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English Revisited:

Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

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be it: sei es

cutlery: e.g. knife, fork,
spoon

proverbial: well-known

melting pot: many cultures
come together to form
something different, in this
case the American culture

steadfastly: without chang-
ing your opinions or ways

cherish: consider very
important

at the behest of: *command
or an urgent request (used
here somewhat humorously)*

Editorial

In this day and age, we are exposed on a daily basis to many different cultures and cultural influences, be it on the subway, in the grocery store or at the University. Culture pervades so many aspects of our lives that we often do not notice subtle differences. In fact, many a thing can be learned simply by observing others' table manners or everyday eating customs. Did you know, for example, that you can often tell an American from a Brit by the way they hold their cutlery? Read on to find out more. In the proverbial melting pot of the United States, there are a number of cultures that have steadfastly held firm against the march of time as well as the

pressure to assimilate. One of these cultures, the Amish culture, was the focus of a couple of interviews we posted as videos in a previous issue of our newsletter. This time round we will take a closer look at this Amish culture and what they value and cherish. Finally, at the behest of our readers we have pointed out in our grammar section when to use gerunds (the *-ing* form) instead of infinitives (the *to* form) in English. Sadly for our readers, there are few hard and fast rules here. Often, you have to learn one by one the expressions that trigger the gerund or an infinitive.

Upcoming Issues :

- academic writing
- modal verbs
- letters of recommendation

John Nixon



Comments

Do you have any ideas for
future issues?
Please contact us.

Subscription



Currently on Offer

If you are interested in any of the following, please **contact us**.

Free Workshop in November

Socializing and Networking in Academic Settings: Monday, Nov. 28 (9:00 to 12:15)
Registration online at
https://www.sz.uni-stuttgart.de/formulare/workshops-2016/SocNet_fall16
Workshops for academic staff for 2017 will be advertised in December.

Free Lunchtime English for University Employees (Topic: Presenting in English)

Are you interested in practicing your English in an informal setting over lunch? Then join us for our first lunchtime get-together on **Friday, December 16 from 12:30 to 13:30** in the University Library (downtown campus). Everyone should bring his or her own lunch. We will provide a brief input on presentations and the rest of the time will be spent speaking English in a relaxed and enjoyable environment.

- **Editing Service and Coaching:** Do you have a paper, abstract or other document that needs to be looked over by a native English speaker before it is published? If so, we can help.

Grammar

TO BE OR NOT TO BE: THE -ING FORM

The most common goodwill phrase used to end any type of English letter is I look forward to hearing from you. And here we also find one of the most common grammar mistakes that German speakers make: hardly ever is the correct -ing form (hearing) used. Instead, Germans tend to opt wrongly for an infinitive structure. Why the mix-up?

In *look forward to* the *to* is not part of an infinitive as most learners think, but is a preposition and belongs to the verbal phrase *look forward*. In the above-mentioned sentence you might also write *I look forward to your reply*. If you now want to replace the noun (reply) with a verb, you need to use a gerund (hearing), which is a noun formed from a verb.

There are many more examples of VERB + ADJECTIVE/ADVERB/NOUN + PREPOSITION + -ING FORM in both everyday spoken English and academic/business writing.

The report **argued against** changing the law.
I **do apologise for** being late. (*do* is used for emphasis)
The company won't **charge you for** using the gym.
In Britain you'll need to **get used to** driving on the left.

Don't mix up *be / get used to* and *used to*. The latter needs an infinitive and refers to something that was the case in the past, but is not now:
I used to drive on the left when I lived in Sussex.
Als ich in Sussex lebte, fuhr ich auf der linken Seite,

The new employee is **excellent at taking the minutes**.
People sometimes have **difficulty in** reading my writing.
You also find *difficulty reading*, i.e. without the preposition *in*.

A great number of verbs and expressions are followed by an -ing form although they have no preposition.
It is not worth waiting for a bus at this time of night.
Would you mind closing the door?

Job interview questions:
Why are you considering leaving your current job?
Could you imagine working part-time?
Do you like / enjoy making small talk with your colleagues?

In British English you use the -ing form after *like / love* if you want to express that you enjoy that activity. You would use an infinitive to express that

you find an activity "wise" but not necessarily enjoyable: *I like to pay bills on time*. In American English you can use both the infinitive and the gerund to express enjoyment.

