EPISODE 315

What's a Paradox?

Full transcript · mini-story · vocabulary review

Hi, I'm Georgiana. Thanks for joining me for a new Speak English Now podcast episode.

How to accumulate vocabulary, how to learn grammar, how to learn deeply and not forget, how to speak automatically, and how to stay motivated.]

Ok, let's start!

A **paradox** is a fact, expression, or story that seems contrary to logic.

I invite you to listen to this **paradox** and then assume the solution. Pay attention!

A tourist arrives at a hotel. He is very **picky** about the rooms, so he asks the **receptionist** if he can see them first. The receptionist agrees but asks the tourist to leave $100 at the front desk. The tourist leaves a $100 bill and goes upstairs to look at the **vacant** rooms to see if he likes any of them.

The hotel manager then takes this bill and goes to the butcher shop to pay a $100 **debt** to the butcher.

The butcher goes to the bakery to pay the $100 debt he owes the baker and does so with the same $100 bill.

The baker, in turn, takes the bill and pays his debt to his doctor with the same bill.

Finally, the doctor returns to the hotel and pays a $100 debt he owes to the hotel manager.

At that point, the tourist returns and tells the desk clerk that he does not want to stay at the hotel. He takes his $100 bill and leaves.

The **apparent paradox** is that before the tourist arrived, the manager, the butcher, the baker, and the doctor owed $100. When the tourist recovers the $100 bill, the tourist, the manager, the butcher, the baker, and the doctor no longer owe anything. No one owes anything to anyone. No one has worked or produced anything, and no one has lost a single dollar.

I think the key to understanding this supposed paradox is that each of the characters owed $100, but they were also owed $100.

That is, everyone at some point would have to pay $100, but also at some point had to receive $100.

In reality, the bill has not affected anyone's economy.

What has happened is that each person's debt has been canceled.

Now I think I need an aspirin :)

What do you think? Can you explain this story in your language? Or, could you explain this paradox directly in English? I know it's even more difficult, but there is nothing impossible. :)

Now, let's practice.

Mini-Story

Speaking Practice

Answer the questions aloud with short and quick responses. Repeat the Mini-Story several times to improve your speaking and listening.

The tourist leaves a $100 bill at the front desk and goes to the second floor to examine the rooms.

Does the tourist leave a bill or a coin?
A bill. The tourist leaves a bill at the front desk.

Where does he leave it?
At the front desk. He leaves it at the front desk.

Does he go up or down to the second floor?
He goes up to the second floor from the front desk to examine the rooms.

Why does he go upstairs?
To examine the rooms.

In the first room, the tourist sees through the window how the manager hands his $100 bill to a butcher.

In which room does he see something through the window?
In the first room. In the first room, the tourist sees something. He sees how the manager hands his bill to a butcher.

Does the tourist see how the manager hands over $500 to a butcher?
No. No. Not 500 dollars. It was $100. He sees the manager hand over his $100 bill.

Who does the manager hand the money to?
To a butcher. The manager hands the money to a butcher.

In the second room, the tourist watches the butcher hand his bill to the baker.

Does the tourist observe how the butcher hands money to a baker?
Yes. He watches the butcher hand his bill to a baker.

Whose bill?
The tourist's bill. It is the same bill that the tourist left at the front desk.

In the third room, the tourist, completely astonished, sees his bill pass from the baker's hands to a doctor.

Is the tourist astonished?
Yes. The tourist is astonished.

Does the bill pass from one hand to another?
Yes, the bill passes from one hand to another.

Does it pass from the doctor's hands to the baker's hands?
No. No. The bill passes from the baker's hands to the doctor's hands. In other words, the baker gives the bill to the doctor.

The tourist returns to the hotel front desk and sees the doctor walking out the door.

Does the tourist go down or up?
He goes down. He returns to the front desk.

Does the tourist see someone?
Yes. He sees the doctor.

Does the tourist see the doctor walking through the door?
No. No. He sees him walking out the door.

The tourist leaves the hotel with his bill and assumes that everyone is insane.

Does the tourist leave the bill at the hotel?
No. No. The tourist leaves the hotel with his bill.

Does the tourist assume that everyone is sane?
No, the tourist does not assume that. He leaves the hotel assuming everyone is insane. Being sane is the opposite of insane.

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.

Review

Vocabulary from This Episode

Review the most useful words and expressions before listening again.

01 paradox a statement or situation that seems impossible or contrary to logic.	**05 debt** money that one person or business owes another.
02 picky very particular and difficult to please.	**06 owe** be required to pay or return money.
03 vacant empty and available for use.	**07 cancel a debt** remove an obligation to pay money.
04 receptionist a person who welcomes guests and handles the front desk.	**08 apparent** seeming to be true, although it may not be.

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