The Importance of Being Earnest
8: The truth about Ernest

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Defining and non-defining relative clauses

Narrator
Cecily and Gwendolen both thought they were engaged to someone called Ernest. But Gwendolen has just found out her man’s real name is Jack. Let’s join them in the garden now, where Cecily is asking Algernon an important question…

Cecily
Are you engaged to Gwendolen?

Algernon
Engaged to Gwendolen? Of course not! What made you think that?

Cecily
Thank you.

Narrator
And Cecily lets Algernon kiss her on her cheek.

Gwendolen
I knew there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr Algernon Moncrieff.

Cecily
Algernon! Is your name Algernon?

Algernon
I cannot deny it.

Cecily
Oh!

Gwendolen
Is your name really Jack?

Jack
My name certainly is Jack. It’s been Jack for years.

Cecily
Gwendolen, we have both been greatly deceived.
Gwendolen
My poor Cecily!

Cecily
My sweet Gwendolen!

Jack and Algernon
[groan]

Gwendolen
Mr Worthing, there is just one question I would like to ask you. Where is your brother Ernest? Cecily and I are both engaged to be married to your brother, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where he is at present.

Jack
Gwendolen, Cecily, it is very painful for me to speak the truth and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I don't have a brother Ernest. I don't have a brother at all. I've never had a brother in my life, and I don't plan to ever have one in the future.

Cecily
No brother at all?

Jack
None!

Gwendolen
Have you never had a brother of any kind?

Jack
Never. Not even of any kind.

Gwendolen
Cecily, it's quite clear that neither of us are engaged to be married to anyone.

Cecily
It's not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

Gwendolen
Let's go in the house. They'll dare not come after us there.

Cecily
No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

Narrator
And the two women, who minutes before were arguing, now go arm in arm into the house.

Jack
This awful situation is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?
Algernon
Yes, and a wonderful Bunbury it is.

Jack
Well, you've no right to Bunbury here.

Algernon
That's absurd. People can Bunbury anywhere they choose. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

Jack
Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

Algernon
Well, you have to be serious about something.

Jack
Well, the only satisfaction I have in all this terrible business is that your friend Bunbury is finished. You won't be able to run to the country quite as often as you used to, dear Algy.

Algernon
Your brother is a little unwell, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently now.

Jack
As for your behaviour towards Miss Cardew, I must say that fooling a sweet, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that I am her guardian.

Algernon
I can see no excuse at all for you deceiving a clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

Jack
I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

Algernon
Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

Jack
There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

Algernon
And I don't think it's very likely, Jack, that you and Miss Fairfax will be together. Ooh… muffins…

Jack
Well, that's no business of yours… And how can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble? You seem perfectly heartless.
Algernon
[eating] Well, I can't eat muffins in a nervous way. The butter would probably get on my sleeves. You should always eat muffins quite calmly. It's the only way to eat them.

Jack
Well, that's no reason to eat them all in that greedy way. Give them to me.

Algernon
But you just said it was heartless to eat muffins.

Jack
Algy, I wish you would go.

Algernon
You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. Besides I have just arranged with Reverend Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six with the name of Ernest.

Jack
My dear fellow, please stop that nonsense. I arranged this morning with Reverend Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I will, of course, take the name of Ernest. We can't both be called Ernest. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been christened by anybody. You, on the other hand, have already been christened.

Algernon
Yes, but I haven't been christened for years.

Jack
Yes, but you have been christened. That's the important thing.

Algernon
Yes, so I know I can stand it. You're not quite sure that you have ever been christened, and I think it would be rather dangerous to do it now. It might make you very unwell.

Jack
[eating] Oh, that's nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

Algernon
Jack, you're eating the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

Jack
Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here.

Algernon
I haven't quite finished my tea yet! And there is still one muffin left.

Jack
[groans in despair]
Vocabulary

**embracing**
holding someone in your arms to show you love them

deny
to say something is not true

deceived
tricked

cowardly
not brave enough to do something they should

**Bunburying**
invented word which means inventing a person (either for yourself or a different person) to give you an excuse for behaving in a different way or to avoid situations

**inexcusable**
describing behaviour that is very bad

**muffins**
small, round breads that are sliced and eaten hot with butter

**heartless**
showing no feeling or consideration for others

**Reverend**
title for a person who performs religious duties in the Christian Church

**christened**
given a name (usually as a baby) during a religious ceremony in the Christian Church

**right**
something a person is allowed to do or have

**constitution**
state of someone's health
Quiz

1. Jack finally admits to Gwendolen that… 
   (Hint: What does he say about his brother Ernest?)
   a) … he has a brother but he’s not called Ernest.
   b) … he doesn’t have a brother at all.
   c) … his brother Ernest is already married.

2. When Gwendolen and Cecily find out Ernest doesn’t exist… 
   (Hint: They leave the boys and go into the house)
   a) … they laugh.
   b) … they are angry.
   c) … they argue with each other.

3. Jack thinks that Algernon shouldn’t be christened by Reverend Chasuble because… 
   (Hint: One of the men hasn’t been christened, but who?)
   a) … Algernon might become ill.
   b) … it could be very dangerous.
   c) … Algernon has already been christened.

Feedback

1. Jack finally admits to Gwendolen that …
   a) … he has a brother but he’s not called Ernest. – Wrong – Jack says ‘I don’t have a brother Ernest. I don’t have a brother at all.’
   b) … he doesn’t have a brother at all. – Correct – Well done!
   c) … his brother Ernest is already married. – Wrong – Jack says I don’t have a brother Ernest. I don’t have a brother at all.’

2. When Gwendolen and Cecily find out Ernest doesn’t exist …
   a) … they laugh. – Wrong – They are not very happy at all.
   b) … they are angry. – Correct – Well done!
   c) … they argue with each other. – Wrong – They were arguing earlier, but now they are not happy with the men.

3. Jack thinks that Algernon shouldn’t be christened by Reverend Chasuble because …
   a) … Algernon might become ill. – Wrong – It’s Algernon who says to Jack ‘It might make you very unwell.’
   b) … it could be very dangerous. – Wrong – It’s Algernon who says to Jack ‘I think it would be rather dangerous to do it now.’
   c) … Algernon has already been christened. – Correct – Well done!