



ESL Podcast 454 – Hailing and Taking a Taxi

GLOSSARY

taxi / cab – a car, usually painted yellow, that is driven by another person and that one uses to go somewhere, most often in a large city

* How much will it cost to take a taxi to the airport?

from start to finish – throughout the whole process; during every moment of doing something; from the beginning to the end of something

* We had a huge project to finish in just two months, so from start to finish, we were working 14-hour days.

to hail (a cab) – to get the attention of a taxi driver so that he or she lets one get into a car and takes one where one wants to go

* To hail a cab in New York City, just raise your right arm high into the air.

cabbie – a taxi driver; a cab driver

* Good cabbies know the main streets of a city.

off duty – not working at a particular moment, usually because one is not scheduled to work then or because one is taking a break

* Are police officers allowed to wear their uniforms when they are off duty?

to take no notice of (someone or something) – to not pay attention to someone or something; to not see or respond to someone or something; to ignore someone or something

* Chelsea was reading a book while walking, and she was so interested in the book that she took no notice of the hole in the sidewalk.

to pull over – to drive to the side of a street and stop there for a few moments, usually to let someone into or out of one's car

* Let's pull over and ask that lady for directions.

return fare – money received from a person who rides in a taxi from point B to point A after the taxi has already taken someone else from point A to point B

* Whenever taxi drivers take someone to the airport, they know that they can easily get a good return fare because so many people want to go from the airport to downtown.

taxi stand – a place where taxis wait in line for people who need a taxi ride

* There is a large taxi stand in front of the bus station, with about seven taxis waiting for passengers at any time.



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flat rate – an amount of money that is paid for a service, no matter how difficult the service is or how long it takes

* When he writes stories for the magazine, he charges a flat rate instead of a fee per word.

meter – a small machine in a taxi that shows how much money one needs to pay, based on how long one has been in the taxi and how far the taxi has gone

* When you sit down in a taxi, don't forget to make sure that the meter starts at zero!

posted – placed or hung where people can see or read something

* The teacher's rules for the classroom are posted by the door where all the students can read them.

suit yourself – an informal phrase meaning that one can do whatever one wants and that it doesn't matter to the person who is speaking, especially if he or she thinks it is a silly or bad idea

* When Pollyanna said she was going to eat a whole box of cookies by herself, I said, "Suit yourself, but your stomach is going to hurt afterwards."

to steer clear of (something) – to stay away from something; to not use something; to not become involved with something

* Steer clear of the freeways around 5:30 p.m. because there are too many cars on the road then and they move very slowly.

license – official, legal permission to do something, usually presented on a small piece of paper

* How old were you when you got your driver's license?

to take (someone) for a ride – to trick someone, especially to get money or to make someone believe something that isn't true

* The salesman sold us an expensive bottle of pills that he said would help us lose weight really quickly, but it didn't work. He really took us for a ride.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the cabbie mean when he says, “Suit yourself”?
 - a) He thinks Ignacio should wear a suit.
 - b) He wants Ignacio to drive the taxi.
 - c) He doesn’t care what Ignacio does.

2. What is the meaning of the phrase “steer clear of private cabs”?
 - a) Be careful when driving near private cabs.
 - b) Always ride in private cabs because they have better steering.
 - c) Never ride in private cabs.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

meter

The word “meter,” in this podcast, is a small machine in a taxi that shows how much money one needs to pay based on how long one has been in the taxi and how far the taxi has gone: “Hideaki was horrified when he saw that the meter had hit \$80.” The word “meter” is also used to talk about any small machine that says how much of something one has used: “How often does the water company read the meter at your house?” A “parking meter” is a small machine on the side of the road that one puts coins into to be allowed to park there for a certain amount of time: “Sayir put \$1.25 into the parking meter, so we have an hour before we have to move the car.”

posted

In this podcast, the word “posted” means placed or hung where people can see or read something: “Photographs of criminals are posted on the walls at the police station.” The verb “to post” is used to talk about messages that one writes online and puts on a forum or blog: “Have you ever posted anything on the ESL Podcast Blog?” The phrase “to keep (someone) posted on (something)” means to give someone new information as something changes, so that he or she always has the most updated information: “Please keep us posted on how your job search is going.” Finally, the phrase “to post (someone) (somewhere)” means to send someone to work in another country, especially in the military or the government: “He was posted in Algeria from 1986-1989.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Taxi cabs are very common in New York City. Within the five “boroughs” (geographic parts) of New York City, only Yellow Medallion Taxicabs are allowed to pick up people who hail a cab on the street. To drive one of these taxis, the cabbies must have a taxi license, which is also called a “hack license” in New York City. People with a hack license can also drive “limousines” (very long, expensive cars often used by very rich people).

