

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English: February 29

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“You don’t look too happy. What’s wrong? Did you have a fight with Sujatha again?”

“Yes, we had another one of our silly fights! And this time it was over balcony.”

“Don’t you guys have anything better to do? Why have a fight over a balcony? I mean...”

“It was about the use of the word balcony. I told her that I was sitting in the balcony when I saw...”

“Knowing Sujatha, she must have corrected you immediately. She must have said, people sit ‘on’ and not ‘in’ a balcony. Am I right?”

“That’s exactly what she said. Is she right?”

“She is, I’m afraid. Native speakers tend to say sit on a balcony.”

“I see. My friends and I usually play cards on the balcony?”

“That’s a good example. During winter, I sit on the balcony and do my assignments. If you’re thinking of the balcony seats in a theatre, then you say, ‘We sat in the balcony’”

“Most of the new theatres in cities don’t have a balcony. They have...”

“That’s true. I remember the first time I sat in the balcony. It was a...”

“I have something to say, so please don’t interrupt. Allow me to say my opinion.”

“You can say what’s on your mind, but you don’t say your opinion. One usually ‘gives’ one’s opinion or ‘expresses’ it. One doesn’t ‘say’ it.”

“I see. There are people who are afraid to express their opinion.”

“People who appear on our news channels never get a chance to express their opinion. They are usually shouted down either by the anchor or by their fellow panellists.”

“Kunthala is very diplomatic. She never gives her opinion on anything. Tell me, how was your three-day workshop? Did you and your friends have a good time at the resort?”

“We were hoping to have a good time, but the experts made sure we didn’t. They really made us work. By the end of the day, most of us were punch-drunk.”

“Punch-drunk? So, you had a good time after all!”

“When you say that you’re punch-drunk, what you mean is that you’re extremely tired. And because you’re tired, you’re unable to think clearly. You...”

“Oh, I know that feeling. You’re tired and rather confused. You can’t really make sense of what is happening around you.”

“Exactly! You’re dazed. And this happens because you’re either extremely tired or excited about something. The negotiations with the workers went on till midnight. We were punch-drunk with fatigue.”

“The soldiers hadn’t slept or eaten in two days. They were punch-drunk from exertion.”

“That’s a good example. The expression is mostly used in informal contexts.”

“But tell me, why punch? Why not whiskey or brandy? I mean...”

“The punch in this case, does not refer to the drink. It refers to the punch that we associate with boxing. When a boxer gets hit or punched repeatedly on the head....”

“The poor chap probably sees stars! He becomes dazed and confused.”

“Exactly!”

“Never insult an alligator till you have crossed the river.” – Cordell Hull

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