



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

TOPICS

American houses, what Americans think they need, using “the” before a country’s name, either versus neither

GLOSSARY

natural disaster – any bad event not caused by people but by nature, such as floods, fires, and earthquakes, that results in deaths, injuries, or damage to property

* My friend has lived on the Florida coast for all of her life and has lived through at least a dozen natural disasters.

tornado – a large moving rotating (moving in a circle) wind that usually comes with a storm and that can cause a lot of damage

* The tornado went through the small town and destroyed over 30 homes.

brick – a small rectangle-shaped block that is made of clay and used for building

* The protestors threw bricks through the laboratory’s window to show their anger.

cement – a hard building material made of stone, clay, and water that is liquid until it dries

* Quick! Let’s write our names in the sidewalk before the cement dries.

foundation – the lowest part of a house that is usually below ground level that everything else builds upon

* The home inspector found a large crack in the house’s foundation and advised us not to buy it.

frame – the hard structure that gives a house its shape and support

* Once we have the frame of the house up, we can install the windows.

basement – the part of a house or building that is below ground level

* When I was young, I was always afraid of going down to the basement of our house because it was dark and cold.

to crawl – to move forward on one’s hand and knees

* The baby is only five months old, but she’s already starting to crawl.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

to come out – to be made available to the public; to be published; to be revealed

* The politician resigned his position when the story about his gambling problem came out in the newspaper.

to be unable to live without – to need to have; to require something to live

* My coworker can't live without two cups of strong coffee every morning.

microwave oven – a small oven that cooks or heats food and drinks very quickly

* Dinner is almost ready. I just need to heat up the sauce in the microwave oven.

just barely – only just; almost not

* When we went to Disneyland, Oliver was just barely tall enough to go on the rides.

either – used before two possibilities to show that one of the two will be chosen or will occur

* I can't decide which computer to buy, but I think either of these two models will work for me.

neither – not one or the other of two people or things

* - Would you rather live in Los Angeles or New York City?
- Neither. I want to live in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Telethons

A “telethon” is a very long television program to raise money for “charity,” or organizations that give help to people in need. There are telethons to raise money for many different “causes” (something that deserves people’s support).

In the United States, the most famous telethon is the Jerry Lewis Telethon to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, an organization that fights “diseases” (medical disorders or problems) that affect people’s muscles. Jerry Lewis is a well-known actor and “comedian” (an entertainer who makes people laugh), who acted in many movies in the 1940s and 1950s. Since 1966, he has held a 22-hour telethon each year on the weekend of the Labor Day holiday (celebrated the first Monday of September). Telethons are often shown without “commercials” (advertisements on TV).

What occurs during the very long telethon broadcast? One of the most common things you’ll see are performers and celebrities who entertain by singing a song, doing a comedy routine, or something else that will keep people watching. As they perform, a telephone number and website address will appear on the bottom of the TV screen, where people can make “donations” (money given to charity). These celebrities will also ask people to call in to make a “pledge” (formal promise) to give money.

The broadcast may also have people who are affected by the disease or disaster tell their stories to the audience. This way people watching may feel “sympathy” (feelings of sadness for someone else’s misfortune) and decide to make a donation. The broadcast will also “pause” (stop briefly) from time to time to give the “tally” (overall total) of how much money has been raised so far.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 77.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 77. Seven is, in English, a lucky number so 77 is very lucky, I guess.

On this Café, we're going to be talking about American houses - American homes - what they are made out of, meaning what they have as the materials in the house - wood or brick or cement. We're also going to be talking about what Americans think they need, according to a recent survey. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started!

Our first topic today is American houses and what they are built with. You often see on the news when there is a natural disaster - a natural disaster are things like an earthquake, a hurricane, when there is a big snowstorm and it is so serious that it causes problems, that it kills people or that it damages buildings, we call that a natural disaster. The opposite of natural disaster would be man-made disaster, and we have lots of man-made disasters as well.

When you see the news of a natural disaster in the United States, you'll often see that houses are damaged, sometimes completely ruined, for example by a strong earthquake or a tornado. A tornado, "tornado," is when the wind goes around very fast in a small area, and it easily destroys many homes.

The question is why are homes so easily damaged in the United States? The main reason is that houses in the US, unlike some other countries, are made mostly of wood; wood is the primary material that we used to build houses in the United States. It is not as common to see brick, "brick," which is a rectangular, hard building material made of clay, "clay," which comes from the ground. You also do not see houses that are made mostly of cement, "cement," which is also something that you can use that looks like or is as hard as a rock or stone. It's very expensive to use brick, stone or cement in building a house, so only very expensive houses or very old houses - houses that were built maybe a hundred years ago - are made primarily of brick or stone.

