
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

You think you're invisible?



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Welcome to 6 Minute English, the programme where we explore an interesting topic and bring you six items of useful vocabulary. I'm Neil.

Dan

And I'm Dan.

Neil

Now, Dan, have you ever wanted to become **invisible**?

Dan

Invisible – impossible to see. Of course! Who hasn't?

Neil

Well how about this: most of us think we *are* in fact invisible, at least some of the time... We'll be looking at the '**invisibility cloak illusion**' in this programme.

Dan

Fascinating. And in that phrase we heard our first three words. **Invisibility** – the state of being **invisible**. A **cloak** is a long piece of material worn like a coat around the shoulders.

Neil

And the third word in that phrase – an **illusion** – is something that seems real but isn't.

Dan

OK, question time. Which of these stories features an **invisibility cloak**? Is it...

a) The Hobbit

b) Harry Potter

Or c) The Invisible Man

Neil

I know they are all connected to invisibility, but I'm gonna say...a) The Hobbit.

Dan

Ok – we'll reveal the answer later on. Now, let's hear more about this **invisibility cloak illusion**. What's the theory, Neil?

Neil

Right – imagine you're sitting in a crowded train. People are busy looking at phones and books, but they're also looking at each other.

Dan

They're 'people-watching', as we call it. Yes. Yes, I do that. I do it a lot, if I'm honest!

Neil

So – where does the **invisibility** part come in?

Dan

A team of scientists from Yale University did some experiments on this. Commenting on the research here is neuroscientist Dr Catherine Loveday from Westminster University. What did the Yale team find?

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Dr Catherine Loveday, Neuroscientist, Westminster University

So this study, they asked people that, first they did a survey and they asked people sat in a canteen how much they were watching somebody, and how much they thought those people were observing them. And there was always a **mismatch**. People always thought they were more observational than the people who were watching them.

Dan

So, people think they observe others more than others watch them. Everyone thinks they aren't observed very much - it's almost as if they're **invisible** to others – or wearing an **invisibility cloak**!

Neil

And the difference between how much they are actually being watched and *think* they're being watched is what she called a **mismatch**. It's the difference between two things – they're two things which don't 'match'.

Dan

In other words – it's not true that people aren't watching us – which is why the idea of having an **invisibility cloak** is just an **illusion**. This next bit is interesting. Two people were asked to wait in a room. Then they were each asked to make two lists: one, what they noticed about the other person; and two, what *they thought* the other person noticed about them.

Neil

So list one was always longer than list two. Not only that – but there was also an important difference in the content of the lists.

Dan

Let's hear again from neuroscientist Dr Catherine Loveday. What was the difference?

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Dr Catherine Loveday, Neuroscientist, Westminster University

When people are observing you they're doing it in a non-**judgemental**, fairly empathic way – and not actually noticing the things that you're **self-conscious** about. So if for example you feel **self-conscious** about a spot on your nose, or something that you're wearing, that won't be what they're noticing. It's a much less **judgemental** form of observation.

Neil

Right, so even if we're feeling **self-conscious** about something – that means feeling extra aware of an aspect of ourselves – maybe our appearance or our clothes – we needn't be.

Dan

Yes, you don't need to feel **self-conscious**. People aren't being **judgemental**.

Neil

And being **judgemental** means being critical.

Dan

That's good news. So even though all I'm thinking about is how badly I need a haircut, the other person is probably noticing something completely different. Back to the question about the **invisibility cloak**. Which story is it in?

Neil

I said The Hobbit.

Dan

And it was in fact – Harry Potter. Not only does the garment make you impossible to see, it also protects you against magic spells.

Neil

Wow – I need one of those!

Dan

In The Hobbit, it's a ring that makes you **invisible**, and in The **Invisible Man**, the main character uses chemicals to achieve the same effect.

Neil

Now, before we become **invisible** ourselves, how about we go through today's words?

Dan

Marvellous. First we had **invisible** – which means impossible to see. You could say that stars are **invisible** during the day.

Neil

They're only visible at night.

Dan

We also had **cloak** – who would wear a cloak? Maybe a king or a monk? Or maybe you, Neil?

Neil

I'm sure I could look good in a **cloak** – that's a long piece of material worn over the shoulders. What about **illusion**?

Dan

Illusions appear to be true, but they're not. It can describe an idea: you could say a politician has the **illusion** that everything he says is true. Then we had **mismatch** – which can refer to the difference between two things which perhaps should be similar: there's a **mismatch** between what Michael says and what he does.

Neil

Who's Michael?

Dan

Just an example! You could also say that Michael and Simone are an unlikely couple – they seem very different – they're a bit of a **mismatch**.

Neil

What is it with you and Michael?! One, he doesn't exist, and two, I think you're being **judgemental**.

Dan

Well, I'm criticising him so, yeah, you're right – I'm being **judgemental**. Perhaps I should stop. It's just that... it's just that I'm in love with Simone myself, and I get all nervous and **self-conscious** when I see her.

Neil

You mean you become embarrassed about what she might think of you – you become **self-conscious**?

Dan

I do.

Neil

Even though she doesn't exist either?

Dan

Well, only in my examples. Sometimes I wish I really did have an **invisibility cloak**.

Neil

Hey, hang on, Dan - where have you gone?

Dan

Haha – very funny, I'm still perfectly visible. Time to go – but do visit our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube pages, and of course our website!

Neil

Goodbye for now.

Both

Bye!