Both possible?

So far, so good. A much more difficult case is that of a handful of verbs which can be followed by both the -ing form and an infinitive, however, with a difference of meaning.

1) Remember/forget/regret

doing something

▶ I did something and now I remember/have forgotten/regret it. The action happens before the remembering/forgetting/regretting.

to do something

▶ The remembering/forgetting/regretting happens before the action.

Examples

I clearly remember handing in my assignment before the weekend. I'm absolutely sure I did it.
Please remember to close the windows before you leave.

I will never forget meeting the Queen. That was the most remarkable day of my life.

I completely forgot to buy any coffee. So sorry.

I now regret saying what I said. It was a stupid mistake.
The company regrets to inform you that they are unable to offer you the job.

2) Go on

doing something

▶ Carry on doing the same thing.

to do something

▶ Do something new.

The CEO went on working all night.

The director went on to say that the company would end the fiscal year in the black.

We hope you have **enjoyed reading** this article and are **looking forward to learning** some more -ing patterns in a future newsletter.

Glossary

To be or not to be: Probably the most famous Shakespearean quotation (*Hamlet, Act III, Scene I*). Here it refers to grammar: whether an infinitive or an ing- form should be used.

In business correspondence **I look forward to hearing from you** is more formal than *I am looking forward to hearing from you*.

to take the minutes: to write down what is said at a meeting (*Protokoll führen*)

to be in the black: to make a profit; the opposite is *to be in the red*

Sylvia Grade



Intercultural Communication

Dinner Beyond the Emily Post of Etiquette

Eating and socializing over a meal seem to be the simplest things on earth you may think. However, in reality there is hardly a better opportunity to really put one's foot in it as you are not only what you eat but also how you eat.

A wonderful scene illustrating this is the dinner scene in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhtjwGZlaew>) Here the daughter of a Chinese-American family introduces her white Anglo-Saxon fiancé to her family. When meeting the mother he pays her a compliment saying, "Boy, something smells good. Seems we have come to the right house?" Though this icebreaker goes down well, what follows becomes an intercultural disaster, as the American lacks the essential information necessary for the Chinese context. Being American, he says what springs to mind, is very direct with his comments and takes a comment by the chef berating her best dish literally. In a high-context culture, like the Chinese, where communication is implicit, it is an implicit request to praise the chef when s/he says that the food is not good. In a low-context setting, however, the "not salty enough" is taken literally. A man of action, the American prospective son-in-law rectifies the situation by pouring oodles of soy sauce over the dish, thus killing its subtle and delicate flavours and behaving like the proverbial bull in a China shop.

From where you sit down, when, and next to whom, from how much food you take, who takes food first to how often you have to decline when food is offered to you, there are many unwritten rules in high-context cultures that you have to adhere to. That is not to say that it is a piece of cake to behave correctly in low-context settings like the anglophone USA and Britain.

While many table manners are similar, when it comes to handling cutlery and where to put one's hands, there are differences: Brits have their fork in their left hand at all times (when cutting, the prongs or tines are turned down) and cut with the knife in their right hand. Americans, however, start this way but change over when they do not need the knife anymore. Also known as the star-spangled fork-flip, freedom fork-over, homeland handoff or simply cut-and-switch, swapping forks from the left to the right hand came into vogue in 18th century France. By mid-19th century the fashion was dying out in trendsetting France and everywhere else and only the Americans stuck with it.¹

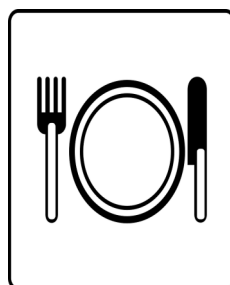
When the fork has been swapped, the left hand becomes free. Americans in this case put it in their laps or rest their arms on the edge of the table and tuck their left hand underneath it. To a Brit this is irritating, as one's hands (but never the elbows) should be above the table at all times.

These examples illustrate that differences can be subtle and that when it really matters whether you have to interact in a high- or low-context culture, it could help to engage a cultural coach to role-play a dinner situation.

In a low-context culture communicators assume that they share a relatively small body of knowledge and have only some reference points. There is a low level of shared context or the insecurity that the level of shared context could be too low to enable successful communication. For this reason people are explicit and communicate in a straightforward way, ask questions and summarize to make sure that they are talking about the same thing. Communicators of low-context cultures (such as Germany) may come across as very direct and at times as rather blunt and unrefined. To them, you should call a spade a spade and "honest people speak their mind".

