
ESL Podcast 27 – Car Trouble

GLOSSARY

engine light – a small light inside a car that turns on when the car has a problem in the engine (the machine that powers a car)

* The car had been making strange noises, so when the engine light turned on, Manuel knew there must be a problem with the car.

to pull over – to drive one's car to the edge of the road and park or stop it there

* Kimberly's cell phone rang, so she pulled over to the side of the road to answer the phone.

shoulder – the edge of a road; a narrow section of road that cars cannot drive on but can park on if needed

* The car suddenly started to make strange noises, so Percy moved to the shoulder of the road and stopped there to see what the problem was.

hood – a large cover on the front of a car which protects the engine and other important machines inside the car

* The hood of the car was stuck and would not open, and Shawanna couldn't add water to the radiator.

mechanic – someone who fixes machines, especially cars and other vehicles

* When Christopher's truck stopped suddenly while he was driving, Christopher took it to a mechanic to get it fixed right away.

to overheat – for a machine to become too hot to work correctly

* The hot water heater overheated and stopped working.

steam – water vapor; the white cloud that appears when water is heated

* The pot of water was so hot that it had begun to boil, and steam rose above the stove.

radiator – a device or tool inside a car that cools hot water used to keep the car cool

* When the car's radiator broke, the car started getting too hot and would not run properly.

battery cable – thick wires that connect the car's battery (the power supply) to other machines in the car or to another car battery, supplying those machines with energy and making the car run

* The battery was dead, so we connected Dan's car battery to the battery in my car with battery cables to get it working again.

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tow – the act of moving something by pulling it with a rope; the act of moving a car or vehicle using a chain that is attached to another truck

* The car was parked in a place that did not allow parking, so it got a tow to the police yard.

fuel pump – a machine or tool inside of a car that sends fuel from the tank or container it is stored in to the engine

* The fuel pump stopped working, so even though the car had a full tank of gas, there was no way to get the gas to the engine.

transmission – the gears and tools inside of a car that moves power from the engine to the wheels, making the car move

* Jim thought that there might be a problem with the car's transmission when the car stopped running smoothly.

electrical system – a system of machines in a car that provides electricity or power to start the rest of the machines inside the car

* When the electrical system stopped working, there was no way to adjust the power windows or seats.

brakes – a device inside a car that stops the car when it is moving

* Catherine needed to stop the car quickly, so she slammed on the brakes.

tow truck – a truck used to pull or transport another car or vehicle, usually one that is not able to move on its own

* The tow truck hooked a heavy chain onto the car and towed it away.

sensor – a device used to sense light, heat, noise, or other energy; a device that indicates when a light or other energy source is on

* Once the sensor in the room detects motion, the lights turn on automatically.

dealer – a business that sells cars and other vehicles

* Luke went to the dealer to buy a new car.

to cost (someone) an arm and a leg – to cost a large amount of money; to be very expensive

* The expensive medical tests cost Ivy an arm and a leg.

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CULTURE NOTE

Do You Mind?

Anyone who has been to London can tell you what the phrase “mind the gap” means. It is an announcement heard on the subway/metro (called the “Tube” in England) when the doors to the subway trains open and close. “Mind,” in this case, means to pay attention to something, and “gap” means the space between two things. “Mind the gap” is a reminder for people to be careful of the space between the subway train doors and the station “platform,” the flat area where people wait for the train to arrive.

Americans don’t use “mind” in the same way. While “to mind” can mean to pay attention to something, Americans use it in a very specific way. You may hear parents or adults say to children: “Mind your parents,” meaning do what your parents tell you to, or “mind your manners.” “Manners” refer to social behaviors, so we talk about people having good manners or bad manners. When parents tell their children to “mind their manners,” they mean for the children to behave well, such as to say “please” and “thank you,” and to not eat with their mouth open at the dinner table.

Another phrase you’ll hear is, “Do you mind?” Americans use this in two ways. First, they use it to mean, “Is it all right?” or “Is this acceptable to you?” Here are a couple of examples:

- “Do you mind if I meet you at 2:00 instead of 1:00?”
- “Li asked me if we would mind if they sat with us at the concert, and I told her that we wouldn’t mind at all.”

