

Catch Word #69 – Over My Head

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone.

Harp: This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: Here at Culips, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: And we're here with your Catch Word podcast, where we look at an expression and we give you lots of explanations and examples, and also similar expressions that have the same theme.

Harp: Yeah, and make sure you check out the website and become a member, because then you have access to the Lipservice, which includes the detailed explanations, a complete transcript, and even a quiz.

Maura: Right, so if there's something that you're not sure about in this episode, it will probably be explained in Lipservice.

Harp: Exactly. And if it's not, write us an email.

Maura: Yeah, we love to get emails from our listeners. So, the theme for today's episode is someone who completely didn't understand something and the expressions all describe someone who didn't understand something. OK, now let's introduce the expression for today.

Harp: All right. Today's expression is ***it went over my head***.

Maura: Right, so we can say ***it went over my head*** or ***it went over her head***.

Harp: Yeah, ***it went over my head, it went over his head***.

Maura: There are lots of variations, depending on who you're talking about.

Harp: Exactly. Maura, what does this mean?

Maura: This means that the person didn't understand something, they didn't understand anything. It could be something that another person just said or it could be something that they're reading in a book...

- Harp: OK, so the **it** is what they don't understand, and they would use the **my head, her head, his head** depending on the person who's talking.
- Maura: Yeah, right. And the reason that the person doesn't understand could be for a variety of reasons. It could be because they don't know very much about the subject, so they don't know the technical language and it's too complicated so they can't understand.
- Harp: So for example, last week my computer broke and I called my **IT help desk** and they came over to fix it and the guy was so nice but he was using all these **tech** terms. I didn't know what he was saying. **It just went over my head.** I didn't understand a thing he was saying.
- Maura: Yeah, in that case you don't have the knowledge about computers so you're not able to understand when someone's talking about that.
- Harp: Exactly. **It went over my head** because I don't know much about computers.
- Maura: Yeah, exactly. So most of the time, we're talking about a past situation. So we say **it went over my head**. But we can also say **something is over my head** or **it was over my head**.
- Harp: OK, can you give me an example with that?
- Maura: Yes, I can. I wish that I knew more about cars and how cars work, but I really don't know anything other than the names of parts like the engine. So when someone starts to talk to me about a car problem or parts of a car, **it's really over my head**.
- Harp: I agree. **I'm the same way**. OK, so that's a good example. Maura, let's do a dialogue.
- Maura: OK, great. **Man**, do you understand what the teacher is talking about?
- Harp: I have no idea what she's talking about right now.
- Maura: I'm so confused.
- Harp: Yeah, **it's over my head**. I don't understand.
- Maura: Me too. Maybe we should ask a question.
- Harp: That's a good idea.

- Maura: OK, great. So that's an example of two people who didn't understand something, which is what this expression means.
- Harp: Yeah, maybe they didn't do their homework the night before.
- Maura: Yeah, or maybe it was just too complicated for them. So one more thing we should mention about this expression, **it went over my head**, is that sometimes people also use a **hand gesture** that expresses the same thing.
- Harp: Yeah, so if you're in a situation where you don't understand something and you put your hand over your head and you move your hand over your head, it's showing that **it went over your head**, that you don't understand. We'll take some pictures and show you on our website.
- Maura: Yeah, so what people do is they take their hand in front and they quickly move it above their head, and usually they have a confused look on their face.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK, good. So the first expression was **it went over my head**, but we also have more expressions that also mean someone doesn't understand something.
- Harp: OK, what's the next expression, Maura?
- Maura: The next expression **it's all Greek to me**.
- Harp: **It's all Greek to me**.
- Maura: Yeah, **it's all Greek to me**. And this means that, again, someone doesn't understand another subject that someone's talking about.
- Harp: Exactly. If someone's talking to you about something you don't understand, maybe a computer or maybe a car, you could just say, **it's all Greek to me**, which means you don't understand what they're talking about.
- Maura: Right, and there's a couple things that are interesting about this expression. The first one is that similar expressions exist in many different languages. The only thing that really changes is the language. In English, we often use **Greek** or sometimes I've also heard people use **Chinese**.
- Harp: Yeah, **it's all Chinese to me, it's all Greek to me**.

