side to mean “no”: “I asked Kelvin whether he wanted to go to the movies with us, but he shook his head.” The verb “to shake” also means to move something up and down very quickly, usually to mix the things inside: “Shake the bottle of chocolate milk before you open it.” Finally, “to shake” can mean to tremble, or to move one’s body without control: “Heather was so scared that she was shaking.”



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, there are many jokes “based on” (made from) stereotypes. Many of these are ethnic or racial jokes and many people consider them to be too “rude” (impolite) to share. But there are many other jokes that are based on “more acceptable” stereotypes, meaning that fewer people are offended by them.

Americans tell many “blond jokes” that are based on the stereotype that women with “blond” (light-colored) hair are “bimbos,” or not intelligent people. Here is one example:

Two blonds were driving to Disneyland. One saw a sign that said, “Disneyland Left.” So they turned around and went home.
(The women should have turned left to go to Disneyland, but they stupidly thought that Disneyland had moved to another place, so they went home).

Many other jokes are based on the stereotype that “jocks” (athletes) are not intelligent. Here is one example:

A jock and a college graduate applying for the same job. The boss said, “You need to take a test before you can get this job.” So they took the test, and the next day they came back to see which person the boss chose.

“Well,” the boss said, “Both of you got the same score except I’m going to choose the college graduate.” The jock complained, “Don’t you think that’s unfair?”

“Well,” the boss said, “Let me tell you what happened. Both of your papers were correct all the way through until the last question. On that question, the geek answered ‘I don’t know,’ and then when I looked at your paper, you answered, ‘I don’t know either.’
(Based on the answer, “I don’t know either,” we know that the jock stole his answers from the college graduate, but showed that he was copying the answers with his last response.)

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 282: Offending Someone.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 282. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com and download a Learning Guide for this episode. It contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional explanations that you don't hear on the podcast, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of this episode.

This episode is called "Offending Someone." "To offend someone" means to make them feel bad or to say something that they don't like. We'll hear a dialogue between Eileen and Colin, talking about a joke that one of them thinks is offensive. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I was telling my friend, Gina, a joke. I began it by saying, "An Irishman, an Englishman, and a Frenchman walk into this bar, and..." Suddenly, Gina grabbed my arm and shook her head. I turned around and our coworker, Colin, was standing right behind me.

Eileen: Oh, hi Colin. I didn't see you standing there.

Colin: I guess you didn't.

Eileen: I was just telling Gina a joke...

Colin: Yes, I know. I heard. I can't believe you're telling off-color jokes, especially at work.

Eileen: I'm really sorry. Please don't be offended. I didn't intend to insult you. I know that you're from Ireland. It was just a joke.

Colin: It may be just a joke to you, but it's getting a little old to me. I already have a tough time fitting in as an outsider in this company, and I'm really tired of being the butt of jokes around here. Besides, ethnic jokes reinforce stereotypes.



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Eileen: Please don't be angry.

Colin: I'm trying not to be oversensitive. I enjoy a good joke as much as anyone, but this isn't the first time this has happened. The other day, someone drew a picture of me dressed as a leprechaun and put it in the break room. That wasn't funny, and neither is this.

Eileen: You're right. We're all being a little insensitive. As far as I'm concerned, it won't happen again.

Colin: I accept your apology and I'll take you at your word.

Eileen: Can we shake and be friends again?

Colin: Yeah, sure. I guess so.

[end of story]

Our dialogue begins with Eileen telling a joke to her friend, Gina. The joke begins by her saying, "An Irishman, an Englishman, and a Frenchman walk into this bar, and..." and then she stops.

The way she begins this joke is actually an old, very typical way of starting what we would call an "ethnic joke." An "ethnic (ethnic) joke" is a joke about some particular group – some "nationality," people from a specific country. The formula "There was person 'A,' person 'B,' and person 'C' who walk into this bar" is a very old, traditional formula for starting a joke.

"Ethnic humor," making jokes about people from Ireland or England or France or another country, have a long history in the U.S. However, in the last 15-20 years or so, it has become less common to hear ethnic humor. This is because people think that it is "offensive," that it is wrong to tell jokes about other groups.

The exception to this would be if you are a member of that group. It is sometimes considered okay, for example, if you are Chinese, to tell a joke about Chinese because you are one of that particular group. If you are "African-American," or black, it is often considered okay to tell a joke about African-Americans. But it is not okay, and would not be a good idea, at work or in your personal life in the U.S., to tell a joke about another ethnic or racial group, because it is considered by many people to be "offensive," something that hurts another person.



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That doesn't mean that you won't still hear jokes like that in movies or on television. It's probably still common to make jokes about certain European countries: people from Britain, people from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and so forth. You may still hear some jokes like that, even on television, but they have become much less frequent; much less common.

