

Catch Word #47 – Corny

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Jessie: And Jessie.

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

Jessie: And our Catch Word podcast is when we give you a phrase or an idiom and we tell you all about it, we give you examples, and we give you some synonyms.

Harp: Exactly. Make sure you check out our website, Culips.com, that's CULIPS.com, where you can find the Lipservice. And in the Lipservice you can find the detailed explanations, the transcripts, and even a quiz.

Jessie: And as always, you can also download our episodes from iTunes.

Harp: For sure.

Jessie: So Harp, what is our Catch Word today?

Harp: Our Catch Word today is **corny**.

Jessie: **Corny**.

Harp: **Corny**.

Jessie: I like it.

Harp: I like it as well.

Jessie: So, does that mean having to do with corn?

Harp: Um, no, not at all.

Jessie: What does it mean?

Harp: Something that is **corny** is something that is **cliché**, unoriginal; it's oldfashioned.

Jessie: OK, so **corny** is an adjective describing something that's not very sophisticated, maybe kind of sentimental.

- Harp: Yeah, exactly.
- Jessie: Not original.
- Harp: No, not original.
- Jessie: You know, my grandfather tells really **corny jokes**.
- Harp: Really, what kind of jokes?
- Jessie: Well, they're the kind of jokes that no one really laughs, everybody just kind of goes, **ugh**.
- Harp: Oh, the jokes where you groan, not laugh.
- Jessie: Yeah, I think the most famous **corny joke** is: Why did the chicken cross the road?
- Harp: Why?
- Jessie: To get to the other side.
- Harp: **Ugh** ... that's actually funny.
- Jessie: Well sometimes things that are **corny** can also be funny.
- Harp: That's true.
- Jessie: But in a **corny** way.
- Harp: Yes, yes. You know, Maura has a really **corny joke**.
- Jessie: Does she? What is it?
- Harp: Why did the tomato blush?
- Jessie: I don't know. Why?
- Harp: Because it saw the salad dressing.
- Jessie: Ah ... That is **corny**!
- Harp: But again, a little bit funny.

- Jessie: So, that's because salad dressing is a kind of sauce that you put on salad, but dressing also means putting clothes on.
- Harp: Exactly, so it's **corny**.
- Jessie: It's very **corny**, but I like it.
- Harp: Me too.
- Jessie: So, that brings up a good point actually. **Corny** is kind of a negative thing, but something that's **corny** could also be really sweet or cute.
- Harp: Exactly, for sure.
- Jessie: Like those jokes were **corny**, but I still liked them.
- Harp: Me too, I still laughed.
- Jessie: For our two-year anniversary, my boyfriend is taking me to the restaurant where we went on our first date.
- Harp: Oh, that's nice.
- Jessie: I know it's kind of **corny**, but I still think that it's really sweet.
- Harp: I agree, **corny** but sweet.
- Jessie: Exactly. Yeah, something that's **corny** – it's ok in small doses, but too much **corniness** gets really annoying.
- Harp: Yeah, like one or two **corny jokes** is OK, but a **corny** movie, that's a lot of time.
- Jessie: Right, or if you know a person who's always making **corny jokes**, always saying **corny** things, you probably don't want to spend a lot of time with them.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Jessie: Now, it is important to note that, whether or not something's **corny** – that's kind of a personal opinion.
- Harp: Yeah, something that I think is **corny**, you could think is really funny or cool.

- Jessie: Right, exactly. Like, maybe Maura thinks her jokes are really good. (But we think they're **corny**!)
- Harp: Oh, that's funny!
- Jessie: Don't tell her I said that.
- Harp: So now, **corny** doesn't have anything to do with food. Where do you think it came from?
- Jessie: Well actually, it used to kind of have to do with food. Because a long time ago, people who lived out in the country, in rural areas, would eat a lot of corn. And people who lived in the big city thought that country people were kind of stupid, kind of unsophisticated, so they would call those people **corny**.
- Harp: Ah! That makes a lot of sense.
- Jessie: Right, so originally it kind of did have to do with corn.
- Harp: Oh, OK I see.
- Jessie: But now it has nothing to do with it.
- Harp: Makes sense.
- Jessie: What are some synonyms for **corny**?
- Harp: Um, the first synonym that comes to mind is **cheesy**.
- Jessie: Cheesy, that's a good one.
- Harp: Yeah. If something is **corny**, it's very often **cheesy**.
- Jessie: Right. Yeah, they're almost exactly the same.
- Harp: Exactly, so it was a **corny** joke – it was a **cheesy** joke.
- Jessie: Right. You could watch a **cheesy** movie, or it could also be a **corny** movie.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Jessie: What could we use to talk about something that's the opposite, something that's really original, really neat?

