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TOPICS

Alcatraz; The Simpsons; using negation with an infinitive; heaven versus heavens; kind of versus sort of versus type of

GLOSSARY

to escape – to find a way for one to leave without permission and without other people knowing about it and stopping one

* The rabbit escaped from her cage and now we can't find her anywhere.

guard – a person who works at a prison and prevents people from escaping; a person whose job is to keep away people who are not supposed to be in an area; a person whose job is to keep things and people safe

* Although the prisoner is in the hospital, there are two guards preventing him from escaping.

jailbreak – an escape from a prison

* Did you see the movie on TV last night about two clever prisoners' jailbreak from the worst prison in the country?

cover-up – a story that is shared to hide the truth; an effort to hide the truth by telling a different, untrue version of events

* I won't be part of this cover-up! If we did something wrong, we need to tell the truth and deal with the consequences.

cell – a small room where a prisoner sleeps; a small room that can be locked, where one or more prisoners are kept

* None of the cells have windows, only a bed, a small sink, and a toilet.

haunted – with ghosts or spirits of people who died there still in the building

* No one will buy the house on the hill, because people in this town think it's haunted.

animated – drawn, like a cartoon, but with moving pictures

* Characters in animated movies can do things that live actors cannot do.



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dysfunctional family – people in a family who have poor relationships with each other; a family of people who have major problems dealing with each other

* Each episode of the new reality show follows this dysfunctional family as the family members argue and fight.

troublemaker – a person who often creates problems, especially at school; a person who creates problems for other people

* The teacher hoped that Sam would be a good student like his sister, but instead, he's a troublemaker.

pacifier – a small piece of plastic that babies like to suck on because it makes them feel calmer

* If you want to stop the baby from crying, put a pacifier in her mouth. That usually works.

merchandise – things that are sold, like toys, clothing, food, video games, and more

* At the concert, you could buy all kinds of merchandise with the band's name and picture, such as T-shirts and posters.

lexicon – the group of all words and phrases in a language; the vocabulary of a person or in a language or an area of knowledge

* The English lexicon changes constantly and dictionary publishers have to add new words every year.

heaven – according to the Christian religion, the place where God lives

* Do you believe that when you die, you'll go to heaven?

heavens – skies; according to the Christian religion, the place where God lives

* The heavens have never looked so lovely as they do tonight.

kind of – rather; a little bit; member of a recognized group of people, places, or things

* He didn't like the other cars, but kind of likes this one.

sort of – rather, a little bit; member of a recognized group of people, places, or things

* The reason why I don't want to go to the party is that I sort of have a headache.

type of – member of a recognized group of people, places, or things

* These are the type of small-minded people I don't want my children to play with!



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

The Fugitive: The Television Show and Movie

A “fugitive” is a person who should be “in the custody of” (under the authority of) the police or the government, but “escapes” (breaks free from other’s control). We often say that someone who escapes is a fugitive from the law.

The Fugitive was also the name of a popular television series that “aired” (was shown) between 1963 and 1967. This TV show was about a doctor named Richard Kimble who is “falsely” (mistakenly) accused of killing his wife.

Dr. Richard Kimble is “convicted” (found guilty) of the murder and given the “death penalty” (to be killed as punishment for his crime). While on the way to the prison for other “death-row prisoners” (prisoners who have been given the death penalty), the train that Kimble is on crashes. Knowing himself to be “innocent” (not guilty), Dr. Richard Kimble escapes and begins a “journey” (long trip) across the country to find the real killer.

Although the TV series ended in 1967, The Fugitive was not forgotten. In 1993, a movie based on the television series was made with two of the most popular movie actors of that time: Harrison Ford as Dr. Richard Kimble, and Tommy Lee Jones as the federal “marshal” (police officer) who tries to “track him down” (find him). While trying to find the fugitive, the marshal “reopens” (starts again) the murder case of Dr. Kimble’s wife to find out what really happened.

Both the television series and the movie were very popular. Tommy Lee Jones, who played the federal marshal, won an Academy Award for his role in the film.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 205.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 205. 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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On this Café, we're going to talk about a very famous prison or jail in San Francisco, California called Alcatraz. We're also going to talk about a popular animated (or cartoon) television series that you may have heard of called The Simpsons. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

We begin this Café begins with a discussion about Alcatraz Island, which is an island that is in the water – the ocean next to San Francisco, California. San Francisco is in the northern part of California. Most people just call this island Alcatraz or it's sometimes called The Rock. Alcatraz was a federal or national prison for 29 years. A "prison" is the same as a jail, a place where people are sent for certain period of times as punishment for something bad, for doing something wrong, for breaking the law. People who steal and kill are sent to prison for many years, at least if the police catch them.

