

Catch Word #57 – Fishy

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here at Culips bringing you a Catch Word podcast.

Maura: That's Culips. And our website is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Harp: Yeah, check out the website. Because there you can find the Lipservice for each episode, and in the Lipservice you can find a complete transcript, detailed explanations and even a quiz.

Maura: Yeah, so check it out. Today's episode is a Catch Word episode where we take one expression and give you some definitions and fun examples.

Harp: Fun! What is our Catch Word for today, Maura?

Maura: The expression for today's episode is **fishy**.

Harp: **Fishy**.

Maura: Yeah, like something is **fishy**, or something smells **fishy**.

Harp: OK, so something is **fishy**, something smells **fishy**.

Maura: Yeah, so what does it mean when something is **fishy**?

Harp: When something is **fishy** it's questionable, something seems suspicious. How else would you describe it?

Maura: Yeah, if we say that something is **fishy**, we believe that there is something strange about it.

Harp: OK. Maura, do you know the origin of this expression?

Maura: Well, there are a few possibilities but the most interesting one is that it actually comes from the smell of a fish.

Harp: Oh, OK.

- Maura: So when the fish is fresh it actually doesn't have a very strong **odour**. But if the fish has been dead for a few days, it starts to have this really strong **fishy** smell.
- Harp: OK, so that's where the expression came from.
- Maura: Right, so if you see a fish and it has a very strong fish smell, you think, "I don't know if that's a good fish."
- Harp: Right, because it's not a fresh fish.
- Maura: Yeah, you're suspicious about the fish. Maybe at the market they're saying, "fresh fish!" but because of the smell, you're not sure, right?
- Harp: Interesting!
- Maura: Right, so now we use it to talk about anything, not fish.
- Harp: OK.
- Maura: So someone, a person can be **fishy**, or an event can be **fishy**.
- Harp: Yeah or a story could be **fishy**.
- Maura: Yeah, pretty much anything where something is strange or suspicious.
- Harp: OK, let's give an example.
- Maura: OK.
- Harp: So Maura, Matt **called in sick** to work today.
- Maura: Really, he seemed healthy yesterday.
- Harp: Yeah, his story seems a bit **fishy**.
- Maura: Yeah, if he seemed so fine yesterday and today he's sick, something seems **fishy** about that to me.
- Harp: Yeah, he actually updated his Facebook with a new posting saying he's going to a party today.
- Maura: Mm hmm.
- Harp: Mm hmm, something seems **fishy**.

- Maura: He doesn't sound very sick.
- Harp: Nope, he doesn't **at all**.
- Maura: OK, great. So, in this example, the story was **fishy** because Matt seemed healthy but he said he was sick so we didn't believe him.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK, let's give another example. Harp did you see the news last night?
- Harp: No, what happened?
- Maura: Well there was a story on the local Montreal news that said that a man downtown had seen a **UFO**, something flying in the air, that he didn't know what it was.
- Harp: Really?
- Maura: Yeah.
- Harp: Were there any pictures?
- Maura: No, there weren't any pictures **and to be honest**, the guy who was telling the story seemed a bit **fishy**.
- Harp: Yeah, the story seems a bit **fishy**.
- Maura: Mm hmm.
- Harp: I don't believe it.
- Maura: So there's another example of something that just seems strange, right?
- Harp: Yeah, exactly, it seems suspicious. I don't believe it.
- Maura: Yeah, the story was **fishy** and the guy who was telling the story.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK, now we can say something is **fishy** or smells **fishy** but there are also some other similar expressions.
- Harp: OK, another similar expression is to say that something is **funny**. Something seems **funny**.

- Maura: Right, so probably a lot of you listening know the word **funny** to mean something that makes you laugh, right – ha ha ha ha ha!
- Harp: Yeah, but in this sense we're saying something is **funny** when something is strange.
- Maura: Right, so in this case **funny** can also mean the word *strange*. Ah ... Harp, you were telling us about a funny story.
- Harp: Well, I read it on the **BBC** so I think it's true. There's a story that some scientists created an invisible **cloak**.
- Maura: OK.
- Harp: So it's a material that if you put it over something you can't see the thing anymore. It seemed strange to me, it seemed- something seemed **funny** about the story but it was on the **BBC**.
- Maura: That definitely seems like a **funny** story.
- Harp: Yeah, it sounds like something from Harry Potter or a story like that.
- Maura: Yeah, that definitely seems **hard to believe**.
- Harp: Yeah, something seems **funny** about the story. Right. What's the next expression that's similar to something is **fishy**, or something smells **fishy**?
- Maura: Well, we can also simply say that something **isn't right**.
- Harp: Yeah, something **doesn't seem right**, something **isn't right**.
- Maura: Right, and in this case it means the same thing, something is strange, or questionable, there's something you're not sure about.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: For example, when it was my birthday in October, my friend had a surprise party for me. You know! You were there.
- Harp: It was **funny** because you were so confused that no one was doing anything for your birthday, no one was planning anything and all of us said that we were busy and we couldn't hang out, we couldn't go for dinner and you seemed – you seemed suspicious.

