



ESL Podcast 577 – Magic and Illusions

GLOSSARY

magic show – a type of entertainment where the performer (magician) appears to do things that are impossible or unbelievable

* Have you ever been to a magic show where the magician actually pulled a rabbit out of his hat?

magic trick – a skillful action where the performer (magician) appears to do something that is impossible or unbelievable

* He has a really cool magic trick where he seems to pull a coin out of a child's ear.

to blow (one's) mind – to make someone feel very surprised, impressed, and excited

* The way you're able to work full-time running your own business, raise three young children, and compete in the Olympics blows my mind!

illusion – something that appears different than how it actually is

* She seems to have everything under control, but it's really an illusion and her life is actually falling apart.

smoke and mirrors – something that distracts people so that they focus their attention on something else

* The president's press conference on space exploration was really just smoke and mirrors to distract people from more important issues.

sleight of hand – quick hand movements that have been practiced many times, used in a magic trick so that people cannot see how something was done

* Ahmed's quick sleight of hand makes it really easy for him to cheat while playing cards.

escape artist – a performer who is able to get out of very difficult situations, for example when tied up inside a locked box that is placed underwater

* That escape artist must have held her breath for at least three minutes before she got out of the box and swam up to the surface of the pool.

misdirection – the act of distracting someone, making him or her focus on something else, usually so that one can do something secretly

* The boy's cry for help was just misdirection so that his father, the thief, could steal money from the store without being seen.



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trap door – a hidden door in the floor, usually underneath a rug, that allows someone to leave a room quickly without being seen

* You left the room so quickly that we started to wonder whether there was a trap door we didn't know about!

mind reader – psychic; a person who has the power to know what other people are thinking even when they don't say anything

* I wish I were a mind reader so I could know what you're really thinking.

supernatural power – an ability to do something that is normally impossible and cannot be explained by scientists

* Which supernatural power would you rather have: the ability to see through walls, or the ability to fly?

to debunk – to prove that something is impossible or not true

* So far, no one has been able to debunk the scientist's unusual theory.

power of suggestion – the ability to give someone a thought or idea and make him or her think that it was his or her own idea and then believe it

* Watching commercials for food always makes me hungry. Those companies are really good at using the power of suggestion to sell more of their products!

jaded – no longer interested in something, usually because one has had too much of it; no longer able to become excited about something

* When Troy first came to this company, he was really excited about the work we're doing. But now, more than 20 years later, he's jaded and can hardly make himself come to the office each morning.

gullible – believing everything other people say and do; easily tricked or fooled

* Did you really think you could buy a real Rolex watch for just \$15? How gullible are you?



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why doesn't Sergio like the magic show?
 - a) Because he has seen all the magic tricks before.
 - b) Because he thinks magic is evil.
 - c) Because he knows how the tricks are done.

2. What is a "sleight of hand" trick?
 - a) A trick performed with animals.
 - b) A trick that requires fast hand movements.
 - c) A trick where one's hand seems to disappear.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to blow (one's) mind

The phrase "to blow (one's) mind," in this podcast, means to make someone feel very surprised, impressed, and excited: "It blew the children's mind when they found out that Debbie's father was an astronaut." The phrase "to blow (one's) cover" means to reveal someone's real identity or real name: "Who blew the police officer's cover?" The phrase "to blow (something) out of proportion" means to act as if something is much more serious or important than it really is: "When Karina scratched the car, her parents blew it out of proportion and started acting like she had gotten into a major car accident." Finally, the phrase "to blow off steam" means to do something to get rid of one's feelings of anger or stress: "I should really go to the gym to blow off steam before I end up yelling at my boss."

trap door

In this podcast, a "trap door" is a hidden door in the floor, usually underneath a rug, that allows someone to leave a room quickly without being seen: "Lorraine hid a box of secret love letters under a trap door in the attic floor." A "tourist trap" is an expensive place where many tourists go to, but that doesn't offer very much real value: "That market is such a tourist trap, selling poor quality things at high prices!" A "speed trap" is a place on a road where police officers wait for speeding cars so that they can give the drivers a ticket: "Make sure you slow down around this bend, because there's a speed trap there." Finally, a "death



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trap” is a car that is in very poor condition and is dangerous to drive: “Did you really drive across the country in that death trap?”

