



Hi everyone and welcome to the Clover English podcast, the podcast dedicated to helping you improve your English while learning about Irish culture. If you're new to this podcast you might be wondering how can listening to this podcast help my English? Well, apart from practicing your listening skills these episodes come with full PDF guides which include:

- The full transcript of the show
- Vocabulary explanations
- An extra article
- And a grammar explanation

These are all available for download from my website. However, these won't be free forever so make sure to download them now for free while you still can! I'll leave the link in the show notes.

So in today's show I'll be sharing some top Irish slang with you. As you may know slang is informal language and language that is characteristically more metaphorical like idioms. Now, the Irish are **renowned**¹ for our verbal abilities. In fact there is one expression that is highly associated with the Irish which is that we have the gift of the gab which means that we are very skilled speakers. Perhaps actually we speak too much I think that's fair to say also.

This reputation is strongly associated with the oral tradition of Irish culture. The oral tradition in this sense means our tradition for oral story-telling and folklore which has really been a **cornerstone**² of Irish culture. To illustrate this point, memoirist Frank McCourt gave us some insight into this culture in his extremely successful book "**Angela's Ashes**³". In one chapter when he describes being in the hospital as a young boy, he tells us that one of the cleaners would go to the pub and learn poems and come back to the hospital recite them to him while he was in bed. The cleaner didn't know how to read or write so he had to depend upon this oral tradition **in order to**⁴ learn the poems. So I just think that's a really great example of the oral tradition in Ireland and that was relatively modern that book...you know speaking about childhood

¹ Famous for

² Something that is cornerstone is iconic or representative

³ Check out this amazing memoir by Frank McCourt (a MUST READ Irish book)

⁴ Discourse marker showing relation

in like the 1950s in Ireland. Ok, so what about slang? That was just a little overview of the oral tradition in Ireland but what about slang?

So first of all, learning slang words is especially important when you are visiting or living in a country. Not only will it help you better understand what people are saying to you (which is important!) but if you use regional slang in your speech correctly, it's also a great way to connect with natives of that area. It shows that you're really making an effort to integrate yourself into that culture. Now it's true that most people will try not to use slang a lot if they know you're foreign, but many times people don't even realize they are using it because the slang is so **embedded**⁵ in their everyday speech.

One such example from the north of Ireland is the use of wee (now that is wee spelt with two es by the way it is not the third person plural pronoun 'we'). So this wee with two es ...oh my God this is like I don't know there's too much rhyme going on here but.. this word 'we' used in the north of Ireland and Scotland and is usually added before a noun. So, for example;

"Would you like a wee cup of tea?" "Would you like a wee cup of tea?" So you can hear that 'wee' before cup. So even though this 'wee' is a diminutive it doesn't actually refer to the size of the cup in this sentence. Saying "would you like a wee cup of tea?" is the same as saying "would you like a cup of tea?" It doesn't really have any specific meaning in this sentence and it's usually used in this way. I remember one friend of mine who was Spanish, he was living in Belfast for a while told me he didn't understand why everyone was using the third-person pronoun "we" every five minutes when they spoke. He didn't realize that it wasn't the same word and that it was actually a diminutive. So, if you go to the north of the country or Scotland actually, you're likely to hear this 'wee' a LOT. The other day I saw a Twitter thread on this very topic the other day and here are some more real-life examples of the use of "wee".

"Can I help you with your wee bag?"

"Here's the wee menu."

"I'll help you in a wee minute."

Okay so you can see all these uses of the word 'we' before a noun. Okay, we use it a lot, I use it a lot I use it all the time.

Moving on, another key Irish-English phrase that's used throughout the country is the expression: what's the craic? And craic by the way is spelt c-r-a-i-c in its Gaelic form. If someone was to ask me for the most iconic Irish phrase I'd definitely say it's "what's the craic?"

Now, this expression just means "how's it going?" So a typical greeting could go something like;

⁵ Prevalent; if something is embedded in something else it means it is very attached to that thing

“Hey, what’s the craic?” or “Alright, what’s the craic?”

