ENGLISH CAFÉ – 202

TOPICS

Ask an American: civility; sour versus tart; (something) is king; thorough versus comprehensive

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GLOSSARY

to get out in front – to try to be in front of the other people, so that they are behind oneself
* The fastest runner got out in front of the others within the first few seconds of the race.

tone of voice – the way that one speaks; the volume or how loud one is talking and the way that one's voice sounds
* His friendly tone of voice helps people relax and feel comfortable in his office.

on the go – busy; having to do a lot of things and not having time to rest or take a break between activities
* You must be exhausted after having been on the go all day.

slower-paced – with a slower speed; slower; without as many things to do
* I know that sometimes I complain about having too much work to do, but really I'd be bored in a slower-paced office.

courtesy – something nice and polite that you do for another person
* When we stay in someone else's home, it is a courtesy to keep our room neat and clean.

detrimental – negative; damaging; causing harm
* Buying an expensive new car had a detrimental effect on the family's finances.

put off by – annoyed or frustrated by something
* She was really put off by the way Chuck didn't offer to pay for the meal, especially after she paid for his the last time they went out.

captive audience – a group of people who cannot leave a place, so they have to listen to someone or something
* Whenever the professor has a captive audience, he talks for hours and hours, not paying attention to how bored his students are.

to take up – to use all of something and not leave anything for other people
* Don't you realize that you're taking up the entire hallway? Please move to one side so that other people can walk by.

to give way to – to let someone have room to do something, especially to pass
* Drivers must always give way to ambulances and fire trucks on the road.

analogue – something that is similar to something else
* The layers of an onion are often used as an analogue for understanding someone's personality, which can be complex and made up of many different things.

sour – with an acidic taste, like lemon, sometimes unpleasant
* If you forget to put the milk in the refrigerator, it might be sour the next morning.

tart – with a sharp but usually pleasant taste
* This jam is too tart, so we should add some more sugar.

(something) is king – used to describe something as the best, most important, powerful, or respected
* In this business, money is king.

thorough – complete; leaving nothing out
* They've made a thorough search of the entire house, but they still can't find Pilar's keys.

comprehensive – including a broad range of knowledge or ideas; complete
* The documentary provides a comprehensive overview of World War I.

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Etiquette Columns

Many American newspapers publish "advice columns," or short articles written by one person every day or every week on a particular topic, where people can ask questions and receive answers from experts. "Etiquette" (proper, polite behavior) columns are specifically about good behavior and civility. Two very well-known etiquette columns are those written by Emily Post and her family, and Miss Manners.

Emily Post wrote a book called Etiquette in 1922 that became very popular. Later, she began speaking on radio programs and writing newspaper columns. She created the Emily Post Institute in 1946, and it continues to do her work, although she "passed away" (died) in 1960. One of her granddaughters continued to write etiquette advice for a popular magazine, and now the wife of one of her great-grandsons is doing so. One of her great-grandsons writes an etiquette column for the Boston Globe newspaper, and he has also written several books on modern etiquette. Even two of her great-great granddaughters are now writing about etiquette for weddings and younger people.

Miss Manners is an advice column that has been written by a woman named Judith Martin since 1978. Manners are ways of behaving, and there can be good or bad manners. Her column is popular not only because she has a lot of knowledge about etiquette and manners, but also because she "admonishes" her readers for bad behavior, or tells them quite strongly that what they are doing is wrong. In 2005, President Bush gave her an important award, the National Humanities Medal, for her work.

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 202.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 202. 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. On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional premium courses in business and daily English that you will enjoy, I think. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and every current episode. The Learning Guide contains additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, comprehension quizzes – just about everything you need to improve your English.

On this Café, we're going to have another one of our Ask an American segments, where we listen to other native speakers talking at a normal rate of speech – a normal speed. We're going to listen to them and explain what they're talking about. Today we're going to talk about "civility" (civility), or polite behavior. As always, we'll also answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our topic on this Café is "civility," or behavior that is polite and respectful. Saying "please" and "thank you," giving your seat to an older person on a bus; these are examples of common civility. Yelling at people and being rude to people are the opposite of being civil. We expect people to be "civil," which is the adjective that comes from "civility," but unfortunately, as we know, many people are not.

One of the founders of the United States – our first president in fact, George Washington – was very interested in civility, and as a young man he had a list of 110 rules for being more civil. He didn't invent these rules himself; in fact they were taken from the late 16th century in France. But, he used these rules to try to be more civil – try to be nicer to people.

