



English Learning for Curious Minds



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Episode #021

Conspiracy Theories

January 28, 2020



[00:00:02] Hello, good morning, good afternoon, good night, wherever you are.

[00:00:07] This is the English Learning for Curious Minds podcast by Leonardo English.

[00:00:13] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about conspiracy theories.

[00:00:21] We'll talk about what they are, the psychology behind why people believe them, what impact they have, and at the end of the podcast, I'll tell you about three of the weirdest ones out there.

[00:00:36] You'll find out why people think Disney made the film Frozen, what animals people think built the pyramids, and who people think helped humans build Stonehenge.



Conspiracy Theories

[00:00:55] Before we get right into it, if you don't have the transcript and key vocabulary in front of you, you can grab it over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:06] If you're not already a member of Leonardo English, but would like to get your hands on the transcript and key vocabulary so that you can follow along as I speak and not miss a single word and get the definitions of any of the less common words or expressions, then our promotional price of just nine euros per month is only available until midnight on January the 31st.

[00:01:30] This was the special 'early bird' price and good things, well, they can't last forever .

[00:01:36] So if you want to understand every single word and discover new bits of vocabulary as you listen, then head to leonardoenglish.com/subscribe to find out more.

[00:01:49] As I said, this is only available until midnight on January the 31st, which is three days from when this episode is being released, so there isn't a huge amount of time left.

[00:02:01] Okay then, conspiracy theories.



Conspiracy Theories

[00:02:05] Before we go into some of the weirdest ones out there, let's just define exactly what they are, why people believe them, and why they can be so [seductive](#)¹.

[00:02:18] A conspiracy theory, according to the Cambridge dictionary, is 'a belief that an event or situation is the result of a secret plan made by powerful people'.

[00:02:31] You probably know about the existence of conspiracy theories such as that the moon landing was [faked](#)², that JFK was assassinated by the CIA, or that 9/11 was [an inside job](#)³.

[00:02:48] You might be familiar with these theories, you might even believe them.

[00:02:53] Millions of people all over the world do believe them.

[00:02:58] 29% of Americans, apparently, according to a recent survey, believe that there is a [deep state](#)⁴ working against President Trump.

[00:03:09] I have to admit there is something very [seductive](#) about a lot of conspiracy theories.

¹ making you want to do, have, or believe something, because of seeming attractive

² not real, but made to look or seem real

³ a crime, especially stealing, committed by someone in the organisation in which they work

⁴ organizations such as military, police, or political groups that are said to work secretly in order to protect particular interests and to rule a country without being elected



Conspiracy Theories

[00:03:16] This idea that there is some great conspiracy, some great secret or trick that is being held back from normal people, plays right into the [fictional⁵ narratives⁶](#) that we enjoy so much in films, books, and TV.

[00:03:34] It plays into this idea of [goodies⁷](#) against [baddies⁸](#), normally with the government or any kind of [institution⁹](#) that has power over us as the [baddy¹⁰](#) and the rest of the world us normal people, as the [goodies](#).

[00:03:52] Conspiracy theories are also popular because we as humans are always searching for meaning and connections in events, even when there might be none.

[00:04:04] Professor Joe Uscinski, who is the author of a book called American Conspiracy Theories says, ' we are very good at recognising patterns and regularities, but sometimes we [overplay¹¹](#) that.

⁵ imaginary, not true

⁶ stories or descriptions of a series of events

⁷ people, especially in a film or story, who are good

⁸ people, especially in a film or story, who are bad

⁹ a large and important organization, such as a university or bank

¹⁰ see baddies

¹¹ to make something seem more important than it really is



Conspiracy Theories

[00:04:19] We think we see a meaning and significance when it isn't really there. We also [assume](#)¹² that when something happens, it happens because someone or something made it happen for a reason'.

[00:04:32] What Professor Uscinski is saying is that especially when you want to believe something is true and it fits into your [narrative](#)¹³ of goodies versus baddies, if someone presents a connection between different events that fits your narrative of what you want to believe, then it's quite easy to find yourself believing it.