- Maura: Yeah, and if you're a person who does understand Greek or who does speak Chinese, then you probably wouldn't use this expression.
- Harp: Yeah, you use the language that you don't know.
- Maura: Exactly. OK, so let's give another dialogue example with ***it's all Greek to me***.
- Harp: OK. OK, so with this math problem, all you have to do is add to here and then divide it by 674,000, and then...
- Maura: **Whoa, whoa, whoa.** I don't understand that. ***It's all Greek to me***, Harp.
- Harp: Oh no.
- Maura: Yeah, I think you need to explain that to me again.
- Harp: Should I start from the beginning?
- Maura: Yes, please.
- Harp: OK.
- Maura: OK, good. So that was an example of a math problem, which I really didn't understand, and I used the expression, ***it's all Greek to me*** to tell you that I didn't understand anything.
- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: That sounded like a pretty complicated problem.
- Harp: It was!
- Maura: OK, so, so far we looked at ***it when over my head*** and ***it's all Greek to me***. And we have one more expression that means that someone completely didn't understand anything.
- Harp: Yeah, this expression is ***not to make heads or tails of something***.
- Maura: Right, so we use this expression in the negative, ***not to make heads or tails of something***. So we might say ***I can't make heads or tails of something***, or ***she couldn't make heads or tails of something***. So we use this expression in the negative.

- Harp: Yeah, so to understand this expression, ***I can't make heads or tails of something***, imagine an animal that you can't see the difference between the head and the tail. This is obviously a very confusing animal, or you don't understand it.
- Maura: Right, so normally when you look at an animal, it's very clear what is the head of the animal and what is the tail, so ***if you can't make heads or tails of it***, you don't understand it, you don't know what it is, you're completely confused.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly.
- Maura: OK, so let's give another dialogue example with ***not to make heads or tails of something***. Harp, are you OK? It looks like you're having some problems.
- Harp: **Urgh!**
- Maura: Harp, what's wrong? It looks like you're having trouble with the vending machine.
- Harp: I don't understand on how to use it. I keep putting my money in and the money comes out and I'm not getting any chocolate. I'm getting very frustrated. ***I can't make heads or tails of it.***
- Maura: OK, here. Let me show you. You put your money in and then you have to choose what you want.
- Harp: **Ugh.** I was choosing before I put the money in!
- Maura: Yeah, OK.
- Harp: I understand now. Thanks, Maura!
- Maura: OK, no problem. OK, good. So in that example you were definitely confused by that vending machine. You didn't know how it worked it, but by the end of it you figured it out.
- Harp: Yup, with your help. Maura, do we have one last expression we're going to look at?
- Maura: We do have one last short expression that's very common. Often when people don't understand something they simply say ***I'm lost.***
- Harp: Yeah, ***I'm lost.***

- Maura: Right, so **lost** is usually associated with the physical space and not knowing where you are. But people also use **lost** when they don't understand something.
- Harp: OK, so for example, with the math example, when you didn't understand what I was teaching you about the math problem, you were **lost**.
- Maura: Yes, exactly. A lot of the times I might find myself **lost** if I'm learning a new language, because there are so many grammar rules and vocabulary that you just feel **lost**, because there's so much to learn and so many difficult things.
- Harp: That's a good point. Let's do a dialogue example with **to be lost**.
- Maura: OK, good. So did you see the new girl?
- Harp: No, I haven't.
- Maura: Well today she was at her desk trying to get some work done, but she looked completely **lost**.
- Harp: Oh no. She doesn't know what she's doing?
- Maura: No, she really looked really confused and I **felt** kind of **bad for her**.
- Harp: Oh no, maybe I'll go help her out, see if she's doing OK.
- Maura: Yeah, that's probably a good idea. All right, so that was our last expression for this episode. Let's just repeat them all one more time for you.
- Harp: OK, so we started with **it went over my head**.
- Maura: Right, and we can also say **it is over my head** or **it was over my head**. And the next expression was **it's all Greek to me**.
- Harp: Maura, and what was the third expression?
- Maura: The third expression was **to make heads or tails of something**, but remember, we almost always use this expression in the negative form, so, **not to make heads or tails of something**.
- Harp: OK, and the last expression was **to be lost**.
- Maura: Right, so we can say **I'm lost** or **you're lost**.

Harp: Or *she's lost*.

Maura: Yeah, good. So thanks for listening to another Culips episode, and don't forget to go to our website, where there's lot of fun English learning stuff.

Harp: Exactly, that's Culips.com. C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: This has been Maura.

Harp: And Harp.

