ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #78
Modern Day Pirates
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Transcript

[00:00:00] Hello, hello, hello and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about pirates.

[00:00:28] But not the old kind with swords, earrings and parrots.

[00:00:32] We are going to be talking about modern pirates, the kind with speedboats, machine guns and **night-vision goggles**[1].

[00:00:41] We'll be talking about where they come from, why pirates have suddenly **re-emerged**[2] after piracy not really being a problem for 200 years or so, and we'll find out what pirates are doing in 2020.

[00:00:56] Before we get right into that though, let me just remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus subtitles, transcripts, and key vocabulary, over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:11] This is also where you can check out becoming a member of Leonardo English, and join a community of curious minds from all over the world, doing

[1] special glasses that let you see in the dark

[2] appeared again

meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally, improving their English in a more interesting way.

[00:01:27] So if that's of interest, and I certainly hope it is, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:36] OK then, let's get started, and get right into the fascinating topic of modern day pirates.

[00:01:45] Now, piracy, of course, has been around for thousands of years, in different shapes and forms.

[00:01:53] For almost as long as there have been boats, there have been pirates, and there is evidence of pirates going back to the 14th century BC, almost three and a half thousand years ago.

[00:02:07] Nowadays, the term piracy can be used for a whole variety of things - pirate radio, pirate CDs, pirate video games, pirate music, and so on.

[00:02:19] But the subject of today's episode is the more 'traditional' type of piracy, of groups of people attacking other ships in order to steal their **treasure**[3].

[00:02:30] And we'll find out that although the pirates of the 21st century are 'traditional' in that their overall aim is similar to that of famous pirates like Redbeard or Blackbeard, their reasons for turning to piracy and their methods are quite different.

[3] valuable things such as gold, jewels or money

[00:02:50] Now, you may well have heard about modern piracy, about where it takes place, and how these pirates typically operate.

[00:02:59] The world **hotspot**[4] for piracy in the 21st century, and where the majority of pirate attacks have taken place over the past 20 years or so, is off the coast of Somalia, to the east of the horn of Africa.

[00:03:16] What you might not know though is the reasons for this, and they are threefold, there are three of them.

[00:03:24] Firstly, the Somali government collapsed in 1991, and the country was **plunged**[5] into **disarray**[6]. The **navy**[7] was **disbanded**[8], and there was practically no rule of law. This, of course, is in the potential pirate's advantage.

[00:03:45] As a result of this, and secondly, the waters off the coast of Somalia began to be heavily fished by foreign boats. Now, they weren't actually allowed to do this, they were **trespassing**[9] into Somali waters, and they didn't have the right to fish there, but as there was nobody to stop them, they continued. What had previously been a very

[4] a place where a lot of a particular activity happens

[5] suddenly thrown

[6] a state of confusion and lack of order

[7] the part of a country's armed forces that fights at sea

[8] broken up so that it no longer existed as a group

[9] going without permission

fertile[10] area for fishing quickly became overfished, and the local fishermen found that there weren't nearly as many fish left for them.

[00:04:21] And finally, as there was no Somali navy, and effectively no police to control anything that went on, foreign ships began to dump[11] toxic[12] waste in the water off Somalia. They would bring rubbish from Europe, and just throw it overboard[13], or on the coast of Somalia, which by the way is the longest coastline in the whole of Africa.

[00:04:49] It's said that Italian companies with links to the mafia would take rubbish from Europe, then strike[14] deals with Somali warlords[15] to dump huge amounts of waste either in the sea, or on the Somali beaches. Some of this was highly toxic, and it's thought that it also included nuclear waste.

[00:05:12] This led to people getting respiratory[16] infections, mouth ulcers[17], skin infections, and all sorts of nasty things.

[00:05:22] This was exacerbated[18], it was made worse, after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. While India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand were the worst hit, the

[10] productive; producing a lot
[11] get rid of something by leaving it somewhere carelessly
[12] poisonous
[13] over the side of the ship into the water
[14] make or agree
[15] military leaders who control an area by force
[16] affecting the lungs and breathing
[17] painful open sores
[18] made worse

tsunami also did some serious damage to Somalia. And how this is relevant to our story is that it **stirred up**[19] a lot of this toxic waste that had been sitting at the bottom of the ocean, and it ended up polluting even more of the coastline.