[00:04:58] The world can be a confusing place and people want to see patterns, they want to understand things, they want there to be connections between events.

[00:05:10] Conspiracy theories offer explanations that provide these connections, and they also suggest that the [underlying](#)¹⁴ causes are hidden from public view.

[00:05:23] When confusing things happen, believers in conspiracy theories can then [assume](#) that it is because they are being [intentionally](#)¹⁵ [deceived](#)¹⁶ by outside forces, normally by the government, and this fits into this attractive [narrative](#) of goodies versus baddies.

¹² to accept something to be true without question or proof

¹³ see 'narratives'

¹⁴ real but not immediately obvious

¹⁵ in a planned or intended way

¹⁶ to deceive is to persuade someone that something false is the truth, or to keep the truth hidden from someone for your own advantage



Conspiracy Theories

[00:05:46] And while conspiracy theories used to be pretty [niche](#)¹⁷ and would exist in forums and chat rooms deep in the [recesses](#)¹⁸ of the internet, for a series of reasons they are now much more [mainstream](#)¹⁹.

[00:06:04] Some [attribute](#)²⁰ this to social media, the [ease](#)²¹ with which fake news spreads, or you could even say just the ease with which information spreads.

[00:06:17] Others [attribute](#) this to a lack of trust in government and the authorities.

[00:06:23] As people trust these kinds of institutions less and less, the more [seductive](#) it becomes to believe that there is some kind of great conspiracy that the government is [engaged in](#)²² against us, against normal people.

[00:06:40] While others blame politicians for [fanning the flames](#)²³.

¹⁷ interesting to, aimed at, or affecting only a small number of people

¹⁸ a secret or hidden place

¹⁹ considered normal, and having or using ideas, beliefs, etc. that are accepted by most people

²⁰ a quality or characteristic that someone or something has

²¹ the state of experiencing no difficulty, effort, pain, etc

²² taking part in something

²³ to make a dangerous or unpleasant mood or situation worse



Conspiracy Theories

[00:06:45] When the President of the USA is a [serial](#)²⁴ conspiracy theorist, this [legitimises](#)²⁵ a lot of beliefs which would previously not have been [given the light of day](#)²⁶.

[00:06:58] And while some conspiracy theories used to be sort of [laughable](#)²⁷, the past few years have shown just how dangerous some of them can be.

[00:07:09] Pizzagate, for example, is one that you might remember. To those of you that need a reminder, this was a conspiracy theory that there was a [child sex ring](#)²⁸ linked to the Democratic party in the USA, and it was operated out of a pizza restaurant in Washington DC. It was [spread](#)²⁹ by fake news websites and far right organisations after having [surfaced](#)³⁰ in internet forums.

²⁴ used to describe a person who repeatedly commits a similar crime or carries out a similar bad act, or the crime or act itself

²⁵ to make something legal or acceptable

²⁶ when something sees the light of day, it appears for the first time

²⁷ silly and not deserving to be seriously considered

²⁸ a group relating to the abuse of children

²⁹ to move from one place to another, or to cause something to move or be communicated

³⁰ if a feeling or information surfaces, it becomes known



Conspiracy Theories

[00:07:42] The restaurant owners, the owners of the pizza restaurant, were [harassed](#)³¹ by hundreds of people, and a 28 year old man turned up at the restaurant to 'self-investigate' with an assault rifle and he fired three shots.

[00:07:59] The conspiracy theory has been completely [debunked](#)³², proved to be completely false, and luckily nobody died, but evidently it was pretty close.

[00:08:12] So these kinds of conspiracy theories can be really dangerous, and obviously I wouldn't like to even give any [airtime](#)³³ to any semi [mainstream](#) conspiracy theory.

[00:08:25] So today we are going to talk about three of the [wackiest](#)³⁴, weirdest conspiracy theories out there.

[00:08:34] All of these aren't a joke, there are people who really genuinely believe them.

[00:08:40] So [without further ado](#)³⁵, our first one, our first conspiracy theory is that dinosaurs built the pyramids.