CULTURE NOTE

David Copperfield is a very well-known American magician. He began practicing magic tricks when he was just 10 years old, and he was “admitted to” (allowed to enter) the Society of American Magicians when he was just 12 years old, becoming the organization’s youngest member. In 1977, he became the “host” (someone who introduces guests on a program) of a television show called “The Magic of ABC,” and then began “starring” (having the lead or most important role) in his own show, “The Magic of David Copperfield.”

Copperfield is an illusionist, and his illusions have included making the Statue of Liberty seem to disappear and “levitating” (floating in the air) over the Grand Canyon. Today, he owns the International Museum and Library of the “Conjuring” (magic) Arts, which is filled with “memorabilia” (objects connected with a famous person or event) related to famous magicians.

Forbes magazine has described Copperfield as the most “commercially” (related to business and money) successful magician in history. He has sold more than 40 million tickets to his magic shows, with “revenues” (money received before expenses are paid) of more than \$1 billion. He has also won 20 Emmy Awards and the Academy of Magical Arts has named him the “Magician of the Year” twice.

Penn and Teller are other famous magicians who perform many magic tricks and illusions. They frequently perform in Las Vegas and have also written many books about magic. Many of their tricks are “quite” (very) violent and “shocking” (surprising, usually in a negative way). For example, in some of their tricks, one of them is run over by a heavy truck or knives go through their hands. However, even these violent tricks are performed in a “humorous” (funny) way.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 577: Magic and Illusions.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 577. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the beautiful City of Los Angeles, in the State of California.

Go to our website today at eslpod.com. In fact, go there right now – I'll stop and wait! When you're there, you'll see that you can download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is a dialogue between Patricia and Sergio about magic, about people doing tricks that make you think that they have special powers. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Patricia: This is the best magic show I've ever seen. Have you ever seen so many amazing magic tricks in your life? They're blowing my mind!

Sergio: They're all just illusions. It's nothing but smoke and mirrors.

Patricia: I don't know how you can say that. We've seen some really impressive sleight of hand tricks and that escape artist seemed to do the impossible.

Sergio: Couldn't you see that it was just misdirection? While you weren't looking, the magician left through the trap door.

Patricia: Maybe that's how that trick was done, but how do you explain the mind reader? How did he know what I was thinking if he couldn't really read my mind?

Sergio: I'm sure any supernatural powers these magicians and entertainers claim to have have been debunked by somebody. Maybe he used the power of suggestion. Who knows?

Patricia: And maybe you're just jaded.

Sergio: And maybe you're the most gullible person who ever lived!



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[end of dialogue]

Patricia says to Sergio, “This is the best magic show I’ve ever seen.” A “magic show” is a type of entertainment where there is a performer, what we call a “magician,” who appears to do things that are impossible. Patricia says, “Have you ever seen so many amazing magic tricks in your life?” A “magic trick” is something that this magician does that appears impossible. For example, perhaps there’s a woman in a box, and they separate the box, and you think that the woman has been cut into two pieces. But of course, she hasn’t – or has she? Patricia says these magic tricks are blowing her mind. “To blow one’s mind” means to make someone feel very surprised or excited or impressed: “I heard her play the violin last night at the concert and it blew my mind. She was amazing.”

Sergio says, “They’re all just illusions.” An “illusion” is something that appears different than how it actually is. You think you’re seeing one thing, but really you’re seeing something else. Sergio says, “It’s nothing but smoke and mirrors.” “It’s nothing but” means all that it is is smoke and mirrors. The expression “smoke and mirrors” (mirrors), it’s also sometimes “blue smoke and mirrors” or just “smoke and mirrors,” they both mean the same, which is that you are distracting people to focus their attention on something else or somewhere else, so they think that what is going on is magic, but it’s just an illusion. “Smoke and mirrors” or “blue smoke and mirrors” is a distraction.

