



Video 8 – Real Vocabulary: what does *transpire* mean?

Hi there! What is the correct meaning of *transpire*? Well, *transpire* has three meanings. In its original use, *transpire* is a technical word for describing what leaves do when they give off water vapour. This meaning is common in texts about botany. *Transpire* can also mean “to become publicly known”, and in this sense it often occurs in the pattern “it transpired that” – for example in a sentence like “It later transpired that three members of the jury had been bribed”. The third meaning of *transpire* is the one that is controversial.

In the sentence:

“We were asked not to divulge what had transpired at the meeting.”

... *transpire* simply means “to happen”, and this is the meaning that traditionalists object to. Their argument seems to be that this meaning is unnecessary, since English has several other perfectly good ways of saying something happened – like, for example, *take place*, or *occur*, or *happen* itself. But that isn’t a good enough reason to say that *transpire* is unacceptable as a synonym for *happen* – after all, English is full of words with very similar meanings (think of *let*, *allow* or *permit*, which all have more or less the same meaning).

It is fair to say that this use of *transpire* sounds rather formal, and in most situations *happen* or *take place* would be more normal and more appropriate. But that’s not the same as saying it is “wrong”. Using *transpire* in this way is quite acceptable – but be careful not to use it in less formal contexts.

In my next video I will cover the question: is the word *data* singular or plural?

Thanks for watching!