



All Ears English Episode 194:

How to Decide Between a Free Language Exchange and a Lesson

Gabby: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Number 194: “How to Decide Between a Free Language Exchange and a Lesson.”

[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.

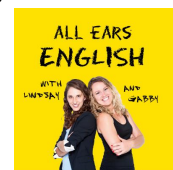
[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In today’s episode, you’ll learn about the biggest mistake that you might make when you decide between a free language exchange and a paid, professional English lesson.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Every day All Ears English listeners download our transcripts, and they get to read along with every word on every episode that they download.

Lindsay: Yeah, so if you guys haven’t gotten your transcripts yet, you’re missing out on half of the experience of All Ears English. And don’t forget that by November 1st, the prices on these transcript are going up. So go over there



today and get your transcript to get the full All Ears English experience. Go to...

Gabby: AllEarsEnglish.com/conversations. That's c-o-n-v-e-r-s-a-t-i-o-n-s. See you on the inside at the transcripts.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay.

Lindsay: Hey, Gabby. What's, what's happening today? How (are) you doing?

Gabby: Oh, I'm doing great, beautiful weather here in Tokyo.

Lindsay: Same here in Boston, another gorgeous day with blue skies and sunshine. I love it.

Gabby: Awesome. (You know), I'm really excited because, (you know), we've been growing this podcast. It's been almost a year, and now we can announce some opportunities that we have to partner with companies that also wanna (want to) grow with us and with, with you the listener. So, we're, we just wanna (want to) tell you that soon, very soon – keep your, your ears, (uh), tuned.

Lindsay: Open.

Gabby: Open because we're gonna (going to) be announcing some services, (uh), that we believe could really help you to improve your English, to practice with native speakers, and to improve your English in other ways.

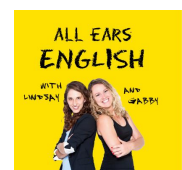
Lindsay: Yeah, these guys provide exactly what you guys have been asking us for.

Gabby: (Mm).

Lindsay: So, we've partnered with them to provide an awesome opportunity for you guys...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...and some really cool discounts.



Gabby: Yeah, so just keep your ears tuned. We're not quite ready to, (you know), announce our suggestions yet, but very soon we will. So, let's get into our topic for today, Lindsay. We've been talking together about language exchange. It's kind of a hot topic in language learning.

Lindsay: Hot topic.

Gabby: It's, (I mean), it's nothing new, (right). (I mean), we've been doing pen pals for, (you know), since we could write a letter, right? (I mean), that's, like, nothing new.

Lindsay: Yeah, sure, sure, sure.

Gabby: But I think language exchange has really, (sort of), taken off since we've had Skype or, (uh), (you know), Google Hangouts, or ways to chat online because the whole world has just opened up, (you know).

Lindsay: Absolutely, absolutely.

Gabby: (Um). But also in person. (I mean), of course, (you know), people are traveling more. So, especially if you live in a big city or you're traveling to a big city you have more opportunities for language exchange these days too.

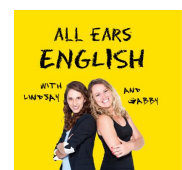
Lindsay: Absolutely, and language exchange can be great for some people at certain times.

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Lindsay: But at other times, there are also times when you actually need a teacher and a real class.

Gabby: Right. So we wanna (want to) talk about those two different times to help you. (You know), if you've been thinking about, 'Wow, should I look for a language exchange partner?' (You know), there's (there are) pros, there's (there are) good things, and there's (there are) cons, bad things. So...

Lindsay: Right.



Gabby: ...it just depends what you need, and we're gonna (going to) talk about that a little bit today from our own professional opinions because, as you know, Lindsay and I are not just, (uh), (podc-), podcast...

Lindsay: Podcasters.

Gabby: ...hosts, (right), or podcasters. We also have a combined, (uh), 20 years of experience as language teachers, and we've both done language exchanges ourselves.

Lindsay: Right. So, let me just tell a personal, (uh), a little story...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...about an interaction that I had with a student through my other company, (uh), a few weeks ago. (Um), I had a student come to me who was visiting New York, and he was here for, (uh), about two months, in New York, and he really wanted to spend that time in New York kinda (kind of) perfecting his grammar.

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Lindsay: (Uh), he was confused about different grammar points, and he wanted to be able to use them in conversation, and also to learn some local New York slang, expressions, things like that, right?

