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ENGLISH CAFÉ – 67

TOPICS

In the News: pretexting, stay the course, The Colbert Report, if that's anything to go by, color vs. hue, contribute vs. attribute, the die is cast

GLOSSARY

pretexting – getting information about someone else by not telling the truth, such as pretending to be that person over the phone or giving a false reason for asking for information

* There was an article in the newspaper about a woman who tried to steal people's money by using pretexting to get their banking information.

to stay the course – to continue in the same way; to keep doing something even though it is difficult

* The treatment for his illness hasn't work so far, but the doctors want to stay the course in order to give the treatment more time to work.

to mock – to mimic; to pretend like someone else to make fun of that person; to laugh at someone in an unkind way by talking or behaving like them

* Stop mocking the way that old man walks! It's cruel and it's not funny!

satire – using humor (such as telling jokes) to make fun of someone or something, usually related to politics or news topics

* Some of the best satire about the President is in this magazine's political cartoons.

parody – pretending to be someone or something in an exaggerated (more than it really is) way to be funny

* At the school show, the students sang a parody of the school song that some of the teachers didn't like.

political pundit – a person who knows about politics and who is often asked for their opinion

* I'm tired of turning on the television and seeing the same political pundits each week.



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loudmouth – a person who talks too much in an way that causes other people to be annoyed, angry, or hurt

* I wish Dan wasn't such a loudmouth when we go drinking in bars.

if that's anything to go by – if that is an indication; if this is true, then...

* If our company's January earnings are any to go by, we'll be making more money this year than in any previous year.

color – what one's eyes see when light is reflected off a surface, such as red, yellow, blue, green, pink, and orange

* I can't remember your favorite color. Is it blue or green?

hue – small differences in color; smaller divisions within a color

* This sweater is the same color as that shirt, but it's the wrong hue. It's too dark.

to contribute – to give something so that something else can be achieved; to give a part of what is needed to complete something

* We won't make the deadline for our school magazine if we don't find enough students to contribute articles and stories.

to attribute – to give someone or something credit for something; to say that someone has produced something or is the owner of something

* When the team captain was interviewed after winning the game, he said that he attributed their win to the hard work of the players.

the die is cast – some decision or action has been made that has determined the future and cannot be changed

* Once you told your daughter that she could have a pet, the die was cast. You can't change your mind now.



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WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

“I Have a Dream” Speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an American “civil rights” (the right of citizens to have freedom and equal opportunities) leader until his death in 1968. His most famous speech was given in Washington D.C. during a “march” (a group of people walking together in protest) for equal rights. He is considered one of the greatest public speakers in American history. This speech, which contains the words “I have a dream,” is considered one of the greatest U.S. speeches ever given.

The most famous parts of the speech are these two sentences:

*I have a dream that one day this nation will **rise up** and live out the true meaning of its **creed**: “We hold these truths to be **self-evident**: that all men are created equal.”*

To “rise up” means to stop being willing to be told what to do and doing it. A “creed” is a set of beliefs that someone has, and “self-evident” means to be clear to everyone without needing any explanation.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

In this sentence, Dr. King is saying that he hopes that someday in the U.S., everyone will have an opinion about other people based on how those people behave and what they believe in, and not based on what race they are.

Dr. King is one of the most admired people in American history. He and his work is honored every year with a national holiday on the third Monday of January.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESLPod.com's English Café, number 67.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café, episode 67. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On today's Café, we're going to have a new segment in our Café, something we're going to call "In the News," and as always, we will answer your questions. Lets get started.

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I mentioned in Café number 66, our last Café, that we were going to try some new things on the Café, and today is another one of those new things. We're going to have a part of the Café every so often called "In the News," where we talk about some vocabulary that is popular in the news in the United States. This is a little difficult to do sometimes because, of course, the news changes every day, but we will try to pick some words or expressions that are popular and have been popular at least for a few months, so that if you do read the newspaper - and we have a lot of people who have emailed us asking us to talk a little bit more about news vocabulary - this, we hope, will help.

In this episode, we're going to talk about two words, or a word and an expression, that have been popular in the past few months in the United States, if you read the American newspapers. One of them it is pretexting, "pretexting."

This word comes from pretext. As a noun, a pretext is sort of like an excuse - a reason that you tell someone you are doing something, but it's not the real reason - it's not the true reason. For example, you see a beautiful woman and you want to talk to her, you go over to her and you ask her what time it is; that is a way of starting the conversation. Asking her for the time is a pretext to get to talk to her, the real reason. By the way, if you do that, make sure you're not wearing a watch!

