



All Ears English Episode 155: StartupRadio.de Host Talks About How NOT to Translate Your Idioms into English

Gabby: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 155: “Startup Radio.de Host Talks About How NOT to Translate Your Idioms into English.”

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel’, from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Can’t get enough of All Ears English?

Gabby: We can’t get enough of you either. We made a four hour video course with four phrase guides that go together.

Lindsay: You’re gonna (going to) learn the four keys to connecting with American people.

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[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In today's episode, you'll learn how NOT to translate your idioms and you'll get two tips for successful study abroad in the US.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay.

Lindsay: Hey, Gabby.

Gabby: How you doing?

Lindsay: I'm going good, how are you?

Gabby: I'm great. Today, (uh), we have a special guest, (um), Jörn Menninger. Jörn, how are you?

Jörn: Doing good. Thank you. How are you doing ladies?

Lindsay: Good.

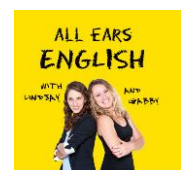
Gabby: Very good. Thank you.

Lindsay: Thank you for joining us today.

Gabby: So I'd, I'd like to introduce Jörn to all of our listeners. Jörn is one of the hosts of StartupRadio.de. That means, (uh), from Germany. It's a, a podcast based in Germany. Jörn, which city are you based out of?

Jörn: (Uh), Frankfurt. Frankfurt-am-Main.

Gabby: Oh, excellent. And, (um), Jörn has studied in the US. (Um), and he, he's a management consultant with experience in entrepreneurship. Jörn has actually been involved in five Startups. That's, that's pretty impressive. (Um), so, so we wanna (want to) welcome Jörn to our show and we're gonna (going to) talk a little bit about his experience, (um), and his advice for international students who wanna (want to) come study in the US. And also, (uh), as, as an entrepreneur, how to do business across cultures using English. So, some really meaty topics that we're gonna (going to) give you



some real quick (uh) specific advice for in today's episode. So, (um), Jörn, (jus-) thank you so much and let's get right into your experience studying in the US. Do you have, (you know), just one or two of your top pieces of advice to share with our audience about, (um), studying in the US. And specifically you were in Texas, so if you want to talk about that, (um), let's hear it. (Wh-), what, what's your advice?

Jörn: Well, y-y-you got to know Texas is quite different. So basically the story is I was studying in, (uh), North Texas...

Gabby: (Mm-hm).

Jörn: ...in a twin University of my University in Germany, and came over to do the senior year. So I...

Gabby: Ah.

Jörn: ...was basically there almost all of 2006.

Gabby: Okay, great.

Jörn: So one of, one of the biggest things in my experience is you gotta (got to) include yourself, you gotta (got to) bring yourself into the community. Because if you're just going to classes, and then hang out with other people, (um), maybe also from Germany...

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Jörn: ...(um), in the other time, and they are your roommates, you, you never get really included.

Gabby: Yeah.

Jörn: It, It's totally different if you join groups and societies on campus, even fraternities, and then, then, then you really take the dive into the culture. This is when you learn much more about the language, (um), than you would ever in class because you totally use it.

Gabby: (Mm-hm).



Jörn: You, you're totally (kind of) involved in it. And, at one point, it was for me after, I think, two months you start dreaming in English.

Gabby: Ah, that's great.

Jörn: And that, that's the point when, when you're really in the culture.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Wow. And...

Gabby: (Ju-), sorry. Just a quick thing. If you could, (um), (uh), just be a little bit farther away from your mic. There's a little bit of that muffling sound. (Uh), Lindsay...

Lindsay: Yeah...

Gabby: ...you had a question?

Lindsay: ...I had a question. So did you join a fraternity, Jörn? Or...

Jörn: Yes, of course.

Gabby: Ooh, wow.

Jörn: What, what is, what is an American college (ex-), experience without, (um), a fraternity?

Gabby: Oh wow.

Lindsay: Did you pledge then, when you – so you had to pledge, like to apply, right?

Jörn: Yes...

Lindsay: Okay.

Jörn: ...of course. Everybody has.

Lindsay: (Mm).

Gabby: Oh my goodness.



Lindsay: I'm just curious...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...what did they make you do?

Gabby: Oh no!

Jörn: (Uh), I'm, I'm not permitted to speak about that.

Gabby: That's what I figured.

Jörn: I was joining a very good fraternity. They had a "no hazing" policy.

Gabby: Oh, okay, good. I've heard that some of the fraternities...

Lindsay: (Hm).

Gabby: ...have some interesting hazing practices.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: And I'm not sure if we're allowed to talk about them. They're very secretive. But I know that's been in the news, (uh), in recent years. But, (uh), but good, I'm glad...

Jörn: But, I, I can tell you something really different, which really annoyed the hell out of, (uh), my fellow pledges because they did not haze us, but they told us, "You gotta (got to) have at least a 3.0 GPA."

Gabby: Oh, well that's good!

