Transcript: "Listening Time" Episode 80

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And if you want to be able to ask me all of your questions regarding English, grammar, listening, pronunciation, language learning, or anything else, then become a Listening Time VIP, and you'll be able to ask me questions every week, and I'll answer them in a weekly Q&A session where I record a video of myself answering all the questions that I get from my Listening Time VIPs. So, if you're interested in that, then click on the link in the Episode Description below this episode. That's www.patreon.com/listeningtime

Alright, so in today's episode, we're going to talk about two language learning keys, two very important things when it comes to learning a language and improving in a language. So, this is going to be a good episode. I think all of you are going to enjoy it and benefit from it.

So, before we start, remember that you have the transcript available for this episode in the Episode Description. So, go down and click on that if you need it. And listen to this episode as many times as you need until you can understand everything that I'm saying without using the transcript. And please remember to share this podcast with anyone else who might find it useful, any friends or family members who are learning English, and give this podcast a five-star rating.

Alright, let's get started. Okay, so I'm going to talk about two keys when it comes to improving in a language. And I'm going to be talking about my philosophy based on my experience as a teacher and as a learner. And so, some people might disagree with me, and that's okay. We all have different opinions, but I'm speaking from my experience, and I'm speaking from what I have seen with my students and with myself.

So first, before we talk about those two keys, I want to talk about some misconceptions when it comes to language learning. A "misconception" is an idea that someone has... when they don't really have a lot of experience with something... it's an idea that they have that is false. Okay? That's a misconception. So, there are many misconceptions when it comes to language learning, because the vast majority of people have no experience learning a language, or even if they do have experience, they have no experience with linguistics and language acquisition theory and the science behind language learning. So, that's why there are so many misconceptions regarding this topic.

So, the main thing that people need to understand is that language is very different from every other subject that you learn. And unfortunately, most people don't realize this. And so, when you take English classes in high school, they teach them in a

very ineffective way because they are designed like the other classes are designed for other subjects. And this is unfortunate.

And this is why when I talk to new students of mine, and I ask them how long they've been learning English, they almost always tell me that they started learning English in school, but they learned almost nothing, and they weren't able to communicate in English after those classes. This is what I hear 99% of the time. So, we know there's a problem there. So, language is not like any other subject that you learn. It works very differently in your brain. So, it's not about learning rules and learning formulas and memorizing them and applying them. This is not how you become fluent in a language. This is how you can become good at math. But not English or any other language.

So, I get a lot of questions from students of mine who ask me, "What do I need to do to reach the next level"? They'll say, "Why do I keep making the same mistakes over and over again"? And they say, "I think I need to study more grammar because I keep making the same mistakes." And all of these doubts, they come from the misconceptions about language learning. And let me show you a good example of why this thought about grammar is a misconception. I often hear my students tell me, "I keep making the same mistakes over and over, so this must mean that I need to learn the rules better. I need to study grammar." Or, "Can you teach me grammar"? Right?

However, there's a problem with this theory, and that is, that in my conversation classes, at the end of each class, I give my student a report which shows some of their errors and the corrections to those errors. So, we do this at the end of the conversation. When we're done speaking, we look at this report together. And usually, what happens is when the student sees their mistakes, they say, "Oh I know that. Oh, I know that rule. Ah, I already know that. Why did I say that"? It's like they know almost every mistake that they made once they see it after the conversation, and they tell me that they know the rule, and they don't know why they said it wrong because they know that rule.

So, this shows that a lot of these students already know all of these rules. They already know what the rule is. They know what they're supposed to say. However, when they're actually having a real conversation with someone, they can't think of these rules. These rules don't actually help them in a real conversation. This is a perfect example of that.

So, in summary, grammar, and knowing grammar rules, doesn't actually translate to fluency when you're speaking in a normal conversation. If that happened, then my students wouldn't be so frustrated because they know all of these rules and they don't know why they're making mistakes with them. That wouldn't happen because they would just apply the rules and speak correctly. But unfortunately, that's not how it works in language learning.