So, Eileen is telling a joke about someone from Ireland, England, and France – an Irishman, an Englishman, and a Frenchman – and suddenly her friend, Gina, grabs her arm and shakes her head. “To grab” means to reach out quickly with your hand and hold onto something. So, I take my arm and I put it towards you and I put my hand on you – I grab it – I grab your arm. Or, you could grab a thing such as a glass or a cup that was falling from a table; you could grab it before it falls. You reach out with your hand, and you take it in your hand.

In this case, Gina grabs Eileen's arm and shakes her head – moves her head back and forth – to tell her to stop telling the joke. The reason is that someone that she works with, Colin, is now there with them, and Colin, we find out, is from Ireland.

Eileen says, “Oh, hi Colin. I didn't see you standing there” – I did not realize that you were there. Colin says, “I guess you didn't.” Eileen then says, “I was just telling Gina a joke...” And Colin says, “Yes, I know. I heard you.” Colin is upset; he's angry with Eileen. He uses the expression “I can't believe.” This is when you are surprised, and perhaps angry about something. Colin says, “I can't believe you are telling off-color jokes, especially at work.” The expression “off-color” means not appropriate; inappropriate; something that would not be acceptable to other people. An “off-color comment” or an “off-color joke” is one that would make other people angry, perhaps because you are insulting them or because you are using bad language.

Eileen says that she is sorry. She says to Colin, “Please don't be offended.” “To be offended” means to be angry; to be upset; to be mad at something that someone else does or says. If someone were to say, “People who don't have any hair on their head are really stupid,” that would offend me because, you see, I'm bald. I don't have any hair on my head; so don't say that to me!

Eileen says, “I didn't intend to insult you.” “To intend” (intend) means to want to do something; to mean to do something. We might also say, “to do something on purpose” – intentionally. She says, “I didn't intend” – I didn't mean to – “insult you.” “To insult (insult) someone” is to say something that would make another person angry.



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Colin says, “It may be just a joke to you, but it’s getting a little old to me.” When we say something “is getting a little old,” we mean that you are tired of it; you have heard it many times before or seen it many times before.

Colin says that “I already have a tough time fitting in as an outsider in this company.” “To fit in” (two words) means to become part of something, usually to become part of a group, to make friends and be comfortable with people in a particular group. Colin says he's having “a tough (tough) time fitting in.” A “tough time” would be a difficult time, when you are having problems.

Colin says he's “tired of being the butt of jokes around here.” When someone is the “butt” (butt) of jokes, or of a joke, we mean that he or she is the person that everyone is “making fun of,” is laughing at – is telling jokes about.

Colin says, “...ethnic jokes” – jokes about people from a specific nationality or country – “reinforce stereotypes.” A “stereotype” (stereotype) is something that people believe to be true about everyone in a particular group. They believe everyone in the group is the same about this one particular characteristic. This is usually considered something that is considered false or wrong; people think it is true, but it isn't really true about everyone in that group, or even about most people in that group. That's a stereotype, usually considered a bad thing.

Eileen says, “Please don't be angry.” Colin responds, “I'm trying not to be oversensitive.” “To be oversensitive” means to get mad or offended too easily. Colin says that someone recently drew a picture of him as a leprechaun. A “leprechaun” (leprechaun) is an imaginary small person, who wears green clothes and is in Ireland – is an Irish person. It's a fictional person who sometimes appears in stories about Ireland – in Irish stories, we could say.

Eileen says, “You're right. We're all being a little insensitive.” “Insensitive” means that you are not concerned or don't care about other people's feelings – whether you offend other people or not. So, we have “oversensitive,” which is you are too concerned about other people insulting you, and “insensitive,” when you don't care about insulting other people.

Eileen apologizes. Colin says, “I accept your apology.” When we “accept (accept) someone's apology,” we are saying, “It's okay. I believe that you are sorry and it is not a problem. I will not be angry with you anymore.” Colin says, “I'll take you at your word.” “To take someone at their word” means to believe what someone says without asking for any additional proof or evidence – “I take you at your word.”



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Eileen then says, “Can we shake and be friends again?” “To shake” (shake) in this case means to shake hands; to put your hand in the hand of the other person and move it up and down, like you’re making an agreement. The verb “to shake” has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for this episode for more explanations.

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

[start of story]

I was telling my friend, Gina, a joke. I began it by saying, “An Irishman, an Englishman, and a Frenchman walk into this bar, and...” Suddenly, Gina grabbed my arm and shook her head. I turned around and our coworker, Colin, was standing right behind me.

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Colin: It may be just a joke to you, but it’s getting a little old to me. I already have a tough time fitting in as an outsider in this company, and I’m really tired of being the butt of jokes around here. Besides, ethnic jokes reinforce stereotypes.

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Eileen: Can we shake and be friends again?

Colin: Yeah, sure. I guess so.

[end of story]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

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

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