

Catch Word #78 – Gossip

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone! This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here at Culips.

Maura: That's the free ESL podcast, Culips.

Harp: C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: And when you go to our website, you can look at all our past episodes, and you can also become a member, where you'll have access to our transcripts, and more explanations, and a quiz for this episode.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: And if you want to support us in another way, you can also make a donation.

Harp: Everything helps to make wonderful, fantastic, fun podcasts.

Maura: And speaking of fantastic, wonderful, fun podcasts, today's podcast is a Catch Word podcast, where we talk about different expressions and we give different examples of how to use these expressions.

Harp: Yes. And today we're going to discuss **gossip**.

Maura: Right. Today's Catch Word episode is about **gossip**.

Harp: We're going to look at English expressions related to **gossip** that native English speakers use all the time.

Maura: Right. So we're looking at English expressions that you hear when people are talking about **gossip**. **Gossip**. It sounds so **juicy**, just the word.

Harp: Yes. What is **gossip**, Maura?

Maura: Well, **gossip** is all of the stories that people tell about other people that aren't there, and these stories are really personal or interesting and exciting stories.

Harp: Yes. They're sensational stories that we like to tell.

- Maura: Right. And most of the time, you don't know if it's true or not.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: So, these stories are told from one person to the next and they're very exciting.
- Harp: Yes. They're personal and intimate stories about other people when they're not there.
- Maura: Yes. So, it's fun and exciting, but it can also be disrespectful and unfair to the person who is being **gossiped** about.
- Harp: Yeah, and **gossip** can be mean, because you don't know if it's true, so you could be telling stories that are false.
- Maura: Yeah, it's **dangerous territory, gossip**. Now, **gossip** can be used to talk about all of these stories that are so interesting, and we can also use **gossip** as a verb, so **to gossip** is to tell these sensational stories to other people.
- Harp: Yeah, *we were **gossiping** last night about her.*
- Maura: Right. Or *he **gossiped** about his ex-girlfriend.*
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: And someone who **gossips** a lot can also be called **a gossip**. So the person is **a gossip**.
- Harp: Yes, exactly. So, **gossip** means stories about other people who aren't there that are personal stories, they're sensational stories, and we don't know if they're true or false.
- Maura: Right. And we can also say **to gossip**, so, to tell stories about other people, **to gossip** about people.
- Harp: Yes. And you can call someone who **gossips** a lot **a gossip**.
- Maura: So there are many ways to use this word.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: And now that we've defined it, let's talk about different expressions that we use to talk about **gossip**, or when we're talking about **gossip**, different

expressions that we might use.

Harp: Yes, expressions related to **gossip**.

Maura: So the first expression is **hearsay**. To say that something is *only hearsay* or *just hearsay*.

Harp: Yes, *it's only hearsay*.

Maura: Right. And this word—**hearsay**—is made up of two words: *hear* and *say*, but they're put together to form this one word: **hearsay**.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: And **hearsay** means that something is **gossip**, or a **rumour**, or not true.

Harp: Yes, exactly. **Hearsay** has the same meaning as **gossip**. So when you say *it's only hearsay*, you're saying it's only **gossip**.

Maura: Right, which means that you don't trust the source, you don't trust the story, you don't really believe it.

Harp: Yeah. It could be false.

Maura: So, someone might say *it's only hearsay* if they hear a story and they don't believe it; they don't trust it.

Harp: Yeah. If you hear a story and it's about someone and you don't believe it, there's no evidence, there are no facts, there's no proof, you can say *it's only hearsay*.

Maura: Right. And someone who would say this is probably someone who doesn't **gossip** very often. They don't want to participate in **spreading rumours**.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: So let's give an example now using **hearsay**. So, did you hear about Jasmine and Sam?

Harp: No. Tell me.

Maura: Well, **supposedly** they're dating.

Harp: Really? Jasmine told you that?

