



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

TOPICS

Ask an American: The Cherokee Language; regard versus consider; remember versus memorize; knock on wood

GLOSSARY

tense – a form of a verb that indicates or shows time, or whether an action is complete

* Why is “ate” the past tense of “to eat”?

tone – the way one’s voice sounds, and especially how high or low a voice is

* Your voice has such a beautiful, deep tone. Have you considered becoming a professional singer?

inflection – the way that one’s voice goes up or down when speaking

* The phrase, “Do you mind?” can have two different meanings depending on your inflection.

bits and pieces – a little bit at a time, or with many different pieces of information coming from many different places

* The intelligence agency receives bits and pieces of information from people all over the world, and uses them to try to identify threats to national security.

from the heart – with a lot of feeling and emotion

* Her books are very popular because she writes from the heart.

to provide for – to give someone, especially a child, the things that he or she needs

* Ava and her husband have more children than they can provide for.

trustworthy – can be trusted; reliable and honest; dependable

* Are you sure he’s trustworthy? I’d be worried about giving him our bank account information.

foster – related to temporary care for a child, especially when there are problems in the child’s family home and his or her relatives cannot care for the child

* As children, we were put in foster care while our mother recovered from her addiction to drugs.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

as if – a phrase used to talk about something that didn't really happen, but seems to have happened

* He says he's exhausted and he's acting as if he didn't sleep at all last night, even though I know he slept for at least seven hours.

to regard – to pay attention to; to look at something without looking away; to be evaluated as; to think of someone in a specific way

* Many people regard Yellowstone National Park as one of the most fascinating natural areas in the United States.

to consider – to think about something or someone carefully; to look at someone or something carefully and thoughtfully

* They're carefully considering whether they should buy a home or continue to rent.

to remember – to have or keep an image or idea in one's mind of something or someone from the past, to cause something to come back into one's mind

* Do you remember the time when we stayed up all night baking cookies?

to memorize – to learn something so well that one is able to remember it perfectly

* How many poems have you memorized?

knock on wood – an idiom that expresses the hope that a good thing will happen or continue to occur, or that a bad thing will not happen.

* Knock on wood, we'll have good weather for the outdoor wedding this weekend.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Artificial Languages Created for TV & Movies

While the Cherokee and other groups of people “struggle” (work hard under difficult circumstances) to preserve their dying languages, other people are creating new languages for television and movies. Movie producers hire “linguists” (people whose job is to study languages) to create new languages for their characters to speak.

The movie Avatar is about a group of creatures called the Na’vi who live on another planet and speak the Na’vi language. A linguist at the University of Southern California named Paul Frommer created the Na’vi language, developing vocabulary, grammar, and more. It has taken him several years and the language now has about 1,000 words. He hopes it will continue to grow if and when Avatar becomes a series with additional movies.

The TV show Star Trek also created its own language, Klingon. Klingon was created by a linguist named Marc Okrand and it has become very popular among Star Trek fans (people who like Star Trek very much). Serious fans study Klingon and speak it with each other. The Elvish language created in by J.R.R. Tolkein for his series of books, The Lord of the Rings, is another example of a language that has become popular among fans.

Obviously many people enjoy studying these “artificial” (fake; not real) languages, and they are a good “exercise” (practice for academic purposes) in understanding grammar and syntax. However, some people criticize the amount of time and energy spent to create and study these artificial languages. They believe that the same time and energy could better be spent studying dying languages and helping communities preserve their linguistic “heritage” (things that are passed down from one generation to the next).



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 236.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 236. 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 I think you will enjoy. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and all of our current episodes. The Learning Guide contains lots of additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, and a comprehension quiz on what you're listening to now.

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 are talking about. Today we're going to talk about the way that the Cherokee, a group of Native Americans, or American Indians, are trying to preserve their language by teaching it to their children. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

We have an unusual topic for today's Ask an American; it's about a very specific but important issue among the Native American, or American Indians, those who were here in the land we call the United States long before the European colonists arrived. This is the issue of language preservation. "To preserve" means to keep, to make sure it doesn't disappear. This is actually in many Native American communities a question of language revitalization. "To revitalize" is to bring new life to something. The basic problem is that many of the Native American tribes – a "tribe" is a group of, in the United States, American Indians – many of the tribes no longer speak the language. This is, in part, because the U.S. government, in many cases, forced them to give up, or abandon, the language and they weren't allowed to speak it. But in recent years there has been an interest in revitalizing, or reviving, the language in many of these tribes.

Today we are talking specifically about the Cherokee, or a group of Native Americans who live in Oklahoma and North Carolina mostly. Their "ancestors,"



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

the people who came before them, spoke this Cherokee language; unfortunately very few Cherokee children speak the language today.

