



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 152

TOPICS

Topics: Ask an American: Tattoos; to cover up (something), talk versus say versus speak, pronouncing certain consonants in the middle of words

GLOSSARY

buzz – a low humming sound; a low humming noise like that made by an insect
* Do you think that buzz is the sound of a small airplane?

tattoo parlor – a business where people can go to get a tattoo, a permanent marking with ink on the skin
* We looked at the designs in the books at the tattoo parlor to decide which tattoo to get.

tough guys – men who are physically strong; men who are able to endure or tolerate a lot of pain
* Len said that his friends were tough guys, but I don't think so since they were tired after only 10 minutes of moving boxes.

broken heart – feeling of being very sad because of losing something important; feeling very sad as a result of ending a romantic relationship
* When Dirk's wife died, he walked around with a broken heart.

to commemorate – to remember someone or something important; to show respect for someone or something
* This celebration is to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the opening of our store.

newborn – recently born, usually a child or an animal
* This newborn puppy is so cute! It's so small, it can fit in the palm of my hand.

angst – a strong feeling of being afraid of something that may happen in the future; a strong feeling of not wanting something to happen in the future
* Delilah was feeling so much angst before her big test that she was making herself ill.



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to put (something) out there – to make a suggestion and invite other people to give their opinion; to take an action that invites other people to react

* This may be a strange idea, but let me just put it out there. What do you think about painting our house pink?

to hop in/into (somewhere) – to go to a place briefly on an unplanned visit

* Let's hop into Jim's Bar on our way to the concert for a drink.

intricate – very complicated; very detailed

* The pattern you want for the new garden is too intricate. I don't think we can find and plant all of the flowers you want to create that pattern.

to cover up – to try to prevent other people from finding out about a serious mistake or crime; to conceal; to wear a loose piece of clothing over a swimsuit or exercise outfit so others cannot see one's body

* To cover up the records showing that Eva had stolen \$1 million from her company, she tried to destroy the computer system.

to speak – to talk; to discuss

* To avoid problems at the meeting, let's agree that I will speak first and you will speak after I'm finished.

to say – to speak, often used to report someone's exact words; to give a command

* What did your wife say when you told her that you wanted to buy a motorcycle?

to talk – to speak; to discuss

* It's important that we talk about where we want to go on vacation next month so we can start planning.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Reality Tattoo TV Shows

Reality TV shows have become very popular in the United States. Many of the shows follow a group of people to see how they “interact” (relate) with each other. One “sub-genre” (smaller category) of reality TV shows is a kind of show that focuses on a business and the people who work there.

Since getting tattoos have become more “mainstream” (normal; common), there are reality shows about tattoo parlors. Miami Ink and L.A. Ink are shows about tattoo parlors in those cities, and Inked is “set in” (located in) Las Vegas. Each show has a slightly different focus. Miami Ink, for example, focuses each episode on one “client” (customer), telling that client’s story. The show follows that client as they select a design and talk about why they chose that design. They may also talk about the experience of getting the tattoo and what happens afterwards.

Other shows or individual episodes also focus on the owners and/or employees of the tattoo parlor. Some shows like to focus on the conflict between employees, “highlighting” (showing as important) the personalities of those people.

The show not only follows the employees as they work, but also “delve” (go deeply) into their private lives. They follow the people through personal relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, as they deal with financial problems, and make decisions about their own lives and the lives of their families.

One recent controversy about reality shows is how “accurately” (truly) they show what happens in real life. One “complaint” (statement about something being wrong) is that the shows are actually “scripted” (the actors reading their words from a written page), rather than being “spontaneous” (not prepared in advance). Even though the controversy continues, these shows about tattoos parlors continue to be popular with viewers.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 152.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 152. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode, an 8 to 10 page guide we provide for all of our current episodes that will help you improve your English even faster. While you're there take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has additional courses in business and personal English, and our ESL Podcast Blog, where we provide even more help in improving your English.

This Café is another one of our "Ask an American" episodes, where we listen to native speakers talking at normal speed and try to explain what it is they that are saying. It gives you a chance to hear other voices, other than mine. This Café is going to focus on "tattoos," marks that people make on their skin, why tattoos are popular in the United States, and what are the reasons that people get tattoos. As always, we'll also answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Getting tattooed, or getting tattoos – you can use either expression: to get tattooed, or to get a tattoo. A "tattoo" is when they put ink on your skin, and it stays there permanently. "Ink" is what you would normally find in a pen, but this is a special kind of ink, usually with many different colors.

