

Catch Word #14 – Eavesdropping

Transcript

- Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp...
- Maura: And Maura...
- Harp: With the **Catch Word** podcast...
- Maura: Where we look at a word or expression and explain it and give examples too.
- Harp: Sometimes we also give synonyms or different idiomatic expressions as well.
- Maura: And if you'd like to follow along, you can go to Lipservice where we have transcripts and more explanations, and that's on our website Culips.com.
- Harp: Yeah, so that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and there's a different Lipservice for each episode of each different type of podcast. So now what is the Catch Word for today?
- Maura: **"Eavesdropping."**
- Harp: This one's a fun one, I like this.
- Maura: It's a big word.
- Harp: It is a big word, but it's interesting and fun, I think.
- Maura: It's a big word for a very little action. Usually you can't even see if someone's doing it. So **"to eavesdrop"** is to listen to someone's conversation. So, that's to listen to someone else's conversation that you're not a part of—or not invited to listen to.
- Harp: Exactly! You're not participating, you're not talking; you are just listening, really.
- Maura: So, where are some places where people usually **eavesdrop**?

- Harp: I would say very public places. So, for example, I take public transportation, I take **the metro** and I take the bus in Montreal, and I love **eavesdropping**.
- Maura: Here, because of the French, it's a little like a listening comprehension exercise.
- Harp: Exactly!
- Maura: But, yeah, you can **eavesdrop** in restaurants or bars—you listen to what other people are talking about—especially if it starts to get interesting, right?
- Harp: Exactly, exactly! Sometimes people have arguments or sometimes people are telling secrets that aren't so secret if you're listening.
- Maura: So, we thought of this word "**eavesdropping**" because just a few minutes ago the phone rang and it was Harp's boyfriend.
- Harp: Everyone started **eavesdropping** in the room.
- Maura: Well, what really happened is that Harp was talking and the rest of us were quiet.
- Harp: They were trying to listen.
- Maura: I think we were trying to maybe just be quiet so you could have a conversation, but it looked like we were **eavesdropping** because we were so quiet we could hear everything that Harp was saying and maybe it was private.
- Harp: It wasn't, but it could have been.
- Maura: Right, so I made a joke with Yoshi that we were **eavesdropping**, we were listening to Harp's conversation.
- Harp: Which I hope they weren't.
- Maura: And then when Harp got off the phone I was asking her if she was going to the jazz festival.
- Harp: Because right now in Montreal it's the jazz fest, which is an amazing time in Montreal. So, I think it is one week?

- Maura: I think it might be even longer, a little bit longer, but it's huge. It's a really big jazz festival.
- Harp: Exactly! So, there are concerts that you go and pay money and you go into a concert hall and listen to people. I think this year is Aretha Franklin, Al Green, some really amazing, amazing artists. But they also have so many free concerts.
- Maura: Yup!
- Harp: I think almost every hour starting at 11 a.m. in the morning.
- Maura: They even have more than one stage outside. So, it's outside as well, the streets are closed. It's really nice.
- Harp: Yeah, it's fantastic. I'm lucky because I work really close to that, so I get to go often.
- Maura: Oh yeah, at lunch and stuff. So, anyways, Harp was talking on the phone and I **overheard** that she was talking about the jazz festival.
- Harp: Now, she says "**overheard**," but that's just a nice way of saying that she was **eavesdropping**. So, "to **overhear**" is I guess you could say when you accidentally hear something that you're not supposed to.
- Maura: Right! You didn't intend to hear the conversation, I wasn't trying to listen, but really Harp, I'm sitting right beside you. So, I couldn't help but hear you talk about the jazz festival.
- Harp: That's true, that's true! If I was having a private conversation I would have left the room.
- Maura: So, there's **eavesdropping** when you try to listen, and there's **overhearing** a conversation which is when you don't try to listen but it just kind of happens because we are so close to it.
- Harp: Yeah, and sometimes these are difficult to distinguish because, for example, if I'm riding on the bus and there are two people and they're talking very loud, I'm not trying to **eavesdrop** but if they're talking so loud I hear everything, I'm **overhearing** but I could be **eavesdropping** at the same time. Sometimes it's a very **fine line**, I think.

- Maura: And in some cases where I am **eavesdropping** on a friend's conversation, but then I want to talk about something I heard, I would probably say that I **overheard**. I wouldn't tell them that I was **eavesdropping**.
- Harp: Definitely, it's more polite to say that you **overheard** something.
- Maura: I don't think I have ever heard someone say, "I was **eavesdropping** on your conversation and..."
- Harp: Nope, I would never say that!
- Maura: No, it would be very strange. "**Overhear**," (I **overheard**), that's definitely the best way.
- Harp: Yes, yes, definitely.
- Maura: So, I think we've covered that pretty well.
- Harp: I think so.
- Maura: So, if you want to learn a little bit more go to our website and check out Lipservice and our website address is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com
- Harp: Definitely, and we will give you more information about the jazz fest. Included on the website we have the Lipservice and this comes with each single episode where you can see the Detailed Explanation, the transcript and quizzes. That is about it for today, I think.
- Maura: So, this has been Maura...
- Harp: And Harp...
- Maura: And we'll talk to you next time. Bye!
- Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

To eavesdrop

“To **eavesdrop**” is to listen secretly to someone’s private conversation.

