



TOPICS

Regulating monopolies and antitrust laws; American songs: Happy Birthday; whilst versus while; to blow away (something); using “do” for emphasis

GLOSSARY

monopoly – a business that does not have any competitors; with only one company selling a product or providing a service

* His company opened a store in this small town hoping to get a monopoly on selling liquor.

competitor – businesses that try to sell the same product or service

* Bill left our company to open his own, and now it is a competitor with ours.

antitrust law – laws that were created to not allow one company from being too powerful and to prevent unfair business practices

* Will the government use antitrust laws to prevent this large company from buying the other three smaller ones?

sanctioned – approved by the government; given permission by an official organization

* These T-shirts aren’t officially sanctioned by the city’s team, and sell for about half the price.

to break up (something) – to make something into many smaller pieces

* Can you break up this large piece of chocolate into 10 smaller pieces so I can serve them with dessert?

to appeal – after one court has already made a decision, taking a court case to another, often higher (more powerful), court, hoping for a different decision because one believes the first court had made a mistake

* The woman convicted of murder appealed her case, saying that the judge in the case didn’t allow her to lawyer to do his job properly.

lyrics – words in a song

* The lyrics of this song tell the story of a man in love with two women at the same time.



kindergarten – the school that American children go to when they are 5 or 6 years old, before they enter first grade

* When Jun started kindergarten, he already knew how to read and how to add numbers!

to catch on – to become popular and spread; to become known and used by more people

* When the popular movie star shaved his head for a movie, it caught on and a lot of men shaved their heads to be fashionable.

copyrighted – when something is officially owned by someone and it cannot be used by other people without the owner's permission

* Can we use the information we found on the Internet for our own website, or is it copyrighted?

royalties – money that a copyright holder or owner receives every time the thing that is copyrighted is used to make money

* After 35 years, the song was still being played on the radio and the songwriter continued to get royalties.

commonplace – found and heard almost everywhere; known and/or used by many or most people

* It was rare for women to keep their last names after getting married 50 years ago, but it's commonplace today.

while – during the time that something else happens or as long as something else is going on

* What were you doing while you waited for your wife to get home from work?

whilst – an old fashioned word meaning during the time that something else happens or as long as something else is going on

* Jeremiah wrote down each name whilst the members introduced themselves.

to blow away (something) – to impress or stun someone with excellence; to shock or surprise someone with something very big or amazing

* They blew away the audience by giving the best presentation at the conference.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

The Board Game “Monopoly”

There are many popular “board games” (games played on a flat board, moving small pieces around that board) that Americans play with friends and family. Traditionally, board games were considered an American “pastime” (something that a person does regularly for enjoyment).

One of the most well known board games is a one called “Monopoly.” Monopoly is played on a board with spaces marked for many different streets and locations. Each player travels around the board and if the player has enough money, he or she can build houses and hotels on the spaces. When other players “land on” (arrives at) a space with a house, he or she must pay “rent” (money for permission to live in a place). In this way, players can “accumulate” (collect overtime) properties. The “aim” (goal) of each player is to make as much money as possible. The person with the most “wealth” (money and valuable things) at the end of the game wins.

The original version of the game board “consisted of” (had) 40 spaces and several other special spaces, including one that reads: “Go to Jail.” When a player lands on “Go to Jail,” he or she must remain in jail for a short time while the other players continue to play. In the original board, the properties are named after locations in, or near, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The company that makes the game, Parker Brothers, has made or “licensed” (given formal permission, usually in exchange for money) other organizations to make different versions of the game. For instance, many cities and many universities in the U.S. have their own versions of Monopoly, with the names of the streets and locations on the game board replaced with local streets and places. According the Guinness Book of Records, a book that records “world records” (the best performance in the world), over 500 million people have played Monopoly, in one form or another.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 188.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 188. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California, of course.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. Download this episode's Learning Guide, an 8- to 10-page guide that will help you improve your English even faster. Also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, as well as our ESL Podcast Blog while you're there.

On this Café, we're going to talk about how the U.S. government regulates monopolies, or companies that don't have any competitors, through special laws called antitrust laws. We'll look at two big monopolies in particular: Ma Bell and Microsoft. Then we'll continue our series on American songs (yes, that's right, you will get to hear me sing in this episode) with a look at the popular song Happy Birthday in English. As always, we'll also answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins a discussion of how monopolies are regulated in the United States. A "monopoly" (monopoly) is a business that does not have any "competitors," that is, other businesses that sell the same product or service as the company. When a business has a lot of competitors, it must continually try to provide better service, a better product, lower prices, or else the customers will go to the other companies. But a monopoly doesn't have to do that. A monopoly can charge very high prices and customers are often not happy, but they don't have another choice.

