

河北省社会科学基金项目 (HB09BYY014)

学会美国习语

Learn American Idioms

魏福利 著



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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

学会美国习语 / 魏福利著. —石家庄:河北科学技术出版社,2009.8

ISBN 978-7-5375-3719-3

I. 学… II. 魏… III. 英语-社会习惯语-美国 IV. H313.3

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2008)第 146408 号

学会美国习语

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出版发行	河北科学技术出版社
地 址	石家庄市友谊北大街 330 号(邮箱:050061)
印 刷	石家庄金版彩印厂
经 销	新华书店
开 本	787 × 1092 1/32
印 张	7.125
字 数	250000
版 次	2009 年 8 月第 1 版 2009 年 8 月第 1 次印刷
印 数	2000
定 价	29.80 元

<http://www.hkpress.com.cn>

前 言

本书是根据河北省社会科学基金项目“大学英语教学改革创新——跨文化交际中的英美习语教学探索”(HB09BYY014)编写而成的。《学会美国习语》在大学英语教学改革中占有极其重要的地位,对于大学英语教学改革创新,探索英美习语教学发挥了重大作用。

英语是一种国际性语言。中国是国际大家庭中的一位举足轻重的成员,中国政府一直重视在各级学校普及英语教育,但收效甚微。因为多数学生在经过多年的学习之后只会讲一些洋泾浜英语。更糟糕的是不少人学到的只是“哑巴英语”。很显然,每个语言学习者都希望学到纯正口语。但他们为什么不能达到这个目标呢?依我之见,最大的原因可能是没有掌握好习语。众所周知,词汇是人类已知的有声语言中最重要的组成成分,而习语就是词汇中的一颗璀璨明珠。英语中的习语尤其丰富,可遗憾的是中国学术界却很少有人对它进行系统的研究。因此,这一空白亟待填补。事实已经证明:不娴熟地掌握英语习语,也就不可能掌握地道的英语,尤其不可能掌握纯正的英语口语。

习语是语言的精华,是人类智慧的结晶。它含蓄、幽默、严肃、典雅。不仅言简意赅,而且形象生动,妙趣横生,给人一种美的享

受。习语虽短小精炼,但寓意深刻,蕴含着丰富的文化内涵,且具有浓厚的地方和民族色彩,能直接反映出人类在探索宇宙过程中所表现出的不同侧面,也为他们所根植的文化环境勾勒出一幅精彩的画卷。

美国英语中充满了绚丽多彩、生动有趣的习语,且大都源于美国政治、历史、文化、生活等诸多方面。因此,探究其渊源不仅有助于我们准确理解和使用英语,而且能加深对美国文化的了解,特别是对于我国大学英语教学改革创新具有很大的帮助作用。美国人诙谐、幽默,在日常生活交往中使用习语频率极高,学好美国习语和俚语非常有助于学好美国英语,为弥补广大的英语爱好者不能身临其境地感受美国英语中的习语和俚语之遗憾,作者把在美国华盛顿大学学习期间学习到的最常用和最新的习语和俚语奉献给各位爱好英语的朋友,相信各位朋友在掌握书中的习语和俚语之后,不仅能更好地了解美国文化,还一定会说一口很“酷”的英语。

在《学好美国习语》的编写过程中,作者得到了河北省哲学社会科学规划办主任李延龄的帮助和支持,河北经贸大学副校长武建奇的亲切指导,河北师范大学外国语学院李正拴院长提出了许多宝贵建议,特此表示衷心的感谢!

魏福利

2009年8月

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§ 1 Life on Campus—
From Academics to Dormitory Life

In this chapter, we cover everything from academic slang to dorm slang ... in short, everything we could think of that relates to life on a college campus.

101 (adj) At most colleges, classes are coded by number to indicate difficulty, with 101 being the most basic level. **101** has been adopted into common speech to indicate something that is basic or easy.

*You didn't open the car door for Maria? Come on, man, that's dating **101**.*

ace (v) To **ace** an exam is to get a grade of A. When people are sure that they've done well on an exam, they say they **aced** it.

Woman 1: I think I flunked my literature midterm.

*Woman 2: You should have hit the books like I did—I definitely **aced** that exam.*

bird classes (n) These are classes that are so easy that you fly through them like a bird.

*My classes are so hard this semester, except for bowling—what a **bird class** that is.*

bloody paper (n) Professor often grade students' work with red pen, and a paper that is returned to the student all marked up with red pen is called a **bloody paper**, because there are so many corrections

written in red that the page looks like it's bleeding.

*I thought I did such a good job on my term paper, but when I got it back from the professor, it was completely **bloody!***

blue book (n) This is a small book with a blue cover filled with lined paper. Many professors require **blue books** for essay exams; some will provide them to you, but at some schools, you are required to purchase a **blue book** yourself (they cost approximately 15 cents each) and bring to the exam.