Like the examples we gave, people often **eavesdrop** on a stranger’s private conversation in a public place. You listen on purpose because you are curious.

The information you hear when **eavesdropping** could be very personal and private. For example, you could **eavesdrop** on a girl telling her friend why she broke up with her boyfriend.

The information in the conversation could also be general and not personal or private, like the score from last night’s hockey game. You secretly listen because you want to know the score too, but this isn’t private information.

We can use this word in two ways. We can simply say, “I was **eavesdropping**,” or we can say “I was **eavesdropping** on your conversation” to be more specific.

To eavesdrop on a conversation

The preposition (or word) that follows “**eavesdrop**” is “on.”

He **eavesdropped** on their conversation and found out the password.

She was **eavesdropping** on his phone call and found out that he is sick.

We can also use “**eavesdrop**” with nothing after it:

He is always **eavesdropping**.

The metro

In this episode Harp says, “I take **the metro** and I take the bus in Montreal and love **eavesdropping**.”

“**The metro**” means “the subway.” In England, they also call the subway “the tube” or “the underground.” In Montreal, everyone calls the subway “**the metro**.” We call it “**the metro**” because this is the French name for the subway. This is very special to Montreal. I don’t think there is another place where English-speaking people call the subway “**the metro**.”

"Festival International de Jazz de Montreal"

This is the full French name for the festival. In English we usually say, "The Jazz Festival". This festival happens in Montreal every summer, around the end of June and beginning of July. It is a huge festival with over 3000 musicians and lots of shows. There are 10 concert halls for paid shows and around 450 free outdoor concerts too. Streets are closed to cars, as millions of people come each year to attend this festival.

The Montreal Jazz Festival is over for this year! We recorded this episode at the time of the festival, but as we record ahead of time, The Jazz Festival has already finished. Next year, we will post more episodes with information about all the festivals in Montreal.

To overhear

Sometimes you do not want to **eavesdrop** but when someone has a conversation close to you, you hear what they are saying without trying. This is called "**overhearing**."

Also it is more polite to say, "I **overheard** your conversation," than to say, "I was **eavesdropping** on your conversation."

For example, you **overhear** someone talking about a subject that you are interested in. Let's say the subject is a concert. Then you want to talk to the person about that concert. You could say, "I **overheard** you talking about that concert. How was it?"

It would be strange to say, "I was **eavesdropping** when you were talking about the concert. How was it?"

This is because **eavesdropping** is generally considered rude. With a close friend, you can normally joke about it, like Harp and I did.

A fine line

Harp says, "I'm **overhearing** but I could be **eavesdropping** at the same time. Sometimes it is a very **fine line**."

This is an expression we use when we say that two things are very close. Harp is saying that **eavesdropping** and **overhearing** are very close. A full sentence would be, "There is a **fine line** between **eavesdropping** and **overhearing**."

"**Fine**" can mean "little" or "thin." A **fine line** between something means that one side can often become what is on the other side.

Here are examples:

There is a **fine line** between drinking a lot and alcohol addiction.

Drinking a lot and alcohol addiction; that is a **fine line**.

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. What does “to eavesdrop” mean?

- a) to listen to the radio
- b) to listen to someone talking to you
- c) to secretly listen to another person’s private conversation

- 2. Kevin: Hey, I heard Nicole is really sick.
Katie: How do you know that?
Kevin: I heard her talking to Jon. She said something about
 spending a night in the hospital last weekend.**

How does Kevin know that Nicole is sick?

- a) He was eavesdropping on her conversation with Jon.
- b) Nicole was eavesdropping on Kevin.
- c) Kevin talked to Nicole.
- d) Nicole called Kevin and Jon.

3. Where do people eavesdrop most often?

- a) in public places
- b) at a concert
- c) in the bathroom
- d) at the zoo

4. Why is overhearing different from eavesdropping?

- a) Overhearing happens when you are part of the conversation.
- b) Overhearing happens when you are over the person.
- c) Overhearing is not on purpose and happens accidentally.

5. Steve: Michael was talking to someone on the phone beside my desk. I heard him say he may be getting divorced.
Lisa: Were you trying to listen?
Steve: No, I just _____.

Fill in the blank.

- a) eavesdropped
- b) overheard

6. Melissa: I heard Frank talking to someone about an affair. I tried to find out more details, but I couldn't hear any names.

What was Melissa doing?

- a) eavesdropping
- b) overhearing

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

These materials are created by Maura Smith. Copyright © Culips (2008) Culips.com