It used to be that tattoos were popular only among prisoners, gang members, perhaps sailors (people in the armed services at sea), what you might call "tough guys," men who were considered tough, men who were considered very masculine and perhaps a little dangerous. Now, however, tattoos have become very popular. One out of every five Americans now has a tattoo; that's 20 percent of the population, according to one recent survey.

Why are these tattoos becoming so popular; what are the reasons why people get a tattoo on themselves? The reasons may not have changed over the years, even though tattoos are now more popular. We're going to start by listening to one person who works at a tattoo shop, what we might call a "tattoo parlor" (parlor), a place where you can get a tattoo. He's going to describe some of the typical reasons why people get a tattoo. We'll listen, and then go back and explain what he says.



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[start of recording]

It could be a broken heart; it could be a newborn kid. It could be just one of, you know, let your mom know that – that you love her, you know, like the old heart/mom thing. Sometimes it's just to get out some of that teen angst on your arm. You know, whatever imagery they get tattooed, whatever story they're telling through their tattoos is something that they want to commemorate, that they want to honor, that they want to communicate with the rest of the world. You know, it's a – it's a way of putting a message out there.

[end of recording]

Because this interview was done at a tattoo shop, you can actually hear the sound of the machine that puts the tattoo onto your skin. We would call that sound a “buzz” (buzz); it's sort of a “zzzz” sound.

The gentleman here says that there are many reasons why people get tattoos. He begins by saying, “It could be a broken heart,” meaning that your girlfriend left you, or your boyfriend left you. When you have a romantic disappointment, we say you have a “broken heart.” “It could be a broken heart; it could be a newborn kid,” that is, if you have a child very recently, some people may celebrate that by putting a tattoo of the child's name, for example.

He says, “It could be just one of, you know, let your mom know that – that you love her.” Of course, in American English you hear this expression, “you know,” a lot when people are thinking of what to say next. So, another reason would be to let your mother know that you love her, “like the old heart/mom thing,” he says. A very traditional tattoo was to put a heart on your arm and your mother's name or just “Mom” in the heart to show that you loved your mother.

He continues that sometimes the reason is just to get that teen angst out on your arm. “Teen” means teenager; “angst” (angst) here means a sort of anger, when you are mad at the world, when you are mad at everything. Something that many teenagers go through. He says that getting a tattoo is a way to get that teenage angst out. To “get something out,” here, means to get rid of it, and you get it out – you get rid of it on your arm; you put that angst – that anger on your arm. It's sort of a type of almost therapy, you might say.

He says, “whatever imagery (whatever picture people get), whatever story they are trying to tell through their tattoo is something they want to commemorate.”



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He's saying here that when someone gets a tattoo, they are telling a story, almost; they are trying to communicate something. He says they want to commemorate something. To "commemorate" means to remember something, to honor something. In fact, the next thing he says is something that they want to "honor," something that they want to give respect to. It's also something that they want to, usually, communicate to the rest of the world, to let other people know about this story, this thing, this idea that you have.

He says, finally, "You know, it's a way of putting a message out there." To "put something out there" is an idiomatic expression which means to let other people know about it, to publicize it, to put it in a place where other people will hear or see it. Someone may say, "I just want to put this idea out there for us to consider." For example, you're having a meeting at your company, and you say, "Well, let me put this out there" – let me share this with you, let me tell you this so that that every one knows about it. In this case, the person getting the tattoo is putting that message out there – putting whatever message they have in their tattoo out so that other people can see it, perhaps talk about it.

Let's listen to that same comment again.

[start of recording]

It could be a broken heart; it could be a newborn kid. It could be just one of, you know, let your mom know that – that you love her, you know, like the old heart/mom thing. Sometimes it's just to get out some of that teen angst on your arm. You know, whatever imagery they get tattooed, whatever story they're telling through their tattoos is something that they want to commemorate, that they want to honor, that they want to communicate with the rest of the world. You know, it's a – it's a way of putting a message out there.

[end of recording]

Getting a tattoo has become very popular among young adults – teenagers, and people in their 20s and 30s. One of the changes that has come about in tattooing is that people now want something very personal; they want to design their own tattoo, their own message. Before, people would walk into a tattoo parlor and they would say, "I want that design," and you could select one. Now, it's becoming more popular for people to express themselves through their own tattoo design. We'll listen to someone who's going to talk about this change in how tattoos, now, are supposed to be more personal.



