

Curious Questions - **Whichever**

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone! This is Maura

Harp: And Harp

Maura: with the Curious Questions podcast where we answer your English language questions.

Harp: Little things come up all the time that confuse us when we are learning another language. Do you have a question that you have been dying to ask?

Maura: Is there a question burning inside you?

Harp: Please ask us! You can email your questions to questions@culips.com or go to our website, C-U-L-I-P-S.com for more information.

Maura: This next question is really interesting to me because I had a similar misunderstanding myself, even being a native English speaker. Let's start by listening to Chrystelle from Stuttgart's question.

Harp: *Today, my dear Canadian friend, Susan, and I were planning a trip to visit Europe. And she asked me if I prefer to visit Italy or France. And I wanted to tell her that I am interested in both of those countries, really. So I said, "Whichever" but she thought I was not so enthusiastic. But I would be happy to visit either country. How would you answer in a positive way?*

Maura: So Chrystelle here believes that because she used '**whichever**,' her Canadian friend thought she was negative and that she was not interested in traveling at all. But the truth was she was interested and both countries interested her equally.

Harp: Does everyone listening know the expression, "**whichever**"? It is used often when a choice or options are presented. Like in the learner's example, the choice was between traveling to Italy or France.

Maura: Here's what happened to me. A few years ago on New Year's Eve, I arrived at a friend's place and I had been really looking forward to seeing her and going out to a restaurant for dinner. I was also really hungry.

Soon after I got there, she asked me where I would like to eat dinner. And I replied that it didn't matter. I said, "It doesn't matter." And just like the learner, my friend thought that I did not want to go out to dinner anymore. But, I was actually so hungry that I could have eaten anywhere!

Harp: "**Whichever**" and "It doesn't matter" are similar in that they mean the speaker is content with any choice.

Maura: So I scratched my chin, and thought about these misunderstandings. It is not the word itself which is negative, but the tone of the voice. Whatever, wherever, whoever, **whichever** can all be negative if the tone of voice is negative. But they can also be positive.

Harp: For example: "What do you want to do tonight?"

Maura: "Whatever! I am up for anything. I just want to party!"

Harp: And a negative example: "What do you want to do today?"

Maura: "Whatever."

Maura: I am sure you can hear the difference there. The thing is, like in my case, sometimes our tones are not clear. This is true for ESL learners and sometimes for native English speakers too.

A positive tone is generally more high-toned. Whatever.

And a negative tone has a low tone and often goes down at the end. Whatever.

Harp: I wanted to give you another example of a word that can be negative or positive depending on the tone of your voice and the context. And this example is "unbelievable."

Maura: "How was the concert last night?"

Harp: "Unbelievable."

Maura: "Can you believe that Johnston didn't get his work done again?"

Harp: "Unbelievable."

Maura: The tone and situation give away if it was used positively or not.

Harp: In order to make perfectly clear whether your “**whichever**” is positive or not, follow it with a sentence. In fact, not following it with another sentence makes your response very short and short responses can also be seen as negative. Not always, but sometimes.

Maura: So Chrystelle could have said, “**Whichever** country you would like to go to is fine with me. I will go anywhere!”

And I could have said, “It doesn’t matter where we eat. I am so hungry,” making sure my tone is high and happy.

Harp: So two general rules with this question are:

Maura: When you are making a positive sentence, use a positive tone.

Harp: And, to be sure, add another sentence to clarify if your “**whichever**” or “doesn’t matter” is positive or negative.

Maura: To check your understanding of this podcast, you can quiz yourself or read the transcripts at lipservice at culips.com.

Harp: I hope this time we have answered a question that helps you improve your English. I also hope even if you didn’t ask this question, you also found it useful.

Maura: Please keep your questions coming. We are always happy to answer them.

Bye!

Detailed Explanations

Misunderstanding

I like the word **misunderstanding** because there is no blame involved.

We can easily say, “You didn’t understand me” or “She doesn’t understand the project”. But like in the second example, it puts the blame on her.

To say, “We had a **misunderstanding**” or “We **misunderstood** each other” means that there is no one to blame for the situation.

A **misunderstanding** is diplomatic and can be used to be polite, even if you know the other person is to blame.

Whichever

Whichever is used when there are at least two options. It doesn’t matter which option. **Whatever** is used in any case. We can have more than one option or only one or none.

Example: “What do you want to do?” “**Whatever**.”

Wherever means it doesn’t matter where.

Whoever/Whomever means it doesn’t matter who/whom.

Whenever means it doesn’t matter when.

We can use these words alone, like in the example above and from the question in this episode. We can also use these words in a sentence.

Examples:: “I will do whatever you want.”
“**Whichever** party you want to go to is fine by me.”

We can also use it when we are saying something and then we decide that it doesn’t matter.

Examples: “You know, that place on the corner, the building is red, whatever...”

History of Whatever

Whatever is a real word, but is also a part of Valspeak or Valley Girl slang. This is vocabulary that originated in an area of California referred to as “The Valley.”

Examples of how **whatever** is used in Valley Girl:

“She said that you are not invited to her party.” “Whatever.”
Meaning – I don’t care.

“I just got tickets to the concert.” “Whatever.”
Meaning – I don’t believe you because that is such good news.

More Valley Girl Examples

The most popular and widely used is ‘**like**’. This is slang for all teenagers and as the teenagers of the 1990s grew up, people in their 20s (age) too.

You can use ‘**like**’ anywhere in a sentence. It doesn’t mean anything or change the meaning of the sentence. You can use it like ‘um’ also. Although using ‘**like**’ too often can make people think that you are not intelligent.

Examples:

“I **like** really think your dress is nice.” means “I really think your dress is nice.”

“She thinks he’s **like** totally* hot.” means “She thinks he’s totally hot.”

*Totally is another word in Valley Girl Slang.

‘**As if**’ is short for ‘as if I would do that’ which means ‘I would never do that.’

Example:

“Did you say I was stupid?” “**As if**.”

“That dress is so ugly. I am not wearing that. **As if**.”

Tones of Voice

I did a bunch of searching online and most of the stuff I found was for native English speakers. Sometimes we need help with our tone too!

In general, high tone for positive meanings and low tone for negative. The tone in questions usually goes up at the end.

Maybe we should do a Curious Questions episode about tone and intonation. What do you think?

Scratching your chin

I used this expression in this episode. **To scratch** is physically to rub your fingernails back and forth on something. If you have an itch, a funny or uncomfortable feeling on your skin, you usually **scratch** it.

The chin is the bottom part of the face, under the lips.

If you **scratch**, or stroke, **your chin** it indicates that you are thinking. If you say, like I did in the episode, that you were **scratching your chin**, it means that you were thinking about something, considering something, trying to figure something out.

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

1. **Speaker 1: "I am hungry."**
Speaker 2: "Whichever"
Is this short dialogue correct?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) depends on the context
2. **There can be misunderstandings with the word whichever. What reason for this did we mention in this episode?**
 - a) people have different accents
 - b) it's a hard word to pronounce
 - c) it depends on your mother tongue
 - d) it depends on your tone
3. **Whichever is like**
 - a) it doesn't matter
 - b) I don't care
 - c) I don't bother
 - d) Don't bother me
4. **What expression did Maura use in her misunderstanding?**
 - a) whatever
 - b) unbelievable
 - c) whichever
 - d) it doesn't matter
5. **"What do you want to do tonight?" Which are possible answers?**
 - a) Whichever
 - b) Whatever
 - c) Unbelievable
 - d) Whenever

Answers: 1-b 2-d 3-a 4-d 5-b