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**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

**TOPICS**

Native rate of speech, to preach to the choir, common sense, “though” at the end of a sentence, possess vs. own, allow you to vs. allows you to, pronouncing “twenty” and “ninety,” picking a suitor, a make-out scene

**GLOSSARY**

**native** – related to the country, region, or situation where a person is born  
\* We’ll be wearing the native dress of our country at the festival, so everyone will know that we represent Somalia.

**rate** – the speed at which something moves or happens  
\* At this slow rate, the construction company won’t finished building the new school until next year!

**to preach to the choir** – to try to convince people who already agree with you  
\* When Jeremy tried to get us to take an extra day of vacation from work, we told him that he was preaching to the choir.

**sermon** – a talk on a religious topic  
\* The priest gave an inspirational sermon about using our own abilities to help the poor and the sick.

**choir loft** – a balcony (second floor area with no wall on at least one side) in a church, usually for singers and musicians  
\* The singers in the choir loft began singing as the organist played.

**pulpit** – a raised (higher place) in a church where someone gives a sermon (religious talk)  
\* The people in church looked up to see the new priest standing in the pulpit.

**common sense** – good judgment in practical or daily things  
\* None of us have experience taking care of children, but let’s use our common sense and I’m sure we’ll be able to take care of this baby until his mother returns.



www.eslpod.com

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

---

**though** – however; usually used to show how this statement is different from the one made before it

\* I really like cold weather. Spending December in Minnesota, though, is too cold even for me.

**to possess** – to have; to own; to have an ability or characteristic

\* Do you think he possesses the skills necessary to become a good painter?

**to own** – to have; to possess, usually an object or physical thing

\* I wish I could help, but I don't own any folding chairs that can be used for the party.

**to allow someone to** – to permit someone to do something

\* Before we can allow anyone to go back into the building, we need to make sure it's safe.

**suitor** – someone (usually a man) who is doing special things to show his romantic interest in someone else (usually a woman)

\* She's very smart and beautiful. It's not surprising that she had a lot of suitors before she got married.

**to make-out** – to kiss, hug, and touch someone you are romantically interested in

\* Teenagers like to park along this mountain road to make-out on the weekends.

**to watch the ball drop** – to watch a ball with lights move from a very high place to the bottom of a pole at 11:59 p.m. on December 31 in Times Square in the middle of New York City as part of the New Year celebration

\* We normally stay up until midnight to watch the ball drop on TV, but this year, we fell asleep at 11:30!



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **The Song “Auld Lang Syne”**

There are many traditions that people in the U.S. follow when celebrating the New Year on January 1. One of these traditions is singing the song “Auld Lang Syne” at 12:00 a.m. on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

The title, “Auld Lang Syne,” is actually not English, but Scottish, the language spoken in Scotland. It means “long ago” or “days gone by” (days in the past). This “melody” (the series musical notes) is one of the most well known ones in the U.S. and in many other English-speaking countries.

The “lyrics” (words in a song) to the song are from a poem written by Robert Burns, born in 1759 and considered the national poet of Scotland. Most people don’t know all of the lyrics to the song, but know the first “verse” (a section of a song or poem).

Should auld (old) acquaintance be forgot,  
and never brought to mind?  
Should auld (old) acquaintance be forgot,  
and auld lang syne?

The language in the song is an older version of English used when the poem was written. The word “old” is the modern word for “auld.”

In the first line, “acquaintances” are people whom we have met and know a little, but don’t know well enough to call them our friends. In the second line, “to bring (someone or something) to mind,” means to remember that person or thing. If you learn these few lines, you’ll be able to sing along on New Year’s Eve.



www.eslpod.com

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 65.

This is the English Café episode 65. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On this, our last podcast, well, our last English Café of 2006, were going to be answering questions in this episode, just like we did in English Café number 64. In this Café, we're going to try to answer several questions on many different topics. I'm sure that at least some of these will be of interest to you.

Remember to visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com), where you can download a Learning Guide for this podcast. Now let's get started.

Our first question comes from Germany, from “Joern,” Joern. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing that correctly, so my apologies. The question has to do with something that I say on many of our regular ESL Podcasts, our Monday and Friday podcast. After I give my explanation of the dialogue, we listen to the dialogue again at a fast speed, and usually the expression that I use is “a native rate of speech.” The question is what does that mean, native rate of speech?

Native, “native,” means where you are born; it relates to a specific place. So for example, if you say, “I'm native of Minnesota,” that means that's where you were born.

When we use the term native rate of speech, we're talking about the rate, “rate,” or speed that someone talks who is a native speaker - who grew up, from the time they were a little baby, speaking English. So, you are a native speaker of your language, whatever that language is, and I am a native speaker of English. So, a native rate of speech is how people who are fluent English would talk to each other - that's the speed at which they talk to each other.

