



TOPICS

Ask an American – International students in the U.S.
don't versus doesn't; ain't; you singular versus you plural

GLOSSARY

to get along with (someone) – to be friendly and not fight or argue with someone; to have a good and friendly relationship with someone
* Do you get along with your sister and brother well?

fake – not real; false; not genuine
* Marciana was very upset when she learned that there was a fake diamond in her wedding ring.

genuine – real; true; sincere; not false or fake
* Jefferson saw a genuine improvement in his health once he started taking a new type of medicine.

to pig out on (something) – to eat a very large amount of something, especially if it isn't very healthy
* Antonio and his friends pigged out on hot dogs and hamburgers while they were watching the baseball game.

Buffalo wings – chicken wings that are cooked in oil and a spicy (hot) orange-colored sauce
* At many restaurants, you can choose how spicy you want your Buffalo wings to be.

buffalo – a very large and strong North American animal that is bigger than a cow and has long hair and short horns
* Have you ever eaten buffalo? Many people think it tastes better than beef.

impolite – rude; not polite; without good manners; saying and doing things that offend or bother other people
* In the United States, it is considered impolite to rest your elbows on the table while eating.



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absolutely – definitely; certainly; without a doubt

* I would absolutely love to go to the beach with you this weekend. Thank you so much for the invitation!

modest – humble; presenting one’s abilities and experiences in a moderate way

* I wish Sandra would be more modest about her achievements, and stop telling everybody how much money she makes and how big a house she is.

to sell (oneself) – to present one’s abilities and ideas very positively and very well, so that one is judged positively or the idea is liked by others

* Mahoud sold himself very well during the interview and the company offered him the job the next day!

lyrics – the words to a song; the words that are said while singing

* I never knew what this song was about until I read the lyrics!

ain’t – a word used in nonstandard or informal English to mean am not, are not, is not, have not, has not, do not, does not, or did not

* Mom says that she ain’t going to cook tonight.

Say it ain’t so! – a funny phrase used to show disappointment or disbelief

* When Akahito learned that the family was going to Springfield instead of Maui for vacation, she said, “Say it ain’t so!”

you all – a phrase used in English to address (talk to) two or more people at once

* You all should come here tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. for the early morning meeting.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Foreign Words and Phrases Commonly Used in English

American English uses many words and phrases from other languages. These are sometimes called “loanwords,” because they are borrowed without translation from other languages. Here are some common words and phrases that have an “international origin,” meaning that they came from languages that are spoken in other countries.

Hasta la vista is a Spanish phrase that means “see you later.” Speakers of American English sometimes use it to say goodbye to friends. We also talk about *siestas*, a Spanish word for afternoon “naps” (short periods of time when people sleep during the day).

C’est la vie is a French phrase that means “this is life,” or “that is life.” Speakers of American English use it when they talk about a situation that they have no control over – it’s simply a part of life. For example, if someone is complaining about not having enough time in the day, you might say, “C’est la vie,” meaning that everyone has that problem and there’s not very much we can do about it.

When someone “sneezes,” (pushes air quickly and loudly through one’s nose, usually when one is sick or has an allergy), Americans sometimes say, “*Gesundheit!*,” which is a German word meaning “good health.” Other Americans just say “bless you” after someone sneezes.

Americans also talk about bungalows. *Bungalow* is a Hindi word that refers to a specific type of one-story house in India, but many smaller single-family homes in the States are also referred to as bungalows.

In Afrikaans, the word “trek” means a very difficult journey. Americans sometimes talk about “trekking in the mountains,” which means walking long distances outdoors, usually for many days.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 83.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café number 83. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

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In this Café, we're going to talk about international students - students from other countries, who come and study in the United States, and what some of the problems and questions they have about coming to the US once they get here - once they live here. We're going to hear some quotes from some teachers and some students, so it will be like our "Ask an American" series. And as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started!

Students who come to the United States to study often have many questions and sometimes problems in understanding American life and in understanding English. I wanted to spend a little time talking today about a university here in California, the University of California, Berkeley, which is probably the best public university in California, and one of the best universities in the United States.

The university gets many international, or foreign, students, and recently they started a class called "America 101." The numbers "101" are used in the American university system to mean a very beginning or basic class. So, "America 101" is a class about America - the United States - introducing American ideas and explaining things that students might have difficulty with.

We're going to start by listening to some students and teachers talk about what some of these problems and differences are. They're going to be speaking at a native rate of speech - a little fast, but as always, we will listen first and then go back and explain what they were saying. Let's listen:

[recording] First student: Americans, they have to do everything by themselves.

Second student: You can get along here easier by yourself than any other country.



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First Student: They have this, you know, smiling face.

Third student: Well, to me, most of those smiles are not genuine. It's just something plastic.

These are some international students giving their opinion about Americans, and their impressions, or ideas about Americans. The first person says:

[recording] Americans, they have to do everything by themselves.

