



TOPICS

American Cities: San Francisco/Bay Area; the ACLU; using 'back' to refer to the past; failure versus error versus mistake

GLOSSARY

image – a picture; a representation of something that people can see

* The image we have of Arizona is that it is a hot and dry place.

strait – a narrow piece of water that connects two larger bodies of water

* The ship sailed through the strait from one sea to the other.

bay – a body of water that is mostly surrounded by land and connected to an ocean

* We stayed in a hotel on the bay that overlooked the water.

living expenses – things that one must pay for to survive, like housing, food, transportation, and electricity

* Jamal bought a new car that he couldn't afford and is now having problems paying his living expenses.

steep – having a strong angle; rising or falling sharply (very much)

* On the tour, we had to walk up several steep hills to get to the museum.

cable car – a car that carries many people and that gets its power from a long wire or the track (metal lines) on the ground

* The cable car passes our apartment every day and the children like to wave at the passengers.

liberal – not having traditional opinions and beliefs; not conservative

* Liam's parents didn't like Liam's girlfriend because they thought her views about having a family were too liberal.

costume – special clothing that one wears to look like someone or something else

* We are all supposed to wear a costume to the party so that no one will know who we are.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

civil liberties – rights or freedoms that people should have, allowing them to do what they want, and when and how they want to do it

* If a person or organization tries to take away your civil liberties, you can take them to court to try to stop them.

litigation – legal action; lawsuit

* Do you think there will be litigation against our company because we haven't paid our bills, or do you think we will be able to find another solution?

to lobby – to speak and to meet with political representatives to try to change their opinions and get them to vote certain ways

* A group of parents met with state representatives to lobby for stronger laws to protect children.

to infringe upon (something) – to limit something or to go against the law or someone's rights

* Telling the students that they can't publish their opinions in the school newspaper infringes upon their right to free speech.

back – in the past time; in a former location; referring to a time in the past or a place you have been in the past

* Back in 1985, I had a haircut that I thought looked good, but I now realize looked silly.

failure – not unsuccessful; without success

* The coach of our team told us that we needed to play better because failure was not an option.

error – something that is not correct; inaccurate; a mistake

* There's an error in the letter I received from the government. I was born in 1975, not 1935!

mistake – something that is not correct; an error caused by poor thinking, carelessness, or not having enough information

* Telling Monica about the surprise party was a mistake. We wanted to keep it a secret but she's told everyone about it!



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

“I Left My Heart in San Francisco” by Tony Bennett

A well known song that people think of when they think of the City of San Francisco is “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.” Most Americans know the version sung by the classic singer Tony Bennett. In fact, this song is considered his “signature song” (a song that a singer is closely identified with). Even though the song was not written for him, he recorded it in 1982 and it became a “hit” (very popular). His recording won many awards, including two Grammy Awards, which are the most prestigious American music award given each year.

The song became the “anthem” (official song) of the City of San Francisco. “To leave (one’s) heart (somewhere)” means that you miss that place and it is the place you love the most.

Here are a few lines from the “chorus” (main section of a song that is repeated) of the song:

*I left my heart in San Francisco
High on a hill, it calls to me
To be where little cable cars climb halfway to the stars
The morning fog may chill the air, I don't care*

The last line mentions the “fog,” which is the thick cloud in the air when the air is wet. San Francisco is known for its “dense” (thick) fog and its “chilly” (a little cold) temperatures.

If you visit San Francisco, you may also leave your heart there. Hopefully, you will return and find it again, even in the fog!



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 148.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 148. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful City of Los Angeles, in the State of California, in the U.S.A.

You can visit our website at eslpod.com. While you're there, download the Learning Guide for this episode, an 8 to 10 page guide we provide for all of our current episodes that gives you some additional help in improving your English. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional business and personal English courses, as well as our ESL Podcast Blog, where we provide even more help to increase your language proficiency.

On this Café, we're going to continue our American Cities series by focusing on the City of San Francisco. We're also going to talk about a well known organization called the ACLU, what they do, how they try to protect different types of civil liberties, or rights, as they see them. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

We begin this Café by talking about another popular Americans city, San Francisco, and the area around San Francisco called the Bay Area. A "bay" (bay) is when you have ocean that goes into the land; it's almost as though there's a "U" in the land – a U-shaped space where there's water and land around it. The Bay Area is located about six hours or so from Los Angeles – takes about six hours to drive to the City of San Francisco and the other cities that are in the area. San Francisco is actually "isolated," or separated from the other cities by water on the north, west, and east. So there are many bridges to get into the City of San Francisco from the areas around it.

Perhaps the most famous image of San Francisco is the Golden Gate Bridge. You might have seen this. An "image" is a picture or a visual symbol of something. An image of San Francisco would be something that most people can see in their minds, at least most Americans would think of when they think of San Francisco. The Golden Gate Bridge is a very common image for the city, but it isn't actually golden – it's not made of gold, it's not a gold color. It is a long, beautiful, red bridge actually, that spans (or goes across) a strait. A "strait" (strait) is a narrow piece of water that connects two larger bodies (or two larger sections) of water. In this case, the strait connects the Pacific Ocean and the



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

San Francisco Bay. Remember, a bay is water that is mostly surrounded by land and is connected to the ocean. Here in Los Angeles, we have the Santa Monica Bay.