We're going to start by listening to a quote from Renissa Walker, who is in charge of the language, history, and cultural preservation program for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians – the eastern group of Cherokee Indians. We'll listen first as she talks about the Cherokee language. Try to understand as much as you can, and then we'll go back and explain what she said.

Let's listen:

[recording]

It's a very, very, very difficult language, because in Cherokee, there are so many verb tenses and then you have tones and inflections.

[end of recording]

She says that Cherokee is a very difficult language to learn, and she gives three reasons why she thinks this is true. First, she says that Cherokee has many verb tenses. A verb "tense" (tense) is a form of the verb that indicates or shows time, or whether an action has been completed. For example, you probably know in English we often use terms like the present tense: I do, I go, I am; the past tense: I did, I went, I was; and the future tense: I will do, I will go, I will be. Renissa says that Cherokee has many tenses, and she thinks this makes it difficult to learn, or acquire, the language.

She also says that Cherokee has many tones and inflections. These are words that we use to describe some languages. "Tone" is the way your voice sounds, whether it is high or low. I can speak in a high tone, like this, or a low tone, like this. I can also speak in a sad or happy tone. Many languages, such as Chinese, are tonal languages, meaning the meaning of the word depends on how you pronounce it – how the tone is. "Inflection" is the way that one's voice goes up or down when speaking. For example, to ask a question in English, the inflection usually goes up at the end of the sentence: "Are you having a good time?" We don't say, "Are you having a good time?" That's not the normal form of a question. So if I change the inflection and my voice goes down, it no longer sounds like a question.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

Renissa is explaining that Cherokee, she thinks, is difficult to learn because it has many verb tenses, tones, and inflections. I don't quite agree with Renissa about this. Languages are not more or less difficult because of the different elements in them. Languages are more or less difficult to pick up, or to acquire, depending on how much of the language is comprehensible to you – how much you can understand. If you speak a language such as Spanish and you are trying to acquire, or pick up, Italian it will be easier for you because of the similarities. It will make what you are listening to – the language, the message – more comprehensible, more understandable, so you will probably pick up Italian more quickly. However, the important thing is the comprehension. If you can present language in such a way that it is comprehensible, it doesn't matter how many verb tenses or inflections or tones it may have as long as you're getting lots of what we call comprehensible input – comprehensible language. But that's for another Café!

Let's go back, then, and listen to Renissa's quote one more time:

[recording]

It's a very, very, very difficult language, because in Cherokee, there are so many verb tenses and then you have tones and inflections.

[end of recording]

Next, we'll listen to someone who is trying to pick up Cherokee as an adult. This is the voice of Michell Hicks; he's the principal "chief," or leader of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Let's listen:

[recording]

My grandma was fluent. My dad understands. He speaks some, but he only taught in bits and pieces, and so that's how I learned. And I'm still learning. I'm not that fluent but, uh, I know a lot of phrases, I know a lot of words.

[end of recording]

You'll notice that Michell's English has a very Southern accent. He's talking about learning Cherokee as an adult. He starts by saying, "My grandma was



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

fluent.” “My grandma” is my grandmother. When we say someone is “fluent,” we mean they can speak the language just like someone who grew up with the language, like a native speaker, or close to a native speaker.

Michell says that his dad understands; this is actually quite a common pattern. The grandmother speaks and understands Cherokee, the father understands things but doesn’t speak it very much, and the son doesn’t understand or speak it. This is why by the third generation, when an immigrant family comes over to, say, the United States, usually by the time of the grandchildren, the grandchildren have pretty much lost their family language. Not always, but it does happen quite, quite commonly.

Getting back, then, to Michell, he says, “My dad understands. He speaks some (he speaks some Cherokee), but he only taught bits and pieces.” The expression “bits and pieces” means a little bit at a time, or many different pieces of information coming from many different places. When you learn something in bits and pieces, you’re not getting the whole picture; you’re not getting everything. Someone says, “Do understand what he said?” and you say, “I could only understand him in bits and pieces,” a little here, a little there, but not everything. Michell says that’s how he learned Cherokee, but he also says, “I’m still learning. I’m not fluent, but I know lot of phrases,” he says, “I know lot of words.”

Let’s go back and listen to Michell one more time:

[recording]

My grandma was fluent. My dad understands. He speaks some, but he only taught in bits and pieces, and so that’s how I learned. And I’m still learning. I’m not that fluent but, uh, I know a lot of phrases, I know a lot of words.