Jörn: [crosstalk] you don't have to do it if you don't have it, we go to the library and you have study time there. And that was much harder for some of my fellow pledges...

Gabby: Oh my gosh.

Jörn: ...than getting hazed.

Gabby: I love that.



Lindsay: Wow.

Gabby: And if you could, (like), quickly explain hazing. (Um), it's just you have to do some challenges in order to join a group. And sometimes the challenges could be quite crazy...

Lindsay: Quite dangerous.

Gabby: ...quite...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...dangerous, as well.

Jörn: Yes. I know from one other fraternity who made people, (uh), jump in a well.

Gabby: Ooh!

Jörn: (Um), like, like a (foun-), like one that had a fountain, and one of them broke some of the pipes and one of his bones.

Gabby: Wow, wow. So...

Lindsay: I've heard about eating goldfish, things like that.

Gabby: Oh! So beware. Beware.

Jörn: Yeah, yeah.

Gabby: Don't, don't be scared away from joining a fraternity. Join one like Jörn did, that makes you study and, (uh), cares about your well-being. That's great. Well, I love your tip to be included in the community and joining a fraternity, for men, or a sorority for women, if you're on a college campus, is an excellent idea. That's great. (Um), was there another tip that you have about studying in the US and making that a successful time?

Jörn: (Um), yes, of course. You, you gotta (got to) see – before I came to the States I was basically living for, (uh), a little bit more than half year in China.



Gabby: (Um).

Jörn: And the, the culture from the outside seemed to be pretty similar, but it's different. So you should not just go in like you did every day, but first observe. For example, I had this one experience when I was – within the first days in, (uh), in all over the United States present big market, (uh), grocery shopping...

Gabby: Oh yeah.

Jörn: ...and (th-) there was this shelf, and there was this lady, and I just grabbed the chips, and she jumped back a foot, and said, "Oh, excuse me!" And I said, "Yeah, sure." Because that, that was something I, I did not get, this, this personal space. That was some...

Gabby: Ah.

Lindsay: Oh.

Jörn: [inaudible 07:31].

Gabby: That's so interesting.

Lindsay: It's important.

Jörn: Yes.

Gabby: Yeah, I think we talked about that a few episodes ago with the close-talker, right, when...

Lindsay: Big thing...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...here. Yeah.

Gabby: Oh, that's a great point. So, (um), (uh), so for, this was, sorry, a Chinese woman, or an American woman who jumped back?

Jörn: An American woman in a, in a big, (uh), grocery market in the States, in Texas.



Gabby: Oh, okay, right. Because I think Americans tend to have a little more personal space?

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: The “personal bubble,” as we called...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...it on that show.

Jörn: But...

Gabby: Right, right.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Well that’s a...

Jörn: You can...

Gabby: Oh, go ahead.

Jörn: ...try to make (uh), (uh) **top three [08:07]**. So basically the Americans have the most personal space.

Gabby: Okay.

Jörn: Germans have some.

Gabby: (Mm).

Jörn: And in China, I think that concept is totally unknown because it’s...

Gabby: Right.

Jörn: ...so densely populated.

Both: Right.



Jörn: I can give you just one example. Do you know how, how many people get into an elevator?

Lindsay: (Mm).

Jörn: The people get in, as many as would be in the US.

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Jörn: Then more people get in. And then more people get in until the overweight alarm goes off.

Gabby: Oh my gosh.

Jörn: And the last person gets out.

Lindsay: Wow.

Gabby: Oh my gosh.

Lindsay: I didn't know that. That's interesting.

Gabby: Well I've...

Jörn: So...

Gabby: I've been to...

Jörn: You have your brief, you have your, your bag behind you, and even if you wanted to, you could not even grab it.

Gabby: Wow.

Jörn: It's, it's so tight.

Gabby: I, I was going to say, I've been to China just briefly, (um), on vacation to Beijing and (um), Xi'an, a city more in the interior. And I remember walking around Beijing and people kind of bumping into me, which for an American is a little scary and a little rude. But I think in China it's quite normal. But it takes some getting used to. Because, (um), in the US, if someone bumps into you, that could be cause for a fight, (you know).



Lindsay: Oh, yeah.

Jörn: Yes.

Gabby: Yeah, so.

Jörn: Yes, exactly. And one other, one other thing. (Uh), friends of mine who live in China...

Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Jörn: ...they told me when you travel there with a European baby, (um), the, the Chinese people love the babies so much, they, they'll just take it and cuddle it a little bit.

Gabby: Ha.

Jörn: So (a-)...

Lindsay: Wow.

Jörn: ...I think every (moth-), American mother would totally freak out.

Lindsay: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah. "Don't take my baby."

Gabby: Oh that's interesting. Yeah.

Jörn: They just love them. They, they think they're cute, they're beautiful. And they just want to cuddle it a little bit.

Gabby: Well that's nice. It's just, it's different because we don't tend to, (you know), try to cuddle other people's babies here, unless we know the mother pretty well. Right?