[00:05:55] So, we have these three **core**[20] factors going on. The lack of the rule of law, the overfishing, and the illegal waste **dumping**[21].

[00:06:07] Combined with this, Somalia was, and still is, an incredibly poor country. GDP per capita was $187 in 2010, which is 1% of the world's average.

[00:06:23] You could say, it was **ripe**[22] for piracy.

[00:06:27] However, you might be wondering, what does the overfishing and the rubbish have to do with it?

[00:06:35] Well, the overfishing led to people struggling even more to make a living. The sea had been **plentiful**[23], but after the arrival of these foreign boats, mainly from Iran and Yemen, there were a lot fewer fish to go around.

[00:06:53] And the **dumping** of the **toxic** waste, of course, had an impact on the marine system, and wasn't good for the **fish stocks**[24]. There were fewer fish in the ocean anyway because there were more people trying to catch them and there was **toxic**, even nuclear, waste that had been **dumped**[25] there illegally, so this was killing what fish there were left.

[19] moved around and brought up from the bottom

[00:07:17] So, what happened next?

[00:07:20] Small, Somali fishing communities decided to take matters into their own hands. There was no **navy** or police to defend their seas, so they had to act for themselves.

[00:07:33] They **armed**[26] themselves, and went out into the ocean to scare these fishing boats away. This was their sea, their ocean, the foreign boats didn't have the right to be there, and they were prepared to defend their territory.

[00:07:51] Occasionally, when a fishing boat got too close, the Somali fishermen would get on board the boats, and demand a payment from the boat's owner. The idea behind this, reportedly I should say, was as some kind of compensation.

[00:08:09] These fishing boats had stolen all of their fish, so they needed to pay.

[00:08:14] The fishermen soon realised that this was actually a pretty good business.

[00:08:21] All you needed was a boat, some guns, and a few friends, and you could quickly make a lot of money.

[20] main and most important
[21] getting rid of something by leaving it somewhere carelessly
[22] in the right conditions
[23] full of fish, with more than enough for everyone
[24] the amounts of sea creatures available to be caught
[25] left or thrown away carelessly
[26] got weapons for

[00:08:28] It turns out that people are prepared to pay quite a lot of money to not be killed, and to have their boat back, so this was a potentially **lucrative**[27] source of income for the fishermen in these **poverty-stricken**[28] communities.

[00:08:43] Especially young, unemployed men saw it as a quick way to make money to support their families. Just one **raid**[29] and they could support a family for years.

[00:08:56] Soon, the number of attacks started to increase, and the **ransoms**[30] paid, the money paid to release the prisoners, or ships, started to increase as well.

[00:09:08] And soon these fishermen went from defenders of their **fishing stock**[31], and brave defenders of the coastline against foreign invaders into **fully-fledged**[32] pirates.

[00:09:21] They were typically organised in small groups. They would either attack directly from the coast, or if they were searching for **prey**[33] further away from the coast, there would be a main 'mothership', a larger ship, and smaller speedboats from which these attacks would be launched.

[27] making a lot of money

[28] extremely poor

[29] sudden attack

[30] payments demanded to free people or things that have been captured

[31] supply of sea creatures they could catch

[32] real and complete

[33] ships to attack

[00:09:42] They would rush up on a ship, normally in the early morning, **armed to the teeth**[34], and try to seize control of it.

[00:09:50] Once they had got control of the ship, they would do a combination of things.

[00:09:57] They might just steal what was on the ship. These ships would normally carry quite a lot of cash, in US dollars, so they would just take that, along with anything else that was valuable on the boat.

[00:10:10] Sometimes they would ask for a **ransom**[35], when you request money for something, so either for the **crew**[36], the people on the ship, or the ship's **cargo**[37]. These could be in the millions of dollars, and would normally be paid.

[00:10:27] Think about it - if you have a ship with hundreds of millions of dollars on it, then you are quite likely to pay a considerable **sum**[38] to get that ship back.

[00:10:38] The record for a **ransom**, the record amount paid to these modern day pirates, was 13.5 million dollars.