[end of recording]

Earlier we listened to Renissa, now we’re going to listen to Renissa’s mother, Myrtle Driver. She speaks Cherokee fluently. We’re going to listen first to her speak a little Cherokee, so what you’re going to hear in the beginning of this quote is someone speaking the Cherokee language. I don’t speak Cherokee, so I can’t translate. After that, she’ll start speaking English, and that’s what we’ll talk about.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

Let's listen:

[recording]

I think the most important part of being Cherokee is the language. When I speak my own language, I'm speaking from the heart. When I'm speaking English, I'm speaking from here.

[end of recording]

When Myrtle starts speaking English, she says that part of being Cherokee is the language. Part of being in the Cherokee tribe, having a Cherokee identity, I suppose, is the language that the Cherokee speak, or used to speak. She says that when she speaks her own language, Cherokee, she's speaking from the heart. Obviously she doesn't mean that the words are literally coming from her heart – they're coming from her mouth and throat. The phrase "from the heart" means with a lot of feeling and emotion. Very often, we try to think carefully about what we're going to say; we think we're being logical. But when we're very passionate about something, when we have strong feelings about something, we speak from the heart, we are sharing our true thoughts and feelings. This is what happens to Myrtle when she speaks Cherokee: she speaks from the heart.

She says, "When I'm speaking English, I'm speaking from here," and she points to her head. Although she speaks English, then, it isn't what expresses, or what she uses to express her deepest feelings and emotions.

Let's listen to her quote one more time:

[recording]

I think the most important part of being Cherokee is the language. When I speak my own language, I'm speaking from the heart. When I'm speaking English, I'm speaking from here.

[end of recording]

Myrtle, who, remember, is the mother of Renissa, who we heard earlier, now explains that although she speaks Cherokee fluently, she wasn't able to teach her daughter. The reason is that she sent her daughter to live with a non-



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

Cherokee family – a foster family. Let’s hear her talk about that and then we’ll go back and explain.

[recording]

In order for me to go to school so that I could provide for my children, I had to put her with a trustworthy foster home, and she liked it, even though I wanted her to know, you know, that she was Cherokee.

[end of recording]

She starts by saying that in order for me to go to school so that I could provide for my children, I had to put her (her daughter) with a trustworthy foster home. To “provide for” someone means to be able to give someone, especially a child, the things that he or she needs. Providing for a child means giving him or her a home, food, clothing. This is what most parents, of course, try to do for their children. Myrtle needed to get an education, but she couldn’t do that and still provide for her children so she decided to put her daughter, temporarily, in a trustworthy foster home. Something that is “trustworthy” (one word) is something that can be trusted, something that you can have faith in. A trustworthy person is someone who is honest and reliable. Myrtle put her daughter in a trustworthy foster home. A “foster (foster) home” is a home where a child lives temporarily, especially if his or her own parents cannot take care of him, or that the government decides that the parents are unable to take care of the child, they may be placed in foster home. We talked about foster care in English Café 204, so you can listen to that episode to find out more about how foster care works here in the United States.

So Myrtle put her daughter in a foster home and says that her daughter liked it, but the daughter didn’t learn to speak Cherokee while living with her foster parents because the foster parents did not speak Cherokee themselves. Myrtle says that of course she wanted her daughter to know that she was Cherokee, and have that Cherokee identity.

Let’s listen one more time:

[recording]



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

In order for me to go to school so that I could provide for my children, I had to put her with a trustworthy foster home, and she liked it, even though I wanted her to know, you know, that she was Cherokee.

[end of recording]

Our final quote also comes from Myrtle. Myrtle wanted Cherokee children to learn to speak and read the Cherokee language, so she translated a book by Charles Frasier called Thirteen Moons. The “moon” is what is up in the sky; it goes around the earth. The book, however, is about the forced migration of the Cherokee people in 1838. That is, it’s about the way that the Cherokee people, who were living in the southeastern part of the United States, were forced by the U.S. government to move to the central part of the United States, particularly to the State of Oklahoma. This is a famous and unfortunate part of American history, how the American Indians, or Native Americans, were treated. So, this is a book for children to talk about that event. Let’s hear her explain why she decided to translate this book into Cherokee.

[recording]

He wrote it as if he experienced it. He wrote about some of the things that actually happened to the Cherokee people. And now we have our immersion children that will one day read it. And they’ll read it in the Cherokee way, as if grandma were sitting there telling them what actually happened.

[end of recording]

She begins by saying the author, Charles Frasier, wrote the book as if he had experienced it. The phrase “as if” is used to talk about something that didn’t really happen, but seems to have happened. So an actor, for example, who is playing the part of Abraham Lincoln isn’t really Abraham Lincoln; he’s talking at and acting as if he were Abraham Lincoln. So, Charles Frasier didn’t experience the forced migration of the Cherokee people himself, but he writes as if he had, meaning the book seems to be written by someone who was on this forced march – this forced migration.