- Maura: Well, no. But some people said that they saw Jasmine and Sam out at the movies.
- Harp: It's only **hearsay**; that's just **gossip**. They might have gone to the movies just as friends. Jasmine would have told me. She's my best friend.
- Maura: You're right. But someone told me that they were sure they saw them **holding hands** yesterday.
- Harp: Hmm, interesting **gossip**.
- Maura: OK, good. So, in that example, you weren't sure if you believed me, because it was only **hearsay** and only **gossip**, so you didn't really trust it.
- Harp: Yes. In that example, I **needed to see it with my own eyes**.
- Maura: Good. Now, let's look at another expression that we use when we're **spreading gossip**.
- Harp: Yes. This expression is *a little birdie told me*.
- Maura: Right. And when would you use this expression, *a little birdie told me*?
- Harp: I would use this expression—*a little birdie told me*—when I'm **spreading gossip** and I don't want to tell where I heard it or if it's true.
- Maura: Right. So sometimes, when you tell a story about another person, the person listening will ask you, *well where did you hear that from?* Because they're trying to find out if it was really true and so they're trying to find the source of the information. And so sometimes when you don't want to say where you heard the **gossip**, you might say *a little birdie told me*.
- Harp: I think that people use this expression—*a little birdie told me*—when they are the person who wants to **spread the gossip**.
- Maura: That's interesting. That's why this little expression is so mysterious, because you're not giving any information.
- Harp: Yes. Some people start off **gossiping** by saying, *well a little birdie told me something interesting*.
- Maura: Right. And then when someone starts by saying *a little birdie told me*, you know that it's going to be **gossip**.
- Harp: Yes. You know it's going to be a personal, intimate story about people who aren't there.

- Maura: Exactly. So really, this expression signifies that you're listening to **gossip**.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: So let's use this expression in an example now.
- Harp: Hey, I heard that Mohammad is quitting his job.
- Maura: Really? Who did you hear that from?
- Harp: **A little birdie told me.**
- Maura: Oh, come on, tell me! Where did you hear it?
- Harp: I can't reveal my source. It's a secret who told me.
- Maura: Well, I guess we'll have to wait and see if it's true.
- Harp: I think he's going to quit his job. Maura, what's the next expression related to **gossip**?
- Maura: Well, when people are **gossiping**, they're talking about people who aren't there.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: And I think no one really likes that—to be talked about, especially in a negative way, when they're not there. And so we have an expression, which is **to talk about someone behind their back**, which means to talk about someone in a negative way when they are not there.
- Harp: Yes. So when you **talk about someone behind their back**, they are not there. They can't defend themselves against the story.
- Maura: If you imagine that your back is turned and people are talking about you; if your back is turned, you can't hear what they're saying, you can't see what they're doing. So they're really doing it without you knowing.
- Harp: Exactly. So they can **gossip** and say whatever they want, and you can't defend yourself.
- Maura: Exactly. But now this expression can be used, of course, at any time. You don't need to be in the room. You can be in another city and people can be **gossiping** about you.

- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: So let's give an example now with this expression. I can't believe that Ben was **talking about me behind my back**.
- Harp: Oh no! What did he say?
- Maura: Well, he was saying that I don't work hard, and I always do my projects late, and they're never good quality. I just ... I can't believe that he **talked about me behind my back**. Why wouldn't he just talk to me?
- Harp: Yeah, he should've talked to you directly if he thought there was a problem. I can't believe he would just **gossip** about you and **talk about you behind your back**.
- Maura: So, here's an example when one person was **talking about another person behind their back**, and this one is always negative. Some **gossip** can be positive, but when you **talk about someone behind their back**, it's always a bad thing.
- Harp: Yeah. If, for example, I told you *oh, I heard that Jane got engaged yesterday*, that's a good story. It's **gossip**, but I'm not **talking behind her back** because it's not negative.
- Maura: Right. You're not being mean.
- Harp: Exactly. I'm being nice.
- Maura: Now, our last expression is really important, because you hear so much **gossip**, you hear so many **rumours** about different people, sometimes, you just really want to know what is the truth.
- Harp: Yes. And when you want the truth, you can say that you need **to hear it straight from the horse's mouth**.
- Maura: Yes. This is long one, so we're definitely going to repeat it a few times. **To hear something straight from the horse's mouth**.
- Harp: Yes, **straight from the horse's mouth**.
- Maura: Right. So this means that you hear it directly from the source. That you go directly to the person and that person will tell you if the **gossip** is true or not. You can go straight to the source.