So, let's talk about the two keys that I wanted to mention today. I should say that, before I get into those two keys, when you first start learning a language, of course, it's very helpful, or maybe even necessary, to learn basic grammar, to learn basic structures and see how the language works, and learn basic vocabulary and just try to start to put sentences together like a puzzle, and learn the different formulas, so to say, the different structures just for reference, to kind of help you understand how the language works and help you get accustomed to this new system. Yes, when

you're starting to learn a language, that stuff is important. Of course, that stuff helps you, and this is the time when grammar is very useful, when you're just starting to get to know a language. Okay? However, after that, it's not about grammar. It's not about knowing the rules.

So, let me talk about the number one key when it comes to improving your ability in a language. And the biggest key is: exposure. So, when you have exposure to something, this means that you encounter it. This means that you experience it. You see it. So if I say, "I was exposed to that way of thinking when I was young," this means that I encountered that way of thinking. I experienced it, I heard about it, people talk to me about it, etc. This means that I was exposed to it. So, exposure in language learning refers to seeing different things in meaningful context many, many times, okay?

So, when you're listening, when you're reading, when you're having conversations, you hear the same word or you hear the same structure many, many times, because the same words and structures come up again and again in English, some more than others. But seeing them or hearing them many, many times in different meaningful contexts will eventually help you feel confident in using that word or using that phrase, but it takes a lot of exposure. Okay? So, this could require many different exposures to that same word or that same phrase, for example. So, you might have to see this same phrase hundreds of times before it finally becomes natural to you. Or you might even need to see it thousands of times before it finally becomes natural to you.

And this is the key. You need to understand this, that just learning a structure and studying it with a teacher doesn't mean that you can actually use it when you're speaking at normal speed in a normal conversation. That almost never works. I see this every day with my students. So, what does work is being patient and allowing yourself to be exposed to that structure hundreds or even thousands of times and not feeling so pressured to know the structure and to be able to use the structure right away. It's about exposure. Okay?

So, at some point, it will become natural. And I can't tell you when that's going to happen. When you see a new vocabulary word, you're probably going to forget it in 10 minutes or by the next day. But if you see it again, and then you hear it again, and then someone says it to you again, this cumulative exposure actually adds up, and eventually, it will become natural for you to use that new word.

This happens to me all the time in Spanish. I don't study Spanish. I have never really studied Spanish, so to say, except when I was a beginner. After that point, I just learned through exposure: through listening, reading, just gaining exposure in the language, and eventually speaking, and getting more practice with that. And this happens to me nowadays all the time. I'll use a new vocabulary word or phrase that I've never used before, and I never really thought about in detail and I never studied.

But suddenly, it just feels natural for me to say that new word in one of my sentences. And I just suddenly say it almost by accident. And then I ask my wife, "Was that correct"? And she says, "Yes, why"? And I realize, "Oh wow, I just acquired that word." That was the first time I've ever said it. And it came out in a natural way, and I didn't study it. And it happened just because I heard that many hundreds or even thousands of times, and now it finally feels natural for me to use it. And it just happened kind of automatically.

So, that's how exposure works. And so, let me give you an example of how this might work in your language learning process. So, for example, students often ask me, "Why am I making the same mistake now that I made last year? Why haven't I corrected that mistake yet"? And I give them this example. So, let's say you need to hear a new vocabulary word 500 times before it becomes completely natural to you. And this number is just made up. It probably won't take 500 times for most vocabulary words, but let's just use that number.

So, let's say that student had heard that vocabulary word 50 times last year. So, they hadn't heard it enough for it to become natural for them. They had only heard it 50 times, and so they couldn't use the word correctly in their speech. So, they made that mistake last year. And then, this year, let's say they've heard it another 250 times. So now in total, they've heard that word 300 times, and so they haven't reached that goal of 500 times. So, they still can't use that word naturally in their speech.

But for the student, they don't realize that they're getting this exposure, and they're getting closer to that goal of hearing it 500 times. All they know is that they're still making the same mistake with that word, or they're not able to use that word, and it's been a year since they first realized that they were making a mistake with that word. So, for them it's very frustrating because a year has gone by and they still can't use that word naturally.