*Man 1: Professor Jones, I forgot my **blue book**.*

*Man 2: Lucky for you, I have an extra **blue book**; otherwise, you would have run to the bookstore to get one, and that would not leave you much time to complete the exam.*

bone up (v) To **bone up** is to study all of the facts you need to know for an exam.

*I'm feeling pretty good about my math test tomorrow, but I need to **bone up** on my geometry, because I don't understand it as well as the algebra and I really want to ace the test.*

brownie points (n) If you do something that puts you in good favor with your professor, whether you have done extra credit work or just made an effort to participate in class and be noticed, you earn **brownie points**. This expression is derived from the Girl Scouts of America, whose junior members are called brownies and who earn points for completing a variety of tasks. Earning **brownie points** is a good idea, but do not go so overboard that you become a brownoser.

*I stopped by Professor Chadwick's office yesterday, and she was swamped grading English 101 papers, so I helped her out and earned some major **brownie points**.*

browner (adj) Browners are sycophants—people who go out of their way to flatter and ingratiate themselves with a professor with the distinct purpose of getting better grades. Please note: Being a **browner** goes way beyond taking the time to get to know a professor — you should always get to know your professors; just don't be annoying about it.

*Ugh! Diana is such a **browner**! Not only does she deliver coffee to Professor Cluck every morning, but she also shines his shoes!*

buckle down (v) To buckle down is to commit yourself to studying in a serious way without distractions.

*I've been doing nothing but partying since the semester began. I really need to **buckle down** if I don't want to flunk all of my classes this semester.*

bunk beds (n) These are two beds stacked on top of one another to save space. Dorm rooms are notoriously small, so many have **bunk beds**.

*Do you mind if I take the top **bunk bed**?*

buyback (n) Where do all of those used books in the bookstore come from? They come from other students, of course! At the end of every semester (or year, depending on the school), colleges will buy back your books. Sounds great, right? Well, don't get too excited. The

school pays a highly discounted price for the books, say, \$5 for a \$75 book, and many of the books you purchased will be ineligible for **buyback** for a number of reasons. Look for local bookstores that buy books back from students because they often buy them back at a higher rate than the school's official bookstore.

*This semester I paid \$450 for my books. I went to the **buyback**, and I was able to sell five of my books back—for a total of \$20!*

catch up (v) When you miss a class, you need to **catch up**—do the work you've missed so you will be on the same level as your classmates who have not missed any classes. If you miss a lot of classes, you may find yourself playing **catch up**.

*Woman 1: Miss Thomas, you have missed three classes in a row! You are far behind the rest of the class. How do you plan to **catch up**?*

Woman 2: I will study an extra 3 hours a day and do any additional reading that you can recommend.

caught red-handed (v) People who are cheating can be caught after the act, or they can be **caught red-handed**, which means caught at the moment they were actually cheating. People can be **caught red-handed** doing other things, even serious things such as robbery.

*Jolie is going to be expelled for cheating—she was **caught red-handed**, reading the answers off her shoe!*

clue (someone) in (v) To **clue someone in** is to let that person know what is going on or to explain something to someone. If you miss a class, for example, you may need a classmate to **clue you in** about anything you missed in class.

Man: I didn't understand the professor today when she was talking about feminist theory in the twentieth century.

*Woman: Why don't we go get a cup of coffee and I can **clue you in**?*

couch potato (n) This term denotes someone who possesses a high degree of laziness. So, if your roommate does nothing but sit around on the couch (or bed) all day and watch television, she's a **couch potato**.

*Man, you're such a **couch potato**! Why don't you come out and play volleyball with us instead of playing video games! Are you surgically attached to the couch?*

crack the books (v) To **crack the books** is to study hard. A synonym is hit the books.

*I really need to **crack the books** if I'm going to do well on my midterm exam.*

cram (v) This word is used frequently on campus. To cram is to study as much information as possible at the last minute and refers to literally stuffing your brain with information. This is not a good way to study. It's much better to study a little bit every night than to try to learn an entire semester's worth of work in one night.

*I haven't done any of the reading for anthropology this semester, and I cut class tons of times, and now I have to **cram** for the final tomorrow! I have one night to read 500 pages of text and to go over class notes that I borrowed from a friend.*

crash pad (n) The place where someone sleeps is his or her **crash** (sleep) pad(dwelling). This is often shortened to **pad**.

*Want to come back to my **pad** to study? My roommate is out of town, so it's quiet there.*

cream of the crop (adj) This term describes the best of something; for instance, the best students or the best athletes would be the **cream of the crop**.

*Law schools are looking to admit only the **cream of the crop**, so I need to get excellent grades to get into law school.*

cut class (v) To **cut class** is to intentionally not attend a class for the purpose of doing something else. The “something else” can range from social plans to sleeping. Cutting class is not advised. It's hard to learn if you are not in class, and, hey, you paid for the class, so you might as well attend and get your money's worth. Some professors also have attendance policies, such as if you miss more than a certain number of classes, you fail. A synonym is **skip class**.