- Maura: Yeah, so I didn't have any proof but I just had a feeling that **something wasn't right**.
- Harp: Yeah exactly, and then we surprised you with the party.
- Maura: Yeah, and then everything was great.
- Harp: It was a fun party.
- Maura: So right, before the surprise party, when I was really confused, I could say that **something wasn't right**, or something seemed **fishy**.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: There was something that- I just wasn't sure if I could trust all of my friends.
- Harp: Exactly. All of your friends were busy on the weekend of your birthday? Something seemed **fishy** there.
- Maura: Yeah but it was a really good surprise.
- Harp: Good, I'm glad you liked it.
- Maura: OK, so let's review all the expressions we looked at.
- Harp: OK we started with something is **fishy**, something smells **fishy**.
- Maura: Right, so you can use this to talk about a person or an event, or pretty much anything.
- Harp: Exactly, anything can smell **fishy** or can seem **fishy**.
- Maura: And it means that something is strange or suspicious.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: And then another similar expression is that something is **funny** or seems **funny**.
- Harp: Exactly, it's the same thing; something seems strange, something seems doubtful.
- Maura: Yeah and then the last expression that was similar was **something isn't right**, or something doesn't seem right or feel right.

- Harp: Yeah and again, this is used in exactly the same way, that something doesn't seem right, that something is strange.
- Maura: Yeah, that's it. So if you want to know more about these expressions or read the transcript or read our blog, or just have fun on the Culips website, go check us out.
- Harp: Yeah, and again it's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.
- Maura: So this has been Maura.
- Harp: And Harp.
- Maura: And we'll see you later.
- Harp: Bye everyone.
- Maura: Bye.

Detailed Explanation

Fishy

The focus expression this week is **fishy**. We can say that something *is fishy*, *seems fishy*, or *smells fishy*. We can talk about a thing or a person. When we say that something is suspicious by using the expression *something smells fishy* we are not actually talking about the smell.

Like we say in this episode, there are a few possibly origins to this expression. At Culips we usually choose to tell you ones that make the most sense to us and ones that relate to the expression enough that it may help you remember it.

***Fishy** can also be used in a literal way. We can say that something smells **fishy** because it actually smells like fish. Here are a couple examples, one using the expression and the other using fishy in a literal way.

Fiona: He told me that he is an excellent chef and studied at a famous culinary school in Paris.

Desmond: That sounds **fishy** to me. All he ever eats is peanut butter sandwiches.

Ben: What are you cooking ? It smells **fishy** in here.

Barbara: I am making burritos, but I cooked fish yesterday so maybe that is why.

Odour

We can use the word **odour** (spelled odor in the U.S.A.) or smell in the same way. It can be a good or bad. **Odour** can sometimes be used to have only a negative meaning; that the smells are bad.

Scent is used the same way as **odour** and *smell*, but *scent* is usually a good smell.

To call in sick (to work)

In one of our examples in this episode, Harp says that Matt **called in sick** to work. **To call in sick** means that you call a place where you were supposed to be, like work or school, and tell them that you are sick. You could be sick, or you could only be saying that you are sick.

Here are some examples with the expression **to call in sick**.



Kevin: I **called in sick** today.

Olivia: Oh, were you not feeling good?

Kevin: Yeah, I woke up this morning feeling horrible.

Sheila: This is so fun! I could stay out all night!

Jen: Me too! Let's stay out all night and **call in sick** tomorrow.

Dean: Did you work today?

Norm: No, I didn't. I **called in sick** and spent the day outside because it was so nice!

A fish story

We don't talk about this expression in this episode, but it is a related expression. **A fish story** is a story that is impossible, or **fishy**, and is told by someone to impress others and to sound interesting. **Fish** is used to mean impossible only in this way, not in any other usage.

There is a movie called *Big Fish* by Tim Burton that was released in 2003. This movie is all about the crazy, unbelievable stories told by one of the characters.

The possible origin of **a fish story** is different from our focus expression, **fishy**. **A fish story** comes from the habit of fishermen who catch a fish and exaggerate their size when telling others about it. For example, someone who catches a small fish might say they caught a huge fish and exaggerate its weight and length!



At all

These two little words, **at all**, are used for emphasis in negative sentences, like *very* or *really*. In this episode, Harp says, "He doesn't **at all**." **At all** usually goes at the end of a sentence (or clause) and emphasizes or intensifies the simple sentence, "he doesn't."

Here are a couple more examples.

Jon: I am so tired. I don't want to do work today **at all**.

Hillary: Me neither.

James: I don't think she likes me **at all** and I don't know what to do.

Mindy: Maybe she will change her mind when she gets to know you.

