

Simplified Speech #105 – Bad luck

Episode description

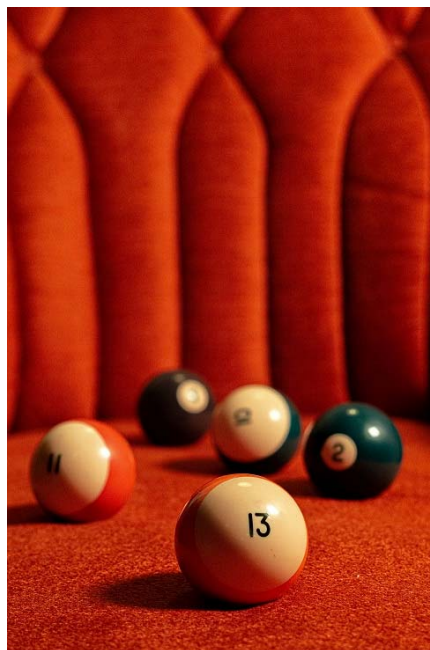
Do you get scared when you cross a black cat at night? Do you change your behaviour when you notice the day is Friday the 13th? Join hosts Andrew and Kassy in this Simplified Speech episode as they share their stories and opinions on the topic of superstitions.

Fun fact

Superstition is the main topic of this episode. Did you know that it is also the title of an amazing Stevie Wonder song? Rolling Stone magazine ranked it 74th on their list of the 500 greatest songs ever.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To work your butt off
- To be predestined
- That's beside the point
- To cause a scene
- To cringe
- To be fitting



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Andrew: Hello there, friends. Welcome back to Culips. Today we have a Simplified Speech episode prepared for you. If you don't know what Simplified Speech is, well, let me explain. Simplified Speech is the series that features clear, natural, and easy to understand conversations that are designed to help you boost your English listening skills and increase your knowledge of essential English vocabulary, and ultimately make you a better English speaker. And today I am joined by my cohost Kassy, Hey there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew.

Andrew: What are we going to talk about today, Kassy?

Kassy: Well, today, the day we are recording, is Friday the 13th. So we are going to talk about bad luck today.

Andrew: Maybe some of our listeners don't know, but in English-speaking countries, Friday the 13th is considered an unlucky day. And I thought it **was fitting** that we should talk about bad luck on Friday the 13th. It seems appropriate.

Kassy: Yeah, I totally agree.

Andrew: So we'll get to that conversation in just a moment, everyone. But before we do, I want to remind all of our listeners about the study guide for this episode. It's available for all Culips members. And it includes a transcript, detailed vocabulary descriptions, and explanations of all the key expressions and vocabulary that you hear Kassy and I use here today. There is a quiz and just a lot of other good stuff in our study guide. We highly recommend that you study along with it while you listen to us here today. So just visit Culips.com to download it.

Andrew: OK, so, Kassy, let's talk about bad luck. Maybe we should start here with just a quick explanation of our personal beliefs. Kassy, do you believe in good luck and bad luck? Is this something that affects the way that you live your life at all?

Kassy: I totally believe in luck. Do I believe it's based on our actions or some higher power? I'm not sure. But there are definitely people who are hit with that lucky stick and others who are much less fortunate.

Andrew: Yeah, I think my beliefs are similar to yours. I do believe in luck, but I think we kind of make our own luck. Sometimes you think, oh, that guy is so lucky, like, maybe in a business situation. But, really, that person could be hustling and **working their butt off** to make sure they're in a good position to take advantage of a good opportunity when it arises. And from afar when we're looking at that situation, we might think, oh, that's so lucky. But, really, that person has been working hard for that opportunity behind the scenes.

Kassy: Yeah, he might be lucky in the opportunities that he finds at just the right time, but he is looking.

Andrew: Exactly. So on the other side of the coin, there is bad luck. Do you believe in bad luck? Do you think that some people **are just predestined** to have negative things happen to them?

Kassy: I believe a little bit in karma and attitude. So I believe if you live kind of a positive life, on average, luckier things are gonna happen to you. And if you live kind of a negative life, more bad luck will come upon you, more unlucky things will happen to you. How about you?

Andrew: I want to believe that. I want to believe in karma and that philosophy, but I don't know if it's true. When I look around at the world, I see some people doing some really bad things and they seem to be very successful, and they don't really have any problems at all and no bad luck. So I want to believe that, but it's a little bit tricky for me to fully believe in it.