³¹ annoyed or troubled repeatedly

³² proved to be false or incorrect

³³ (the amount of) broadcasting time that someone or something has on television or radio

³⁴ most strange, unusual in a pleasing and exciting or silly way

³⁵ without wasting more time



Conspiracy Theories

[00:08:50] Yes. Dinosaurs, the species that most people acknowledge to have been made [extinct](#)³⁶ about 65 million years ago.

[00:08:59] They are believed by some to have been [tamed](#)³⁷, [domesticated](#)³⁸ by the ancient Egyptians and to have built the pyramids.

[00:09:11] The reason for this is [supposedly](#)³⁹ that some texts were found that show images of dinosaur-type creatures building the pyramids, but the evidence seems to be pretty [tenuous](#)⁴⁰.

[00:09:27] I think we can safely say that dinosaurs were not involved in the construction of the pyramids. But I guess we'll never know for sure.

[00:09:36] I imagine that's the [policy line](#)⁴¹ of people who believe that particular conspiracy theory.

³⁶ not now existing

³⁷ (especially of animals) not wild or dangerous, either naturally or because of training or long involvement with humans

³⁸ see tamed

³⁹ used to show that you do not believe that something you have been told is true

⁴⁰ a tenuous connection, idea, or situation is weak and possibly does not exist

⁴¹ the official view



Conspiracy Theories

[00:09:41] Secondly, and this is one that I quite like, there is a conspiracy theory that Disney made the film Frozen in order to [distract⁴²](#) attention from the other conspiracy theory that Walt Disney, the creator of Disney, was [cryogenically frozen⁴³](#).

[00:10:04] If you weren't aware, there was a conspiracy theory or there still is a conspiracy theory, that when Walt Disney died he was frozen in order to be brought back to life when the technology existed.

[00:10:19] So when people would Google 'Disney frozen', all these websites would show up with conspiracy theories about Walt Disney being [cryogenically frozen](#).

[00:10:33] So some people believe that the reason the entire Frozen [franchise⁴⁴](#) was created, and that it was called Frozen, was to fill up the search results with references to the actual film and not the conspiracy theory.

[00:10:50] So with this example, you kind of get two conspiracy theories for the price of one.

[00:10:56] If this is indeed true, and I should add, of course, I don't believe it is, the people at Disney really are pretty smart.

⁴² to make someone stop giving their attention to something

⁴³ frozen after death, with a view to being brought back to life

⁴⁴ a series of films that have the same or similar titles and are about the same characters



Conspiracy Theories

[00:11:05] As not only did this film hide the previous conspiracy theory from the search results of people looking for Disney plus frozen, but it has also made the company more than a billion dollars.

[00:11:20] Finally, our third conspiracy theory takes us to Britain, and it's to do with Stonehenge.

[00:11:29] If you aren't familiar with Stonehenge, it's the [prehistoric](#)⁴⁵ monument in the English countryside with huge stones [piled up](#)⁴⁶ on each other. It's [estimated](#)⁴⁷ that it was constructed between 3000 and 2000 BC and archeologists have no hard evidence actually for how these huge stones were lifted up on top of each other.

[00:11:55] So some people believe that aliens built it.

[00:12:01] That they either built it themselves or they explained to humans how to lift up these huge stone [blocks](#)⁴⁸. And also, I have to admit, if you have ever seen them, it is pretty amazing to think that prehistoric man managed to lift up [blocks](#) weighing around 50 tonnes.

⁴⁵ describing the period before there were written records

⁴⁶ objects positioned one on top of another

⁴⁷ thought to be

⁴⁸ a solid, straight-sided piece of hard material



Conspiracy Theories

[00:12:22] But I think that going from thinking that it's pretty amazing to believing that the only explanation is that aliens helped them, well, I think that's [quite a stretch](#)⁴⁹.

[00:12:35] We could of course go on all day with weird conspiracy theories, and if you Google conspiracy theories, it really is a internet [rabbit warren](#)⁵⁰, you could just go on and on all day, but I think this is quite enough for today's podcast.