Maura: And we'll talk to you next time.

Harp: Bye everyone!

Maura: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

It went over my head

This episode's first expression is ***it went over my head*** or ***it is over my head***. This means that someone did not understand something. The reason that the person did not understand could be because it was too complicated or because it is a subject area that they do not know much about.

This expression can be used to talk about any person or people, for example, ***it went over his head*** or ***it is over their heads***. **It** can also be replaced to be more specific, for example, ***the homework was over my head***.

Here is one more example with this expression:

Don: Did your friend help you out with your finances?

Oscar: Yes, but it's so difficult. I don't think I could ever do it alone. **It's over my head.**

Hand gesture (it went over my head)

Along with the expression *to go over someone's head*, people might also make a **gesture** that expresses the same thing. People might do only the **gesture** or say the expression and do the **gesture** at the same time. A **gesture** is a movement with hands and arms, sometimes the head too. In this case, the **gesture** with *to go over someone's head* is a **hand gesture**.

The **hand gesture** with this expression is done by moving one hand above the head from the front to back, as if to show that something just flew by, right above your head. Check out the video on our website, if you haven't already seen it.

IT help desk

IT stands for **Information Technology**. **IT** is a field of study in university and it is also often a department at work. In **IT**, people work with computers and other technology. At a workplace, the people who work in **IT** are there to make sure that the computers and other technologies that everyone needs to do their jobs are functioning properly. If you have a computer problem at work, you call someone from **IT**, just like Harp did in her story. This is a relatively new term, which has become popular as computers became more common.

A **help desk** is a place you can call for help. You can find **help desks** in shopping malls if you need help finding a certain store. There are also **help desks** located in universities. In any large institution, there is usually a **help desk** for anyone who has questions. An **IT help desk** is a place where someone from **IT** will help you. Sometimes it's a real desk, and other times it's just another way to say the **IT** department.

Tech

In this episode Harp says “**tech** terms.” **Tech** is the short version of the word **technology** or **technological**. Because those are such long words, people often shorten them, and now **tech** is a word.

Tech can also be short for the word **technician**, a person who does technical things. For example, the **lighting tech** for a play takes care of the technical parts of the production that have to do with the lights.

I'm the same way

In this episode, Maura says that she doesn't understand how cars work. Harp replies that **she is the same way**. This is simply another way of saying that you are the same. When we use **the same way** to talk about people, we are often talking about their behaviour.

Here are a couple of examples:

Jenny: When I go into a haunted house I get so scared.

Ben: **I'm the same way**. I start acting like a baby.

Brent: How was your weekend?

Alex: It was good. But my wife kept bugging me to go out and mow the lawn.

Brent: Yeah, **my wife's the same way**, she hates it when I sit around doing nothing.

Man (slang)

If you listen to English music or TV shows or movies, or speak often with native English speakers, you'll probably hear this slang term. **Man** has no meaning when used as a slang term, and is often used at the very beginning or end of sentences to add emphasis. Using **man** when you speak is very casual, and it should never be used in professional situations or if you're trying to make a good impression in a formal setting.

Here are a couple of examples with **man**. Remember that the meaning of these sentences does not change at all if you remove the word **man**.

Cindy: **Man**, I have so much work to do this weekend!

Jason: Yeah, I hate that.

Neil: How's it going, **man**?

Shannon: Good, good. How are you?

It's all Greek to me/It's all Chinese to me

This is another expression that means a person did not understand. If you do not understand Greek, and you say **it's all Greek to me**, it's logical that you mean that you did not understand. Whatever the person is saying is so confusing to you, they might as well be speaking another language that you don't understand at all.

Remember, if you can speak Greek, this expression doesn't work for you! In English we most often use the expression with **Greek** or **Chinese**.

Here is one more example with this expression:

Heath: Did you understand the last part of the presentation?

Lorne: No! **It was all Greek to me**.

Heath: Me too.

Whoa

Whoa is a sound that people make when they're surprised or impressed. People may say **whoa** as a reaction to something that someone else has said. It can also be used as a way to tell someone to stop speaking. You may want them to stop speaking because you don't understand what they said, or you are so surprised by what they said that you don't believe it.

In the example in this episode, Maura says, "**whoa, whoa, whoa**." It's common to say **whoa** three times, like Maura does. Maura says this because she wants Harp to stop speaking, because she doesn't understand. She wants Harp to stop and repeat what she said more slowly and clearly.