[34] carrying a lot of weapons

[35] a payment demanded to free people or things that have been captured

[36] the people who work on a ship

[37] the goods carried by a ship

[38] amount of money

[00:10:48] It was paid for a Greek **oil tanker**[39] that was carrying $200 million worth of oil. So you could say, 13.5 million dollars is quite a **bargain**[40].

[00:11:02] But if you were a pirate and you wanted to launch a big attack, the sort of one where you could **feasibly**[41] get a **ransom** like this from a large **cargo ship**[42], this would require a lot of resources.

[00:11:17] You would need a large mother ship, smaller speedboats, and a big group of pirates, it wasn't a cheap thing to do at all.

[00:11:26] All of your pirates would all need to be paid, plus you would need to buy all of the guns, **grenades**[43], boats, equipment and everything else to successfully **mount**[44] the attack.

[00:11:40] And unless you were already a pirate that had launched several successful attacks, you needed someone to **loan**[45] you the money, or provide the cash for you to go on your pirate adventure.

[39] a ship that carries large amounts of oil

[40] a low price for something of much greater value

[41] realistically; possibly

[42] a large ship that carries goods

[43] small bombs thrown by hand

[44] organise and carry out

[45] lend

[00:11:53] What this led to is a sort of pirate **stock market**[46], where people could invest in a pirate mission, providing the capital, the money, and then taking a share of the profits.

[00:12:07] This became a pretty big business.

[00:12:11] One of the bigger pirate **expeditions**[47] could cost $30,000, and the investor, the person putting in the money, might get three quarters of the total **ransom**.

[00:12:23] If we're talking about a **ransom** of $13.5 million, that's $10 million from a $30,000 investment.

[00:12:33] And it's not just the pirate investors that were getting rich, the normal, fisherman-type pirates were also making huge amounts of money.

[00:12:45] They would typically get between 30 and 50 thousand dollars per raid, and reportedly there would be a bonus of $10,000 for the first pirate to get aboard the ship that they were attacking.

[00:12:59] 30 to 50 thousand dollars would obviously be a lot of money for pretty much everyone, but for someone in a country that is frequently ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, this is a **monumental**[48] amount of money.

[46] a system where people put money into businesses and receive a share of the profits

[47] organised trips or missions with a particular purpose

[48] extremely large

[00:13:16] And the amount of money that these pirates made actually started pushing up the price of things **on shore**[49], on land. The pirates had so much money that they could **outbid**[50] everyone else, and the price of everything went up.

[00:13:34] The local merchants were happy with this, of course, because they were making more money, but it wasn't good news for the local people who suddenly had to pay more for the same things, to compete with the pirates.

[00:13:48] One thing the local people were happy about though is that the arrival of the pirates has, understandably, scared off a lot of these big fishing boats, and **fish stocks** have started to come back.

[00:14:03] I don't think that we can say that these pirates are **eco-warriors**[51], but this is certainly one positive side-effect.

[00:14:12] So, what is actually happening now with pirates, and is there any end to this super **lucrative** profession that is **tarnishing**[52] the reputation of Somalia, and meaning that ships avoid the country's waters out of fear of being taken over by pirates?

[00:14:31] The good news if you're a shipowner, and bad news if you're a pirate, is that the **golden age**[53] of the modern pirate does seem to be coming to a close.

[49] on land

[50] offer more money than

[51] people who fight to protect the natural environment

[52] damaging

[53] the most successful period

[00:14:42] Ships are now much more heavily guarded, and they tend to sail much further away from the coast, meaning it's harder for them to be found by the pirates, who often launch their attacks from the coast, or at least not far from the **shore**[54].

[00:14:59] And the numbers of attacks show that it's getting harder.

[00:15:05] Since 2011, the number of pirate **raids**[55] has reduced almost every year, and off the Somali coast, the life of a pirate isn't quite as easy as it was 10 years ago.

[00:15:18] But, **elsewhere**[56] in the world, new pirate **hotspots**[57] are emerging.

[00:15:25] The world's piracy **hotspot** in 2020 is now the Gulf of Guinea, on the other side of Africa from Somalia, just below Nigeria.

[00:15:35] There were 21 pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea in the first 3 months of 2020, out of the total of 47 worldwide. And this is actually increasing, it's up from 38 worldwide in the same period the year before.