Andrew: But that's **really beside the point**, Kassy. Before we get too deep into the philosophy of luck, we should get back to our main topic, which is Friday the 13th and other bad luck superstitions that we have in English-speaking culture. And so we talked a little bit about Friday the 13th and that it's an unlucky day. But do you know the origins about why we consider it to be unlucky?

Kassy: I've heard a few. But how about you go into more detail?

Andrew: Sure. So I was researching this a little bit because, honestly, I think everybody, every native English speaker is gonna know that Friday the 13th is an unlucky day, right? Like, we just know, when we look at the calendar, oh, my god, it's Friday the 13th. Whoa.

Kassy: That's how I felt this morning.

Andrew: Yeah, we don't get really afraid or anything. It's more like a joke, right? We're sort of joking around, like, oh, be careful today's Friday the 13th, bad luck today. We don't really take it seriously, like, I'm not going to leave my house today because it's a bad luck day. We don't go to that level, right? But we still do think that it's an unlucky day.

Andrew: So I had to research. I didn't know why do we think of Friday the 13th as being unlucky. And, of course, like many traditions, its origins are way back in history. And there's different theories about it. Kassy, the theory that I read related to Norse mythology. So from Northern Europe. There's a story about 12 Norse gods having a dinner party. And one god, whose name is Loki, he was kind of the trickster god, he wasn't invited to the party. But then he came as an uninvited guest later on and **caused a big scene**. And so perhaps that's one of the reasons why 13 is considered an unlucky number.

Andrew: And then, Kassy, you had another idea, which I thought was really interesting, and totally could be the origin. What was your idea about why 13 is an unlucky number?

Kassy: Yeah, I actually have two that I've heard. The first one was about Jesus' apostles, his 13th apostle was Judas. And that was the one that betrayed him before he got sacrificed.

Kassy: And then the other one has to do with the Chinese zodiac. There are 12 animals in the zodiac. But I've heard the cat was supposed to be the 13th animal in the zodiac, but he was not invited to a party with God, similar to Loki.

Andrew: Interesting. Wow. We also have 12 months in a year, right? So I think the idea of 12 is a kind of complete, full, good number. And then 13 is the opposite of that. It's kind of throwing things out of balance. And for whatever reason, because of that, we have this superstition.

Andrew: And a superstition is a belief that something is either lucky or unlucky. So we have this superstition that the number 13 is bad luck. And so that means that we think of any Friday in the year that is the 13th day of the month—just like the day that Kassy and I are recording right now—we think this is bad luck. But also in buildings, like if you go into a building and take the elevator, you'll notice that in many elevators, there is no number 13 because there's no 13th floor in the building.

Kassy: People are afraid to live there or go there, yes.

Andrew: Yeah. People are afraid to live there or go there, yeah. But that's not the only superstition that we have that's related to bad luck in Western culture. And, actually, we have quite a few. Kassy, what are some other bad luck superstitions that you know about?

Kassy: One of my favourite ones, because it's so silly, is opening, opening an umbrella indoors. If you open an umbrella inside, it is super taboo, bad luck, in Western culture.

Andrew: Yeah, so if you ever visit an English-speaking country, don't open an umbrella inside. It will freak everybody out. And it's interesting, Kassy, because, you know, we both live in Korea, and Korea doesn't have this superstition at all. And people open umbrellas inside all the time. In my office, my office mates will open their umbrellas and just dry them out inside. And it freaks me out, to be honest with you.

Kassy: I was gonna say, do you **cringe** a little bit every time you see it?

Andrew: Yeah, I do **cringe**. Like, even though I know this is such a stupid, dumb superstition, there's absolutely no truth to it at all. Your life doesn't become unlucky if you open an umbrella inside. When I see people do it, still, in the back of my mind, something warns me that this is an unlucky situation, and I should avoid it. I shouldn't do it.

Kassy: Yeah, it's the funniest thing, our superstitions. Andrew, what's the superstition that you've heard that is considered unlucky?

Andrew: Yeah, another one that I don't believe in, but that I observe, that I follow, is to never walk under an open ladder. So, for example, maybe you're walking down the sidewalk, and there is, like, a repairman fixing a window or even washing a window on the side of the building and his ladder would be crossing over the sidewalk. So if you want to keep walking down the sidewalk, you have to pass under that ladder. You know, this doesn't happen every day, but from time to time you find yourself in a situation like this, right? Where somebody is blocking your way, standing on a ladder. And so for whatever reason, I don't know the origin of this one, we just think that it's bad luck to walk underneath that ladder. It's probably due to, like, at some point, somebody was walking under a ladder and something fell on them and they died or something.