“He wrote,” Myrtle says, “about some of the things that actually happened (during this time). And now we have our immersion children that will one day read it.” “Immersion” is the idea – the name given to schools that have children come in and learn a different language; everything is done in the second language.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

There are many immersion programs throughout the world; all lot of them try to do this – try to teach another language by immersing. “To immerse” means literally to put under water. But here, the idea is that you are completely surrounded by the language, and that’s what they are doing for these young Cherokee children.

Myrtle says the children will read it – this book, when they can – in the Cherokee way, as if grandma were sitting there telling them what actually happened. Notice again we have the phrase “as if.” Grandma isn’t actually going to be there telling them the story because they are reading it in the book, but it’s as if – imaginary idea – as if grandma were actually there reading the story – telling the story to the children.

Let’s listen one more time:

[recording]

He wrote it as if he experienced it. He wrote about some of the things that actually happened to the Cherokee people. And now we have our immersion children that will one day read it. And they’ll read it in the Cherokee way, as if grandma were sitting there telling them what actually happened.

[end of recording]

That’s the story, then, of the language preservation and revitalization that is taking place in some Native American tribes and communities here in the U.S.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Klaus (Klaus) in Germany, of course. Klaus wants to know the difference between “regard” and “consider.” For example: “Do you regard him as a good swimmer?” versus “Do you consider him a good swimmer?”

“Regard” means to – or can mean to pay attention to something, to look at something. “She regarded the painting.” That’s one meaning, not a very common one. A more common meaning that I think Klaus is interested in is to be evaluated as, to think of someone in a special way: “The police regard that man to be a suspect,” or “They regard him as a suspect.” It’s more common to use



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

“as” after this expression “to regard.” “I regard my brother as a very good hockey player.”

“Consider” can also be used in this way; “consider” can also mean to think about someone in a particular way: “I consider my brother to be a good hockey player.” Notice we don’t use “as” in this particular use of “consider.” “Consider” can also mean that you are thinking about something carefully: “I am considering my options.” I’m thinking about them carefully. You could also say, “I’m considering going to Jamaica *mon.*” I’m considering it – I’m thinking about it.

Our next question comes from Eun Mi (Eun Mi) in South Korea. Eun Mi wants to know the difference between “remember” and “memorize.”

To “remember” something is to have an idea in your mind of something or someone from the past. It could be a person, it could be a piece of information, and you are able to come up with that information right now – you’re able to think of that information. “I remembered all of the answers when I took the test (or the exam).” I was able to go back into my memory and remember them – and think of them now and use them.

“Memorize” means to learn something so well that you are able to remember it perfectly. Usually we use the verb “to memorize” when we’re talking about specific words or numbers or facts. Sometimes young children in grade school in the U.S. will memorize all of the capitals – the state capitals in the U.S. for all 50 states. They memorize them – they repeat them to themselves, they go over and over them until they know them.

So, “memorize” is what you do, in a way, so you can remember something later. They’re not the same; you can’t use them the same. “Memorizing” is an act of learning, and “remembering” is an act of, we would say, “recalling,” bringing to mind again.

Finally, William (William) in China wants to know the meaning of the idiom, or expression, “to knock on wood.”

“Knock on wood” is an idiom that we use when we are hoping that something good will happen, or something bad will not happen that; it hasn’t happened yet. We’re expressing a hope – we’re expressing a desire, a want. For example: “I have not been sick this year with the flu, knock on wood.” The “knock on wood” means I hope I don’t get sick in the future either. Or, “I’m going to ask my



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 236

girlfriend to marry me. Knock on wood that she'll say yes." I'm hoping that she will say yes.

"To knock" means to, usually, take your hand and hit a hard object. We talk about knocking on the door; you make a sound on the door so that the person inside will open it for you. "To knock on wood" means to take your hand and hit wood, a type of material that comes from trees. You may actually see somebody take their hand and find a piece of wood and knock on it as they're talking to you to demonstrate – to illustrate this expression.

It actually comes from, I think, very ancient, what we would call superstitious belief that there were spirits – there were these define elements that lived in the tree. When you were in danger, then, you would go to the tree – the thickest part, the bottom of the tree and you would ask the spirit inside for help. And knocking on the wood was a way of, I suppose, getting their attention. However, I could be wrong about that explanation. Knock on wood I haven't completely given you the wrong information!

Remember you can email us if you have a question or comment. You can memorize our email address, it's not too difficult: eslpod@eslpod.com. We will consider all of your questions; we regard all of our listeners as being very important to us, of course!

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

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan and Dr. Lucy Tse, copyright 2010 by the Center for Educational Development.