Of course, some people who are sent to prison don't like being there – I don't know why! – so they try to "escape," find a way to leave without permission, without other people knowing about it. Alcatraz was built as a prison that was supposed to be impossible to escape from. The prison itself had very high security, meaning the "guards," the people who work at the prison and make sure the prisoners stay in the prison, did many things to make it difficult for people to escape.

One of the things that made it so difficult to escape from Alcatraz was that it was an island – it was surrounded by water. Even if the prisoner did escape from the building, he would be on an island in the middle of San Francisco Bay, with no



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way to get off the island. The water up in Northern California – the ocean water is very cold and it moves very rapidly, so it's very difficult to swim from the island to what we would call the "shore," the main part of the land, without either getting very cold or getting taken out into the ocean by the water.

Even though it seems impossible to escape from Alcatraz, many people tried to do it. The federal government says officially that no one ever escaped from Alcatraz prison, but there were 36 inmates – an "inmate" is a person who lives in the prison, is a prisoner – there were 36 inmates who tried to make a "jailbreak," or an escape; 36 men tried to escape, six of them were killed, two of them drowned when they were trying to swim away, the others were just caught before they could leave the island. Some people believe that the two people that we think drowned didn't actually drown, but escaped. The government, some people say, just says that they drowned as a cover-up. A "cover-up" is a story that the government may tell to hide the truth – to lie to people. "To drown," of course, means to be in the water and to have water go into your lungs, which will make you die under most circumstances. But because two people were never found – the two bodies, apparently, were never found – some people say that means that they escaped. The government says that they probably drowned.

To try to escape, prisoners would make their own tools to try to chisel the walls of the prison. "To chisel" (chisel) means to take a long, sharp object, which we call a chisel (as a noun) and hit it against the wall many times so that small pieces of the wall begin to come out. The prisoners were trying to chisel a "tunnel," a narrow passage that would let them go down on their hands and knees, crawl through the wall, and escape from their cell. The "cell" in a prison (cell) is a small room where the prisoner sleeps, usually with one or more prisoners.

Alcatraz became very famous in the United States while it was open as a prison. One particularly well-known escape attempt (or jailbreak attempt) resulted in several people dying. This happened on May 2nd, 1946 and it later became known as the Battle of Alcatraz. Of course, it wasn't an actual battle in a war. What happened was that for two days the prisoners took over control of the prison. Two prison workers and three prisoners were killed in the Battle of Alcatraz, and many others were injured. Eventually, however, the guards got control of the prison again, and two of the prisoners, who were part of this takeover, were "executed," were killed for trying to escape. There have been several movies made about this so-called Battle of Alcatraz and, as well, about other attempts to escape.



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Finally, in 1963, which is 46 years ago, Alcatraz prison was closed because it became too expensive to keep prisoners there, and because the buildings were getting too old. In 1972, Alcatraz Island became a natural recreation area, and today you can actually visit a museum and go into the old prison buildings. Some people, however, say that Alcatraz is “haunted,” meaning that the spirits of the people who died there are still in the building. Some people say that they have seen or heard ghosts in and around the prison, and are even scared to visit Alcatraz. Some people drink too much! Other people just don’t like the idea of visiting a prison. I have been to San Francisco several times; it’s only about five or six hours north by car. I have never gone to Alcatraz prison, however. You have to take a boat, obviously, from San Francisco out to the island. For some reason, I just never was very interested; I’m one of those people who have never been particularly interested in visiting a prison. I hope never to visit a prison as one of the residents!

Now let’s turn to a very different topic. One of the most popular television programs in the United States for many years has been The Simpsons. The Simpsons is what we call an animated television series. Something that is “animated” is drawn, like a cartoon, and has moving pictures. You’ve seen, probably, animated Disney movies, perhaps Sleeping Beauty or The Lion King. It’s very popular here in the U.S. on Saturday mornings for there to be animated cartoons on television for young children. Most of these cartoon series – these animated series are made for children, but The Simpsons is different; The Simpsons is made for adults.

The Simpsons is a parody of middle-class American family life. A “parody” (parody) is something that imitates or copies something else, but in a funny way; it is making a joke of something. The Simpsons isn’t, of course, about a real family, but it does copy from real American families in funny ways, that’s what makes it funny. The Simpsons are a family with a father, whose name is Homer, like the famous Greek poet; the mother’s name is Marge, the son’s name is Bart, and the daughter’s name is Lisa. Actually there’s also a baby girl; her name is Maggie.