[00:15:55] So, as long as there are large ships carrying multi-million dollar **cargo**, and people without many economic opportunities have access to speedboats and machine guns, then I think we'll continue to see modern pirates **popping up**[58] in new and unexpected places for a few more years to come.

[54] the land along the edge of the sea

[55] sudden attacks

[56] in other places

[57] places where a lot of a particular activity happens

[58] appearing suddenly

[00:16:17] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Modern Day Pirates.

[00:16:23] Thank you very much for listening to the show, and I hope that you now know a little bit more about modern pirates than you did 20 minutes ago.

[00:16:30] As always I would love to know what you thought of the show.

[00:16:36] I normally say that I'd particularly like to hear from you if you have a personal story about this.

[00:16:41] But I guess you probably aren't a pirate and you've never been taken hostage by a group of pirates.

[00:16:48] It is a **long shot**[59] but if you have, wow, I would love to hear that story.

[00:16:52] And even if you haven't I'd still love to know what you think.

[00:16:56] You can email hi hi@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:17:01] And as a final reminder if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, and to unlock the transcripts, subtitles, and key vocabulary, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:17:20] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[59] a very small chance

[00:17:25] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Night-vision goggles	special glasses that let you see in the dark
Re-emerged	appeared again
Treasure	valuable things such as gold, jewels or money
Hotspot	a place where a lot of a particular activity happens
Plunged	suddenly thrown
Disarray	a state of confusion and lack of order
Navy	the part of a country's armed forces that fights at sea
Disbanded	broken up so that it no longer existed as a group
Trespassing	going without permission
Fertile	productive; producing a lot

Dump	get rid of something by leaving it somewhere carelessly
Toxic	poisonous
Overboard	over the side of the ship into the water
Strike	make or agree
Warlords	military leaders who control an area by force
Respiratory	affecting the lungs and breathing
Ulcers	painful open sores
Exacerbated	made worse
Stirred up	moved around and brought up from the bottom
Core	main and most important
Dumping	getting rid of something by leaving it somewhere carelessly
Ripe	in the right conditions

Plentiful	full of fish, with more than enough for everyone
Fish stocks	the amounts of sea creatures available to be caught
Dumped	left or thrown away carelessly
Armed	got weapons for
Lucrative	making a lot of money
Poverty-stricken	extremely poor
Raid	sudden attack
Ransoms	payments demanded to free people or things that have been captured
Fishing stock	supply of sea creatures they could catch
Fully-fledged	real and complete
Prey	ships to attack
Armed to the teeth	carrying a lot of weapons

Ransom	a payment demanded to free people or things that have been captured
Crew	the people who work on a ship
Cargo	the goods carried by a ship
Sum	amount of money
Oil tanker	a ship that carries large amounts of oil
Bargain	a low price for something of much greater value
Feasibly	realistically; possibly
Cargo ship	a large ship that carries goods
Grenades	small bombs thrown by hand
Mount	organise and carry out
Loan	lend
Stock market	a system where people put money into businesses and receive a share

	of the profits
Expeditions	organised trips or missions with a particular purpose
Monumental	extremely large
On shore	on land
Outbid	offer more money than
Eco-warriors	people who fight to protect the natural environment
Tarnishing	damaging
Golden age	the most successful period
Shore	the land along the edge of the sea
Raids	sudden attacks
Elsewhere	in other places
Hotspots	places where a lot of a particular activity happens

Popping up	appearing suddenly
Long shot	a very small chance

Language spotlight

1. Stir up

- **Meaning**: To move something around so that things at the bottom rise up, or to cause trouble or strong feelings.
- **Synonyms**: disturb, churn up, agitate
- **Antonyms**: settle, calm, leave undisturbed
- **Examples**:
    - The children **stirred up** the mud at the bottom of the pond while they were playing.
    - His comments **stirred up** a lot of anger among the staff.

2. Armed to the teeth

- **Meaning**: Carrying a large number of weapons.
- **Synonyms**: heavily armed, well armed, fully equipped with weapons
- **Antonyms**: unarmed, defenceless, empty-handed
- **Examples**:
    - The guards at the gate were **armed to the teeth**.
    - In the film, the robbers arrive at the bank **armed to the teeth**.