However, they're much closer to the target of hearing it enough times to where it becomes natural, but they don't realize this, so they're actually improving in a way because they're getting more exposure. They're getting closer to that point where it becomes natural, but they haven't reached it yet. So, they're still making the mistake. And in their brain, this is a bad thing. They're doing something wrong. But I have to give them this example for them to realize that this is the process that we all go through as we're getting more and more exposure to different words and phrases. Okay? So, be patient. It takes hundreds of times, it takes maybe even thousands of times for you, of hearing that same structure, for example, until you can actually say it correctly in your speech without thinking. So, this is how exposure works in language learning.

However, there's one other key that I wanted to mention, which is the ability to notice. So, the other key is noticing. If you can start to notice different elements, different things, different patterns in English, this can speed the process up. This can actually help you learn and be able to use a new word or structure with less exposure. So, you can limit the amount of exposure that you need before you can say something naturally. So, most of the time, this is just a secondary key.

Exposure is the main key, of course, but noticing will help you learn things faster and not need so much exposure. So, for example, when a teacher points out one of your mistakes to you, and it's the first time you've ever realized that you were making that mistake, the fact that you're now noticing that thing is going to make you hear it more, maybe pay more attention to it, notice it more when you hear native speakers using that structure. And you'll actually be able to get more comfortable with it faster because you're going to notice it more.

So, this can, like I said, decrease the amount of exposure that you need with that one structure. Instead of hearing it you know, 1000 times before it finally becomes natural to you, maybe it only takes you 300 times or something like that. Right? I'm just

making up numbers here. Don't worry about the numbers. I'm just using these for this example, but I think you get the point. If you can start to notice things, if you can notice the differences between what a native speaker says and what you say, this can help draw your attention to those gaps, and you can start to learn these things faster than if you hadn't noticed them. Okay? So, this is a great ability to try to work on, to try to notice and pay attention to the different patterns that you hearing in English. Okay?

This doesn't mean that you need to study grammar. Okay? Don't get me wrong. I don't think you should try to just study these patterns on their own and learn these rules. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is I want you to start to notice these differences. When a native speaker says something, and you say, "Hmm, I wouldn't have said the sentence like that. I would have said it differently," then you know that you probably have some mistake in the way you thought that sentence should be.

And so, you notice that difference, and you try to start to notice that structure that you heard from the native speaker. Try to notice that when you do your listening practice and when you read. Try to hear other people say that same thing, and this will speed up the process of actually acquiring that structure. I think you get the point now, right? Noticing is something that can help you in addition to just getting exposure to these different words and structures.

Sometimes, the ability to notice is essential to actually learn something, and this happens mostly with pronunciation, I've seen. There are many people that have a very advanced level of English, but still make many pronunciation mistakes because they haven't really noticed that their pronunciation is different from a native speaker's pronunciation, and they don't naturally realize this, and so they just never correct it.

And so, in these cases, it might be necessary for someone to point out their mistake and say, "Hey, you're saying that word wrong." And then, that person finally realizes it, and then they can start to hear the real sound, and then exposure will help them eventually say that word correctly. So, this often happens with pronunciation. So, in that part of language learning, it's very, very important to try to notice things or even have someone else, a teacher or whoever, help you notice different sounds that you're missing.

So, to summarize, the two keys that I want you to take away from this episode are that exposure is king, right? Just keep listening. Keep reading. Keep exposing yourself to more and more English. This works. Okay? It's a slow process, but it works. Don't be too concerned about studying grammar and rules and stuff like that. And the other thing is trying to notice more. Try to increase your ability to notice differences in the way native speakers speak and the way you speak. Try to notice those differences and this will help speed up the process so that you can acquire new patterns faster.

Alright, I hope this episode was interesting for you, and I hope it was good practice for your listening. Remember that if you want my advanced podcast episodes, you can become a Listening Time Family Member or Listening Time VIP, and you'll get two new advanced episodes every month where I speak fast. And if you want to be able to ask me questions and have me answer them, then become a Listening Time VIP, and you can ask me questions every week and I'll answer them in a video Q&A session. Also, remember to use the transcript for this episode if you need it. Go down and click on that in the Episode Description. And please give this podcast a five-star

rating, and share it with anyone else who might find it useful. Alright, thank you for listening to this episode, and I'll talk to you on the next episode of Listening Time.
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