Our next question comes from Antonio, “Antonio,” in Italy. Antonio wants to know the meaning of an expression that he heard or read, which is “to preach to the choir.” What does it mean to preach to the choir?

Well first, let's talk about the words in this expression. We begin with preach, “preach.” To preach means to give a religious talk, usually in a church. We call



www.eslpod.com

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

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those religious talks sermons, “sermons.” A sermon is a religious talk that a priest or a pastor or a minister might give in a church.

The choir, “choir,” are the people who are singing. The expression, to preach to the choir, means that you are talking to people who already agree with you. The choir, who sings at the church, are probably already convinced of the religious beliefs of the person who is preaching.

By the way, the place where the choir sings from is not normally called a balcony. In a theater, when you have a second floor - a second story where you have seats up above, that's called a balcony, “balcony.” In a church, the place where the choir is is usually called the choir loft, “loft.” The place where the minister - what we would call the preacher, that's a person who preaches - the preacher gives his sermon, or preaches his sermon, from a place called the pulpit, “pulpit.” The pulpit is the place where the minister stands.

So, “to preach to the choir,” means to talk to people who already believe what you believe. And usually, the expression means that you are, in some ways, wasting your time because if you are trying to convince someone of something, it doesn't make any sense to try to talk to people who already agree with you, and that's what “to preach to the choir” means. So, if your boss says to you, “We have to work harder. Everyone must work more hours,” and you are already working hard and work additional hours, you may say, “You're preaching to the choir” - I already believe that - I already agree with you.

Our next question comes from Europe also, from Poland; “Pawel,” Pawel from Poland. Again, I apologize for my pronunciations here. The question has to do with an expression you will hear many times in English, “common sense.” Common, “common,” sense, “sense.”

Common sense means the knowledge or wisdom that you would get just from your every normal day life, nothing that would require going to school or studying or memorizing. Common sense means that you are able to do things logically, reasonably, without necessarily having any special education.

If you say, “That person has no common sense,” you mean they are not very intelligent or very smart, they can't make logical or reasonable decisions. If you say, “This is common sense,” if you are talking about an opinion that you have, “Well, it's common sense that you should put a coat on if it is cold outside.” The



www.eslpod.com

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

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idea here is that everyone should know that, it's therefore common, everybody has that knowledge; it's not a specialized knowledge.

Massimo, "Massimo," is a gentleman from Verona, Italy. He wants to know the meaning of the word though, "though," especially when it comes at the end of a sentence. For example, "Bob is very intelligent, he doesn't work very hard though." In that expression, we mean however. It's sort of like saying but - "Bob is intelligent, but he doesn't work very hard" - "Bob is very intelligent, he doesn't work very hard however." That is the meaning there of the word "though."

You could also use "though" at the beginning of the sentence. You could say, "Though he's very intelligent, he doesn't work very hard." Either of those would be correct.

Our next question comes from Elisabeth in Switzerland, "Elisabeth." Elisabeth wants to know the difference between two verbs. The first one is possess "possess," and the second one is own, "own."

Both of these verbs mean to belong to someone. You can say, "I own a house" - I bought it, I live in it, I own it, it's mine. You could also say, "I possess a house," however we use the word own a lot more frequently than the word possess. If you're talking about something physical, like a car or a house, you could say own or possess, again, own is probably a little more common. If you are talking about some sort of personality characteristic, for example "He possesses intelligence," we wouldn't say, "He owns intelligence." When you want to say he has intelligence or he is intelligent, we could use the word possess. Or, "He possesses a good sense of mathematics," we wouldn't say, "He owns a good sense of mathematics."

So, if it's something that is not physical - something related to personality - then we would probably use the word possess, but if it's something physical - a computer, an iPod, a coffee cup - we would probably use the word own, more common. To say possess would be a little more formal, it might sound too formal in many cases.

Our next question comes from Jehudi, "Jehudi," I'm not sure where they're from. Jehudi has a question about the expression "to allow you to do" something. To allow, "allow," someone to do something means to permit them - to, we might say, enable, "enable," them - to give them the permission, to say "Yes, it's okay for you to do that." Like any verb, if it was in the first person - I - you would say,



www.eslpod.com

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

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“I allow you.” If it was in the third person - he, she - you would say allows, “He allows you,” with an S at the end.

This expression can also be used to talk about a situation. You could say, “Being in California allows me to see the sun and have warm weather more often than in Minnesota.” So, it can also refer to a situation that gives you the opportunity or permits you to do something.

Our next question comes from Roberto, “Roberto,” from Mexico, south of the United States. We also have a similar question from José in Spain, “José.” Roberto and José are interested in the pronunciation of the letter T. They've noticed in the past podcasts that sometimes the letter T is pronounced differently in different words.