- Harp: Well, a simple choice would be to say that something is **cool**.
- Jessie: Yeah, **cool**. I think that's the most common word to describe something like that.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly. So, I watched a **cool** movie, that's a **cool** shirt.
- Jessie: Yeah, exactly. So to talk about something that's the opposite of **corny** or **cheesy** you could use the word **cool**.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Jessie: OK, so that's it for us today. We hope you've enjoyed listening to our Catch Word podcast about the term **corny**. And **cheesy**.
- Harp: And cool.
- Jessie: Right. So remember: **corny** and **cheesy** mean unoriginal, unsophisticated. And **cool** is the opposite, it means really original, really great – really **cool**.
- Harp: Exactly. So that's it for us today.
- Jessie: And we'll talk to you next time.
- Harp: Bye everyone.
- Jessie: Bye.

Detailed Explanation

Corny and corniness

Both people and things can be **corny**. As Harp and Jessie explained in this episode, something that's **corny** is something that is unoriginal, unsophisticated, or old-fashioned. People who are **corny** are people who do or say **corny** things, or who like **corny** things. The adjective **corny** can be used to describe people, physical objects, ideas, or places.

Here are some examples:

A person – Jessie's grandfather is kind of **corny**. He's always telling old-fashioned jokes.

An object – Even though Jessie's grandfather's jokes are **corny**, they're still kind of funny.

An idea – She wanted to make a video of her cat singing Christmas songs, but her husband said the idea was too **corny**.

A place – I don't want to go back to that restaurant, it's too **corny**. The waiters are all dressed like pirates!

The noun describing the quality of being **corny** is **corniness**. Jessie uses this word in the podcast when she says "... too much **corniness** gets really annoying."

Here's another example of the noun **corniness**:

Sasha: Should we invite Bob to the party?

Janet: I don't know. He's nice, but his corniness might ruin the party for the rest of us.

Sasha: You're right. His **corny** jokes can get really irritating after a while.

Remember, even though the terms **corny** and **corniness** were originally related to people who lived in the country and ate a lot of corn, today the words have nothing to do with food or with the vegetable itself or country people.

Cheesy

Cheesy means pretty much the same thing as **corny**. Like the word **corny**, the word **cheesy** can be used to describe all kinds of things, including people, objects, places, and ideas. We can also use the word **cheesiness** as a noun, just like **corniness**.

In all of the examples above and throughout the podcast, you could replace **corny** with **cheesy**, and the sentences would still have the same meanings.

Here are some other examples:

Diane: What did you think of the movie you saw last night?

Frank: It was OK, but the ending was pretty **cheesy**. Everyone's problems suddenly disappeared and they all lived happily ever after. It was predictable.

Todd: What do you think of this Celine Dion song? Should we play it at our wedding?

Debbie: Todd, I love you, but the music you like is so **cheesy**! I hate this song!

The origin of the word **cheesy** isn't very clear, but some people think it's related to the strong smell of old cheese. To some people, listening to a **cheesy** joke feels like smelling old stinky cheese!

Cliché

Harp used the word **cliché** as one of the words to describe the meaning of **corny**. This is a really interesting English word, because it's actually a French word! The English language has borrowed many words from other languages.

The little mark over the e in the word cliché is called an acute accent. As you've probably noticed, most English words don't include accents over the letters, but these types of accents are very common in French and many other languages. This particular accent tells us that we should pronounce the letter e as /ay/, rather than as /ee/ or /eh/ or a silent e.

In English, the word **cliché** can be used as a noun or an adjective. In either case, it describes something that is very unoriginal or over-used, such as a well known phrase or saying.

Whether or not something is **cliché** can be a matter of opinion. For instance, many North Americans think that it is very nice and traditional for a bride to wear a white dress on her wedding day, but some people think it's oldfashioned and **cliché**.

Here are some examples of the word **cliché** used in sentences:

As an adjective: The idea of a scientist as an old man with glasses and a white lab coat is so **cliché**. There are also many scientists who are young or who are women.

As a noun: The phrase all's well that ends well has been used so many times by so many people that it's now an old **cliché**.

Lame

The word **lame** is a close synonym for **corny** or **cheesy**, but it's not exactly the same thing. We hear this term a lot in everyday conversations, but we chose not to include it in this podcast because of the word's origins.

The word **lame** was originally (and sometimes still is) used to describe a person who has an injury or medical condition that makes it hard for him or her to walk.

Today, the word **lame** is also used to describe something that's **cheesy** or **corny** like a joke, or more often as anything that's not very good or uninteresting.

We don't like the suggestion that someone with an injury or medical condition isn't very good, so we didn't include this word in our podcast. However, many people use this word often in conversation.

Here are some of the types of examples you might hear:

Stephanie: This math assignment is **lame**.

Jordan: I know! It's going to take me at least three hours to finish! It's so stupid.

Sasha: I'm going to invite Bob to the party.

Janet: OK, but tell him not to tell any of his **lame** jokes this time.