*I **cut** my 8 a. m. **class** two times last week because I was too tired to go, and I missed a pop quiz! The professor gave me a zero and said that if I miss one more class, he's going to **flunk** me!*

deadline (n) A **deadline** is the date that a paper or a project is due to be handed in to a professor.

*I have so many **deadlines** to keep track of! I wish professor would get together and decide on one due date for all schoolwork.*

dorm (n) **Dorm** is an abbreviated slang term for **dormitory**, which is the place on campus where students are housed. Your room is your **dorm** room. You will hear the term dorm all the time; you probably won't hear anyone use "dormitory."

*I hate living in the **dorm**. I can't wait to move off campus next year.*

drained (adj) To be extremely tired or devoid of any ability to study or do anything is to be **drained**. Hard work **drains** your energy; for instance, you may be **drained** if you spend all night cramming for an exam.

*I have classes every day, as well as track practice and my volunteer work. By the time the weekend comes, I'm so **drained** that I can't even go out and party.*

drop a class (v) When you decide to remove yourself from a class, it's called dropping a class. You must **drop classes** at the beginning of the semester to avoid having the drop show up on your transcripts. You should only **drop a class** if you can't handle the coursework or have other extenuating circumstances.

*My parents are going to kill me! I have to **drop** Chemistry 101; I don't understand anything, and I can't afford to have a failing grade on my transcript.*

dry campus (n) If your campus is a **dry campus**, it means that alcohol is illegal to possess or drink anywhere on campus. You might also hear **dry** used to describe other things as alcohol-free, such as fraternities or dorms.

*There are no bars on campus here, because it's a **dry campus**. We have to go to another town to get a beer!*

easy A's (adj) **Easy A's** are classes that are so easy that you can easily earn an A

*I'm taking fishing and bowling this semester—I need a couple of **easy A's** to balance out my schedule. The rest of my classes are impossibly hard!*

fire drill (n) A **fire drill** is when the fire alarms go off in the dorm for the purpose of making every resident practice evacuating the building. On most campuses, you can get in big trouble if you stay in your room during a fire drill, which you should never do—there could be a real fire! Fire drills often happen at inconvenient times during the evening.

*We had a **fire drill** at 10 p. m. last night! Jennifer slept through it and was fined \$100 !*

flip-flops (n) Also called thongs, **flip-flops** are rubber sandals held on the feet by two straps that meet between the first and second toes; so named because of the “**flip-flop**” sound they make when someone is walking. This has become a fashionable and common kind of shoe on college campuses this past year. It is a good idea to get yourself a pair of cheap **flip-flops** to wear in the shower in your dorm to avoid foot fungus. Really! (We could have included this definition in Chapter 7, but flip-flops are an integral part of dorm life.)

*I couldn't find my **flip-flops** this morning, so I showered without them, and now my feet itch!*

flunk (v) To **flunk** is to fail a class. If you fail too many classes, you can flunk out of school.

*I am going to **flunk** out of school if I don't buckle down.*

freshman 15 (n) It is said that everyone gains 15 pounds during their freshman year—blame the dining hall and late-night pizzas—called the **freshman 15**. Some people don't gain any weight freshman year, and some gain more than 15 pounds. Please note: Underage drinking is illegal in the United States, but many freshmen gain much of their weight from beer, which is very fattening.

*I never thought I would gain the fabled **freshman 15** at college, and I didn't. I gained 30 pounds!*

frosh (n) A frosh is a member of the freshman class. **Frosh** can also be used to describe someone who is new to something.

Woman 1: Doesn't that annoying girl know not to ask questions at the end of class?

*Woman 2: She's a silly **frosh**, not a wise sophomore like you. She doesn't know any better.*

futon (n) Of Japanese origin, a **futon** is a bed with a flat, usually wooden, base with a soft mattress that converts into a couch when not being used as a bed. You will find many futons on a college campus.

*I bought a used **futon** from a graduating senior for \$50! It will be perfect for my apartment.*

get away with (v) To **get away with** something is to do something

bad or incorrect without suffering any consequences. We've included this with the academic terms because students are always trying to get away with stuff when it comes to class.

Man 1: You better start coming to class. You can't get away with cutting class semester!

Man 2: I can get away with anything. My father donates millions of dollars a year to the school, so they have to pass me!

get the hang of something (v) When someone becomes familiar with a task or routine, they **get the hang** of it. We've included this term here because you may often hear it used in an academic situation.

*I can't seem to **get the hang** of how to study in college. It seemed so much easier in high school, but I guess I'll learn.*

hard core (adj) When applied to studying, **hard core** means to focus on nothing else but studying.

Man 1: Are you going to the football game this Saturday?

*Man 2: No. I've got a huge exam to study for, so I'm going **hard core**. I won't think about anything else but history for the next three days!*

hit the books (v) **See crack the books.**

hit the rack (v) **To hit the rack** is to go to sleep, the rack being the bed.

*I've been up since 6 a. m. ! I can't wait to **hit the rack**!*