To be “eligible” (meeting the minimum qualifications to do something) to apply for a hack license, one must be at least 19 years old and a U.S. citizen, and have a regular U.S. driver’s license. “Applicants” (people who are asking for the license) must have their doctor “fill out” (write information in spaces) a form saying that they meet the medical requirements. They have to pass a “drug test” (a medical exam to see whether one has been using drugs). They also have to be “fingerprinted” (one’s fingers are put in ink to make an image on a piece of paper, so that the images can be compared to those of people who have broken the law).

Applicants must take a course in “defensive driving” (how to drive more safely by paying attention to what other drivers are doing). They also have to finish at least 24 hours of training in “customer service” (being nice to the people who ride in their taxi), “regulations” (laws) for taxis, and reading maps. Finally, they have to take an exam of English “proficiency” (ability to speak and communicate) and other tests.

It can be difficult to become a taxi driver in New York City, but people who have a hack license can make \$1,000 each week, or more.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 454: Hailing and Taking a Taxi.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 454. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go now to our website at eslpod.com and download a Learning Guide for this episode. You can follow along with the transcript of everything we say and also have a list of vocabulary words, cultural notes, comprehension questions, and some additional definitions not found on the audio portion of this episode.

This episode is called "Hailing and Taking a Taxi." To "hail a taxi" means to stop a taxi, to get a taxi's attention so that the car will stop. This episode is going to be using some very typical vocabulary that you might use if you take a taxi in the U.S. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

My company sent me on my first business trip, and I was supposed to travel around the city in taxis. Having never ridden in a taxi before, I had problems from start to finish.

First, I had trouble hailing a cab. I didn't realize that when the taxi's light is off that the cabbie is off duty. No wonder they took no notice of me.

Then, a cab did pull over and I told him where I wanted to go. He said, though, that he wouldn't take me because he wouldn't be able to get a return fare!

I was looking around for a taxi stand when another cab pulled over, but my troubles didn't stop there.

Cabbie: Where to?

Ignacio: I'd like to go the Hamilton Building downtown. There's a flat rate, isn't there?

Cabbie: No, we don't have flat rates.

Ignacio: But a flat rate to downtown is required by law, isn't it?



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Cabbie: Do you want to go downtown or not? I've already started the meter.

Ignacio: Where are your posted rates?

Cabbie: We don't have any. The first mile is \$3.50 and each quarter mile is \$2.00.

Ignacio: That doesn't sound right to me. I think I'll try another cab.

Cabbie: Suit yourself!

I remembered what my co-worker told me. She said to steer clear of private cabs, like this one. The cabbies don't have licenses and some of them will really take you for a ride – and not the kind you want!

[end of dialogue]

This episode is about Ignacio who is on a business trip. He says, "My company sent me on my first business trip, and I was supposed to travel around the city in taxis." He was "supposed to," it was recommended or ordered that he do that. He has to travel around in "taxis," which is the plural for taxi or taxicab or cab; all of those words mean the same thing. It's a car that you basically pay the driver to take you to where you want to go. He says, "Having never ridden in a taxi before (meaning having never taken a taxi – been inside a taxi), I had problems from start to finish." The expression "from start to finish" is a common one to mean the entire time, for the entire time that I was doing something. For example: "The professor walked into class and spent an entire hour yelling at his class from start to finish" – the entire time.

He says, "First, I had trouble hailing a cab." As we said before, "to hail" (hail) a cab or a taxi or a taxicab means to get their attention, often by waving your hand so that they will stop for you. This is very common in some cities such as New York City, where you, if you are in what they call in New York City "the City," Manhattan – the main island where the businesses are mostly in New York City, you can stand at the corner or stand in the street and wave your hand to get a taxicab to stop for you. Here in Los Angeles that is not common, taxis are not as common here in L.A. In fact, in most places you cannot hail a cab, you have to go to what's called a "cab stand," which we'll talk about in a minute.