Kassy: That's what I was thinking.

Andrew: Yeah, it's probably just a dangerous situation. But anytime that I'm faced with this, I will always walk around the ladder. I would never walk under the ladder, just because we consider that to be bad luck.

Kassy: Yeah, I think similar to the ladder superstition, we have another object superstition, which is breaking mirrors. I've heard that if you break a mirror, you have either 5 years or 10 years of bad luck. I can't remember which one.

Andrew: I think it's seven. As far as I know, it's 7 years of bad luck. Yes.

Kassy: OK. In between five and ten.

Andrew: Regardless of what the number is, it is a long time to have bad luck. Like, could you imagine having bad luck for 7 consecutive years just by making a mistake and breaking a mirror?

Kassy: No, I cannot.

Andrew: Have you ever broken a mirror, Kassy?

Kassy: I don't think I have. Have you, Andrew?

Andrew: No, I don't think I have either. So I can't tell you if this one is true or not. But I have a feeling it's not. I have a feeling it's not, but—

Kassy: It could give you a pretty bad day, like 7 hours of bad luck for the day instead of 7 years.

Andrew: Yeah, well, it's just bad luck in general, because then you'd have to clean up a broken mirror, which can't be fun.

Andrew: This is another kind of superstition, though, that is really popular in, like, the consciousness of people from English-speaking countries. I don't want to say Westerners, because I think maybe some other European people might not have the same superstitions. I don't know if, like, France and Germany and the Netherlands, these other Western European countries, follow the same superstitions. Maybe some of them do, maybe some of them don't. If you're a listener from one of these countries, definitely send us a message and let us know.

Andrew: So I'm just saying English-speaking people have these superstitions. But they're ones that everybody knows about, right? Every North American knows about Friday the 13th, opening an umbrella indoors, walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror. So you see these represented in movies and in pop culture from time to time. So I think it's important when you're learning a language, not just to learn about the grammar and the vocabulary, but also the culture. And these things will pop up occasionally in media, and it's good to know that it has some meaning and significance, because it will help you to understand the language and the culture more fully.

Kassy: Yes, exactly. And I want to plug one thing not related to Culips. But anybody who wants to practice listening to a movie about good luck and bad luck, who loves romantic comedies, one of my favourite romantic comedies of all time is called Just My Luck. And it's all about good luck and bad luck. It has Lindsay Lohan in it, for anybody who is interested.

Andrew: Do some of these themes occur in that movie? Do you see some of these bad luck signs?

Kassy: Yes, you can see breaking a mirror, walking under a ladder, winning the lottery for the good luck. There's all sorts of really fun examples. So I really recommend it.

Andrew: OK, what was the name one more time?

Kassy: Just My Luck.

Andrew: Just My Luck. OK, I haven't seen it. But I'm gonna have to check it out now that we've been talking about this. Maybe I'll watch it tonight, that would **be fitting** for Friday the 13th.

Andrew: Kassy, will wrap things up here in just a moment. But there's one bad luck symbol that we still haven't talked about yet and that is a black cat, black cat. Do you have any idea why we think black cats are unlucky?

Kassy: I thought maybe it has to do with witches, like, they're a symbol of a witch's cat. Is that correct? Incorrect?

Andrew: So, Kassy, I think you're right that black cats are often associated with witches. And because of this, they're seen as evil or bringers of bad luck. But, interestingly enough, I've heard that in Japan, black cats are considered symbols of good luck. So I guess it just depends on where you were born, and what culture you grow up in, and everything can have a different meaning, depending on your perspective.

Kassy: Yeah, that's really cool, you know, how some places something's unlucky, and others are lucky. Where you're born really influences how you see the world. So interesting.

Andrew: It's really fascinating. And that's absolutely true, that some things have different meaning depending on where you come from.

Andrew: Well, thank you for listening to us today, everyone. That brings us to the end of this episode. To recap, we talked about bad luck and several different bad luck signs and superstitions, including black cats, opening umbrellas indoors, breaking mirrors, walking under ladders, and, of course, the number 13 and Friday the 13th.

