



ESL Podcast 618 – Eating at a Casual Restaurant

GLOSSARY

something the matter with – a problem or issue with something; something that isn't right or correct

* Is something the matter with your leg? You're walking strangely.

how to put this – a phrase used when one is uncomfortable because one wants to say something that might hurt another person's feelings or be awkward

* I don't know how to put this, but you should know that you don't look very good when you wear orange or yellow colors.

diner – a restaurant that serves informal, inexpensive meals

* This diner serves great fried chicken and mashed potatoes.

hole in the wall – a business, restaurant, or store that doesn't look very nice and is not fancy

* I know this place looks like a hole in the wall, but it has very good service.

mom and pop – referring to a small business owned by a married couple or a small family

* As a teenager, Ross spent each summer working in a mom and pop grocery store down the street from his house.

it's the (something) that counts – a phrase used to show that one particular thing is what really matters or what is really important, and nothing else is as important as that one thing

* It's too bad you didn't like his gift, but it's the thought that counts. Wasn't it a nice surprise that he remembered your birthday?

ambiance – environment; the way that a place looks and how it feels to be there

* We could improve the store's ambiance by changing the lighting and hanging some plants from the ceiling.

greasy spoon – a small restaurant that serves a lot of inexpensive, informal food, such as fried foods

* Can you recommend a greasy spoon in this town where I can get a hamburger and really good French fries?

fancy – very nice, luxurious, and expensive; nicer than normal; nicer than other versions of something



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* The actress wore a very fancy dress that was made from silk and covered in diamonds.

tablecloth – a large piece of fabric or plastic placed over a table to protect it from spilled food and drink and/or to make it look more beautiful

* Putting a lace tablecloth over that old table would make your dining room look really nice.

mood lighting – lights that are put in certain positions and turned on to specific levels of brightness to make people feel a certain way

* To prepare for his date, TJ tried to use mood lighting to make his living room more romantic, hanging small red cloths over the lamps to dim the light.

snooty – snobby; stuck-up; thinking that one is better than other people and not treating those other people very well

* The people at the country club are really snooty to anyone who isn't a millionaire.

booth – one part of a restaurant with two long, soft benches facing each other with a table in between, not a table with individual chairs

* Would you prefer one of these booths along the back wall, or a table by the window?

jukebox – a large machine that people put money into so that they can choose which song will be played next

* Old jukeboxes used to play records, but nowadays, they play CDs or even MP3 files.

counter – a long, flat surface like a table, but attached to the floor or another piece of furniture so that it cannot be moved, often used for preparing foods or for selling products

* The girl behind the counter said the store was sold out of umbrellas, but that a new shipment would arrive next week.

ahead of time – in advance; before something else happens; with early planning

* If you had told us you were coming ahead of time, we would have cleaned the house for your visit.

pie – a dessert made by baking fruit and sugar in a round, deep plate lined with pastry or dough, usually covered with pastry or dough, too

* Most Americans eat pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a mom and pop restaurant?
 - a) A restaurant where the food reminds one of what one ate as a child.
 - b) A restaurant that was purchased for the owner by his or her parents.
 - c) A restaurant that is owned by a married couple or a small family.
2. Where would you expect to find a jukebox?
 - a) In a diner.
 - b) In a store.
 - c) In a fancy restaurant.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

it's the (something) that counts

The phrase “it's the (something) that counts” is used to show that one particular thing is what really matters or what is really important, and nothing else is as important as that one thing: “It's the employees' performance that counts. If they can't do their job well, we'll have to fire them, no matter how much we like them as individuals.” The phrase “to count (someone or something) as (someone or something)” means to think of a person or thing in a certain way: “I count Michelle as one of my dearest friends.” Finally, the phrase “to count on (someone or something) among (something)” means to rely on a person or thing: “We're counting on your donation to fund our programs for the poor this year.”

ahead of time

In this podcast, the phrase “ahead of time” means in advance or before something else happens: “We plan to go to the mall a few hours ahead of time so that we'll have time to shop before the movie starts.” The phrase “ahead of (one's) time” means futuristic, or relating to ideas or technologies that aren't in use yet: “Newton's ideas about gravity were ahead of his time.” The phrase “behind the times” means old-fashioned or outdated, referring to something that is no longer used or is no longer popular: “The style of their living room is really behind the times, so their children are trying to get them to paint and buy new furniture.” Finally, the phrase “past the time” describes something that is late or overdue: “It's past the time for you to go to bed!”



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CULTURE NOTE

Traditionally, a “diner” was a special kind of “prefabricated” (built with standard sizes; not customized) restaurant building. These were long, narrow buildings that could be moved down the road or pulled by trains, and they made it easy for restaurants to be opened very quickly. Many of the diners had a “stainless steel” (made from a shiny, silver-colored metal) “exterior” (outside part) and a lot of stainless steel “accents” (decorations; accessories) on the “interior” (inside part), too.