The Simpsons are what we would call a “dysfunctional family,” which means they have many different problems. In dysfunctional families, people often have very poor relationships with each other; sometimes that’s caused by divorce or even abuse in the family, and that’s a sad thing of course. The Simpsons, however, is funny because it’s a parody of a dysfunctional family. People enjoy watching it because they can recognize things in their own lives and their own behavior that are part of the show.



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Like some other popular American television series, this one has been translated into different languages and shown in different countries throughout the world.

If you haven't seen The Simpsons, each episode – each show shows what happens in the family's life together. The dad, Homer, is overweight (he weighs too much, he's what we would call fat, which is not a very nice word), he drinks beer, he watches too much television, he isn't very smart – he's not very intelligent, and he isn't a very good father for his children. He works at a nuclear power plant, but he's a very lazy and stupid worker who makes lots of mistakes, which of course can be very dangerous at a nuclear power plant. The son, Bart, is a "troublemaker," someone who creates problems, especially at school. The older daughter Lisa, however, is very intelligent, very musical, but she doesn't get the support she needs from her family. The baby girl, Maggie, doesn't do or say very much, and she always has in her mouth what we call a "pacifier" (pacifier), which is a small piece of plastic that babies suck on because it, I guess, makes them feel calmer. There are also other characters in the show, including teachers, people who work with Homer, storeowners, and other people in the town where the family lives.

That town is called Springfield, but we never find out what state it is in. Springfield is a very common name for a town in the United States. There are many states that have cities called Springfield: Springfield, Massachusetts, Springfield, Illinois, and so on. Each week, the family has a new adventure or experience. Most of the episodes are related to something in American culture, perhaps politics or religion or business. But the show always tries to be funny, even when it talks about serious problems.

It was originally created by Matt Groening in 1989. Groening, however, was famous even before that. In the late 70s and in the 1980s he created a "comic strip," a cartoon that appeared in newspapers called Life is Hell, and I remember in college reading these comics every week in the local paper. So, he was already very well known as a cartoonist in the 1980s, and eventually he got a contract to work with a television network (someone who produces television shows) to do this animated cartoon series, which he called The Simpsons.

It is the longest-running American television series for entertainment currently in the United States, meaning that there has been no other show that has been shown on American television for entertainment as long as The Simpsons has, currently. There have been more than 400 episodes of The Simpsons, and a Simpsons movie. The television show also sells many different types of



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“merchandise,” things that are sold, such as toys, clothing, video games, and so forth, all related to The Simpsons. In fact, the “merchandising,” the selling of these products related to The Simpsons has been very profitable for the owners of this program.

The Simpsons have had an influence on American culture; they talk about American culture on the show, but they also influence American culture because it is such a popular program. Most Americans are familiar with the show, even if they don’t watch it regularly. I don’t watch it regularly, but I have seen the show several times. There are expressions, things that the characters say on the program, that have actually become part of the lexicon. The group of words and phrases in a language is sometimes called the “lexicon,” it’s the vocabulary of the language. For example, Homer often says “d’oh” on the show when something bad happens, and you can sometimes hear Americans use that same expression when something bad happens to them. This is true of people who probably have never even seen the show.

In the 1990s, one of Bart’s phrases became very popular. He said, “Don’t have a cow, man!” when he was in trouble and wanted other people to calm down. When other people were getting angry at him, he’d say, “Don’t have a cow, man!” Of course, we say “man” just as an informal expression, like “dude” or “guy.” “To have a cow” is an interesting expression; it literally means to give birth to a cow, like a woman gives birth to a child. A cow, of course, is big, so giving birth to a cow would be, hmm, I guess very painful. The expression, however, simply means calm down; don’t get so excited. And this became a popular expression in the 1990s, but it’s not used as much anymore.

Earlier in 2009, the government Post Office – the U.S. Postal Service issued new stamps with The Simpsons on it in recognition of the show’s 20th anniversary. This is certainly a sign of how popular or influential someone or something is in American culture, when the U.S. government – the U.S. Postal Service, technically – issues or prints stamps with the pictures of The Simpsons or whatever it is their honoring. So, if you have a chance to see it, you would, I think, enjoy it; certainly learn a little something about modern American culture by watching The Simpsons.

Now let’s learn a little bit about American language by answering some of your questions.

Our first question comes from Majka (Majka) in Poland. The question has to do with how we use the word “not” with a type of verb which we call the infinitive.



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Well, let's start with a definition of the word infinitive. The infinitive form of the verb is the form that has the word "to" in front of it. The infinitive form of the verb "tell" would be "to tell." In grammar books and other places, the books will often list the verbs – put the verbs in their infinitive form.