Andrew: If you enjoyed this episode and found it educational and entertaining, then please support us. You could do that in a variety of ways, such as by becoming a paid Culips member. You could also tell your friends who are learning English to check us out and listen to us. You could leave us a five-star rating and a positive review on your favourite podcast app like Apple Podcasts or wherever else you get your podcasts. And, finally, you could follow us on social media. We're on Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

Andrew: If you'd like to get in touch with us, you can send us an email to contact@Culips.com and we would love to hear about what bad luck superstitions you have in your culture. That would be really interesting for us to learn about. So please send us a message and let us know.

Andrew: We'll be back soon with another brand-new Culips episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Kassy: See ya.

Detailed Explanations

To work your butt off

Idiom

Early in this episode, Andrew talks about how a successful person might be seen as a lucky person. However, he also mentions that maybe that person **worked their butt off** to become successful. **To work your butt off** is to work very hard for a long time. **To work your butt off** applies to anyone who works hard. You could be a successful entrepreneur or a parent working two jobs. Those are examples of people who usually **work their butts off**. A more vulgar variation of this expression is **to work your ass off**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to work your butt off**:

Frances: Congratulations on getting your PhD!

Chantal: Thanks!

Frances: It must not have been easy. You've been working a full-time job throughout your studies, right?

Chantal: Yes, it wasn't easy. I had **to work my butt off**. But it all paid off in the end. Just last week, I applied for and got my dream job at the university.

Frances: Wow, congratulations again!

Mark: I've been listening to this new band called The Porcupines. Do you know them?

Rita: For sure.

Mark: They just released their first album and it's selling extremely well. I wish I could be an overnight success like them.

Rita: They definitely aren't an overnight success. I read about them. They **worked their butts off** for years in small clubs. I'm glad they finally got the recognition they deserve.

To be predestined

Verb

In this episode, Andrew asks Kassy if she believes people **are predestined** to have negative things happen to them. **To be predestined** is to have your fate or destiny determined in advance. Although predestination has a long history of debate in the world's religions, people now use **to be predestined** informally. For example, saying you **were predestined** to become a ballerina is similar to saying you always knew you wanted to become a ballerina.

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

Andrea: Do you have any plans for the weekend?

Vicky: My agency is flying me out to Paris on Friday.

Andrea: Again?

Vicky: They booked a few photo shoots for me.

Andrea: It must be nice flying around the world. It suits you rather well, too.

Vicky: My mom said I **was predestined** to become an international model.

Andrea: I guess she was right.

Becky: What's the matter?

Lyle: I failed my driver's licence test yet again.

Becky: That's too bad.

Lyle: I think I **was predestined** to be a failure in life.

Becky: Don't talk like that. I think you failed because you didn't study. If you put in a little more effort, you could change your life. It's up to you.

That's beside the point

Phrase

In beginning of this episode, Andrew shares his personal belief on whether there is karma for people who do bad things. But since that is not the main topic of the episode, Andrew decides to change the subject by saying, "**That's really beside the point.**" In this expression, the point means the topic or the main subject. If something **is beside the point**, that means it's off topic. You can say **that's beside the point** any time someone is off topic and you want to get back on topic.

You can also add adverbs to this expression, as Andrew does. For example, you can say **that's ultimately beside the point** or **that's nevertheless beside the point**.

Here are a couple more examples with **that's beside the point**:

Wendy: How well did you do on your test?

Esther: So-so. I missed one really easy question. I'm kind of angry about it.

Wendy: Wait, did you only miss one question?

Esther: Yes. Like I said, I'm really not happy about it.

Wendy: **Isn't that beside the point?** You got a near-perfect score.

Esther: I guess that's OK, then.

Harold: Did you borrow my favourite t-shirt?

Fred: You said I could.

Harold: Look at it. It's so dirty.

Fred: But you said I could borrow it.

Harold: **That's beside the point.** If you're going to borrow someone's shirt, don't get it so dirty. And if you do get it dirty, you should wash it before you return it.

To cause a scene

Idiom

Talking about the origin of why 13 is an unlucky number in the West, Andrew mentions the Norse god Loki and how he wasn't invited to a party. In the story, Loki **caused a big scene**. **To cause a scene** is to cause a disturbance in public. In this sense, the word scene refers to the kind of drama you would see in the movies or on television. If a couple is arguing at a party, you might hear one of them say, "**Don't cause a scene!**"

To make a scene and **to cause a stir** are variations that have the same meaning.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cause a scene**:

Nathan: Is that Jill over there?