Today, any restaurant that looks similar to a traditional diner and serves diner-style food might be called a diner, even if it isn’t “housed” (located) in a prefabricated restaurant building. Modern diners “tend to be” (are usually) larger and have more “seating” (the number of seats for customers) than more traditional diners.

Traditionally diners were open 24 hours a day, at a time when few other “establishments” (businesses) were open all night long. This made them popular “gathering places” (places for people to meet and spend time together) late at night and early in the morning. “Present-day” (modern) diners might also be open 24-hours, but is no longer as common as it once was.

Traditional and modern diners tend to serve the same simple kinds of food: hamburgers, sandwiches, French fries, pancakes, and eggs. It is also very common for diners to serve pie, ice cream, and coffee.

Many modern diners are decorated so that they look like diners from the 1950s. The waitresses might wear “poodle skirts” (very large, full skirts that were popular in the middle of the century), the jukebox might play music from that time period, and any artwork hanging on the walls might “date back to” (come from a certain period in history) the “mid-century” (around the 1950s).

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 618: Eating at a Casual Restaurant.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 618. 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. If you are serious in improving your English, then you'll want to look at our Learning Guide.

This episode is called "Eating at a Casual Restaurant." It's a dialogue between Russell and Nadia using vocabulary you associate with eating at a casual or less expensive restaurant. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Russell: Why aren't you eating? Is there something the matter with your food?

Nadia: No, the food is fine.

Russell: What's wrong?

Nadia: I'm not sure how to put this. I really like going to diners and hole in the walls with you, and I love mom and pop restaurants as much as you do. For me, it's the food that counts, not the ambiance, but...

Russell: I thought you'd love this place. It's my favorite greasy spoon.

Nadia: I do like it. It's just that when you invited me out for my birthday and said that it would be something really special, I thought you might take me somewhere else.

Russell: Is that why you wore that nice new dress? You thought I was taking you to a fancy restaurant, with tablecloths, mood lighting, and snooty waiters.

Nadia: Well...



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Russell: This is much better, don't you think? We get to sit in this comfortable booth, listen to the jukebox, and watch our food being cooked behind the counter. I can't think of a better dining experience. Don't you agree?

Nadia: Uh, sure.

Russell: And don't think you're not getting something special for your birthday. I planned it all ahead of time.

Nadia: You did? Really? What is it?

Russell: I ordered you a whole pie!

[end of dialogue]

Russell begins our dialogue by asking Nadia, "Why aren't you eating? Is there something the matter with your food?" The expression "something the matter with" means a problem with something, something that isn't right, something isn't correct. This is a very common expression in American English: "Is there's something the matter with you?" That means is there something wrong with you, is there a problem. Or you might say, "There's something the matter with the television. It isn't working correctly." It's a good expression to know; it is very common in conversational English.

Nadia says, answering Russell's question, "No, the food is fine." The food is okay. Russell then says, "What's wrong?" Nadia says, "I'm not sure how to put this." The phrase "how to put this" or "how to put it" is used when you want to say something but you are afraid that what you are going to say will hurt the other person's feelings or that it will make them angry or upset. So you might say, "Well, I don't know how to put this, but you should really not wear that dress. It doesn't look good on you." Husbands, I recommend this with your wives. You should just tell them that they don't look good in their dresses. I'm kidding, of course. If you believe that you won't be married very long!

Nadia says, "I really like going to diners and hole in the walls with you, and I love mom and pop restaurants as much as you do." Nadia describes three kinds of restaurants, similar kinds of informal, casual, less expensive restaurants. The first is a diner. A "diner" typically has a kitchen that is somewhat in the open; you can see it. There's typically a long what we would call a "counter," which is a place where people can sit, sort of like a bar where there's a long piece of wood – a long piece of furniture that everyone sits in front of. In other words, it's not



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like a table, where you sit on one side and I sit on the other. Now, diners will also have tables. Sometimes they'll have a special kind of table, which we call a "booth." Actually, what's special about it is the seats. Instead of being individual chairs, a booth has sort of like a little couch on each side of the table.

Well, anyway. Diners serve informal, inexpensive meals. Diners are often associated with the 1950s and 60s. That's when they were very popular, when America started driving and diners were places you could drive to and eat and get a cheap meal. A "hole in the wall" describes any business, including a restaurant, that doesn't look very nice, especially from the outside, and is not expensive or fancy. A hole in the wall could be a bar, it could be a restaurant, it's an informal place. Somewhat of a negative description: a hole (hole) in the wall. A "mom and pop" business refers to any business that is typically owned by a family, usually a mother and a father. "Mom" is mother; "pop" is a old word for father – dad. But we don't say "a mom and dad store," we say "a mom and pop store," any business, restaurant, store that is owned by a family – a small family. It's their business; both mother and father, and often children work in the business.