So that’s just the same as saying “Hey how’s it going?” or “How are things with you?”

We can also use it to ask questions about a situation or if we need more information about something. For example, imagine there’s a strange car parked in your street that you’ve never seen before. You might ask your neighbour; “Here, what’s the craic with that car over there? It’s been parked there for over three days now.”

Craic can also be used with an adjective like good or great to describe either a fun situation or person. So if someone says “Paul is great craic” what they mean is that Paul is great fun and is a good person to be around. Similarly, if you were out at a party and your friend says “aww this is great craic” they mean it’s a good, fun party and that they are having a good time. Okay so that expression is craic. What’s the craic? Is the same as saying how’s it going? And like I said you can use it with an adjective you can say someone is great craic which means they are very fun to be around.

Now if you’re planning a trip to Dublin, or perhaps you’re even living there, it’s likely that you’ll come across the next item on this list which is: that’s gas. Don’t worry this has nothing to do with biological functions in your body!

This expression, which you normally won’t hear in the north, means that something is funny. So, imagine your friend sends you a funny video on whatsapp, you could reply saying “that’s gas!” Here you wouldn’t really use the expression “that’s great craic” because “craic” refers more to something fun rather than something funny. This difference can be very difficult for many students to **grasp**⁶ but let me give you an example.

A joke for example, is funny because it makes us laugh. So if something is funny it’s associated with comedy and for example, a party is fun because we have a good time but it’s not really intended to make us laugh. You don’t really think of a party and comedy you kind of think of a party and having fun...enjoying it. So, think if it’s associated with comedy and laughing you’re going to use funny. And if it’s associated with enjoyment it’s going to be fun. So a movie can be funny if it’s a comedy, you wouldn’t really say fun.

And now the last slang word for this podcast is grand. Now, outside of Ireland grand has quite a ...well, grandiose meaning! For example, a grand palace or something quite spectacular would be grand. However, in Ireland it simply means “okay” or “fine” and is usually a response to the question “how are you?”

⁶ To grasp something; to understand

So if you ask someone how they are they may very well reply to you saying “I’m grand thanks, and yourself?” So if you ask ‘how are you?’ you’re very likely to hear ‘I’m grand thanks and yourself?’

In fact, I think this is the response I use the most when replying to the question “How are you?” And did you notice that reflexive pronoun at the end? I’m grand thanks, and yourself? Okay, so that ‘yourself’ is the reflexive pronoun. That’s also a very Irish-English trait due to the influence of the Irish language on our English. You will hear reflexive pronouns being used a lot more in Ireland than in other English-speaking countries.

So that’s everything for the slang, there’s a lot more I could do I decided just to give you those three. I’ve also done a couple of blog posts on this topic if you’re **interested**⁷ in **finding out** more. **I will**⁸ link them in the show notes.

So before finishing up I’ll give you this week’s idiom! This week’s idiom is to hit the nail on the head. To hit the nail on the head. If you don’t know what a nail is a nail is a small metal object that we use for things like hanging photos on walls or for holding things together. We use it with a hammer.

So this expression, to hit the nail on the head means to state the truth exactly. So, imagine you’re very annoyed at your boss and you’re complaining about him to your coworker. Your coworker says that your boss is very arrogant and if you agree 100% with that statement you could reply “You’ve absolutely hit the nail on the head!” Which means “I completely agree with you, you’ve described him perfectly.

So, that idiom one more time is: to hit the nail on the head.

Okay, so that’s all for today! Just a quick roundup, a quick overview of all the slang we heard today.

So the first one was ‘wee’ which in Ireland, especially in the north, is just a diminutive. It doesn’t really mean anything it’s just like a feature of our speech and you hear it a lot.

The next one was ‘what’s the craic?’ which really means ‘how’s it going?’

And the last one was grand which means fine or okay.