- Harp: Yeah. And if you go to the website and become a member, we'll tell you more about the origins of this expression.
- Maura: OK. So, let's give a dialogue example with this expression.
- Harp: OK, let's do it.
- Maura: Did you hear that Jennifer is pregnant?
- Harp: Really?
- Maura: Yeah, some other people were talking about it in the bathroom and I just **overheard** it.
- Harp: OK, well I think we need to go talk to her.
- Maura: Do we need to? Should we ask her?
- Harp: Yeah, we don't know if it's true. There's no proof.
- Maura: I guess we should **hear it straight from the horse's mouth**.
- Harp: Yeah, let's go talk to her about it.
- Maura: Before we start buying presents!
- Harp: Exactly!
- Maura: So, in this example, we heard a **rumour** but we didn't know if it was true and we wanted to know if it was true, so we wanted **to hear it straight from the horse's mouth**.
- Harp: Yes, so we were going straight to the source.
- Maura: Now, there is so much we can say about **gossip**.
- Harp: Yes. It's really an endless topic.
- Maura: People talk about each other at work, people talk about each other within their families and friends, and there's even celebrity **gossip**, so you can hear about all the famous people in Hollywood and what they're doing.
- Harp: Yes, people love to **gossip** and to hear **gossip**.

- Maura: Yup. And **to spread** it and discuss it and analyze it.
- Harp: Yes, definitely agree with that.
- Maura: But, like we said, you should always be careful because sometimes **gossip** can be mean.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: So let's go over the expressions that we looked at related to **gossip** one more time.
- Harp: OK. We started with *it's only hearsay*.
- Maura: Right. So something is just **hearsay**, it's only **gossip** and we don't know if we believe it.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: And the next expression was *a little birdie told me*. And when do we use this expression?
- Harp: We use this expression when we don't want to reveal our source; we don't wanna tell where the **gossip** came from.
- Maura: Right. And when someone is talking about another person in a really bad way, we can say that person **talked about him behind his back**.
- Harp: Yes. When you **talk about someone behind their back**.
- Maura: And after all this **gossip** is finished being told, you wanna know the truth, you wanna **hear it straight from the horse's mouth**.
- Harp: I think that about does it for us today, Maura.
- Maura: Right. So let's remind everyone one more time to go to our website, become a member, and you can also give us a donation, which always goes to just helping us make more and even better podcasts.
- Harp: Yes, the website again is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.
- Maura: So, we'll talk to you soon. Bye!
- Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

Gossip

The word **gossip** can be used as a noun in a variety of ways. **Gossip** refers to information that is shared by people that might not be true. Here's an example of how the word **gossip** can be used to describe stories that might not be true:

Tara: Did you hear that Brian is moving to Florida?

Helen: That's just **gossip**. He isn't going anywhere.

The term **a gossip** can also be used to describe a person who tells these stories to other people. The word **gossip** was first used to describe a person who enjoys talking about other people's personal and private lives:

Tara: Are you sure he isn't moving? Dan told me Brian has been looking for jobs in Florida.

Helen: Dan is such a **gossip**. I don't believe anything he says.

To gossip can also be used as a verb when we talk about the act of telling these stories. For example, in the podcast, when Maura says that it's unfair to the person who is being **gossiped** about, she's using **gossip** as a verb. Here's another example:

Tara: You're right. Dan **gossips** about everyone.

Helen: If you really want to know the truth, you should just ask Brian.

Juicy

We can use the adjective **juicy** to describe gossip or any story that's especially exciting or interesting. The term **juicy gossip** can refer to information about someone that may be very private or that includes a story of strange behaviour. **Juicy** gossip usually gets people very excited. As you can imagine, it's often shared in quiet voices and whispers. Here's another example with the adjective **juicy** used this way:

Steve: Oh, I've got some **juicy** news for you!

Linda: What is it?

Steve: I heard that Mark has been stealing office supplies for his own business that he's starting up. He may even get fired for it!

The adjective **juicy** literally means *full of juice*. Fruits like apples or mangos can be described as being **juicy**. The word **juicy** makes the listener or reader imagine that the thing being described—whether it's a fruit or some gossip—is especially enjoyable because it's so **juicy**. Here's an example using the word **juicy** literally, to mean *full of juice*:

Larissa: These oranges are great! They're practically bursting with juice!

Leah: Yeah! A nice **juicy** orange can be so refreshing.

Dangerous territory

Dangerous territory and *dangerous grounds* are expressions that describe a situation or subject that can cause problems or be controversial. When Maura calls gossip **dangerous territory**, she means that when people gossip it can cause trouble.