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[start of recording]

What we're finding is that young adults aren't just necessarily hopping into a tattoo shop, you know, on a Friday night, unplanned, and picking out something off the wall. But, what they're really doing is intricately designing and really thinking out what they want, and planning it. And, um, it's become a big form of artistic expression for people.

[end of recording]

This woman is commenting on how young adults are now personalizing their tattoo design. She starts by saying, "What we're finding (what we are learning) is that young adults aren't just necessarily hopping into a tattoo shop on a Friday night." When we say, "they aren't necessarily," we mean they don't always do this, or this may not be what is happening. To "hop" (hop) normally means to jump up and down on the ground. For example, animals such as kangaroos hop. "Hopping into" somewhere, however, is an expression that means to go somewhere without a lot of thought, to go somewhere without planning too much, sometimes just for a short time. You may be, for example, driving by a drugstore, and you say to your husband or wife, "I'm thinking of just hopping into this store to get some shaving cream" – I'm going to go in and come out quickly, but there isn't a lot of planning involved.

She's saying, then, that young adults aren't just going into a tattoo parlor some night to get a tattoo unplanned; they don't just pick "something off the wall." To "pick" something means to select something; "off the wall" refers to pictures that would be on a wall so you could see them and point to one to select it. As we said before, that's not what people are doing now. "What they're really doing," she says, "is intricately designing and thinking about what they want, really planning it." The word "intricate" (intricate) means with great detail, something that has a lot of small parts or small pieces to it, something that is very detailed. She's saying that these young adults are intricately (using it as an adverb) designing and thinking about what they want. So they're putting a lot of thought into it, we might say.

She says, "it's really a big form (an important way) of artistic expression for people." It's the way people express themselves and their own artistic senses. Let's listen one more time.

[start of recording]



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[end of recording]

An example of someone creating a tattoo especially for themselves as a way of remembering or commemorating something this is next gentleman, who's going to talk about how his brother died. His brother loved nature – loved the outdoors, especially here in California. So, he had a tree – a tattoo of a tree put on himself. It was a redwood tree, which is a very tall tree that grows here in California.

Let's listen to his quote about why he did this, and why it's so important to him.

[start of recording]

My feelings for my brother and how much I loved him and cared about him are going to be with me the rest of my life. So, like, I can wake up in the morning, you know, put my shirt on and be like, "Oh, yeah! There's that thing my brother loved."

[end of recording]

He begins by saying, "My feelings for my brother (what I felt for him) and how much I loved him and cared about him are going to be with me for the rest of my life." He will always remember and have that love of his brother with him. Then he says, "So, like, I can wake up in the morning, you know, put my shirt on and be like, 'Oh, yeah! There is that thing my brother loved.'"

I mentioned before that Americans like to use the expression "you know" as a way of trying to think of, or give them time to think of something to say. There's also another interesting word we use for this same purpose, which is "like": "So, like, I wake up in the morning." He could just say, "I wake up in the morning." The "so, like" is very informal, very conversational. It's something that a young adult or teenager might say especially.

He says, "So, like, I wake up in the morning, you know, put my shirt on and be like, 'Oh, yeah!'" "And be like," here, means "and say to myself, 'Oh, yeah! That is the thing (that tree) that my brother loved.'" The use of "like" has become very



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popular young children, young adults, teenagers. You'll often see it now in movies and television shows. For example, someone may say, "Well, I was like, 'I'm not going to the movies,' and she was like, 'Well, I don't care if you don't go to the movie. I don't like you, anyway!' And I'm like, 'Well, go away!'" The word "like," here, doesn't really have any important meaning other than this is what I did or this is what I said. Sometimes it takes place of another verb, such as "I said," or "she said." So, I can say, "I was like, 'No way,'" meaning I was thinking or I was saying the words "no way."

Let's listen to this comment one more time.

[start of recording]

My feelings for my brother and how much I loved him and cared about him are going to be with me the rest of my life. So, like, I can wake up in the morning, you know, put my shirt on and be like, "Oh, yeah! There's that thing my brother loved."

[end of recording]

Some of you may wonder where my tattoos are. I do have a tattoo; it's a tattoo of ESL Podcast. I decided to put it right on my forehead, right above my eyes, between my eyes and where my hair would be – if I had hair! – so that everyone can see it. So someday if you meet me, you can see my ESL Pod tattoo!