The United States has what are called "antitrust laws," laws that were created to "prohibit," or to regulate monopolies, either to prevent them from happening, or if they did happen, to make sure that they didn't do anything bad that would hurt the customers. The first national (or federal) antitrust laws were back in the late 19th century; the most famous of these was called the Sherman Antitrust Laws. This was a law that most Americans school children study about when they study American history. It was designed to stop some of the big companies that were forming in the late 19th century, especially Standard Oil Company, which had a monopoly on energy distribution and production in the United States, specifically oil. John D. Rockefeller was the founder of this company. Rockefeller is one of those late 19th century businessmen that became very famous, very wealthy.



Today, you can go to New York City and see the Rockefeller Center, which is a large building in Manhattan, in downtown New York City.

The monopoly that Standard Oil had on oil production and distribution was something that many in the government disapproved of (disliked), and so they passed this law, which was a very popular law. Almost everyone in the legislature (in the Congress of the United States) voted for it; only one senator voted against it. Eventually, the government was successful in breaking up the monopoly, although it took several years. “To break up (something)” means to make something into many smaller pieces, to divide something. The Standard Oil Trust was broken up in 1911.

There are, however, some areas or parts of an economy where it makes sense to have a monopoly. This is true especially if it costs a lot of money to do a particular business, and that thing that it provides is important or essential. For example, a power company has to spend a lot of money to build power plants and put wires and connect the wires to everyone’s house. In some countries, the government is the one that does this, and in some parts the United States the government runs the power company. But in many parts of the U.S., it is a private company that provides you electricity, but that is a company that is regulated by the government.

In a situation like this, the government allows the company to stay in business, but it tries to make laws so that the company will not hurt the consumers. A famous example of this is what we called Ma Bell, which was also known as the Bell System. This was the group of companies that did all of the phone service in the United States, beginning in the late 19th century. Ma Bell, which is more of an informal name for the Bell System, had a monopoly on telephone service in the United States; it’s what we call a “sanctioned” or “government sanctioned” monopoly. The government said, “Okay, we can’t have more than one local telephone company, so we’ll allow this company to have a monopoly.” When I was growing up there was just one phone company in the United States, and that was Ma Bell. Technically, the name was changed early on to the American Telephone And Telegraph Company [AT&T], but people called it Ma Bell. You had no choices about what company you used.

Over time, especially during the late 1970s and 1980s, the U.S. government decided that it didn’t want to have just one company (one monopoly) for the telephone industry (for the telephone business). They wanted, instead, to create competition. In 1984, the government broke up the Bell System into smaller



companies. When they broke up the company, the company then had new companies in different parts of the country; the company essentially divided itself.

The most famous recent antitrust case was against Microsoft, the large computing software company. The U.S. tried to get Microsoft to stop some of what it called “monopolistic practices,” doing things that caused a monopoly in the marketplace. However, the decision against Microsoft – the first court decision against them was “appealed,” it was taken to a higher court which overturned (or negated) the first court’s decision, meaning that they decided it wasn’t a monopoly after all. At this point, the government decided to drop the case, meaning they decided to stop pursuing legal action against Microsoft. However, Microsoft did get into problems in Europe, where the courts ruled that they were a monopoly. So, this is a continuing issue, the issue of antitrust, of one company controlling everything. There are some people who believe that some of what Google does may also be monopolistic; we’ll have to see how that develops in the future.

Our next topic is going to be talking about perhaps one of the most famous songs in English, and now in many languages, something I’m sure you have heard, at least in your own language: Happy Birthday to You, which is usually called, simply, Happy Birthday. We sing Happy Birthday to our friends and relatives on their birthday, or the anniversary of the day they were born. We usually sing Happy Birthday to someone as we are bringing out a cake to them. Usually, we sing it right before the person makes a wish and blows out the candles on their birthday cake, which is the traditional custom in the U.S. You wish for something, and then you use your breath to put out the fire on the candles that are on top of the cake. You can learn more about typical birthdays celebrations by listening to ESL Podcast 239 – A Birthday Party.

Just in case you haven’t heard Happy Birthday, I will now sing it for you:

Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday dear Jeffrey,
Happy birthday to you.

I, of course, put my own name in there, so it probably should be “Happy birthday to me,” but you get the idea.

The “lyrics,” or the words to the song are pretty simple and easy to understand. You just put the name of the person who is celebrating their birthday in the third



line, after the word “dear.” I want to talk a little bit about the history of this song, however.

Back in 1893, there were two sisters who were kindergarten teachers who wanted to write a song that would be easy for young children to sing. “Kindergarten” is what we call the school or the grade that American children go to usually when they are five or six years old, this is before they go into first grade. Anyway, these kindergarten teachers wanted to write an easy song, which they called Good Morning to All, that is, good morning to all of you.

Good morning to you,
Good morning to you,
Good morning, dear children,
Good morning to all.