Another way we use the phrase “Do you mind?” is to express our displeasure and to tell someone to stop doing what he or she is doing. For example, if you are on the bus and someone leans over to read your newspaper to the point of getting in your way, you may say to him/her, “Do you mind?” meaning “stop doing that!” This is a pretty forceful statement and is usually used when we’re annoyed or angry about someone else’s actions.

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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 27 – Car Trouble.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 27. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

In this episode, we're going to discuss having trouble with your car. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I was driving down the Santa Monica Freeway yesterday, headed toward downtown, when all of a sudden I saw my engine light come on. Needless to say, that's not the sort of thing one likes to see. So, I immediately pulled over to the side of the road and parked on the shoulder. I popped the hood and looked to see what the problem might be. I'm no mechanic – I barely know how to check the oil and the wiper fluid – but perhaps something would jump out at me.

The car didn't overheat, since there was no steam coming out of the radiator. I checked the battery cables, and the battery was definitely not dead. I didn't know quite what else to do, so I pulled out my cell phone and called AAA for a tow to the nearest repair shop. I started worrying about all the things it could be: the fuel pump, the transmission, the electrical system. Who knows? I just had new brakes put in a month ago, so I knew it couldn't be that.

The tow truck finally arrived and we went to a nearby mechanic. He checked everything and then told me that he had found the problem: the engine light sensor was broken! I now had to take it to the dealer to get it fixed. Well, at least it didn't end up costing me an arm and a leg.

[end of story]

Today we're talking about a common problem if you drive a car, and that is "car trouble." "Car trouble" (trouble), or "automobile trouble," is when you have problems with your car. I said, "I was driving down the Santa Monica Freeway." "To drive down" means the same as "to drive on." But most people don't say, "I'm driving on the street." They say, "I'm driving down the street," meaning I'm moving in a certain direction. We also drive down highways and freeways. A "freeway" (freeway) is a major road where there are no stop signs. In this story, I was driving on the "Santa Monica Freeway."

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In the United States, we have a national system of roads. These roads are called the “interstate highways” and all of these highways have numbers. The odd-numbered freeways go north and south, and the even-numbered freeways go east and west. So, Interstate 35, or Highway 35, goes from north to south, and Highway 94 goes from east to west. In some states, such as California, we give a name to the freeway in addition to its number. The name is usually where the freeway starts or where the freeway ends. So, the Santa Monica Freeway, which is also called “the I-10” or “Interstate 10,” begins in Santa Monica, just about a mile from me.

As I was driving, “all of a sudden” – suddenly – “I saw my engine light come on.” The “engine (engine) light” is a little light that tells you that there is something wrong with your engine, or your motor. The engine light is in front of you when you are driving. It is just behind the steering wheel, which is what you turn to move the car left and right. The area in front of the steering wheel is called the “dashboard.” The “dashboard” (dashboard) is where you can see how fast you are driving and how much gas you have left. And, if you have a problem with your engine, the dashboard is where the engine light will come on.

In most cars, there are several different kinds of lights: the engine light, the oil light, and so forth. I said that I saw the engine light “come on.” We use the verb “to come on” when a light activates automatically or electronically all on its own – we say it “comes on.” I wouldn’t say the engine light “turns on,” because there isn’t a person actually turning it on. I then said, “Needless to say, that’s not the sort of thing one likes to see.” “Needless to say” means obviously. When a person says, “Needless to say, if it’s raining you should bring an umbrella,” this means it is obvious that you should do that.

After I saw my engine light come on, “I pulled over to the side of the road and parked on the shoulder.” “To pull over” means to move your car off the road or the street or the freeway. That is the expression: “to pull over.” If a police officer tells you to pull over, that’s usually bad news. That means that he or she is going to give you a ticket. A “ticket” is a fine for doing something wrong when you are driving, like going too fast, which of course you should never do.

I pulled over and parked “on the shoulder.” The word “shoulder” (shoulder) here is the same as the shoulder of your arm, but when I say, “I parked on the shoulder,” it means the side of a freeway or a highway. There isn’t a shoulder on most streets; we usually use the word “shoulder” for freeways or highways. After I pulled over, “I popped the hood” to see what the problem might be. “To pop (pop) the hood (hood)” means to open the hood. The hood is in the front of your

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car, and it's like a door that you open to see the engine. In most cars nowadays, to pop or to open the hood you need to press a button inside your car that unlocks the hood.