The example that Roberto asks about is the number twenty, “twenty,” and ninety, “ninety.” Roberto noticed that I pronounced the T in ninety like a D, and that is correct. When you have a T or two Ts between two vowels, in this case, the vowel is E and Y (acts as a vowel in English), then the T is usually pronounced, in normal conversation, like a D. So for example, there's a word, “ladder,” ladder, which you use to climb up to the top of your house; there's also the word, “latter,” which is also pronounced, in normal conversation, “ladder,” meaning the later or the more recent.

Both these words would be pronounced almost identically, if not identically, and you would just have to know the context of the sentence to know which ladder you were referring to.

Sometimes, and I think this happens especially among some English teachers, they over-pronounce the T. They pronounce it like a T in other words, so they'll say, “ninety” (nine-tee), but this is not the way we typically speak, and it is not the accepted way of pronouncing the T between two vowels.

Now, in case of twenty, the number 20, there it's a little different. The T is not between two vowels; it's between an N and a Y, “twenty.” Here, what happens more common is that the T gets dropped sometimes, especially when someone is speaking quickly. “I have twenty minutes to get to my car” - I have twenty. It's almost like you pronounce it “tweny,” without the T. That would be in fast conversation. If you were speaking more slowly, more carefully, you could say, “twenty.” You wouldn't say, “twen-tee,” you wouldn't over-pronounce the T, but



www.eslpod.com

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

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you would hear it, more likely, if you were speaking more slowly or more carefully.

The same is true with a word such as “county,” county. If we were saying that quickly, I might say, “couny.” A “couny” or a county is a part of a state - it’s a region within a state. The differences, then, have to do with fast speech - maybe a little more informal speech, versus slow and carefully pronounced speech.

Our next question comes from Eva, “Eva,” in Poland, back over in Europe. Eva has two questions. The first one else to do with the expression “to pick a suitor.” To pick, “pick,” or select, a suitor, “suitor.”

A suitor is usually a man who is trying to be romantically involved with another woman. They’re trying to date them and the woman hasn’t quite said yes. The man is interested, and the woman might be interested but, you know, women, sometimes, they don’t necessarily tell men that they’re interested. So, the man who is interested in a woman is called a suitor.

It’s an older expression; you don’t hear this word that often anymore. There’s also a verb related to this, which is to court, “court.” Again, it’s an old-fashioned expression, nowadays. When you are courting someone - when a man is courting a woman - they’re trying to get the woman to like them - they’re trying to get a relationship with that woman.

So, that is a suitor. So Eva, good luck on picking your suitor! Eva also wants to know about an expression, “to make out.” She saw, or read somewhere, the expression, “a make out scene.”

To make out, “make out,” - sometimes this is spelled with a hyphen in between, sometimes as one word, but usually as two words. To make out is an informal expression that refers to when a boy and a girl, or a man and a woman, are kissing and hugging, usually for a long period of time; that is to make out. So, when you are with your girlfriend and you are in the car, and you are parked outside of your parent’s house and you want to kiss your girlfriend, you kiss her for a long time, you hug her; that would be making out, usually something you would do without other people watching you.

A make out scene, “scene,” probably refers to a scene in a movie or a scene in a television show. The word scene, when we talk about movies or television shows, refers to one part of the show or one part of the movie. Movies usually



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**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 65**

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have different scenes. First they're in a car, then they're in a house, then the people go to the beach; those would be three different scenes - different places or locations where the story takes place. So, a make out scene would, I guess, be a scene in a movie where a boy and a girl are kissing and hugging.

Our final question comes from Hiro, "Hiro," in Japan. Hiro wants to know the meaning of the expression "to watch the ball drop." This is a good question for this time of the year because it is related to something that happens on New Year's Eve, on December 31st at night.

In New York City, there is a popular celebration of New Year's that is located in a section of New York City - of Manhattan - called Times Square. And, in Times Square, which is a big area with buildings around it, there is a pole and on top of the pole, they put a ball. And, I think maybe a minute or two minutes before the New Year's - 11:58 p.m. - the ball begins to go down the pole - it begins to drop. As it is dropping, as they get close to 30 seconds or so, people start to count down, that is to count numbers backwards. So, 30, 29, 28, 27 - everybody says that together until it gets to the bottom, and when it gets to the bottom, it's midnight, and the ball, I think, lights up and the new year - there's a sign with the new year.

So, that is watching the ball drop. It's being in Times Square or watching it on television, because it's on television every year, and seeing this big ball drop on New Year's Eve.

Well, that is a good way to end this special edition all question and answer edition of English Café. Come back next time. On our next Café, our first Café of 2007, we're going to be doing a few new things in the English Café beginning next week, so please come back and listen to us again. And, of course, you can also listen to our Monday and Friday regular ESL Podcast.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Happy New Year! We'll see you next year on the English Café.

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