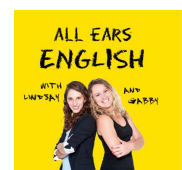
Gabby: Cool.

Lindsay: So, that's great. So, I said, "Okay, perfect. I'm gonna (going to) find you a teacher who can answer all of your questions." (Um), so, I actually did go ahead and assign him to his teacher...

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Lindsay: ...and I was excited that we were going to be able to meet his needs. His teacher was gonna (going to) create a customized plan for him, and will, would be able to lead him from point A to point Z...

Gabby: (Mm).



Lindsay: ...and to get him where he wanted to go. And unfortunately I got an email from him a few days later saying, "Oh, I found a language exchange. So I don't need the lesson anymore."

Gabby: (Mm).

Lindsay: So, there was someone, a, a native speaker was going to be visiting New York, a friend of a, a friend of a friend of his.

Gabby: Okay.

Lindsay: (Uh), and this native speaker was going to sit down with him and practice for an hour in English...

Gabby: (Mm).

Lindsay: ...and an hour in Portuguese.

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Lindsay: And I said, "Oh that might be a mistake."

Gabby: Yeah and...

Lindsay: So, why could that be a mistake, Gabby?

Gabby: (Right). Well, I see a lot of reasons actually, several reasons. (Um), well, you said that this friend was visiting New York, and that he would sit down for an hour. So do you mean that they would only meet once for one hour?

Lindsay: So, I think that he – so this person, this potential student, was going to be in New York for two months but...

Gabby: Okay.

Lindsay: ...this native speaker was only going to be in New York for two weeks. So it was...

Gabby: Okay.



Lindsay: ...going to be a short-term arrangement...

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: ...first of all.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: (Mm-hm).

Gabby: Okay. Well, that's the first problem is a short-term arrangement is not ideal. I think a short-term arrangement could be good perhaps if you have something like a presentation that you wanna (want to) practice, you wanna (want to) run through before you give a presentation or a talk, but if you want to improve your grammar, that's a complex topic and it takes time. It takes time to present grammar points, practice grammar, and review, and actually use the grammar to make sure you have a solid understanding. So, I think time is one issue.

Lindsay: Yep.

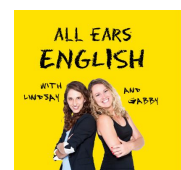
Gabby: Another issue I see is I wonder exactly what the intentions of the native speaker are? Now I'm not saying that the person has, (you know), (uh), bad or, kinda (kind of) a, a double, (um), agenda or hidden agenda. What I'm saying is that – something we've talked about in previous episodes – sometimes when a native English speaker, an American, meets someone from another country they're really happy to meet them. They're really nice, almost too nice, and they say, "Oh, let's hang out sometime," or "Hey, yeah, let's do a language exchange," because...

Lindsay: Oh.

Gabby: ...that just sounds like a nice thing to do, and I know I've been guilty of this...

Lindsay: (Mm).

Gabby: ...in the past, when I was younger. (You know), (uh), I, I remember maybe ten years ago I, I think made a, a Spanish speaking friend and I was



learning Spanish, I'd say, "Hey, yeah, let's do a language exchange. That would be awesome," but realistically...

Lindsay: Sometime, right?

Gabby: ...exactly, realistically I didn't have the time and, (you know)...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...I wanted to be nice, but I really had no definite intention of carrying through with a, (you know), a, really a, a weekly language exchange. I...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: (I mean), I wonder?

Lindsay: That's a really good point, Gabby. I mean, 'cause (because) we've talked in a past episode about the word 'sometime'...

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: ...when it comes from an American person.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: And that that actually often doesn't mean that they have any intention...

Gabby: Yeah.

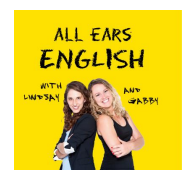
Lindsay: ...to meet you in a serious, scheduled, regimented, way.

Gabby: So, I would be really worried that this student you mentioned from your personal experience just dropped lessons with you because of an American who may not have really intended to meet with him for a language exchange.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: I could be wrong. Maybe...

Lindsay: Could be wrong.



Gabby: ...this American was serious, but I just want to point that out, that sometimes people say, especially younger people, will say, "Hey, yeah, let's do a language exchange. That'd be so cool," and...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...you just don't know.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: So, and, and third, if I can just add one more thing. I think language exchange is excellent for casual conversation, and maybe making friends, (um), but honestly I don't think it works for learning the base, or the bones of the language, such as grammar. I really do not think that works. I think a language exchange can be good for just very casual conversation and perhaps sharing about your culture, (uh)...