Wood is, and has been, cheap in the United States, especially historically. The United States had many forests and it was easy and cheap to get wood, that's probably one of the main reasons why most houses in the US are made of wood. Unfortunately, if you have bad weather that can easily damage the houses. So, when you see a story about the US and a hurricane or a tornado, you will often



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

see pictures of houses that have been ruined, and that's because the houses here are made mostly of wood.

The only part of the house that typically has stone or cement is the bottom of the house, what we would call the foundation. The foundation, "foundation," is the bottom of the house - it is what you put the house on top of, and usually that is made of cement, and then, on top of that you put the wooden, what we would call, frame, "frame." The frame of the house are the pieces of wood that hold up the walls and the ceilings.

In houses in the northern part of the United States, you usually will find a basement in the house. A basement, "basement," is when you have part of the house below the ground. This is common in almost all of the houses in the colder parts of the United States, such as Minnesota, Michigan, New York; anywhere where it's very cold, you will have a basement. In the warmer parts of the United States - Texas, Florida, California - it is not as common to see a basement.

The reason houses in the north of the United States have a basement is because the ground freezes during the winter, and you have to have the foundation of the house below what we would call the frost line. The frost line, "frost line," is where the ground freezes, and the cement - the foundation - has to be below that point.

In the house where I grew up, we had a basement, and you could go down in the basement and it was just like another room in your house. In my house here in Los Angeles, we do not have a basement. There is a space between the floor and the foundation - the bottom of the house - but it is only, maybe, one or two feet. We call that a crawlspace, "crawlspace." To crawl, "crawl," means to go down on your hands and your knees to be like a dog or a cat and walk on your hands and knees - your arms and your legs. Little babies begin crawling; they start moving on their hands and knees. Crawlspace is a place underneath the house, but you can only crawl - you can only lay flat because it is not very big.

Different states have different regulations - different rules - about houses. In some states like California, new houses have to be built so that they will survive an earthquake. Earthquakes, where the ground moves, are common here in California. I have felt many earthquakes in the last 15 years here in California. So, the house has to be strong enough so that it doesn't fall down. However, there are many older houses that were built before these laws - these rules - were passed that will be damaged by an earthquake - my house, probably!



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

So, when you see news stories about the US and you see houses being damaged by natural disasters, you can understand why now, because most of the houses are made of wood, and the wood is not very strong compared to stone or brick, which is not common because it's more expensive.

Our next topic today is talking about what Americans think are necessities. There was an article in a magazine called "The Atlantic Monthly," which is a - you guessed it - a monthly magazine - comes out once a month. For a magazine, we often use that expression, to come out means it's published - you get a new copy once a month. Some magazines come out once a week, like "The New Yorker"; some magazines come out once a month, like "The Atlantic Monthly."

"The Atlantic Monthly" had a survey, where they asked Americans what they thought was absolutely necessary - things that they thought they needed to have. The expression they used is things that they can't live without. To not be able to live without means that it is necessary - you must have it.

The list is somewhat interesting, to see what Americans think they need. One of the things that most Americans - 70 percent of Americans - said they need is air conditioning in their home. Air conditioning makes the home cooler when it is very hot outside. We do not have air conditioning in my house here in Los Angeles, mostly because it doesn't get too hot here. But most Americans - 70 percent of Americans - thought air conditioning was a necessity.

They didn't ask about televisions because my guess is 90 to 95 percent of American homes have a television, and televisions are to be found even in houses where the people are poor. This is true in other countries, too, not just the United States. If you travel or go to parts of a country where the people are very poor, many times you will see them with a television. So, televisions are considered necessities by many people in the world today.

Another thing Americans think is necessary is a microwave oven. A microwave, "microwave," is a machine that uses microwaves - a type of power - to heat up and cook food very quickly. 70 - almost 70 percent of Americans said a microwave is a necessity - they must have one. This is interesting because 30 years ago - or 35 years ago - there were no microwave ovens. When I grew up, we did not have a microwave oven. Now that we have a microwave oven, it is a necessity - we can't live without it.

The majority of Americans also think air conditioning in their car is a necessity, and a home computer, although the figure - the percentage - is 51 percent think a



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

home computer is a necessity. So, that's a majority, but just barely we would say. Just barely, "barely," means it's almost not, but it is a little beyond, in this case, 50 percent - just barely a majority.

Almost a majority - 49 percent - believe a cell phone is a necessity in the United States. Again, that's probably true in other countries - many other countries - as well. Only about 30 percent of Americans thought a high-speed Internet connection was a necessity. And, perhaps most disappointing, only three percent of Americans thought an iPod is a necessity. Now, I think an iPod, of course, is a necessity - you must have one - you cannot live without one or some other MP3 player, of course.