Thanks for listening and if you enjoy this podcast I have a little favour to ask. I’d really appreciate it if you took a few seconds of your time to rate and subscribe to this podcast on your preferred streaming service. This helps me out a lot because it means

⁷ **Remember:** if something interests you then you are **interested** in it. NOT “I’m interesting in history.”

⁸ I used “will” in this case because I just decided something at the moment of speaking. When we do this we use the structure “will”. It’s like when we order in a restaurant; “I’ll have the steak, thanks.”

that I can reach more people by being suggested to other potential listeners. So if you could do that I'd be very grateful so thank you so much in advance.

And don't forget to download the PDF guide which comes with

- The full transcript
- Vocabulary explanations
- An extra article: this week's is about a story from Northern Irish folklore
- Grammar Explanation: separable and non-separable phrasal verbs

Very important I know how much you struggle with phrasal verbs so make sure to download that!

Thanks so much and I'll see you next week!

THE LEGEND OF FINN MCCOOL

In this week's episode I mentioned the strong oral tradition that Ireland is famous for, so what better way to give you some further insight into this than through one of our folk tales? The one I'm about to tell you takes place in one of Northern Ireland's most stunning landscapes: the Giant's Causeway. This causeway is located in the north coast and every year thousands of visitors come to appreciate the area's natural beauty.

Everyone in Northern Ireland knows the legend associated with this magical place: the legend of Finn McCool (Fionn Mac Cumhaill).

Finn McCool was a **benevolent**⁹ giant who lived around the Antrim coast in Northern Ireland. Finn could see the Scotland from his home and wanted a way to cross the sea and reach it without getting his feet wet. So he decided to build a bridge that would connect the two islands. He built the bridge by **carving**¹⁰ the beautiful hexagonal stones that you can see along the Giant's Causeway today.

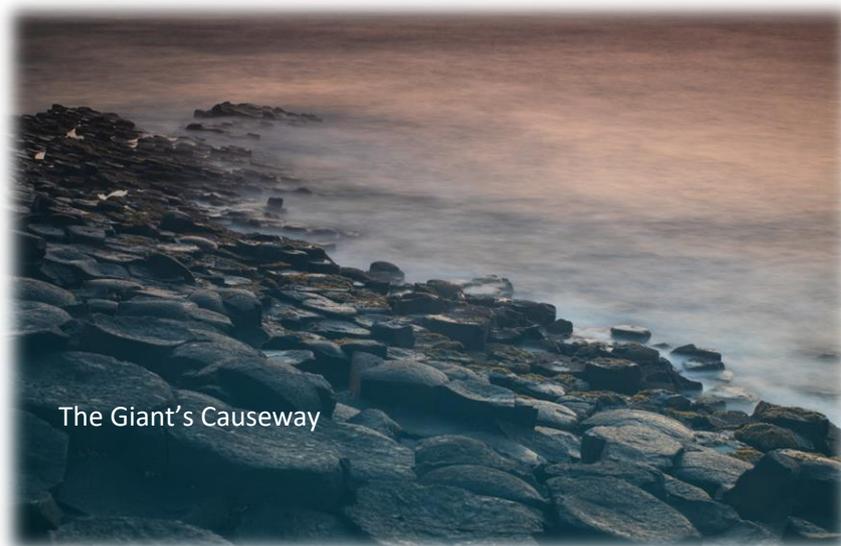
⁹ Kind

¹⁰ Carve: create something from wood or stone with a knife

However, there was another giant on the other side of the bridge called Benandonner who was none too happy that Finn had built this bridge so he made up his mind to cross the bridge to where Finn lived and fight him. Benandonner was colossal in size and Finn knew he didn't **stand a chance**¹¹ against him in a fight, so he asked for help from his wife Oona.

He asked her to **bake**¹² some biscuits and put hard stones in half of them. Oona agreed and baked the biscuits, putting stones in only half of them. Finn had told her that when Benandonner came looking for him she was to offer him some of the biscuits with the stones in them and to give their baby son the other half of the biscuits without stones in them.