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Gabby: ...maybe just spending some time with someone who's from another culture. That's great, but like I said, just casual conversation.

Lindsay: Yeah, I think language exchange can be combined beautifully with lessons. So, I suggested to him, I suggested, "Hey, why don't you continue with our lessons twice a week and...

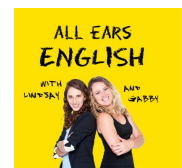
Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...do the language exchange once a week so you can practice what you learn."

Gabby: Yes.

Lindsay: And the – yeah, and the other problem that I see with the mistake that he made is that, (you know), if I ask a random native speaker to take me through an explanation of the 'third conditional'...

Gabby: Ooph.



Lindsay: ...even though we don't really love talking about grammar on this podcast, but I knew that those were the questions that he...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...had for me because he told me during our consultation, "I wanna (want to) understand 'present perfect' and 'past perfect', 'simple past', 'third conditional', 'first conditional'." Okay, my mother, or my friend across the street who's a native speaker is...

Gabby: Yep.

Lindsay: ...never going to explain that because they don't know. They know it in an intuitive...

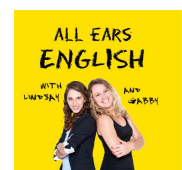
Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...way, but they can't bring you through a lesson, through activities, through a plan to actually help you master it, and it's only gonna (going to) lead to frustration on your part, and the other person's part, if you ask them to do that.

Gabby: Totally agreed. I know this first hand from my experience when I started teaching English ten years ago. Even though I had experienced tutoring conversational English, I had no idea how to explain grammar because you have to understand that your native language comes to you as something that's natural. You don't have to think about the rules, you just do it, it's habitual. So, you have to actually return to learning your language from the ground up, from step one, and learn how the grammar works in order to explain it to someone else. So, if you wanna (want to) really learn grammar you need a trained teacher.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm). Yeah, and we like – on All Ears English podcast, we like to talk about connection, not perfection.

Gabby: Right.



Lindsay: We like to talk about learning English through using it, and that's why combining a language exchange with a lesson, the lesson will give you that nice foundation to work from and then...

Gabby: Exactly.

Lindsay: ...you go into your language exchange with fewer expectations, and just to enjoy a conversation. But don't put all that pressure on this native speaker...

Gabby: Yeah.

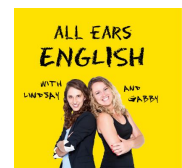
Lindsay: ...who's not a teacher, who doesn't know the grammar, and who really doesn't know how to put you through a systematic plan to get you to your goals.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Don't expect to get magic from a free language (ex-), exchange.

Gabby: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. You could combine both, a, a lesson and a language exchange, (you know), at different times with different people, but you could do both, perhaps, (you know), one on Monday and one on Wednesday, or, (you know), and, and really see good results. (You know), I was just thinking about an example, if we could, (um), make, a, an, (uh), an analogy. It's like, I see a conversation exchange as, (you know), getting together with a friend and maybe playing some basketball in the park, (right). It's fun, you're gonna (going to) probably learn some new things, you're gonna (going to) get a good work out, you'll have a great time. Awesome.

Having an English lesson and learning grammar is (sort of) like training with, (uh), like an NBA coach, someone who's gonna (going to) give you the strategies, and the skills, and the base, that, that could really, (you know), bring your level up and train you for being a superstar in the NBA. That's kinda (kind of) just the analogy that went through my mind. So...



Lindsay: Yeah, I like that analogy. I think that's a good, a good example. It's a good way to explain it.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: So, don't get the two confused, guys, and don't get distracted by things that are free because, (you know), free is great, free is awesome. I go to Walmart and things are free or very cheap and that's great. I want everything, but guess what it's not gonna (going to), it's not gonna (going to) get to, me to my goal...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...necessarily.

Gabby: Yeah, yeah, that's true, that's very true. I think that's a great point. So, I hope that, (like), talking about these points, I hope that they helped clarify a decision for you, and maybe you don't have to decide between one or the other. Maybe you could do both.

Lindsay: Absolutely. Awesome.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Thanks for chatting today.

Gabby: Yeah, my pleasure.

[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.