So, those are some of the things that Americans said that they think are necessities - things that they must have.

Now let's answer a few questions.

Our first question comes from Denis, "Denis." His question is very interesting. He asks about when we use the word "the" in front of the name of a country.

He is from what we would say in English as either the Ukraine or Ukraine. You will actually see both possibilities now. When I grew up, we always said the Ukraine - we used the "the" in front of the name Ukraine, perhaps because when I grew up, it was part of another country - it was part of the Soviet Union. More recently, since it got its independence, many of the newspapers refer to this country as simply Ukraine, and they don't say "the." However, you will sometimes hear me say the Ukraine as I did on one of our previous English Cafés, and that's because that's how I was raised - that's how I learned it. But, a more modern use is not to use the word "the."

This is actually somewhat confusing in English because there are some countries where we always use the word "the." There are some countries where we used to use the word "the," back 30-40 years ago, and now don't, and there are some countries, like Ukraine, where sometimes we use it and sometimes we don't, there's still the old usage that is popular. For example, we always say "the United States," but we don't say "the Canada" or "the France" or "the Japan," but if you say "United States" in English, you usually put the word, "the" in front of it - "the United States." "I'm going to the United States," or "the US." You would not say, "I'm going to United States," you have to have the "the."



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

Why? Well, it's hard to say exactly why we use language the way we do. Some people think it's because the United States is plural and there's more than one. This is similar, for example, to the country of, what we would say in English, the Philippines. The Philippines, which is a country in Southeast Asia, or south of the Southeast Asian part of the Asian continent. The Philippines is a group of islands, and again, the idea is that it's plural - the Philippine Islands. We also use "the" in front of the country of the Bahamas. The Bahamas are a set of islands in the Caribbean, and perhaps because they are plural, we say "the."

But, it is not always logical - it is not always consistent when we use "the" and when we don't use "the." There are some countries where we used to use "the," but we don't anymore. For example, in Africa there are two countries, Sudan and Congo. We used to say "the Sudan" and "the Congo," but now we just say "Sudan" and "Congo." There are other countries such as the Netherlands, where we always use the "the," perhaps, again, because Netherlands means Low Countries, and that's plural. There are even cities, such as The Hague, that we use the definite article, "the."

So, there is no good rule. There are even parts of a city that we sometimes use the word "the." For example, in New York City one of the parts of the city is the Bronx, "Bronx." That's one of the five areas in New York City. We don't say "the Manhattan" or "the Staten Island" or "the Queens," which are other parts of New York City, but if you are talking about this one area, "the Bronx," then we use the "the."

So, unfortunately it's hard to come up with a good rule about when we use the "the" and when we don't. There's a similar case when talking about works of literature from ancient Greece. We used to say, for example, "The Antigone" referring to one of the plays by Sophocles, the great ancient Greek writer - playwright. Now we just say "Antigone," but 50 years ago, we used the article "the."

So, the language changes, and the rules aren't always necessarily logical. But, those are some examples of when we use "the" and when we don't use "the" when talking about countries.

Our next question comes from Reena, "Reena," from Spain. Reena wants to know the difference between the words "either" and "neither."

Either, "either," which can also be pronounced either - they both mean the same thing. Neither can also be pronounced neither. Either means you have a choice



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 77

between two things - two alternatives - two options - two possibilities. “We can go to either the movie or the restaurant,” those are my two choices.

When you say neither - or neither - we mean not one or the other of two things. Another way of saying neither is not either. So, neither combines these two ideas and makes it negative. For example, if your parents retire - if they stop working - and they move to a small house from a big house - they go to a small house - your mother might ask you if you want either of the big red chairs that are in their living room. “Do you want either chair,” or “either one?” If you don't want the chairs, you would say, “I want neither of them,” because you don't want the chairs.

Another example: your girlfriends asks you which movie you want to see this weekend. She may say, “Do you want to see either 'Dreamgirls' or 'The Departed?’” Both of those are popular movies in the United States right now. You may say, “I don't want to see either of them,” or, you could say, “I want to see neither of those movies,” or simply, “Neither.” You may respond to her question just by saying the word “neither,” meaning I don't want to see “Dreamgirls,” nor do I want to see “The Departed.” You may say, “I want to see 'Pirates of the Caribbean: Part Two' because I love Johnny Depp.” Oh no, wait, that's your girlfriend who loves Johnny Depp! Actually, that's my wife who loves Johnny Depp!

So, that's how we use neither and either. Either is when you have two choices; neither is when you don't want the two choices.

That's all we have time for on today's Café. As always, we thank you for listening, and invite you to visit our website at eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on the English Café.

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. This podcast is copyright 2007 by the Center for Educational Development.