“Americans, they have to do everything by themselves,” without anyone else helping them, which is probably true for many Americans; they want to feel independent. Another student says:

[recording] You can get along here easier by yourself than any other country.

She says “you can get along here” by yourself easier “than in any other country.” To “get along” means to survive; to live; to be able to have a life.

Next, the students talk about Americans and their smiles, and what that means:

[recording] First student: They have this, you know, smiling face.

Third student: Well, to me, most of those smiles are not genuine. It's just something plastic.

One student says Americans have these smiling faces; I think that's a very interesting observation. Many people in the US, especially here in California, when you first move here seem very friendly, especially at the store or in the restaurants; the people who work there often smile a lot to make you feel better - to make you feel welcome.

But, one of the women says that these smiles are fake (fake). “Fake” is not real. The opposite of “fake” is “genuine” (genuine). “Genuine” is real, or actual. So, a fake smile is when you are smiling but you don't mean it - you're not happy - and a genuine smile would be when you are really happy inside.

You can use those words, “fake” and “genuine,” for many things. You can have a “genuine photograph,” and then you could have a “fake photograph,” where you change the photograph on your computer to make it look different than it actually is; that would be a “fake photograph.”



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I should say that I'm taking these audio quotes from "The Voice of America," the free radio service. In the story about this Berkeley class, the reporter explains about how some students get confused. He says:

[recording] The international students in the America 101 class are perplexed. A German asks what it meant when an American friend invited him to dinner, saying, "Let's go pig out on Buffalo wings."

The reporter begins by talking about how the foreign, or international students are confused; he uses the word "perplexed" (perplexed). To be "perplexed" means to be confused. Let's listen again:

[recording] The international students in the America 101 class are perplexed.

He then describes one problem that a German student had when an American said, "Let's go pig out on Buffalo wings." "To pig (pig) out" is a slang or informal expression, which means to eat a lot or to eat too much. "I'm going to pig out on pizza" - I'm going to eat a lot of pizza. The verb is "to pig out."

They're going to "pig out on Buffalo wings." "Buffalo (buffalo) is a type of animal that is found in the American west - in the western part of the US. The "wings" refer to chicken wings - the wings of a chicken; that's a part of a chicken that you can eat. Buffalo wings are not related to the animal buffalo; it's just the name we give a certain way of preparing and cooking chicken wings. Usually, they are cooked with a certain hot or spicy sauce - something liquid that you put over - and then you put it in hot oil, and then you eat them hot.

The reason they're called "Buffalo wings" is because there's also a city in the United States, in the state of New York, called Buffalo - Buffalo, New York - and these wings were first made, or created, in a restaurant in the city of Buffalo. Let's listen again to that quote:

[recording] A German asks what it meant when an American friend invited him to dinner, saying, "Let's go pig out on Buffalo wings."

The reporter then goes to one of these classes, and we listen to the teacher explaining how Americans say "no," and how they are often very direct in saying "no." Let's listen to her explanation, and then we'll talk a little bit more about it:



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[recording] Teacher: Is it a bad thing? Is it impolite to say “no?” No, it's absolutely necessary. So, if I say, “Would you like to have lunch with me today,” and you say, “Um, I don't know...” what are you really saying?

Students: No.

Teacher: No, in an indirect way. In this culture, in American English, it is very important to say “no.”

The teacher is explaining the importance of being able to be direct, and say “no” in American English in the way that Americans communicate with each other. She starts by asking the question:

[recording] Is it a bad thing? Is it impolite to say “no?”

“Is it impolite to say 'no?’” When we say something is “impolite” (impolite), we mean it is not polite. It is the opposite of “nice.” It is considered to be rude or not very friendly. She then answers her own question by saying:

[recording] No, it's absolutely necessary. So, if I say, “Would you like to have lunch with me today,” and you say, “Um, I don't know,” what are you really saying?

She says it is “absolutely necessary” to say “no” directly to an American, and not be indirect. The use of this word, “absolutely,” is very common in English. It's a way of adding emphasis - of saying it is very, very, very important, or very necessary - we say, “It's absolutely necessary.”

The teacher then pretends, or acts, like she's an American, and she asks a question: do you want to go and “have lunch with me?” She explains that if you just go, “Um, well...” what you're really saying is:

[recording] No, in an indirect way. In this culture, in American English, it is very important to say “no.”

You're saying “no” in an indirect way,” but it's important to do that. This is difficult for some people visiting or talking to Americans.

The story also goes on to talk about job interviews and the way that you should act and talk in these interviews. One mistake some students make when they are interviewing in English with an American company is that they try to be



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“modest” (modest), which means that you don't say that you're great - you don't say that you're a very good person; you try not to tell people about how good you are. The teacher explains:

[recording] It would be bragging, and it would be completely unacceptable to sell yourselves, so they say, “Oh, I try hard,” and to an American interviewer, this is completely inadequate.