So, Nadia says that she likes going to diners and hole in the walls and mom and pop restaurants. "For me," she says, "it's the food that counts, not the ambiance." "The food that counts" is a form of a more general expression: "it's the (something) that counts." This phrase is used to show that one particular thing is what is really important, what really matters. For some people, if they go on vacation they don't care about how much it costs, they don't care about what kind of room they have at the hotel, it's the temperature – it's the weather that counts. That's the most important for them, that it be warm for example. Well that's what Nadia is saying, the most important thing is the food at a restaurant, not the ambiance. I should mention that there are some other meanings coming from that expression, "it's the (something) that counts," and those can be found in the Learning Guide. Getting back to "ambiance" (ambiance), that's a general word to describe the environment, or more specifically here, the way that a place looks, especially a restaurant or a bar. How it feels, what kind of lighting it has, what the furniture is like, all of these things are part of the ambiance.

So you can get the idea here that Nadia is probably going to complain about the ambiance, even though she says the food is the most important thing, because at the end of this sentence she says "but..." – "it's the food that counts, not the ambiance, but..." and Russell says, "I thought you'd love this place (meaning I thought you would love this place). It's my favorite greasy spoon." A "greasy (greasy) spoon," like the spoon you eat with, is a small restaurant that serves



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informal foods, so it's similar to the other expressions we used, but specifically it often serves fried foods such as hamburgers and French fries. Well, hamburgers aren't fried, but the French fries are. That's what a greasy spoon is. "Grease" is another word here for "fat." It's usually a negative way of describing a restaurant.

Russell says that it's his favorite greasy spoon, the restaurant where they are now. Nadia says, "I do like it. It's just that" – this is another way of saying "however" – "It's just that when you invited me out for my birthday and said that it would be something really special (really nice), I thought you might take me somewhere else."

Russell says, "Is that why you wore that nice new dress? You thought I was taking you to a fancy restaurant." "Fancy" (fancy) means very nice, very expensive. A fancy restaurant would have, for example, "tablecloths" on the tables. This is a piece of material – a piece of cloth you put on top of the table to make it look nice, typically white. You might also find mood (mood) lighting. "Mood lighting" is when the lights are used to create a certain atmosphere – a certain ambiance. Often the lights are lower than they would be, less bright for example. A fancy restaurant might also have snooty waiters. "Snooty" (snooty) is a good word. Someone who is snooty is someone who thinks they are better than other people, and therefore does not treat the other people very well. I say it's a good word not because it's a good word to describe someone, it's a negative way of describing someone, but it's a common word. Other words that mean something similar are "snobby" (snobby), and more informally "stuck-up" (stuck-up). All of these are describing someone who thinks they are better than the other people around them and doesn't treat them very well. So, a fancy restaurant might have snooty "waiters," the people who come and ask what you want to eat and bring you your food.

Nadia says, "Well..." Russell then replies, "This is much better, don't you think? We get to sit in this comfortable booth," remember the booth is where you have two something like small couches, although they are usually made from plastic, around the sides of the table. Russell says, "We get to sit in this comfortable booth, listen to the jukebox, and watch our food being cooked behind the counter." A "jukebox" (jukebox – one word) is a large machine that you put money into and it will play a song for you. Some bars and restaurants have jukeboxes, especially diners that we talked about earlier. A "counter," we also talked about earlier, is like a very long table where the people sit on one side and on the other side there is usually part of the kitchen, and there is a waiter or waitress that works on the other side of the counter, so everyone is facing the same direction. That's a counter.



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Russell says, “I can’t think of a better dining experience (a better place to eat). Don’t you agree?” Nadia, of course, does not agree, but she wants to be nice to Russell. She says, “Uh, sure.” Russell says, “And don’t think you’re not getting something special for your birthday. I planned it all ahead of time (I planned it all in advance).” “Ahead of time” means before something happens. Nadia gets excited about this special thing she’s going to get. She says, “You did? Really? What is it?” And Russell, very disappointingly says, from Nadia’s perspective, “I ordered you a whole pie!” (pie), which is a dessert made usually by baking fruit in a round container that has what we would call “pastry” or dough on the bottom and on the top. There are different ways of making pies. Of course, a pie is not really what Nadia was hoping for in terms of a special gift. So Russell, we think, clearly needs to understand women better!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

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[end of dialogue]

There's nothing the matter with today's script. That's because it was written by our own Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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