When you're using the word "not," a negative phrase, in front of infinitives it's possible to put the word before the infinitive. So for example: "My mom told me not to go to the movie." "Not" is in front of the infinitive "to go." It's also possible, however to put the "not" between the "to" and the verb, so you could say, "My mother told me to not go to the movie." Notice that "not" is in between "to" and "go."

Some people think that putting the word "not," or any word in between the two words of the infinitive, "to" and the verb, is somehow not permitted. In fact, there are some traditional grammar books that say that you should never split the infinitive. To split the infinitive is to put a word or words in between "to" and the verb. This is the traditional rule, however it is not a rule that most good writers and most speakers continue to follow. I think the only people who worry about split infinitives now would probably be lawyers. Many lawyers are trained never to split the infinitive. But this is a rule that really isn't a rule at all. It is completely acceptable in formal and informal English to split the infinitive, so please don't worry about that. It's quite common, in fact it's probably just as common to use the split infinitive as it is to put the word in front of the infinitive.

One of the leading linguists in the United States, a man by the name of Steven Pinker, had a wonderful article about this in the New York Times earlier in 2009 about how this is certainly not a rule that needs to be followed or that we should necessarily follow.

Andrey (Andrey) from Ukraine wants to know the difference between the expressions "the heavens" and "heaven." Well, let's start first with the singular: "heaven."

"Heaven," according to many religious teachings, is a place where God is thought to live; it's a place where good people go after they die, and it's usually done in the singular. In the Christian religion, for example, you may hear someone talking about "going to heaven" – no plural there, just singular. However, you also may hear in English the term "the heavens" as a plural with an "s" at the end.



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“The heavens” can refer to a couple of different things. It can also refer to a place where God lives, or is thought to live, so sometimes it means the same as “heaven.” More commonly, though, when people say “the heavens,” they’re usually referring to the sky above the Earth, because the traditional idea is that God lives up above the Earth. So, someone says, “It must be wonderful to see a bird fly to the heavens,” they mean fly up into the sky, they don’t mean going to where God is thought to exist or live.

Sometimes, you’ll hear the expression “heavens,” without the definite article “the,” as a way of expressing surprise, similar to “goodness” or “oh, my.” Well, just like “goodness” and “oh, my,” “heavens” can be used to express surprise, but it is considered old fashioned nowadays, meaning it’s not an expression people use. Your grandmother might have used that expression, for example – if your grandmother spoke English, that is.

Finally, from Hong Kong comes a question from Icy (Icy). The question is about the differences in meaning of the expressions “kind of,” “sort of,” and “type of.” Well, this is a good question; these are all common expressions in English that are sometimes difficult to understand. Let’s start with “kind of.”

“Kind of” can mean a variety of different things. You could say, “A cat is a kind of animal,” it’s a member – it’s a type of a particular group. You could say that a motorcycle is a kind of transportation. “Kind of” can also mean a little bit. “I’m kind of hungry” means I’m a little bit hungry. I’m not really hungry, but I’m a little hungry – I’m kind of hungry. “I think that girl is kind of pretty.” She’s not beautiful; she’s not as beautiful as my wife, for example, but she’s kind of pretty. She’s, oh, she’s okay. Of course I wouldn’t actually say that about other women.

“Sort of” can also be used in the same way as “kind of.” In fact, in most cases the two can be used interchangeably, meaning one for the other. “Sort of” can also mean being member of a particular group: “What sort of game are you playing?” “What kind of game are you playing?” Both expressions mean the same. “Sort of” can also mean a little bit: “I’m sort of tired right now, I don’t want to go to the movies.” I’m sort of tired – I’m a little bit tired.

Finally, “type of” can also mean a member of a certain group: “What type of game are you playing?” “What sort of game are you playing?” “What kind of game are you playing?” All of these mean the same thing. Or: “A rose is a type of flower,” it’s a member of the group of plants we would call flowers.



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So, both “kind of” and “sort of” can mean a little. This is more informal than formal, however; you will hear that more in conversation than see it in writing. Sometimes we use “kind of” and “sort of” in expressing an opinion, but you want it to not offend or bother someone else. You want to soften, we would say, an opinion. So you might say, “I sort of prefer that you don’t smoke in my house.” You don’t want to just say to the person, “Don’t smoke in my house,” so you can soften that opinion – you can soften that statement by saying, “Well, I sort of don’t like it when people smoke in my house.” It’s a nicer way of expressing it. You can’t say “type of,” however, in this idea of softening an opinion, just “sort of” and “kind of.”

If you’re kind of tired of hearing other people’s questions answered and you want your own questions answered, well then, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. Remember we don’t have time to answer everyone’s question, but we’ll try to answer as many as we can.

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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