Cool

If you've studied or listened to any informal English, you've probably heard the word **cool**. This word is used a lot by native English speakers (especially in informal situations) to describe pretty much anything that's interesting, fun, or great. We use it in our podcasts a lot!

Corny versus cool

Throughout the podcast and this detailed explanation, we've used a lot of different words to describe the terms **corny** and **cool**.

Here's a list of the words we've used in this episode. Can you think of other words that would belong in these lists?

Corny	Annoying, cheesy, cliché, lame, oldfashioned, sentimental, stupid, unoriginal, not original, unsophisticated, not sophisticated
Cool	Fun, great, interesting, neat, original, sophisticated

Um, oh, ah, ugh...

At Culips, we think it's important to provide you with examples of everyday English the way it's actually spoken by native and advanced English speakers.

In informal speech, we use a lot of small words called interjections. The words **um**, **oh**, **ah**, and, **ugh** are all good examples of these. These are small sounds that people make when they're speaking to express a certain feeling or idea.

We try to write our transcripts exactly the same way that the hosts speak during the episode, so you'll see lots of interjections on the Culips site, but interjections are usually much more common in speech than in writing.

Here are some of the interjections that Jessie and Harp used in this episode. Can you tell what each one means by the context of the conversation? First read the examples on the left, then check their meanings on the right.

Examples	Meanings
Jessie: What are some synonyms for corny ? Harp: Um, the first synonym that comes to mind is cheesy .	Harp used the word um to show that she was thinking.
Jessie: Maura thinks her jokes are really good. But we think they're corny ! Harp: Oh , that's funny!	Harp used the word oh to show that she was a little bit surprised by what Jessie had said.
Jessie: People who lived in the big city thought that country people were kind of stupid, kind of unsophisticated, so they would call those people corny . Harp: Ah ! That makes a lot of sense.	Harp used the word ah to show that she had just learned something; that she now understood what Jessie was explaining.
Jessie: They're the kind of jokes that no one really laughs at, everybody just kind of goes, ugh . Harp: Oh, the jokes where you groan, not laugh.	Jessie used the word ugh to represent the sound of a groan, to show annoyance and boredom with a corny joke.

Ugh can also mean that something is disgusting. Check out the upcoming Pet Peeves episode to see this description.

Corny jokes

Did you like the two jokes that Jessie and Harp gave as examples of **corny jokes**?

Jessie: Why did the chicken cross the road?

Harp: Why?

Jessie: To get to the other side.

This joke is only funny because it's so stupid. Obviously anything or anyone that crosses a road is doing it to get to the other side. There's nothing clever or original here; it's a very **corny joke**!

Harp: Why did the tomato blush?

Jessie: I don't know. Why?

Harp: Because it saw the salad dressing.

This one is kind of funny because it's a pun, or a play on words. The word dressing has two meanings, as Jessie explained in the episode. A lot of corny jokes rely on puns like this.

If you want to impress your family and friends, here are a couple more jokes you can tell them. But be careful! These are very **corny**, so if you tell them too often, people might think you're **cheesy**.

Q. Why do birds fly South for the winter?

A. Because it's too far to walk.

Q. What do you call a fish with no eyes?

A. A fsh.

If you know any **corny** or **cheesy** jokes, we'd love to hear them! Share them in the comments section of the Corny podcast post.

Quiz (see the answers at the end of this Lipservice)**1. Which expression would correctly complete the following sentence?**

Please don't invite Stan to come to dinner with us tonight. I don't want to listen to any more of his _____ jokes.

- a) cheesiness
- b) cheesy
- c) corn
- d) cornily

2. Which of the following words DOESN'T fit with the others?

- a) cheesy
- b) cliché
- c) innovative
- d) lame

3. Which of the following is part of the story of the origin of the word corny?

- a) Corn doesn't have very much flavour.
- b) Corn gets stuck in your teeth, which is very annoying.
- c) Corn is not very nutritious.
- d) People who lived in the country ate a lot of corn.

4. Which of the following options correctly gives the meanings of the interjections ah, oh, um, and ugh? (As they were discussed in this detailed explanation)

- a) ah = surprise; oh = understanding; um = thinking; ugh = groaning
- b) ah = thinking; oh = groaning; um = understanding; ugh = surprise
- c) ah = thinking; oh = surprise; um = groaning; ugh = understanding
- d) ah = understanding; oh = surprise; um = thinking; ugh = groaning

5. Can something that is corny ever be good?

- a) No, never.
- b) Something that's corny is always something good.
- c) Yes, but only if corny is used as a noun.
- d) Yes, sometimes.

6. Why did the Culips team choose not to include the word lame in this podcast?

- a) Because it also refers to people who have trouble walking.
- b) Because it is a very old-fashioned word and no one uses it any more.
- c) Because it is only used in very formal speech and writing.
- d) Because they forgot.

7. From which language did the word cliché originally come from?

- a) Arabic
- b) Finnish
- c) French
- d) Spanish

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