The State of California was founded (was begun) after they discovered gold in Northern California, and so even today the state is sometimes called the Golden State. So, Golden Gate Bridge relates to that historical event of discovering gold, not the color of the actual bridge.

The San Francisco Bay Area, which most people call simply the Bay Area, is one of the richest (or wealthiest) parts of the United States. There are many large technology companies that are based in the Bay Area. You probably have heard of Google and Apple; many other companies – large computer companies are in what is called the Silicon Valley. This is an area that is next to San Francisco, in the southern part of the Bay Area.

People who live in the Bay Area make more money than most people in other parts of the country. But San Francisco is also a very expensive place to live; it has some of the highest living expenses in the U.S. Living expenses are things that we must pay for to survive, like housing, food, transportation, electricity...coffee, cable television – all the important things in life! Buying a home in San Francisco is very expensive, extremely expensive, so even though people there make more money than people in other parts of the country, they still have a hard time making enough money to cover (or to pay for) all of their living expenses.

San Francisco is famous for its hills (small, you could call them little mountains). San Francisco, like Rome, is built on a series (or set) of hills. Many of these hills are very “steep” (steep), meaning they go up and down very quickly, so that the angle of the hill (going up it or down it) is very sharp – very high. It’s difficult to walk up these hills, and driving in San Francisco is something of a challenge, something that is difficult to do because there are so many hills. One of the most famous streets that you can drive on in San Francisco is Lombard Street. This is a street where the road curves back and forth many times as it goes down the hill. Many years ago, when I was young, my mother took a trip to San Francisco and brought back pictures of Lombard Street. I didn’t see it myself for many years later.

San Francisco is also famous for its cable cars. A “cable car” is an old type of public transportation that was once popular in almost every city, even in Los Angeles. A cable car is sometimes called a “trolley” (trolley). A cable car (or



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

trolley) gets its power from the electricity in the cables, or long wires that go down the street. Some people who live in San Francisco still use these cable cars to commute – to go back and forth from home and work – but mostly they're used by tourists who are visiting San Francisco and looking for a fun thing to do, a fun way to see the city. If you go to San Francisco, you have to take at least one ride on the cable cars!

Politically, San Francisco is a very liberal place, meaning that most people are not conservatives; they don't have traditional views about politics or society. If you are familiar with U.S. political parties, you probably know that the Democratic Party is more liberal than the Republican Party. The Democrats almost always win elections in San Francisco and the Bay Area. There are many gay men and women who live in San Francisco. You will often find activities and organizations that are geared to – that is, that are directed at, that are organized for the gay and lesbian population in the city.

San Francisco is also a very “diverse” city, meaning that there are many different kinds of people that live there, just like New York and Los Angeles. About 20 percent of the population in San Francisco is Asian American; there are also a lot of Latinos (or Hispanics) from Latin America – from Mexico, Central America, and South America. There also is a large African American (or black) population in San Francisco. San Francisco is also famous for its Chinatown, a neighborhood that is filled with Chinese restaurants and stores and other businesses. Many of the first Chinese immigrants that came to California in the 19th century to work here came to San Francisco and they created this area of the city called Chinatown.

One unusual event that San Francisco has every year is a race – a 7.5-mile race through the city. In this race, however, the runners usually wear “costumes,” special clothing that makes you look like something or someone else. For example at Halloween in the United States, little children dress up in costumes – costumes of a ghost, or a bear, or Mickey Mouse. Sometimes the runners in the San Francisco race – which is called the Bay to Breakers Race – don't wear any clothing at all! We sometimes say if a person is naked (without clothes), we say they're in their “birthday suit.” They look like they were when they were born, without any clothing. But don't get too excited; most people you will see in San Francisco definitely have their clothes on!

So, San Francisco is an interesting place to visit – an exciting place to visit. There are lots of interesting things to do. And if you have the opportunity, you



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

definitely want to go and see the Golden Gate Bridge, travel on the cable cars, have a good lunch in Chinatown, and enjoy the beautiful Bay of San Francisco.

Our next topic is going to be about a very famous American organization. Again, this is an organization that almost every American who reads the newspaper has heard of. It's called the ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union. In this case, the union is just an organization; it's not a group people who are working for a company.

“Civil liberties” means rights or freedoms that people have, or the groups think they should have. The ACLU was founded (or created) back in 1920, and its mission (or reason that it exists) is to protect civil liberties of people who live in the United States. It's a large organization; there are more than 500,000 (a half a million) members of the ACLU.

The ACLU is most famous for its litigation (litigation). “Litigation” is taking legal action. For example, the ACLU has filed many lawsuits, meaning it has brought certain issues to the court – to a judge – in an attempt to protect what they see are people's rights. For example, if a person is not allowed to practice his or her religion, the ACLU might ask the courts to decide if that is fair, since freedom of religion is one of those civil liberties that is guaranteed in our Constitution. The ACLU gets involved in many cases. Sometimes, for example, if a newspaper is told that they can't publish something, the ACLU will file a lawsuit saying that this is a violation of the civil liberty of the free press.