I said that pretext is a noun, and if you look it up in a dictionary, you will see the definition. But, there's a new use of this word as a verb. As a verb, to pretext



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means to get information about someone else by lying - by not telling the truth. For example, you call up the phone company and you pretend to be someone else - you lie and say, "Oh, this is Brad Pitt calling. I'm trying to get Jennifer Aniston's telephone number," even though you're not Brad Pitt. So, lying to get information - giving someone false information in order to find out more about them - that would be to pretext.

The reason this has been in the American news is that one of the big computer companies in the United States - I don't want to give their name...well, okay, Hewlett-Packard. Hewlett-Packard has been accused of - people have said that they have done something wrong, in this case, accused of this technique, pretexting, to get information about some of their own members of their company.

The United States Congress - the federal government - recently passed a law saying that this was illegal - to call and get information by using a pretext - by pretexting. So, that is a term that you may see in American news reports.

Another term - an expression - that has been in the news, really, for the last year or so is stay the course. Stay, "stay," the course. Let's talk a little bit about where this expression comes from, and then I'll tell you what it means in the American news today.

The verb stay, here means to keep or to continue. The course, here, is the direction that you are moving. So, stay the course means continue moving in the same direction that you are moving right now - continue going in the same direction.

The expression actually comes from, originally, the 1980s. Ronald Reagan, who was then the president of the United States, back in 1983, was running for re-election. American presidents are elected every four years, and you can be elected twice.

So, he was getting ready to run for the presidency in 1984. He came up with this expression - well, probably someone who works for him invented this expression to mean that people should continue with him as president - that they should not change the policies that Ronald Reagan had started. The idea was that he wasn't finished yet, and so you needed to vote for him again so that he could continue doing what he was doing.



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That's the original use of the expression in American politics, at least one of the early uses of it. It's been used more recently by our current president, President George W. Bush, to talk about the war in Iraq. President Bush has used this expression, stay the course, to mean continue what we are doing right now - what the American government is doing right now.

There has been, as you probably know, a lot of criticism of President Bush's actions here in the United States. President Bush has used this expression, and others who agree with him, to try to get people not to change what they are doing - what the American military is doing in Iraq. So, that is where you would see that expression, stay the course, in the newspapers today.

Our third topic for "In the "news" today is actually going to be something that is not real news - it's not true news. It's a comedy show that pretends to be a news show. There are actually a couple of these shows on television, one we talked about before, called "The Daily Show," which is a mock newscast. When we say something is mock, "mock," we mean that it is pretend - it is not real. Usually, it tries to be funny. So, a mock news show would be a news show that pretended to be a real news show, but was really just a lot of jokes about the news.

This is popular in many different countries I'm sure, and it has been popular in the United States at least since the 1970s, this kind of show. There is another mock news show in addition to "The Daily Show," which is called "The Colbert Report." Colbert, "Colbert," is the name of the person who is the host of the show. He pronounces his name "cole-bear," you don't pronounce the "t," so kind of as a joke, you also pronounce report, "report," as "re-pore" so that rhymes with "cole-bear." So, "The Colbert Report" is the name of this mock news show.

Now, it's a little different than "The Daily Show," and one of the reasons it has become popular is because it makes fun of - it mocks, notice mock can be a verb as well as an adjective - popular television shows, especially on American cable television - on news cable in the United States. And, this is a show that usually has a political pundit. A pundit, "pundit," is someone who is supposed to be an expert at something - someone who has a strong opinion about something, usually a political opinion about something, and that's what we use the expression political pundit.

The reputation of these news shows has been somewhat negative because many of them have people on the show where they essentially are yelling at each other - they're shouting at each other - trying to disagree with the other person.



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And so, “The Colbert Report” is a parody of these political pundit shows on cable television in the United States.

A parody, “parody,” is when you make fun of someone - you imitate someone to make fun of them. Usually you are exaggerating, or making something funny by doing something more extreme. So, this is a parody - an imitation - a humorous imitation of a popular kind of news program with the political pundits.

These mock new shows are usually trying to use a lot of satire. Satire, “satire,” is using humor to criticize someone. So, you're telling a joke - you're being funny, but you are also criticizing - you have some serious purpose for what you're doing. And the satire here is of some of these shows that are popular but they're really sometimes a little too extreme.

Many people think that political pundits - these people who think they are experts - are really just a bunch of loudmouths. To be a loudmouth, “loudmouth,” means that you talk too much and you say things that hurt or offend other people, and that is what some people's opinion is of political pundits.