[00:12:53] I will leave that up to you if you want to continue the hunt for conspiracy theories, but as I've warned you, it is a [slippery slope](#)⁵¹. So we will leave it there for today.

[00:13:06] For those of you listening that haven't yet got your membership to Leonardo English and haven't got the transcripts and key vocabulary in front of you, I should just remind you that the promotional price will come to an end at midnight on January the 31st the transcripts are incredibly helpful for following every single word, and the key vocabulary means that you get explanations of the harder words as you go along.

[00:13:33] They are all now available in PDF format as well, so you can download them for later, print them out, share them with friends, or do whatever you want with them.

⁴⁹ if something is a stretch, usually means that it is not very believable or that something doesn't fit

⁵⁰ a series of connecting underground passages and holes in which rabbits live, used figuratively to describe the fact that one link would lead to another

⁵¹ a bad situation or habit that, after it has started, is likely to get very much worse



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So head to leonardoenglish.com/subscribe before midnight on January the 31st and check out everything that your membership gives you.

[00:13:54] As always, thank you for listening to the show.

[00:13:57] This has been English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English. I'm Alastair Budge and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Seductive	making you want to do, have, or believe something, because of seeming attractive
Faked	not real, but made to look or seem real
An inside job	a crime, especially stealing, committed by someone in the organisation in which they work
Deep state	organizations such as military, police, or political groups that are said to work secretly in order to protect particular interests and to rule a country without being elected
Fictional	imaginary, not true
Narratives	stories or descriptions of a series of events
Goodies	people, especially in a film or story, who are good
Baddies	people, especially in a film or story, who are bad
Institution	a large and important organization, such as a university or bank
Baddy	see baddies
Overplay	to make something seem more important than it really is
Assume	to accept something to be true without question or proof
Narrative	see 'narratives'



Conspiracy Theories

Underlying	real but not immediately obvious
Intentionally	in a planned or intended way
Deceived	to deceive is to persuade someone that something false is the truth, or to keep the truth hidden from someone for your own advantage
Niche	interesting to, aimed at, or affecting only a small number of people
Recesses	a secret or hidden place
Mainstream	considered normal, and having or using ideas, beliefs, etc. that are accepted by most people
Attribute	a quality or characteristic that someone or something has
Ease	the state of experiencing no difficulty, effort, pain, etc
Engaged in	taking part in something
Fanning the flames	to make a dangerous or unpleasant mood or situation worse
Serial	used to describe a person who repeatedly commits a similar crime or carries out a similar bad act, or the crime or act itself
Legitimises	to make something legal or acceptable
Given the light of day	when something sees the light of day, it appears for the first time
Laughable	silly and not deserving to be seriously considered
Child sex ring	a group relating to the abuse of children
Spread	to move from one place to another, or to cause something to move or be communicated



Conspiracy Theories

Surfaced	if a feeling or information surfaces, it becomes known
Harassed	annoyed or troubled repeatedly
Debunked	proved to be false or incorrect
Airtime	(the amount of) broadcasting time that someone or something has on television or radio
Wackiest	most strange, unusual in a pleasing and exciting or silly way
Without further ado	without wasting more time
Extinct	not now existing
Tamed	(especially of animals) not wild or dangerous, either naturally or because of training or long involvement with humans
Domesticated	see tamed
Supposedly	used to show that you do not believe that something you have been told is true
Tenuous	a tenuous connection, idea, or situation is weak and possibly does not exist
Policy line	the official view
Distract	to make someone stop giving their attention to something
Cryogenically frozen	frozen after death, with a view to being brought back to life
Franchise	a series of films that have the same or similar titles and are about the same characters
Prehistoric	describing the period before there were written records



Conspiracy Theories

Piled up	objects positioned one on top of another
Estimated	thought to be
Blocks	a solid, straight-sided piece of hard material
Quite a stretch	if something is a stretch, usually means that it is not very believable or that something doesn't fit
Rabbit warren	a series of connecting underground passages and holes in which rabbits live, used figuratively to describe the fact that one link would lead to another
Slippery slope	a bad situation or habit that, after it has started, is likely to get very much worse

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What did you struggle to understand?

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