Today we're going to listen to a man talking about something called the Civility Project at the University of Virginia. Virginia is located in the eastern part of the U.S., in the central eastern coast of the United States. The students in the Civility Project are trying to create a list – a similar list of 110 rules describing what it means to be civil in modern times, in the 21st century. We'll listen first to Professor Theodore Crackel, a historian who came up with the idea for the Civility Project. He's going to give some examples of common rules of civility

that are true usually in most cultures. Let's listen first, and then we'll go back and explain what he says.

[recording]

"If someone else is speaking, be quiet and listen to them. If you are walking with other people, stay with them; don't try to get out in front. If you are trying to talk to other people, talk to them in a proper tone of voice, in a proper volume."

[end of recording]

Professor Crackel begins by saying that if someone else is speaking or talking, you should be quiet and listen to them. Don't begin talking if another person is already talking. This is an example of a rule of civility. He also says that if you're walking with other people, you should stay with them and don't try to get out in front. The phrase "to try to get out in front" means to try to be in front of the other people, to be walking in front of them so that they are behind you. It's much more polite, much more civil to walk with other people instead of trying to lead them. If you're walking with other people, that is, you should be walking normally side by side with them, at the same speed that they are walking. This would be especially important if you're a man with your wife or girlfriend; you don't want to be walking in front of her.

He says, also, that if you're trying to talk to other people, talk to them in a proper tone of voice. Your "tone of voice" is the way that you're speaking. It's the volume, it's how loud you're talking, and also the way that your voice sounds. You can have, for example, an angry tone of voice: "I can't believe you just said that!" (that's my angry tone of voice). Or you can have a friendly tone of voice: "I can't believe you just said that!" meaning they said something nice about you. The tone of voice completely changes the meaning even though the words are exactly the same.

Let's listen again to Professor Crackel as he gives his advice about being civil.

[recording]

"If someone else is speaking, be quiet and listen to them. If you are walking with other people, stay with them; don't try to get out in front. If you are trying to talk to other people, talk to them in a proper tone of voice, in a proper volume."

[end of recording]

Next the good professor is going to talk about how the world has changed recently, at least in his view. Civil behavior doesn't seem to be as important as it used to. Many people aren't interested in being civil, he says. Let's listen as he describes some of the reasons why this situation might have changed.

[recording]

"We seem to become increasingly busy, always on the go, doing things. It's interesting that technology has caused part of this. Life was a little slower-paced. Courtesies may have been a little bit easier to live by at that point in time, but life has gotten more complex in some ways and certainly more rushed. I think that has had a detrimental effect on our civility."

[end of recording]

Let's go back and explain what the professor says here: He begins by saying that we seem to become increasingly busy in life. We're always doing things and we're always on the go. The phrase "on the go" means busy, having a lot of things to do, not having time to rest or to take a break between activities. Last week there was one day when I was really on the go, because I had a to do a lot of work, clean the house, run some errands, make phone calls, and other things. I could say that I was on the go all day and I didn't have any time to rest until late at night.

Professor Crackel says that it's interesting that technology is one of the reasons we are always on the go. He says technology has caused part of this. Back in George Washington's time, back at the end of the 18th century, life was a little slower-paced. "Pace" (pace) is the rate or speed at which something happens. We say modern life is fast-paced, with many things to do; there are many things going on, life moves quickly. In the past, he says that life, perhaps, used to be a little slower-paced, and people had more time between activities to relax, think, and talk to other people. The professor says that courtesies may have been a little bit easier to live by in the past. "Courtesies" are things that are polite and nice that you do for another person. Saying "please" and "thank you" is an example of a courtesy. It is also a courtesy to send a thank-you note when someone gives you a gift. When life was slower-paced, then, there was more time for courtesies. He says courtesies may have been a little bit easier (a little easier) "to live by," meaning to actually do, to put into practice.

He then says life has gotten more complex in some ways and certainly more rushed. To become more "complex" means to be more complicated, there are more things that are happening. To be "rushed" means to be in a hurry. If someone says, "I'm really rushed right now," that means I have to go, I have to leave, or I have many things to do and I don't have time to talk to you. That's often how it's used, anyway.

The professors says that all of this has had a detrimental effect on our civility. "Detrimental" is a negative or damaging effect. For example, many of the things that humans do may have detrimental effects on our natural environment. Driving cars, like everyone does here in Los Angeles, has a detrimental effect on our air, because it pollutes the air. It sends things into the atmosphere – into the air that are not clean, and that we end up breathing. This is not healthy; this is a detrimental effect. That's the way it is to live in Los Angeles. Some people say that living in L.A. is detrimental to your health, meaning it is bad for your health. In the same way, today's faster pace of life has a detrimental effect on our civility, because we no longer have time for these courtesies anymore.