Here are two examples with **whoa**:

Sally: So, what do you want to do today?

Tyler: I don't know. **Whoa!** Look outside! It's pouring rain!

Sally: So I guess we're not going to the beach.

Bert: So then you head west on Park Avenue, then take your next right, and then a left.

Shayne: **Whoa, whoa, whoa**. You lost me. Can you please repeat that?

To not be able to make heads or tails of something

To not be able to make heads or tails of something, again, means that someone cannot understand something. This expression is usually used with **cannot** or **can't**, in that someone **cannot make heads or tails of it**.

Here's one more example for you:

Dina: Have you looked at the report? I **can't make heads or tails of it**.

Katie: I think I understand it. I'll try to explain it to you.

Urgh

Urgh is like *whoa*; they're both sounds that express a feeling. **Urgh** expresses a dislike of something or a negative feeling. A person might dislike something because it's boring or frustrating. Harp uses **urgh** in this episode when she's frustrated with a vending machine.

Here are another couple of examples with **urgh**:

Lily: Hey, what are you watching on TV?

Matt: **Urgh**, this really boring movie.

Dorothy: How's your homework going?

Linda: Not that well. **Urgh**, I just can't understand what I'm supposed to do!

I'm lost

This is one last short expression that also means a person does not understand something. To be physically lost means that a person doesn't know where they are, and they don't know where to go. It has the same meaning here, except you are only **lost** in your mind!

Of course we can use this expression with any subject. We can also use **lost** with different verbs like, *to feel* or *to get*.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be lost**:

Keith: How is Gena doing with her new job?

Carmen: She felt **lost** at first, but she's feeling more comfortable every day.

Sam: I was so **lost** when I first started studying German.

Justin: How's your German now?

Sam: It's much better!

I felt bad for her

When someone **feels bad** for another person, it means that someone is in a bad situation. For example, John lost his job, and Cecilia **feels bad for** him because he lost his job. **To feel bad for someone** means that you feel bad or worried or sad about the other person's bad situation. You feel the same thing as the person who is actually in the situation.

In an example in this episode, Maura says that she **feels bad for** the new girl at work. She **feels bad for** her because the new girl doesn't know what she's doing and is having a difficult time at her new job.

In this expression, **bad** can also be replaced by *sad* or *sorry*. It can also be changed to a positive, like *happy* or *excited* when the person is in a good situation. But for some reason, we DO NOT say that a person *feels good for* another person.

Here are a couple of examples with this expression:

Joan: Derrick **feels so bad for** her that he's trying to help her finish the work.

Heather: That's nice of him.

Bernice: I **feel so sad for** Patrice.

Doug: Yeah, I know. First her mother died, and now her father.

Quiz

1. If something goes over someone's head, what does it mean?

- a) They know something very well.
- b) They do not understand something.
- c) They do now know how a car works.
- d) They cannot speak Greek.

2. Greg: I learned lots of new vocabulary in my Spanish class last night, but the grammar was over my head.

What does this mean?

- a) Greg understood vocabulary, but didn't understand the grammar.
- b) Greg didn't understand the vocabulary, but understood the grammar.
- c) Greg didn't understand the vocabulary or grammar.
- d) Greg understood the vocabulary and the grammar.

3. You can also express that something went over your head by doing what?

- a) dancing around the room
- b) smiling
- c) shaking someone's hand
- d) moving your hand over your head

4. It's all _____ to me.

Please fill in the blank with the best answer.

- a) Chinese
- b) Japanese
- c) Spanish
- d) English

5. Why does Maura say “whoa, whoa, whoa” in this episode?

- a) because Harp is so funny
- b) because what Harp says is too difficult
- c) because she like horses
- d) because she wants to speak Chinese

6. If you need help with your computer at work, who should you call?

- a) TI
- b) IT
- c) G.I. Joe
- d) The A Team

7. *I can't make _____ or _____ of it* is an expression that also means someone doesn't understand something.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) heads; tails
- b) tails; heads
- c) tails; legs
- d) heads, feet

8. When someone says *urgh*, what could that express?

- a) They are happy.
- b) They are excited.
- c) They are sad.
- d) They are frustrated.

9. What is another expression that means someone does not understand?

- a) to be found
- b) to be lost
- c) to be travelling
- d) to be crazy

Answers: 1.b 2.a 3.d 4.a 5.b 6.b 7.a 8.d 9.b