Gossip can also cause problems when the story changes as it gets passed from one person to another or if the story was untrue from the start. One of the reasons gossip is such **dangerous territory** is that most people agree that it's hurtful and unkind to gossip about others, but many people still do it.

The term **dangerous territory** can also be used to describe topics of conversation that are especially controversial. In North America, one of these **dangerous territories** is the debate about abortion, because people have very strong opinions about it. Each side believes that they are right, so it's generally not a good idea to discuss the topic of abortion in situations where you don't know if everyone around you feels the same way about it. The topic of abortion can often be **dangerous territory**.

Here's an example with **dangerous territory**:

Maxime: I wanted to ask Dario his opinion about the election that's coming up next month, but I wasn't sure if it was a good idea.

Irene: Yeah, that's **dangerous territory**. I don't know what he thinks about that, and he gets really upset when people disagree with him about politics.

Hearsay

The word **hearsay** can be used as a synonym for gossip. In the first example in the detailed explanation about the word *gossip* above, we could replace the word *gossip* with **hearsay**:

Tara: Did you hear that Brian is moving to Florida?

Helen: That's just **hearsay**. He isn't going anywhere.

As when we use the word *gossip*, when we say something is *just hearsay* or *only hearsay*, we're making it clear that we don't know whether or not the information is true.

The word **hearsay** also has a legal definition, which is very similar to the one about gossip. In court, if someone presents evidence that they didn't hear or see for themselves, but only heard about from another source, it's considered very weak evidence. You may hear this word used often on television shows about the legal system.

A rumour

Rumour is one of those words that has two different spellings. In the United States it's spelled **rumor** and in Canada and the UK, **rumour**. It's fairly common in Canada to see it spelled in the American way, and both ways are correct.

The word **rumour** is different from the word *gossip* because it can't be used as a verb. Also, the word **rumour** isn't used to describe a person who gossips. The word **rumour** can only be used as a noun and it refers to an unverified story that's told to many people.

The noun **a rumour** is used in a similar way as the noun *gossip*. The definition of a **rumour** is a story that's told from person to person that might be true but is not known to be true for certain. In conversation, this may be called either gossip or a **rumour**. Here's an example to compare:

Judy: I heard a **rumour** that Debra is having an affair.

OR

Judy: I heard some gossip that Debra is having an affair.

As Harp and Maura mention in this episode, you can count the number of **rumours** but this is not true for gossip. Someone can say they heard one, two, or ten **rumours**, but *gossip* cannot be counted.

To spread a rumour/to spread gossip

To spread a rumour or **to spread gossip** means to share the story with more people. When someone shares a story with other people and the people they tell go on and tell even more people, this is **spreading a rumour** or **spreading gossip**.

To spread is to distribute something from a small space to a larger space. For example, you could **spread** jam over a piece of bread. The jam begins on the end of the knife and then is **spread** or distributed over the entire piece of bread. In the same way, gossip begins with a small number of people (maybe even just one) telling other people, who then continue to tell even more people.

Supposedly

Supposedly is a word that means the information we are being told could be untrue, but the person telling us has reason to believe that it is true. In one example from this episode, Maura says "**supposedly** they're dating." This means that there's reason to believe that they're dating, but nothing is certain.

Supposedly can be placed at the end of a sentence, the beginning of a sentence, or right before the verb. Here are some examples with **supposedly**:

Pete: I heard Debra's looking for another job.

Sarah: Really?

Pete: **Supposedly** she's been going to job interviews and hiding it from her boss.

OR

She's **supposedly** been going to job interviews and hiding it from her boss.

OR

She's been going to job interviews and hiding it from her boss, **supposedly**.

To hold hands

In Canada, there are only a few situations where it's culturally normal to see people **holding hands**. One of these situations is children **holding** their parents **hands**. Another example is young children holding each others' hands. Adults normally only **hold hands** with other adults if they are a romantic couple. So in the example from this episode, when someone supposedly saw Jasmine and Sam **holding hands**, that person guessed that it meant they were dating, because that is the cultural norm here.

To need to see it with my own eyes

This expression literally means that someone **needs to see something with their own eyes** to believe that it's really true. To believe the information, they need proof. Someone who doesn't like gossip might only believe things that **they see with their own eyes** and can be sure are true.