It doesn’t really rhyme: “all” and “children,” but, well, it was easy. They liked the song a lot, these students of the two teachers. They liked it so much that they began to change the words and started singing the song at birthday parties. This tradition caught on. The phrase “to catch on” means to become popular or spread, to move to other parts of the population or the country. Things that “catch on” are things that become popular such as certain expressions, for example, or certain types of clothing. Not having any hair, for example, is catching on; everyone sees my anniversary videos and, of course, starts to shave their head (take the hair off of their head). It’s catching on; trust me!

In the same way, singing Happy Birthday at birthday parties caught on (“caught” is the past tense of “catch”) and soon people were doing it all over the United States, and even in other countries. In fact, Happy Birthday is probably the most recognized song in English, and it is sung in other countries, in other languages.

Finally, in 1935, Happy Birthday to You was copyrighted. To “copyright” (copyright) means to say that you own something and that it cannot be used by other people without your permission. Happy Birthday to You was copyrighted by a company that had published the original song, Good Morning to All. In 1998, the Time-Warner Company, a large media company in the U.S., bought the copyright to Happy Birthday. The company now says that it should receive royalties for the song. A “royalty” is money that a copyright holder or owner receives every time someone uses their copyrighted product for profit (to make money).



The Time-Warner Company believes that it should be paid royalties whenever Happy Birthday is sung on a radio show, in a movie, or on a television program. However, the song is so popular and “commonplace,” or found and heard almost everywhere, that it is extremely difficult to “enforce” their claim, that is, to get people to actually pay money to them. However, that’s one reason why you don’t often hear Happy Birthday sung in movies or in television programs in the U.S., because officially it is copyrighted. Most people, however, don’t know this, and certainly, no one’s going to stop singing it at birthday parties because of it. In fact I just broke the copyright law by singing it here on the podcast – so don’t tell Time-Warner Company!

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Roman (Roman) from Russia. Roman wants to know the difference between the words “while” (while) and “whilst” (whilst).

“While” means a period of time. For example: “My uncle has been sick for a long while (for a long time).” Or, “Don’t worry, I’ll only be gone for a short while (for a short time).” “While” is also used to mean during a certain period of time, or as long as something else is going on. For example: “Please don’t play your radio while I’m trying to sleep (during the time that I am trying to sleep). If you do, I may throw your radio out the window!” Finally, “while” can also mean “although.” “While I loved the film, I thought the book was even better (although I loved the film, I thought the book was even better).”

“Whilst” is not a very common American usage; you may hear it in British English. However, in the US, you will almost never hear “whilst,” it will always be “while.” Even in British English, however, I think it is becoming rare. If you do hear it, it will mean either during the time that something else is happening, or “although.” It is not typically used to mean a period of time, the first definition that we gave for “while.” In U.S. English, again, “while” is the only thing that you will hear.

Our next question comes from Tzu-Ling (Tzu-Ling) in Taiwan. The question is: What is the meaning of “to blow away (someone’s) expectations”? The phrasal verb “to blow away” means to impress another person because you are so good, to shock or surprise someone with something that is very amazing, almost unbelievable, especially if it is very good. For example: “That movie blew me away.” That means that movie was amazing, I thought it was incredible, it impressed me a great deal. It could also be used for something that is simply shocking: “The fact that he quit his job blew me away.” It surprised me.



“To blow away” can also mean to defeat completely, when one team plays another team: “With a score of 65-0, the Los Angeles Lakers blew away the New York Knicks.” They defeated them completely – they beat them completely, it wasn’t even close. We have another expression using “blow” for that situation; as a noun, we would call that a “blowout,” when one team beats another team by a very large score.

“Blow away,” then, means to impress, to surprise someone, or to defeat someone completely. I would say that the first definition is probably more common. It’s still a little informal, however, but it is very common in conversation.

Earlier, we had Roman from Russia, now we have Bruno (Bruno) from Brazil. Bruno wants to know why we use “do” or “does” in affirmative sentences. For example: “I do listen to ESL Podcast,” or “She does love me.”

“Do” or “does” is used here for emphasis, you really want to emphasize the fact that you are doing this thing: I am listening – I do listen; she loves me – she does love me. You can’t use it, however, with all verbs. “Do” is what we call an auxiliary (or helping) verb. It can’t be used with another kind of verb, what we call a modal verb, something like “should,” “could,” “must,” “may.” These are modal verbs that we don’t use “do” with for emphasis. These verbs are always used alone plus the main verb, not with “do.” So: “you must go to bed now.” You cannot say “you do must go to bed now,” that would not be correct.

If you want extra emphasis when you are using a modal verb like “should” or “must” or “may” or “could,” you have to do it by the tone of your voice: “you must leave right now.” You can also use other words, such as “absolutely: “you absolutely must go now.” That’s another way of providing emphasis in writing. “I may possibly be home by Thursday.” “Possibly” emphasizes the “may” part of that sentence: maybe it will happen, maybe it won’t.

If you email us a question to eslpod@eslpod.com, we may possibly answer it here on the English Café.

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

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