Benandonner came to Finn's home on the Giant's causeway and when Oona opened the door to him she said,



"Finn is out fishing at the minute, would you like to wait for him here?"

Benandonner agreed and when Oona offered him the biscuits he took them gladly.

When he bit into the biscuit and hurt his tooth on the stones inside he yelled out,

"What on earth do you have in these biscuits?" he asked Oona.

"Stones from the coast," she replied, "I always make them that way for the baby."

Benandonner looked across at the baby who was eating his biscuits happily without any complaint. However, he did not know that the baby's biscuits had no stones in them at all. Then he thought, *if Finn's baby son can eat biscuits with stones in them, what must Finn be like?!*

¹¹ This means there's no way he would win in this fight. This is a very colloquial expression. Another example sentence would be; "If I don't study hard for my exam tomorrow, I won't stand a chance at passing it."

¹² Bake: when we make things the types of things you'd find in a bakery (like cookies or bread) we use the verb "bake" and not "cook"

He convinced himself that if Finn's son could eat biscuits with stones in them then Finn himself must be extremely big and powerful. Benandonner became frightened at the prospect of fighting such a person.

He politely excused himself from the house and ran back across the bridge to Scotland, destroying it along the way so Finn couldn't cross it.

Today, you can visit the beautiful Giant's Causeway and see the curious hexagonal rocks that Finn created all those years ago... You might not see Finn himself or Benandonner though!

PHRASAL VERBS

Phrasal verbs. Nightmare, right? I know they are a total pain but one thing that can help a lot in understanding them is knowing when they can be separated and when they can't, but what do I mean by that?

Let's look at two examples from two different phrasal verbs;

Take out: this one is very literal and shouldn't cause many problems. It means to literally take someone or something to another place.

Put up with: tolerate or accept something unpleasant

One of these phrasal verbs is non-separable, meaning that we can't place an object between the main verb and the preposition. Which one is it?

"I have to **put up with** Carla talking incessantly all day at work. I'm going mad!"

"I have to **cut** the tree **down**."

Yep, it's **put up with** because the object (in this sentence it's Carla) comes *after* the full phrasal verb and not between it. So this phrasal verb is non-separable.

However, we can see that the second sentence contains a *separable* phrasal verb because the object (the tree) can come between the two parts of the phrasal verb.

WHICH PHRASAL VERBS ARE SEPARABLE AND WHICH AREN'T?

So, the big question is; how do you know if a phrasal verb is separable or not?

GOLDEN RULE NUMBER 1:

Phrasal verbs with more than one preposition are *always* inseparable (like the example above **put up with**).

“Ted moans a lot. I’m sick of **putting up with** him.”

“That’s a great idea, how did you **come up with** it?”

GOLDEN RULE NUMBER 2:

Intransitive phrasal verbs are always inseparable because they never take a direct object. Therefore if you come across a new phrasal verb check in the dictionary if it’s transitive or intransitive so you’ll know if you can use it with a direct object or not.

“He’s very stubborn, he never **backs down** in an argument.”

GOLDEN RULE NUMBER 3:

There are many phrasal verbs which are *both* separable and inseparable but they *must* be separated when you use the object pronouns (me, you, it, her, him, us, them).

Turn down is a good example of a phrasal verb that is both separable and non-separable. You can say;

“Can you **turn** the radio **down**?”

And

“Can you **turn down** the radio?”

However, if we replace ‘the radio’ with ‘it’ we *must* place it in the middle of the phrasal verb.

“Can you **turn it down**?”

“Can you ~~turn down~~ it?”

GOLDEN RULE NUMBER 4:

Some phrasal verbs are always inseparable even if you are using the object pronoun. This means the verb can never be separated. Good examples of these verbs include;

Look after [something/someone] (take care of something/someone)

Come across [something] (discover something by chance)

Get over [something] (recover from)

“My dog is really ill so I need to stay at home and look after him.”

“You should read the article I sent you, I came across it the other day on my lunch break.”

“It’ll take Tim a while to get over his break-up with Sandra. It really affected him badly.”