In this expression, the word **own** is used to emphasize that the person needs to see it for themselves. The sentence would technically still be correct without the word **own**, but the expression is always said **to see it with my own eyes**. Here's an example:

Jake: I heard that our Christmas bonuses this year are really generous.

Dolores: Really? I'll **need to see that with my own eyes**!

A little birdie told me

There are a few variations of this expression. It could be **a little birdie told me** or **a little birdie whispered it in my ear**. People sometimes say this when they don't want to reveal where they actually heard the information from. This could be because the person who told them asked them not to tell anyone or, as Harp suggested in this episode, because the person who's starting the rumour doesn't want to be responsible for it. This expression can be used to protect a person who's spreading or starting a rumour.

To talk about someone behind their back

To talk behind someone's back is to talk negatively about a person when they're not there. When you **talk about someone behind their back**, the person doesn't know they're being talked about. **Talking about someone behind their back** can be a way of

spreading gossip or rumours, or it can just be saying negative things about somebody to other people.

Here's an example of **talking behind someone's back**:

Adam: Tom never finishes his assigned tasks on time and then we end up having to do them for him. It's really starting to bother me. I feel like he's being really lazy.

Lorna: You're right. He always seems unprepared and even uninterested.

Steve: Guys, if we have a problem with Tom, we should talk to him about it directly. I don't like **talking about him behind his back** like this.

To hear something straight from the horse's mouth

The expression **to hear something straight from the horse's mouth** means that you heard a story directly from the source. It means that the story isn't gossip. You can be sure that the story's true because you heard it from the person who it's about; you **heard it straight from the horse's mouth**. Here's an example:

Millie: Someone's going to get a promotion soon. Jonah got a new job and his position will need to be filled.

Terry: Really? How do you know?

Millie: I **heard it straight from the horse's mouth**. Jonah just told me.

The expression **straight from the horse's mouth** was originally used in horse racing. The most reliable source of information about the horses was the horse trainers themselves, or other people close to the horse. If you wanted to emphasize that the information you had was true, you could say that you **got it straight from the horse's mouth**. This jokingly implied that the horse itself was the one who told you, which would make the information even more reliable than what the trainers said.

To overhear

Gossip and rumours can begin when someone **overhears** something. The word **overhear** is made up of two words: *over* and *hear*. It means that you hear something from another person's conversation that wasn't said directly to you. In this episode, Harp uses the example of **overhearing** that Jennifer is pregnant while she was in the bathroom. Other people in the bathroom were talking about Jennifer's pregnancy, and because Harp was in the bathroom at the same time, she **overheard** the conversation, even though she wasn't really a part of it herself.

Here's another example with **to overhear**:

Mary Anne: Guess what I just **overheard**?

Ned: What?

Mary Anne: I heard that Paul is planning to ask Lina on a date!

Quiz

1. Which of the following best describes gossip?

- a) unverified stories that are told from one person to the next
- b) a person who engages in telling stories about other people
- c) the act of talking about other people's personal lives
- d) all of the above

2. Which of the following statements is true?

- a) Gossip and rumour can be used completely interchangeably.
- b) Rumours are countable but gossip is not.
- c) In Canada, it's spelled rumor and in the US it's spelled rumour.
- d) Only gossip can be spread, rumours cannot.

3. What makes gossip juicy?

- a) It is filled with fruit.
- b) It is about juice.
- c) It is especially exciting.
- d) It is boring.

4. Which of the following types of information is definitely true?

- a) hearsay
- b) gossip
- c) information straight from the horse's mouth
- d) rumours

5. Which of the following does NOT describe a situation in which someone might use the phrase *a little birdie told me*?

- a) when the gossip is like the song of a bird
- b) when the person doesn't want to say where they heard the gossip
- c) when the person who originally told the story asked them not to tell anyone
- d) when the person spreading the gossip doesn't want to admit that they are starting the rumour

- 6. Holding hands in Canada is normal only in certain situations. Which pair of people holding hands is a cultural norm in Canada?**
- a) romantic couples
 - b) roommates
 - c) adult friends
 - d) coworkers
- 7. Which of the following statements is NOT true about someone talking behind someone else's back?**
- a) It's almost always negative.
 - b) It can be hurtful.
 - c) The person is there when it's happening.
 - d) The person cannot defend themselves.

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