Yasmine: It looks like her.

Nathan: She's been saying such mean things behind my back ever since we broke up. I think I'm going to go over there and give her a piece of my mind.

Yasmine: Please **don't cause a scene**. I wanted to have a nice, peaceful evening out.

Nathan: OK, then we should leave. Wanna grab a bite?

Betty: Do you like the holiday season?

Helen: I do, but it can be quite stressful.

Betty: Did you get all your Christmas shopping done?

Helen: Almost. We're still missing a special video game for our boys.

Betty: I thought you went to the electronics shop this afternoon.

Helen: We did. But my husband **caused such a scene** at the store that we figured we should continue shopping somewhere else. It wasn't pretty.

To cringe

Verb

Having an open umbrella indoors is one of the superstitions discussed in this episode. Andrew says that he **cringes** when he sees someone opening an umbrella indoors. **To cringe** is to react uncomfortably in a given situation. You can **cringe** in an embarrassing situation. Some people **cringe** when their partner is making a fool of themselves in public. You can also **cringe** with fear. Some people **cringe** at the sound of a dentist's drill.

You can turn the word **cringe** into an adjective. For example, you can say something or someone is **cringey** or **cringeworthy**. There is also a form of comedy called **cringe comedy**. This is where you have stories built around the idea of social awkwardness.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cringe**:

George: Hey, is this your old high school yearbook?

Dana: Oh, no. Put that away.

George: Wait. I want to see what you looked like back then. Oh my god! Look at your hair!

Dana: I know. I **cringe** every time I think about it.

George: I guess it was the style at the time.

Dana: That doesn't make it better.

Philip: I want to tell you something.

Cathy: Is it bad news?

Philip: Kind of. My dad is going to deliver a speech at our wedding.

Cathy: That's not bad.

Philip: If you think so. But you should get ready to **cringe**. He's going to mention a lot of embarrassing stories in front of everyone.

Cathy: That's OK. They'll be embarrassing for you, not me.

To be fitting

Verb

Near the end of this episode, Kassy mentions one of her favourite movies, called Just My Luck. The movie has scenes that involve luck and superstitions. Andrew says that it would **be fitting** to watch that movie on Friday the 13th. **To be fitting** is to be appropriate for a given situation. It would **be fitting** to watch a movie about superstitions on a day many people are superstitious about. **To be fitting** applies to things and situation only. You would not say a person **is fitting** in this sense.

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

Claire: What are you going to dress as for Halloween?

Jason: I often dress up as Jason.

Claire: Jason like your name? Who is that?

Jason: You know, he's the villain with the goaltender mask in the Friday the 13th movies.

Claire: Oh, yes. Hey, don't you also play goalie for your hockey team?

Jason: It's pretty **fitting**, right?

Erika: Did you hear that John retired last week?

Darren: No. Good for him. Did the company do anything special for him?

Erika: Yeah. They had a slideshow of him throughout the years. He's fishing in half of the pictures. Then we gave him a plane ticket to his favourite fishing location.

Darren: That's **fitting**. He must have been pretty happy.

Erika: For sure—happy and surprised.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is NOT a superstition mentioned in this episode?

- a) breaking a mirror
- b) having an open umbrella indoors
- c) walking under a ladder
- d) thinking the number 4 is unlucky

2. What is one of Kassy's favourite romantic comedies?

- a) Just My Luck
- b) Just My Bad Luck
- c) Just In Time
- d) Friday the 13th

3. What does it mean to work your butt off?

- a) to go to the washroom
- b) to work sitting down
- c) to work very hard
- d) to slack off

4. Which of the following is the best time to say that's beside the point?

- a) when you want to stop talking
- b) when it's impolite to point at someone
- c) when you want to go back to the main topic of conversation
- d) when you are beside yourself with joy

5. What does it mean to cause a scene?

- a) to film a scene in a movie
- b) to create a disturbance in public
- c) to play a scene on stage
- d) to enjoy beautiful scenery

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What are the major superstitions in your culture?
2. Are there some superstitions you know are not true but you follow them anyways?
3. Have you ever started to believe in superstitions from another culture?
4. What makes you cringe the most?
5. Who in your life is the most likely to cause a scene?

Quiz Answers

1. d 2. a 3. c 4. c 5. b

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