In contrast, in a high-context culture the shared body of context is assumed to be rather substantial, which is why communication becomes rather implicit or layered and low-context communicators might feel that their high-context counterparts are "pussyfooting around the problem" or beating around the bush, when they actually only want to maintain harmony.

Coming from a low-context culture, you can expect to encounter many unwritten rules when it comes to sharing a meal. Avoid pitfalls by finding out about them in advance.



Dr. Ines Böhner

Glossary

Emily Post:

American Author (1872-1960) famous for writing about etiquette.

put one's foot in it: to do sth.

embarrassing (US: put your foot in your mouth)

oodles: a lot (colloquial)

behave like a bull in a China shop: have no manners

be a piece of cake: be easy

prongs/tines: pointed ends of a fork

blunt: (here) very honest at the risk of being offensive

call a spade a spade: das Kind beim Namen nennen

beat around the bush: um den heißen Brei herumreden

¹Mark Vanhoenacker, "Put a Fork in It," *Slate Magazine* 26 June 2013: http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culturebox/2013/06/fork_and_knife_use_americans_need_to_stop_cutting_and_switching.single.html

Vocabulary

Amish Ordnung

Many misconceptions surround the Amish community in North America, which is not surprising given their propensity to keep to themselves. For example, many believe that the Amish never use electricity or only get around by horse and buggy, which is not entirely true.

The basic principle of Amish living revolves around the rejection of what they would refer to as “worldly” influences, which are seen as distractions from their values of spirituality, community welfare, and pacifism. Though these fundamental tenets are shared by all Amish, who can be found throughout the United States and even in Canada, one can note differences in what is allowed from group to group. Communities are centered around individual churches, the heart of their society. Each community decides on guidelines for their particular group’s way of life, or Ordnung. In order to take effect, the decisions must be reached unanimously.

Electricity is, in fact, avoided in most cases. It is a luxury that contradicts the Amish ideal of simple, hard work to build character (as in the Amish proverb, “Say nix and saw wood”). Furthermore, it can lead to too many temptations such as radio and television, which are sources of undesirable outside influences.

However, exceptions can be made. Many Amish homes use batteries, natural gas, or diesel generators to run a number of devices like washing machines, refrigerators, flashlights, or electric fences for livestock. Most recently, some Amish homes and businesses have begun to use solar panels. Though they produce electricity, this form of technology remains off the public power grid and therefore adheres to the Amish desire to stay separate from modern society. Many Amish businesses use telephones and even answering machines. The reasoning behind such an exception is that the technology is outside of the home and it only serves a practical purpose; it is not a source of entertainment but rather something intended for commerce.

The most common modes of transportation for the Amish are bicycles, horses, and buggies, but sometimes it is necessary to travel farther distances. The Amish do not own cars, but they are willing to travel in one if a non-Amish person (who they call “English”) is the driver and the purpose of the trip is practical. Likewise, they will shop at any type of store, modern or Amish, if there is something they need there. If there is an emergency, they can even be flown by helicopter to a hospital, which is extremely expensive since they do not own health insurance. In such instances, the community will call upon neighboring communities and gather the money necessary for the flight and hospital bill. The Amish have established relationships with certain hospitals, such as the renowned Cleveland Clinic, who charge them less since they pay “out of pocket” (on their own, without insurance).

Each Amish community grapples with the question of what modern conveniences they should allow. As long as they retain their fundamental way of life, then some forms of technology are accepted, resulting in a community which is more multifaceted than many “English” people realize.

Dr. Joseph Michaels

Click [here](#) for a short video of an Amish man who explains why and how he uses solar panels in his business.

Dr. Joseph Michaels

Glossary

misconceptions:
a wrong idea

propensity:
natural tendency

buggy:
a four-wheeled structure for transportation

welfare:
the state of being healthy, happy, and successful

tenets:
beliefs, doctrines

unanimously:
agreed to by everyone

nix: Amish English for “nothing”

livestock:
animals used as food or labor

adheres: to follow

renowned:
well known and highly respected

grapple:
struggle

retain: keep

multifaceted:
diverse