3. Golden age

- **Meaning**: The period when something is at its most successful or popular.
- **Synonyms**: heyday, peak, prime
- **Antonyms**: decline, low point, dark age
- **Examples**:
    - Many people think the 1960s were the **golden age** of British pop music.
    - The town enjoyed a **golden age** when the factory employed thousands of people.

4. Pop up

- **Meaning**: To appear suddenly or unexpectedly.
- **Synonyms**: appear, spring up, turn up
- **Antonyms**: disappear, vanish, die out
- **Examples**:
    - New coffee shops seem to be **popping up** on every street in the city.
    - An error message **popped up** on my screen just as I was saving the file.

5. Long shot

- **Meaning**: Something that has only a small chance of being true or of succeeding.
- **Synonyms**: outside chance, slim chance, remote possibility
- **Antonyms**: sure thing, certainty, safe bet
- **Examples**:
    - It's a **long shot**, but you could ask if they still have any tickets left.
    - Applying for the job was a **long shot**, but she got an interview.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. According to the episode, where have most pirate attacks of the past 20 years or so taken place?

a) In the seas around Indonesia

b) Off the coast of Somalia

c) In the Mediterranean Sea

d) Off the coast of Iran

2. What happened in Somalia in 1991?

a) Foreign navies took control of its coast

b) It signed a fishing deal with Europe

c) It built up a large new navy

d) Its national government collapsed

3. How did the 2004 tsunami make the situation in Somalia worse?

a) It moved toxic waste from the seabed onto more coastline

b) It destroyed most of the Somali fishing boats

c) It brought foreign fishing boats closer to the coast

d) It killed most of the fish off the Somali coast

4. Why did Somali fishermen at first demand payment from foreign fishing boats?

a) To pay for repairs to their own boats

b) To buy guns from the Somali warlords

c) As compensation for the fish that had been taken

d) As a fee for a licence to fish in Somali waters

5. Why have pirate attacks off Somalia become less common since 2011?

a) The Somali police now protect the coastline

b) Ships are better guarded and sail further from the coast

c) Shipowners have stopped paying any ransoms

d) The Somali navy has started patrolling the coast

True or False

6. Somalia has the longest coastline in Africa. (True/False)

7. Most of the foreign fishing boats in Somali waters came from Italy. (True/False)

8. The record ransom was paid for a Greek oil tanker. (True/False)

9. An investor in a pirate expedition might get a quarter of the total ransom. (True/False)

10. There were fewer pirate attacks worldwide in the first three months of 2020 than in the same period the year before. (True/False)

Fill in the Blanks

11. Firstly, the Somali government collapsed in 1991, and the country was plunged into _____.

12. You could say, it was ____ for piracy.

13. They would rush up on a ship, normally in the early morning, armed to the _____, and try to seize control of it.

14. Sometimes they would ask for a _____, when you request money for something, so either for the crew, the people on the ship, or the ship's cargo.

15. The good news if you're a shipowner, and bad news if you're a pirate, is that the golden ___ of the modern pirate does seem to be coming to a close.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does "**disbanded**" mean when the speaker describes what happened to the Somali navy?

a) Given new and better equipment

b) Sent to guard another country

c) Broken up so it no longer existed

d) Placed under foreign control

17. What does "**exacerbated**" mean when the speaker talks about the 2004 tsunami?

a) Made worse

b) Cleaned up

c) Discovered

d) Kept secret

18. What does "**lucrative**" mean in "a potentially lucrative source of income"?

a) Very dangerous to do

b) Against the law

c) Lasting only a short time

d) Making a lot of money

19. What does "**outbid**" mean when the speaker describes the pirates spending money on land?

a) Cheat in business with

b) Offer more money than

c) Refuse to trade with

d) Borrow money from

20. What does "**tarnishing**" mean in "tarnishing the reputation of Somalia"?

a) Damaging

b) Improving

c) Explaining

d) Spreading

Answers

1. b) Off the coast of Somalia
2. d) Its national government collapsed
3. a) It moved toxic waste from the seabed onto more coastline
4. c) As compensation for the fish that had been taken
5. b) Ships are better guarded and sail further from the coast
6. True
7. False
8. True
9. False
10. False
11. disarray
12. ripe
13. teeth
14. ransom
15. age
16. c) Broken up so it no longer existed
17. a) Made worse
18. d) Making a lot of money

19. b) Offer more money than

20. a) Damaging