UFO

Another example in this episode was the story of the man who saw the **UFO**. **UFO** stands for **unidentified flying object**. So a **UFO** is something that is supposedly seen flying in the air that is not a plane or anything else that we know. **UFOs** are associated with life on other planets - aliens. Other words that are similar to **UFO** include flying saucer, space ship, or space craft.

The first letter of each word - **unidentified flying object** - is used to make up a new word where all the letters are pronounced. This is called an acronym or initialism.

Here are some popular examples of these kinds of abbreviations.

NBC - National Broadcasting Company

IBM – International Business Machines

DVD – Digital Versatile Disc
DNA – deoxyribonucleic acid
FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation
USA – United States of America
BBC – see below!

And to be honest

This is a common expression, but it does not need much explanation because the meaning is literal. We often say **to be honest** when we want to stress that we are saying something completely honestly. We may say this before we express a personal opinion or before we talk about sensitive information that is also true.

Here are some examples with **to be honest**.

Bill: What do you think of Edward's work?

Ned: **To be honest**, I don't think he works very hard, and you can see it in his work too.

Lisa: Do you want to see a movie tonight like we had planned?

Bonnie: I am not really sure. **To be honest**, I am a bit tired.

You can use **to be honest** any time you want to emphasize you are honest.

Funny

Funny can be used just like **fishy**, to describe something strange, suspicious, or questionable. **Funny** can be used to talk about a person or a thing. Most people learning English know **funny** in the more literal way, but it is also often used to mean strange.

In this episode we use the word **funny** to mean **fishy**. Harp also uses it in the literal way; it is underlined in the transcripts for you. She says, "It was funny because you were so confused that no one was doing anything for your birthday." In this case, funny means humorous, not strange.

Here are some examples with funny, meaning strange or humorous.

Harvey: She's so **funny**.

Simon: I know she always has the best jokes.
(Funny means humorous.)

Jean: He's **funny**.

Paul: I know. I don't understand him.
(Funny means strange.)

In some cases it may be unclear if funny means strange or humorous because sometimes both seem to fit!

BBC

Harp's fishy story surprised her because she heard it on the **BBC**. **BBC** represents the words **B**ritish **B**roadcasting **C**orporation, a broadcasting corporation based in the United Kingdom that can be seen and heard in many different countries. It is generally believed to be a trustworthy source for news.

Harp finds it surprising that a story of an invisible **cloak** was on the BBC. A story about an invisible cloak seems **fishy**, but because it was on the **BBC** it is likely to be true in some way.

Cloak

A **cloak** is a fancy old piece of clothing, known as a cape or a fancy kind of coat. It is a big piece of clothing worn on the top of the body, which is often used to hide the body. As Harp says, some of the most famous characters who wear **cloaks** are in *Harry Potter* movies and books. Characters also wear **cloaks** in *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the case of Harp's story, the **cloak** made people invisible or unable to be seen by others when it is worn. It sounds pretty **fishy**!

Hard to believe

When something seems **fishy** or **funny**, we can also say that something is **hard to believe**. We can also say it is **difficult to believe**. The story of the invisible cloak is **hard to believe** because it sounds like magic. When you say someone or something is **hard to believe** it is more polite than saying, "I don't believe it."

Something is not right

We can say that something **is not right**, and it has a similar meaning to saying something is **funny** or **fishy**. You could say that a thing **is not right**, or a person is not right. In this case, this expression is a bit stronger than the other two. This expression can be taken almost literally.

To say that something **is not right** is also an expression that is used in other cases. For example, one person asks another, "Is my math problem correct?" and the other responds, "No, it **is not right**."

Here are a couple more examples of saying something **is not right**.

Sam: How's the soup?

Hannah: Something just **isn't right** about it.

Bruce: Something about George's story just **didn't seem right**.

Kylie: Yes, there was something suspicious about it.

Quiz

1. Which is NOT an expression with *fishy*?

- a) it is fishy
- b) it seems fishy
- c) it smells fishy
- d) it moves fishy

2. *Fishy* can also be used to talk about what?

- a) the smell of fish
- b) the size of a fish
- c) different kinds of fish
- d) seafood

3. Wally: What is that awful smell?

Anne: I don't know. But it is a strong _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) scent
- b) odour
- c) nose
- d) song

4. Which expression means that someone has called their office to say that they are not coming to work because they are sick?

- a) to call in sick
- b) to call on sick
- c) to call off sick
- d) to call in

5. What kind of story is a fish story?

- a) very believable
- b) hard to believe
- c) happens on a beach
- d) magical

6. What do the letters UFO represent?

- a) unidentified flying object
- b) unique flying obstacle
- c) unclear free object
- d) unidentified free object

7. Louis: What is so funny?

Anne: The dog just took your seat.

What is the meaning of *funny* in this example?

- a) strange
- b) suspicious
- c) humourous
- d) questionable

8. What kinds of characters are known for wearing cloaks?

- a) fantasy
- b) science fiction
- c) both fantasy and science fiction
- d) neither

Answers: 1.d 2.a 3.b 4.a 5.b 6.a 7.c 8.c