The teacher is describing what you should not do if you are interviewing. She says that many students don't want to talk about themselves in a good way because they think it would be “bragging.” “To brag” (brag) means to tell other people how good you are - to tell them how great you are. This is something that is not common in some cultures, but is very common in American culture. She says that it's important to “sell yourself.” “To sell yourself” means to tell the other person how good you are. Let's listen to that again:

[recording] It would be bragging, and it would be completely unacceptable to sell yourselves...

Notice she says, “it would be completely unacceptable,” meaning that would not be something an American person hiring - trying to find a new employee - would want from a person interviewing.

We talk about many of these cultural issues on our premium course called “Interview Questions Answered.” So, if you're interested in that, you can take a look at our ESL Podcast Store for more information.

I hope you found that interesting, to listen to other voices and hearing people speak a little faster, but also hearing the explanation as well.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Paulo (Paulo), originally from Brazil but now living in Sweden. He has a question about a song from the Beatles called “Ticket to Ride.” At one point in the song, the singer says, “She's got a ticket to ride, but she don't care.” His question is why do they say, “don't” instead of “doesn't.”

Well, grammatically, the correct, most common form would be “doesn't.” However, many times, songwriters - people who write the words for the song, what we would call the “lyrics” (lyrics), the words of the song; the lyrics - many times songwriters will use what would call “non-standard forms”; forms that are



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more informal, such as “ain’t” instead of “isn’t.” “He ain’t here” instead of “he isn’t here.”

They may do this for many reasons; they may do it so that it feels more informal. Sometimes they may use it just because it fits with the music. In this song, [singing] “She’s got a ticket to ride, but she don’t care” - I’m what they call “the fifth Beatle” - the word “don’t” rhymes, or fits with the music. If you said, “doesn’t” - “but she doesn’t care” - well, that has an extra syllable, so it doesn’t fit as well with the music. So, there may be many reasons why. This doesn’t help you learning English, however, but it does teach you some informal ways that the language is sometimes used.

Our next question comes from (Thierry) Thierry, or Thierry [pronounced Terry], from France. The question is about the meaning of the word “ain’t.”

Well, we just talked about informal English; “ain’t” is an example of a non-standard form. It’s something that we use in very informal, slang speech, but it often has the association, or the connection, with someone who is not well educated. So, you’ll hear it in conversation, but it probably isn’t something you want to use. You’d want to use the more grammatically correct forms, such as “am not,” or “are not”; it’s also used for “is not.” You could say, “He ain’t here,” meaning he isn’t here, or he is not here.

When we were kids - when we were children, we used to say, “Ain’t ain’t a word because it ain’t in the dictionary.” So, we’re saying “ain’t isn’t a word because it isn’t in the dictionary, but you use the word “ain’t” sort of as a joke.

Sometimes songwriters will use “ain’t.” There’s a famous singer, Christina Aguilera, who has a song called “Ain’t No Other Man,” meaning there isn’t any other man, but she’s using “ain’t” and the double negative, “no,” to communicate the idea of slang; of being part of the youth culture, perhaps.

There’s another common expression, “Say it ain’t so.” “Say it ain’t so” is something you’ll hear many people use to mean tell me that it isn’t true. When you hear something that is very bad or sad, you’re saying, “Oh, I hope that is not true” - “Say it ain’t so.” That expression is more common; it’s not considered uneducated to use that expression, but using the word “ain’t” is probably something you normally want to avoid - to not do.

Our final question comes from Gladys (Gladys) in Columbia. Gladys would like to know how you pronounce the word (good) and (would).



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The first word is pronounced “good,” as in the opposite of “bad” - “good.” The second word is pronounced would [wood], so we have good and would, good and would.

Gladys also wants to know about the word “you” (you) for singular and “you” for plural. Well, in English we don't have a separate word when we are using the word “you” to talk about one person and more than one person. Many languages, Spanish for example, have two words; one word if you have just one person, another word if you have two or more people, but we don't have that distinction in English. We just say, “you,” and you have to figure it out from the context - from the other things that are being said.

Sometimes we'll use expressions, however, like “all of you,” or more informally, “you all” instead of just saying, “you” when we are talking about “you” plural - more than one person. “I want all of you to come to my party,” means I want you, and you, and you, and you - the whole group - to come to my party. If you were speaking to just one person, you might say, “I want just you to come to my party.” So, we'll sometimes use these other expressions to communicate the same idea as you have in other languages, where there is a plural and a singular form of “you.”

Well, I hope you all - all of you - enjoy our podcast. If you do enjoy our podcast, please tell some of your friends, family, or people you work with about us. We would love to have more listeners to our podcast. It is free, and we hope that you can let other people know in your own community. You can post a note on a forum or stand out on the street and yell our website address - whatever you think would be good to promote - to let other people know about our podcast. We would appreciate it very much.

That's all we have time for today. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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