Let's listen to the professor one more time.

[recording]

"We seem to become increasingly busy, always on the go, doing things. It's interesting that technology has caused part of this. Life was a little slower-paced. Courtesies may have been a little bit easier to live by at that point in time, but life has gotten more complex in some ways and certainly more rushed. I think that has had a detrimental effect on our civility."

[end of recording]

Finally, the professors going to talk about things that happen now that he considers to be the opposite of civility. We could describe them as being "uncivil," not civil or rude. He'll give some examples, and then we'll, once again, go back and explain why he says.

[recording]

"I think everybody is a bit put off by people who carry on loud cell phone conversations in areas where you're sort of a captive audience to what they're talking about to someone else. Also, I see people walking down sidewalks taking up the entire sidewalk and really not wanting to give way to people coming the

other direction. It's sort of an analogue to the driving, too. They do the same thing on the road. They sometimes feel that wherever their car is on the road, that's their part of the road, and not giving consideration to people that are sharing the space with them."

[end of recording]

He begins by saying that he thinks everybody is a bit, or somewhat put off by people who carry on loud cell phone conversations. To be "put off" by someone or something means to be bothered, annoyed, or frustrated by that person or thing. For example, you might be put off by your co-worker (someone you work with) if he asks you to do some of his work for him. Or you might be put off if someone cuts in front of you while you're standing in line at the bank. To "cut in front" means to go in front of you even though you were there first. These are things that would put off many people.

He's saying that everybody is a bit put off by people who "carry on" (who have; who conduct) loud cell phone conversations in areas where you're sort of a captive audience. "You're sort of" means you are kind of a captive audience. A "captive" is a word we use to talk about someone who is held in one place and cannot move, sort of like a prisoner. Animals in a zoo could also be considered captive, because they're in cages – they're in places where they can't leave. A "captive audience" is a group of people who have to listen to you and don't have any choice. That's a common expression, "we're a captive audience," meaning we can't leave, we can't move, or we're forced to be here, somehow, and listen to you. In this case, he's talking about people who carry on loud cell phone conversations, for example, when you're at the airport waiting for a plane, or you're in a restaurant eating your meal, or your at a café having a couple of coffee. You're there in a public, and someone is carrying on a private conversation. Now, of course, you can leave; technically, it would be possible in some cases. But the idea is that you did not come there to listen to their phone conversation, and most people are put off by that sort of thing. I know I am; it's one of the things that drives me absolutely crazy!

I grew up in a time where there was something called a "phone booth" (booth). A phone booth is a small box that had a public phone that you could pay to make a phone call. But the phone booth was something that was closed; you couldn't usually hear very well, it was like your own little room. Now, with everyone having cell phones, there aren't really phone booths left, at least I haven't seen one in many years. The opposite problem now is that everyone carries on their phone conversations – their private conversations in front of everyone else. As

you can see, this is a particular annoyance that I have, something I'm put off by. But enough about me; let's go back to Professor Crackel.

He says that he sees other examples of uncivil behavior. He says, "I see people walking down sidewalks (walking on the sidewalk) taking up the entire sidewalk." The "sidewalk" is a part next to a street or a road where you can walk without having to walk in the street. So, he sees people walking down the sidewalk taking up the entire sidewalk. The phrase "to take up" here means to use all of something and not leave anything for other people. Your older sister, for example, might take up too much room in the bathroom that you share, not leaving anywhere for you to put your things. In the same way, some people take up the entire sidewalk; they don't leave room for anyone else to walk by them. Professor Crackel says that these people don't want to give way to people coming from the other direction. The phrase "to give way to (someone)" means to let someone have room to do something, especially to walk by or to pass by someone. If someone doesn't want to give way to another person on a sidewalk, he or she makes it impossible for the other person to pass without stepping off of the sidewalk, perhaps onto the grass or onto the street. So, this is another example of rude behavior. Certainly, I see this all the time here in Los Angeles; in most big cities I think this is quite common unfortunately nowadays.

"It's sort of an analogue to the driving," he says. "The driving" meaning the situation of driving. An "analogue" (analog or analogue) is something that is similar to something else. The way that you treat your employees might be an analogue to the way you treat your children, if you treat them in the same way. We have another word, "analogy," which comes from the same root, the same basic idea of something that is similar to something else. According to the good professor, the way that people take up the whole sidewalk and don't give way to other people is similar to – it's an analogue to the way that we drive, because people do the same thing on the road – on the street when they are in their cars. Again, this is especially true here in Los Angeles. People sometimes feel that wherever their car is on the road, that's their part of the road, even if it's on the wrong part of the road; they don't let other people or other cars share that space with them. It can be difficult to find a driver, for example when you are driving down the freeway or the highway, that will let you go in front of them – that will allow you to move in front of them – in front of their car. That's one of the problems of not having civility. The professor says that people are not giving consideration to other people. "To give consideration to" means to consider, to think about the other person, and to allow them to do what they want to do, not just what you want to do.