So, “The Colbert Report” is on every night, Monday through Thursday late at night, on one of the cable channels. It is very funny - I think it's very funny! It is, of course, difficult to understand some of the political humor unless you know a lot about the United States political news. But, it is a popular show, and it is a very funny parody of the political pundits that you see on American cable television.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Of our first question is from - I'll spell the name - “Uwe,” from Germany. The question is about the expression if that's anything to go by. If that's anything to go by, “by.”

This is an expression that means if that is any indication, or if this is true, then something else. For example, “If these clouds in the sky are anything to go by, I would say that it is going to rain today.” The expression, if these clouds in the sky are anything to go by, means if we can use them as an indication of something, then this is what that is - this is what the implication is.



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Our next question comes from Raphael, “Raphael,” in France. Raphael's question is about the difference between color, “color,” or in British English, “colour,” and the word hue, “hue.”

Sometimes people use these two words to mean the same thing. Color is a much more common word. Hue is, as I say, sometimes used to mean color, but usually it's used to mean a particular kind of color, what we might call a shade, “shade.” A shade of color is a particular kind of red or a particular kind of blue. You're trying to be more specific.

It is, really, technically one part of what we perceive - what we see as color. It doesn't matter how light or dark, or how intense color is, hue is independent of that. That's a more technical meaning, but in general, it usually means a shade of the color - a kind of a particular color, whereas the word color tends to be a more general term.

Hue is also related to specific or small differences in color. So, if you're going to paint your wall and you want to paint it white, but you want a particular kind of white, you say call “Well, that's not the hue I was looking for. It's white, but it's a little too something.” Or, maybe white is not a good example - blue or red, but that's the idea.

Our next question comes from Eri, “Eri,” in Japan. The question has to do with the difference between two words, contribute, “contribute,” and attribute, “attribute.”

Well, they sounds similar, and it is easy to get these two words confused sometimes. The verb to contribute usually means to give something to someone else so that they can do something. For example, you want to help a local hospital that needs money, so you contribute to the hospital and they take your money - you give money to the hospital and they take your money so they can do something with it - provide better medical care, for example. So, contribute is to give something or to give part of something that is needed to complete another task - another thing.

Contribute can also mean part of the cause or part of the reason. For example, “The rain contributed to the wet streets and traffic accidents yesterday” - it was part of it - it was part of the cause of it.



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The verb to attribute, with an “a” at the front, attribute, means to give the cause for something - to tell someone what the cause was or to tell someone who said something. You could say, for example, “The expression 'stay the course' is attributed to Ronald Reagan” - he's the person who said it. You could also say, “I attribute the success of my football team to the best player on the team.” I attribute means this is the reason for - the reason or the cause of something.

So, sometimes they are similar, contribute and attribute, when we are talking when we are talking about causes - what causes one thing to happen. But, contribute is the actual thing that causes it. To attribute means to say what the cause was.

Our final question today comes, again, from Germany, from “Bjorn.” The question has to do with an expression, the die, “die,” is cast, “cast.” What does the expression the die is cast mean?

This is an expression that originally comes from Latin, from a saying by Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar had a large army and was returning to Rome, and he was warned not to cross a certain river with his army. If he did, he would start a civil war. The river was called the Rubicon. Julius Caesar decided to cross the Rubicon River with his army, and he began a civil war in ancient Rome - in the Roman Republic at the time.

So, this is an expression, a historical expression by Julius Caesar. After he crossed the Rubicon River, going back to Rome with his army, he said, “The die is cast.” What he meant was that you couldn't change things - it was too late; what he had done could not be reversed - you can't change it in the future.

The word die, “die,” is actually the singular of a word that you might know, which is dice, “dice.” Dice are the things that when you go to gamble, like in Las Vegas, they are two little pieces of wood or plastic that have dots on them, and you throw them down. Another word for throw, here, is you cast them. You cast the dice and if you get the right number, you win money. Die is the singular of dice, so there's one die, two dice, three dice, ten dice, et cetera.

The die is cast here means that once you throw the die down - or once you throw the dice down - you can't take anything back - you can't change the result. In fact, the expression to cross the Rubicon, in English, means something very similar. We have an expression, the point of no return, meaning the point after which you can't go back - you can't change your mind. The result will not change



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- you have to continue doing what you are doing, and that is a general meaning of that term.

We've reached the point of no return for this episode of English Café. I want to thank you for listening. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. We'll see you next time on the English Café.

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