Back to our story: He says that he had trouble hailing a cab. He didn't realize that when the taxi's light is off that the cabbie is off duty. The taxi cars have



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lights usually on the top of the car, if the light is on that means that the taxi is available, they can stop and pick you up. If the light is off, that means that they are already occupied and they will not stop. Well, Ignacio, since he doesn't have much experience with taxis (and apparently has never seen a movie with a taxi!) didn't realize that the taxi's light is off, and he was trying to hail the cabs. He says, "the cabbie (when the light is off) is off duty." The "cabbie" is same as the taxicab driver; cabbie is the person who drives the cab or the taxi. To be "off duty" means to be not working or no longer on the job. If the taxi's cab light is off, he could have someone already in his car or he could be off duty. Ignacio then says, "No wonder they took no notice of me." To "take notice of someone" means to realize that they are there, to acknowledge them, to show or indicate that you see them. But, because the taxicabs were either busy or off duty, they took no notice of Ignacio – they didn't stop.

"Then," he says, "a cab did pull over and I told him where I wanted to go." To "pull over" is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to have a car or a truck stop at the side of the road; to stop the car and usually park it on the side of the road, at least temporarily. So, one of the cabs did pull over – did stop. "He said, though (he said, however), that he wouldn't take me because he wouldn't be able to get a return fare!" A "fare" (fare) when we're talking about taxis is a person who is paying for the taxi. So, the taxicab driver has a fare, meaning they have a customer. In this case, "return fare" means that the taxicab driver will go to a certain place then they'll turn around and come back, if they have someone with them that they pick up on the way back that would be a return fare. Some taxis don't want to go to certain places because there aren't very many people there and they won't have anyone paying them to drive back to the main part of the city.

"I was looking around for a taxi stand," Ignacio says, "when another cab pulled over." A "taxi stand" is a place, often by a hotel or a busy public area, where there are taxis that are parked one behind another, usually several taxis, and you can go there and get a taxi. Here in Los Angeles, for example, when you come out of the airport there are several taxi stands where there are several taxis waiting for people who want a ride – who need a ride. That's a taxi stand. Here Los Angeles, you can get a taxi by going to a taxi stand or by calling a taxi company to come to your house or business. It is not normally possible to hail a taxi in Los Angeles.

Well, Ignacio was still having some problems. The cabbie asks him, "Where to?" meaning where do you want to go. Ignacio says, "I'd like to go the Hamilton Building downtown. There's a flat rate, isn't there?" A "flat rate" is a single fixed price; "rate" is the same as price, here. So, a "fixed rate" is one price that you



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pay – that everyone pays, usually from a certain area of town to another area of town. Again, using Los Angeles as an example, if you arrive at the airport and you want to go to a hotel in the downtown area there's a flat rate. No matter which hotel you go to (some may be closer than others) you will be charged the same fare. Notice that "fare" here means that same amount of money; it can mean both the person who's paying the money and the money you receive.

Well, the cabbie says, "No, we don't have flat rates." Ignacio says, "But a flat rate to downtown is required by law, isn't it?" He's saying that the taxicab driver must him to pay only the flat rate. The cabbie, however, says, "Do you want to go downtown or not?" meaning I'm not going to charge you the flat rate, and if you don't want to pay more, I'm going to leave. The cabbie says, "I've already started the meter." The "meter" in a taxi is a little machine that tells you how far or how long you've traveled, and in most cities the amount that you pay depends on how far you go. The meter tells you how far you've gone or how long you've been in the car.

Ignacio then asks the cabbie, "Where are your posted rates?" Every city has laws that determine how much a taxicab driver can charge per mile or per half mile or quarter mile, and these are supposed to be rates that you can find inside the taxicab – in the car. The cabbie says, however, "We don't have any. The first mile is \$3.50 and each quarter mile is \$2.00." Ignacio says, "That doesn't sound right to me," meaning that is wrong, that's too much. "I think I'll try another cab," he very wisely – very intelligently says. First intelligent thing Ignacio has done! The cabbie says, "Suit yourself!" meaning do whatever you want. The expression "suit yourself" means you do whatever you want, I'm not going to bother you or be bothered by you. Usually we use this expression when you don't agree with what the person is doing, and you are telling them to go ahead and do it but you think they're wrong, basically.

Ignacio says that his "co-worker," someone he works with, had warned him to steer clear of private cabs. To "steer (steer) clear of" something or someone means to avoid, to not go near, to not get involved with. He should steer clear of private cabs, cabs that do not have "licenses," official permission from the city to operate as a taxicab driver. "They really will take you for a ride," he says. "They will really take you for a ride" means they will really steal your money. To take someone for a ride usually means, in this case, to steal their money or to charge more money than they should – to cheat them. It can also mean simply to get into a car and drive somewhere, but that's the double meaning that Ignacio was using here. He says, "They will really take you for a ride – and not the kind you want!" meaning not an actual ride, but using the meaning of the expression to take your money.



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

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by someone who will never take you for a ride, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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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