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Rodrigo (Rodrigo) in Brazil. Rodrigo wants to know about the expression "cover up." "Cover up" can be both a noun and a phrasal verb.

As a verb, to "cover up something," or to "cover something up," means to prevent other people from seeing it, or prevent other people from knowing about something, usually often something wrong that you did. But, to "cover up" can also simply mean, for example, if you come out of the shower or taking a bath and there is someone else in the room, you might take a towel and cover yourself up – prevent other people from seeing those parts of your body that no one should be seeing. In my case, that would be my entire body! "Cover up," as a verb, can also mean to try to hide your mistakes from other people.



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“Cover up,” as a noun, refers to different types of women’s clothing, usually worn over a swimsuit or exercise clothing. A cover up is intended to hide the woman’s body, or the shape of the woman’s body, from view – from other people seeing it. For example, if you are on the beach or near the beach, such as Venice Beach here in Los Angeles, and you are out in the water with your bikini – I always wear a bikini when I go swimming! But you are now, then, going to go to a restaurant. Well, you don’t want to go into the restaurant wearing your bikini, in fact, the restaurant may not allow you in, so you have to wear a cover up so that it covers your bikini and the rest of your body.

“Cover up” is also a type of makeup, so there are three meanings here. It’s a type of makeup that women use, usually, to prevent people from seeing “imperfections,” things that are not good looking on their skin. For example, you may have a mark on your skin, or you may have hurt yourself and there’s a small mark, which we would call a “scar” (scar) on your skin. Cover up is made to cover those things so other people don’t see them. Another word for this type of cover up is a “concealer,” because to “conceal” means to prevent other people from seeing something or knowing about something.

I can actually think of a fourth meaning for “cover up,” which is a noun that describe someone who is trying to conceal something – it describes the situation. For example, after former president Richard Nixon broke the law, there was a cover up; he tried to prevent other people from knowing about it. Of course, that didn’t work and so he had to leave the office of the presidency of the United States back in 19, let’s see, 74, I think.

Our second question comes from Akram (Akram) in Iran. Akram wants to know the differences when we use the words “talk,” “say,” and “speak.” This is a good question because they are similar in meaning; sometimes we can use these words to mean the same thing. “Talk” and “speak,” for example, can be used to express the same idea. For example: “I want to talk to the manager.” “I want to speak to the manager.” Either of these is correct. There are some sentences, however, where only one of these would be correct, and that’s where it gets a little difficult. “Talk” is sometimes used to mean to discuss: “Let’s talk about your proposal over lunch” (during lunch). Or, “My wife and I want to talk about our next vacation” – we want to discuss it.

“Say” is often used when we want to tell what someone else has said, when we want to report someone else’s words. For example: “I didn’t hear you. What did you say?” In other words, I want to hear those words again because I didn’t understand them. Or, “My grandmother always says, ‘Time doesn’t wait for



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anyone.” “My grandmother always says” – this is something that are her words, something that she says.

“Speak” is used specifically with languages: “He speaks Russian.” “He speaks Farsi,” or “Persian.” “How many languages do you speak?” “Speak” is also used when someone is making a formal presentation: “The ambassador will speak at the conference” – there will be a formal presentation that he gives.

Finally, Jamshid (Jamshid) in Germany wants to know about when certain letters are not pronounced in English. This is a difficult thing to try to explain. He’s specifically interested in the words “center” and “half.”

Well, “center” is the middle part of something. If we’re speaking very carefully, we would say “center”; you can hear the “T” (sound of “t”) “center.” But, if we’re speaking normally in a conversation, and quickly, you may not hear the “T” pronounced. This happens in lots of different languages; when someone is speaking quickly sometimes certain letters are not pronounced completely. So, I may say, “I am here in the ‘ce-ner’ of Los Angeles.” “In the ‘ce-ner’ of Los Angeles,” notice I don’t say “center.” I could, if I wanted to be more careful.

The question also relates to the word “half” (half). Here, it’s a little different; the “L” is never pronounced even if you’re speaking carefully. That word is pronounced, simply, “haf,” you don’t hear an “L.” The “half” of something is one part of it, 50 percent of it.

If you have a question for us here at the Center for Educational Development, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. We don’t have time to answer all of your questions, but we’ll try to answer as many as we can.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening, as always. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.

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