I said, "I'm no mechanic." A "mechanic" (mechanic) is a person who fixes cars. "I barely know how to check the oil and the wiper fluid." "To barely know" something means to know only a very small amount, to know only a little. "To check the oil" means to look and see that there is enough motor oil in the engine. "Motor oil" is a liquid made of petroleum that your engine, or your motor, needs in order to run.

"Wiper fluid" means windshield wiper fluid. A "windshield" (windshield) is the window in the front of your car. We don't use the term "window" for that window; we have a special word for it, which is "windshield." The "wiper" (wiper) is the little stick that is on the windshield. You usually have two of them. They go back and forth to clean the windshield. And "wiper fluid" (fluid) is the liquid that helps to clean the windshield when the wipers are moving.

I opened the hood to see if anything would "jump out at me." We use the expression "to jump out at" when we are looking at many different things and we're trying to identify something, but we're not quite sure what that something is. So, for example, someone gives you a list of names and says, "There's someone you know on this list." But he doesn't tell you the name of the person, so you look at the list and hope that some name will "jump out at you," meaning you will suddenly notice it. When something jumps out at you, you might say, "Oh, there it is!"

I said that the car "didn't overheat." "To overheat" (overheat) means that the car becomes too hot. There is something in the front of the car called the "radiator" (radiator) that has water in it to keep the engine cool. But when a car overheats, the radiator water becomes so hot that you begin to see steam coming out. "Steam" (steam) is water in a gas or vapor state. When you boil water in a pan, steam will come off the top of the water. When steam comes out of your radiator, that means that your car engine is too hot: it overheated.

But that wasn't the problem. Then I checked my "battery cables." Your "battery" (battery) is what runs the electrical parts of your car. The battery is connected to the engine with "cables," which are long strings of metal. When a battery stops working, we say that it "dies." Just like a living thing can die, a battery can die, and when a battery doesn't work anymore, we say it is "dead" – there's no more power left in it. But my battery wasn't dead.

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I said that I didn't know what else to do, so I "called AAA for a tow to the nearest repair shop." "AAA" stands for American Automobile Association. It's a national, private organization kind of like an insurance company. I think it costs around \$50 or \$60 a year to become a member, and if your car breaks down or stops working, you can call them and they will tow you somewhere to get your car fixed.

"To tow" a car is to have another vehicle – in this case, a "tow truck" – pull your car somewhere. That's a "tow (tow) truck," not "toe" (toe) like a toe on your foot. The tow truck tows your car to a repair shop. A "repair (repair) shop" is a place where a "mechanic" – someone who fixes cars – works. We sometimes call these repair shops "garages." "I need to take my car to the garage" means I need to get it fixed at a repair shop by a mechanic.

I said that there were several things that could be wrong with my car: "the fuel pump, the transmission, the electrical system." The "fuel (fuel) pump" is a little thing in your motor, in the front of your car, that pushes the gasoline into the engine. The "transmission" is the gears of your car. A "gear" is a wheel that controls the speed of your car. If you have a manual transmission, you can put your car in first gear, second gear, third gear, and so forth. Or you could have an automatic transmission that changes gears for you. The "electrical system" in your car is what controls your lights and all of the things that use electricity.

I had "new brakes put in a month ago." "To put in" or to install brakes means that you put in new brake parts. The "brakes" (brakes) are what you use to stop a car. You hit the brakes. There are two pieces of metal in your car underneath the dashboard. These are called "pedals (pedals)." One pedal you press to go fast or slow: that is your gas pedal. The other pedal you press to slow or stop your car – that is your brake pedal.

The tow truck arrived and "we went to a nearby" – or close – "mechanic." He checked everything and he told me that my "engine light sensor was broken." A "sensor" (sensor) is a thing that can detect or can find out if there is a problem. If the sensor is "broken," or not working, it could come on even though there isn't a problem. So, my engine light sensor was not working, but there was no serious problem with my car.

I said I now had to take it in to the "dealer" to get it fixed. A "dealer," or a "car dealer," is someone who sells cars. And in the United States, the company that sells the car usually has its own mechanics and its own repair shop where you need to get any specialized work done. Finally, I said that "at least it didn't end up costing me an arm and a leg." The expression "to cost an arm and a leg" means

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to be very expensive. Something that costs a lot of money would cost you an arm and a leg.

Now let's listen to our story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

Thanks to our fantastic scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse, for her hard work. And thanks to you for listening. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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