



Video 3 – Real Vocabulary: is it OK to ask “Can I get a coffee?”

Hi there! It's common to hear people make requests using the expression “Can I get...?”: “Can I get a latte, please?”, “Can I get some ice with that?”, and so on. But is this use of *get* correct?

This usage has attracted a lot of criticism, especially from speakers of British English, who often see it as an unwanted import from American English.

This use of *get* did originate in the US, and it became familiar to British speakers through its use in American sitcoms. But it is now very common in most parts of the English-speaking world.

One of the objections to asking “Can I get...?” is that it seems to imply that the customer is the one who is going to do the work – as if we are asking, “Can I make a coffee for myself?” After all, we're equally likely to ask “Could you get me a coffee?”

But this is a weak argument because *get* is such a versatile verb that it can be used to mean almost anything. And the first meaning of *get* in the Macmillan Dictionary is when it means to obtain or receive something – which fits a question like “Can I get a coffee?”.

As always when a word has several meanings, the context tells you which one is intended – and if you're a customer in a coffee shop it's obvious that you're not asking if you can prepare your own coffee. Conventions like this – the language we use when making requests – do tend to change over time.

In our previous Real Grammar series we saw how the expression “May I...?” is rarely used now in situations like this, even though it was once very common. British speakers will still often prefer a more indirect formula (such as “Could I have a coffee?”, or even “Could I get a coffee?”), but in the right context, there is nothing wrong with asking “Can I get...?”

In my next video I will talk about the word *uninterested* versus *disinterested* – do they mean the same thing?

Thanks for watching!