Let's listen to Professor Crackel give these examples one more time.

[recording]

"I think everybody is a bit put off by people who carry on loud cell phone conversations in areas where you're sort of a captive audience to what they're talking about to someone else. Also, I see people walking down sidewalks taking up the entire sidewalk and really not wanting to give way to people coming the other direction. It's sort of an analogue to the driving, too. They do the same thing on the road. They sometimes feel that wherever their car is on the road, that's their part of the road, and not giving consideration to people that are sharing the space with them."

[end of recording]

I think we can all learn to be little more civil in our lives, no matter where you live, no matter who you are.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Zeng Fang (Zeng Fang), and also we have the same question from Mark in Russia. I'm not sure where Zeng Fang is from. The question that they both have is the difference between "sour" and "tart." What is the difference between sour (sour) and tart (tart)? Both of these describe a kind of taste, something that you would sense in your mouth on your tongue.

"Sour" is food that has an acidic taste, like a lemon for example. Sometimes sour can be rather unpleasant. Sometimes sour describes food that has gone bad – food that has spoiled, especially a liquid such as milk. You could say, "I don't like this orange, it's too sour." Or, "This cream has gone sour." In talking about fruit, the opposite of "sour" is often "sweet." You could say, "These oranges are very sweet," they're not sour.

"Tart" can sometimes mean the same as "sour." Often however, tart, although it is acidic and a sharp taste, is considered pleasant. Not always, but often tart is not necessarily an unpleasant thing, whereas sour is almost always an unpleasant thing. "Tart" as an adjective can also mean sharp or insulting: "His tart remark hurt her feelings." That's not as common, however, a usage. "Tart" as a noun is a kind of pie, but it's a pie that doesn't have a top on it, what we would call a top "crust" (crust). A pie usually has crust made with, for example,

butter and flour, and then inside the pie you put fruit, for example if it were an apple pie. Normally, you also put a crust on the top of it to cover the pie, but a tart would be a pie that did not have a top crust on it.

Finally, there's an expression "to goes sour." When we say something "goes sour," we mean that has become worse; it has gotten worse; it has become bad; it's gone from a good situation to a bad situation. "My relationship with my brother went sour after I told him he couldn't use my car," for example.

Our next question comes from Assane (Assane) from Senegal. Assane wants to know what the expression "this thing is king" means in English. What does it mean to say that something "is king"?

Well, "king" is the head of a country (of a state; of a nation). Usually it's a title that is inherited, so if your father was king you could become king. It's what we call "royalty." If it is a woman, we call that person the "queen." But the expression "(something) is king" is used to describe something that is the best, the most important, the most powerful, the most respected. There is not an expression "(something) is queen," however, at least not with this meaning.

There's an old expression from American history that in the American South in the 19th century "cotton was king." The plant, cotton, was in most important plant in the agriculture of the American South, so you would say "cotton was king."

Finally Ibrahim (Ibrahim) in Venezuela would like to know the difference between "thorough" and "comprehensive." Both of these can mean, roughly, the same thing. "Thorough" means complete, leaving nothing out. "The doctor did a thorough job when he looked at me (when he examined me)." He examined every part of me; he was very thorough. "Comprehensive" means complete, but the idea is more of a broad range of knowledge or ideas. "The encyclopedia is a comprehensive collection of information," it contains all of the important information that you might need. You might say, "I need comprehensive insurance," I need something that takes care of everything, that is complete.

The word "thorough" is usually used to describe a task or a job; "comprehensive" is more common in formal, business related, or technical situations. If everything, for example, is in a document – in the pieces of paper that you are giving someone, such as your boss – if everything is included, you would say it's comprehensive; you probably wouldn't say it's thorough.

If you make “thorough” into an adverb by adding an “ly” at the end, it means very, in a complete way: “I am thoroughly happy with my gift that I got from my mother.” I am completely happy – I’m thoroughly happy. You wouldn’t say “comprehensively happy,” however.

So the differences depend on the context; it’s hard to give an exact rule for every case however.

If you have a question or comment, we’ll try to give you a thorough answer here on the English Café. You can email us at eslpod@eslpod.com

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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