The ACLU also engages in (or participates in) a lot of lobbying. To “lobby” (lobby) means meeting with political representatives to try to change their opinion – to change their votes. When Congress, the group of elected representatives for the United States in Washington, D.C., is going to vote on an issue related to civil liberties, the ACLU will lobby those representatives; they will try to make them vote the way they want to vote. There are thousands of different lobbying organizations in Washington, D.C., and the U.S. in general. The ACLU is one of those, one of the more powerful lobbying groups in the U.S.

Most people associate the ACLU with politically liberal views. Some of the issues or causes that the ACLU supports are ones that are supported by mostly liberal, or left wing, Americans. That doesn't mean, however, that their main purpose is not something that most Americans believe in. Ever since the 9/11 events, where the World Trade Center Towers were hit by airplanes, the U.S. government has done many things in an attempt to protect the country. But the ACLU and many other organizations believe that the government has done too



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

much, and that it has infringed upon civil liberties. This expression, “to infringe (infringe) upon” something means to limit something, to go against the law or against someone’s rights. The ACLU believes, as do many other people, that the federal government – the U.S. government has infringed upon the civil liberties of other Americans; they have violated those liberties according to the ACLU.

The government, of course, says that these things are necessary. For example, there is a controversy about the government listening in on phone calls – private phone calls. Some people say this is necessary; other people say it is an infringement upon the civil liberties of those who are being listened to. The ACLU is involved in this issue, and in other issues that it sees as important for protecting the rights of Americans.

The ACLU is a private organization; it is not part of the government. In fact, it is often opposing the government in many of its actions. If you read an American newspaper, or watch American news coverage (news shows) you may see or hear a mention of the ACLU. Now you know what they do!

Let’s answer, now, a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Yener (Yener), who is, I believe, in Istanbul in Turkey. This is a question about the use of the word “back” when talking about the past. For example: “Back in the 1960s, many people listened to the Beatles.”

“Back” is used as an adjective; it can refer to a time in the past. For example: “Back when I was a young boy, I used to play hockey and baseball.” Well, that’s not actually true – but as an example! “Back when I was in high school, all the girls loved me.” Again, a fictional example! “Back” can also mean in a certain place in the past. For example: “I left my cell phone back in the office.” It’s a place where you were and now you aren’t, just as it can refer to a time that you are no longer in. “Harold’s son was born back in New Jersey.” This means that they don’t live in New Jersey anymore; they moved to California, or Texas, or North Dakota – another state – and so they refer to the place where they came from as “back in.” “Back in Minnesota, I have many of my family members living.” So, “back” can be used to talk about time (back in the 1980s; back in the Revolutionary War period) and it can refer to a place where you have come from.

Notice that “back” isn’t really necessary in these sentences. You could just say, “When I was a young boy,” “When I was in high school.” Or, you could say, “I left my cell phone in my office yesterday.” “Back” just emphasizes the past or former location of what you are talking about.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

Andre (Andre) in Germany wants to know the meanings of the words “failure,” “error,” and “mistake.” These are similar words, but they have different meanings and uses.

“Failure” is when you are, or something is, unsuccessful; it’s the opposite of success. “We won the football game” – that’s a success. “We lost the football game” – that’s a failure. When your children don’t do well at school, you may feel, as a parent, like a failure, like you did something wrong; you didn’t succeed.

“Error” is different. “Error” is something that is incorrect, that is not correct, that is inaccurate. “There was an error in my paycheck,” the check that my company gives for working. There was an error – there was something wrong with it; it was incorrect.

A “mistake” is similar to an error; they’re very close in definition. In fact, you can usually use “mistake” and “error” in the same way. “There was a mistake in my paycheck,” you could say. Usually, though, “mistake” means that the problem – the error – is caused by someone who wasn’t thinking very clearly, who was not paying attention, who was not careful. If you’re not careful, you can make a mistake.

An “error” can also be something that is caused by not paying attention, but is considered a little more general, not necessarily emphasizing the fact that it was caused by poor judgment, or poor planning, or poor reasoning.

Another difference in the use of “error” and “mistake” is that “error” is sometimes used in slightly more formal situations: “The company made an error.” “Mistake” is a little more informal: “We made a mistake going to Minnesota during the wintertime because it was very cold.”

“Failure” usually refers to the lack of success of a large project or a large plan, or something that could have been caused by many mistakes or errors. So, it’s a little larger, usually, when we talk about a failure. “The company failed to win the contract” – it failed to get the other company’s business.

If you want to avoid making mistakes in your English, and have a question, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. We don’t have time to answer everyone’s questions, but we’ll do our best to answer as many as we can here on the Café.



English as a Second Language Podcast
www.eslpod.com

ENGLISH CAFÉ – 148

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you 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 and Dr. Lucy Tse. This podcast is copyright 2008, by the Center for Educational Development.