Patricia says, “I don’t know how you can say that. We’ve seen some really impressive sleight of hand tricks and that escape artist seemed to do the impossible.” A “sleight (sleight) of hand trick” is when your hands move very quickly, and you can’t really see what’s going on. Magicians often have sleight of hand tricks. More generally, the expression is sometimes used simply to mean an illusion, a trick, something that isn’t really true but it looks true. An “escape artist” is a magician – a performer, who is able to get out of very difficult situations. For example, the great American magician Houdini, who is probably the most famous magician in U.S. history, was known to be a great escape artist. You could put him in a box, and put him into the ocean, and somehow he would get out the box. Of course, these things were always planned, but they made it look like it was the impossible being done.

Sergio says, “Couldn’t you see that it was just misdirection?” “Misdirection” is distracting someone, making him or her focus on something else so while they’re looking over there, you’re doing something over here. Then they look back, and it looks like you did something amazing or impossible, but in fact, you were just



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doing it so they couldn't see it. That's misdirection, to direct someone to the wrong place. Sergio says, "While you weren't looking, the magician left through the trap (trap) door." A "trap door" is actually in the floor, but you can't see it; you don't know it's there. Usually it is underneath like a piece of carpet or a rug, and when you're not looking someone can go down through the trap door and it looks as though they simply escaped, but you couldn't see how they did it. That's a trap door.

Patricia says, "Maybe that's how that trick was done, but how do you explain the mind reader?" Your "mind" is what you think with. A "reader" is someone who can tell, in this case, what's in your mind. So, a "mind reader" would be someone who can say, "I know what you're thinking. Another word for a mind reader would be a psychic. A "psychic" is a person who that says he or she has the power to know what other people are thinking, or even to know what will happen in the future. The expression "mind reader" is sometimes used in a discussion or an argument, especially between for example a husband and a wife. The wife will say, "Why didn't you go to the store and buy me some flowers?" and husband will say, "Well, I didn't think you liked flowers. I'm not a mind reader." I can't tell what you are thinking – I can't see your thoughts. And then the man sleeps in the living room that night – that's usually what happens!

Patricia says, "How did he know what I was thinking if he couldn't really read my mind?" Patricia thinks that this mind reader – this magician was actually reading her mind, actually knew which she was thinking. Sergio says, "I'm sure any supernatural powers these magicians and entertainers claim to have have been debunked by somebody." "Supernatural" is something that is beyond the natural, beyond the normal, above what normal human beings can do. "Supernatural power" would be the ability to do something that would otherwise be impossible. Sergio says, "I'm sure any supernatural powers these magicians and entertainers claim to have (say they have) have been debunked by somebody." "To debunk" (debunk) means to prove that something is not true, to prove that something did not happen the way you thought it happened. Sergio is saying that these supernatural powers that these magicians say they have are not really supernatural powers, that someone has shown how they do their tricks. Sergio says, "Maybe he used the power of suggestion." "The power of suggestion" is when you give someone an idea – a thought, and make them think that it was their idea to begin with so they believe it.

Patricia says, "And maybe you're just jaded." "To be jaded" (jaded) means that you have experienced something too much so that you're no longer interested in



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it, or you no longer become excited by it. It's definitely a negative expression, a negative way of describing someone to say that they're jaded.

Sergio says, "And maybe you're the most gullible person who ever lived!" "To be gullible" (gullible) means to believe everything that other people say and do. It's, again, a negative adjective; it means that you are easily fooled, that you believe other people when you should not. Sergio, then, is insulting Patricia by calling her gullible.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

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Sergio: And maybe you're the most gullible person who ever lived!

[end of dialogue]

It wasn't just an illusion. Today's script really was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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