Lindsay: Yeah.

Jörn: (Mm). Exactly...

Gabby: Well...

Jörn: ...same in Germany, but different in Asia.



Gabby: Let's talk a little bit about your, your business experience because you have this great experience with entrepreneurs and startups and I believe you've definitely worked with people from, from different countries. And maybe English is the common language there. So, (um), could you share just one quick tip for, (uh), from, from your experience working in, in that area?

Jörn: Yes, of course. Every idiom you have in one language doesn't necessarily apply in another language.

Gabby: Ah. So true.

Jörn: For example...

Lindsay: No.

Jörn: ...I have one example from a friend. I was in Shanghai with him.

Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Jörn: ...and there's this main shopping street, Nanjing Road, and it was totally packed. And he was standing there and said, "Oh, people mountain, people sea."

Gabby: "People mountain, people sea."

Jörn: Yes, exactly. It's "rén shān rén hǎi" (mountain/vast crowd), one of those idioms in Chinese.

Gabby: It's great.

Jörn: And it means: there are enough people here, if you put them together, they would form a mountain, or they would fill up an ocean. It's, it's...

Gabby: Oh.

Jörn: ...pretty packed here.

Gabby: I love it. That's a great example.

Jörn: And there, there's...



Lindsay: So confusing...

Jörn: ...another German that I have because in one phone conference, there was one German, (um), colleague, (uh), from, from my, (uh), from my customers saying, "that's sausage to me."

Gabby: That's sausage to me?

Jörn: Exactly. It's a German idiom, which, when translated, it means, "I don't care."

Gabby: Oh my goodness.

Lindsay: Oh, weird.

Gabby: I love these literal translations...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...because they just sound ridiculous.

Lindsay: You have to be really careful. You're right.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: That's a good point.

Gabby: So, right, (I mean), be aware of what an idiom is. It's something that what, (you know), you're using, (like), the word "sausage" to mean something else. But it definitely does not translate in English.

Lindsay: It's so rooted in culture, right? Yeah.

Gabby: Yeah. Yeah, wow.

Jörn: Exactly.

Gabby: (I mean)...

Lindsay: (Mm).



Gabby: Yeah, I'm just thinking, when we talk about sausage, it's something else. So don't, don't use that.

Jörn: Oh yeah. That just comes to my mind. Yes.

Gabby: Yeah, you have to be careful. (Um), yeah, so I guess our, our tip for our listeners is, (you know), is speak in plain English whenever possible, and maybe start to understand idioms. But use them sparingly until you're really sure, (you know), (uh), how they work, right.

Lindsay: Right. Or just don't translate an idiom, right.

Gabby: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lindsay: Don't try to go into a new place and translate your idiom into that culture...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...the target culture.

Jörn: For Germans, it's, it's pretty tricky because, (um), because some idioms are almost the same. Like, getting into, (uh), "hell's kitchen."

Gabby: Oh.

Lindsay: (Mm).

Jörn: Meaning you get in big trouble, right. You would understand that.

Gabby: Yeah, yeah.

Jörn: Yeah, that, that's a German one you can really translate. But there's other ones, like the sausage, you can't.

Gabby: Not really, yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: How interesting. I just, I feel like this is such a rich topic. And I wish we had more time to get into it. And more time to talk about your, your studies in



the US, and, and business, and everything, but, (um), but, (you know), we just wanna (want to)...

Jörn: Why don't you invite me back?

Gabby: Yeah, absolutely. We'll invite you back. (You know), you can also invite us on your podcast. Why don't we tell our listeners, (um), where to find you, especially our German listeners? We have quite a few people listening in Germany. So, (um), your podcast is on iTunes, right?

Jörn: Exactly. You should search for StartupRadio.de.

Gabby: Okay.

Jörn: Or you can visit our website, where you have the options to subscribe with the Android, (uh), podcast apps, as well as iTunes. You'll find it with www.startupradio.de.

Gabby: Fantastic. And I know you have some material in English, and some material in German. So, (uh), maybe, (you know), all listeners would enjoy the interviews in English that you do as well.

Jörn: Yes, exactly. And we also had one interview with a lady from Australia.

Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Jörn: She set-up a chocolate startup in Germany called Bliss Chocolate.

Gabby: How nice.

Jörn: And (uh), we've been talking about the difference in cultures, and to boil it down to one bottom line, she said, "In Germany, it takes much longer to set something up, but then it works smooth like clockwork."

Gabby: Wow.

Lindsay: (Mm).



Gabby: That's great. Well that would be a great episode to listen to. I'm definitely going to listen to that one. Thank you. Thank you so much Jörn for joining us and for your tips. They're really, really invaluable.

Lindsay: Yeah, thank you, Jörn. Thank you so much.

Jörn: Thank you very much for having me. Have a good day.

Gabby: You too.

Lindsay: Thanks.

Gabby: Bye-bye.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

