



All Ears English Episode 210:

LingQ Founder Steve Kaufmann Talks About Why Learning Is Up to You

Lindsay: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 210: “LingQ Founder Steve Kaufmann Talks About Why Learning is Up to You.”

[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.

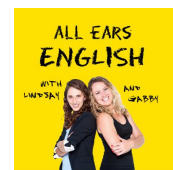
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Lindsay: In today’s episode, we have Steve Kaufmann, founder of LingQ. Steve speaks 15 languages, and today he’s gonna (going to) show you why reaching your English goal is not as far off as you think.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, guys. You’re loving the All Ears English Podcast, but what if you want to actually use the words and phrases that you hear on this show. Go to AllEarsEnglish.com/conversations to get every word we say on the All Ears English Podcast. See you there.

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Gabby: Guys, we've asked you about your biggest challenges in learning English, and some of you've told us that you don't have a native speaker to practice with, you live in a city where there are no native speakers or they're hard to find, or maybe you're busy, so you can't find a native speaker to practice with. You just don't have the time. But guys, there's a solution. You can find a native speaker partner to practice with or a professional teacher online at Italki. And because you can schedule one-on-one classes that are convenient to your schedule and anywhere you have an internet connection, now you are empowered to learn anytime, anywhere.

Guys, you have to check out Italki, especially because now, All Ears English listeners, get ten US dollars to use toward Italki classes. You can claim your ten US dollars for Italki classes at AllEarsEnglish.com/Italki. That's I-t-a-l-k-i. So go claim that money for classes before it's too late.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay. What's up?

Lindsay: Hey, Guys. Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast. Today we have language enthusiast and co-founder of LingQ, Steve Kaufmann. Welcome, Steve. How are you today?

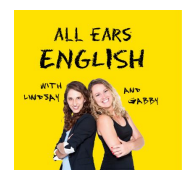
Steve: I am fine Lindsay. Good morning. Nice to talk to you.

Lindsay: Yeah, it's so great to meet you. Thanks for joining us today.

Steve: Well, I'm happy to be here and I'm happy to talk about my favorite subject: language learning.

Lindsay: I know. It seems like you've really cracked the code to know how to actually learn languages. How many languages did you say that you actually speak?

Steve: Well, I would say – I don't speak them all equally well, but 15.



Lindsay: Oh, my god. That's incredible. (Like) many people struggle just to learn one or two languages, so you obviously know how it's done. So Steve can you tell us a story about where the light bulb, where and when the light bulb finally went on, as to how to learn languages? (I mean), let us know what happened.

Steve: Well, I, I, (you know), I would say that there are two moments. One, when I was about 17 and attending university in Montreal, and I had a, I had a Professor of French who made French interesting for me.

Lindsay: Okay.

Steve: And once it was interesting, then I was pursuing the language. And I was looking for, (you know), books, movies, (uh), whatever I could find. So, an- and I realized then – and of course I became so interested in French that I actually became fluent in it.

Lindsay: Wow!

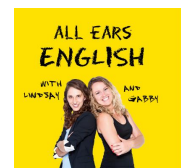
Steve: And, that was a major moment because a lot of people don't know that they can become fluent in another language. They have never experienced it. So it's a bit like climbing a mountain. If you don't think you're gonna (going to) reach the top of the mountain, you may give up.

Lindsay: That's a good point.

Steve: But once you've done it, and you know you can do it, then you are much more confident and motivated, (you know). I always say if I'm looking for something at home and I'm not sure it's at home, then I may not look so hard because it might be at the office or it might be somewhere else. But if I know it's there, I'm gonna (going to) look until I find it. And it's the same with language learning. If you know you can do it, and we can all do it.

Lindsay: We can do it.

Steve: Yeah. You're gonna (going to) try that much harder. So that was one moment and the other moment, I think in a way was the advent of the mini-disc player and the mp3 player [crosstalk]...



Lindsay: Oh, that's interesting.

Steve: ...realize that today – because when I studied, (like), Chinese back in the late 60's, I had this great big open reel (uh) tape recorder, (right). And so now we can download all kinds of audio content. Very often, we can find transcripts, but we can then carry this in this little mp3 player. So starting with the mini-disc player and then with the mp3 player – I'm now 69 – since the age of 60, I have learned six languages.

Lindsay: That's incredible Steve.

Steve: Yeah.

Lindsay: All because of the mp3 player.

Steve: All because of the technology, including our website, LingQ, including, (uh), the resources that are available on the internet, I think language learning has been completely revolutionized. [crosstalk] there's no way back, (uh), 30, 40, 50 years ago that I could've learned all these languages. I would've had to go to a classroom. I would've had to buy, (um), umpteen textbooks and I still wouldn't have been anywhere.

Lindsay: So what you're saying is that the conditions are all here for our listeners to really take their learning to the next level. (I mean), this is the best time in history if you want to be a language learner.

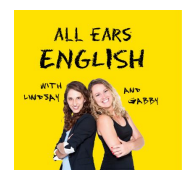
Steve: Absolutely. Absolutely. And, (uh), particularly for those people who are learning English...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: ...because the resources, the availability of, of content, of, of whatever (uh) on the internet is, is limitless, (you know).

Lindsay: They're everywhere.

Steve: But, but I'm learning languages like Romanian, and Korean, an-and Ukrainian, whereas...



Lindsay: Wow.

Steve: ...Czech, it's more difficult to find resources. But even there, there's so many resources on the internet with audio and text.

Lindsay: Yeah, we're lucky at this time. So we've gotta (got to) take advantage of what's out there.

Steve: Absolutely.

Lindsay: So Steve can you tell us – so it seems like you've – like I said before, you've really figured it out here and you told us your story about how things changed for you, but what are your three core tips, three core takeaways that our listeners can use to learn the way that you do, to actually find the kind of success that you've had.

Steve: Well...

Lindsay: What can they do?

Steve: All right. The first thing is to realize that your learning doesn't depend on the teacher, doesn't depend on your school, it depends on you, the learner. That is so important. What does that mean? It means that you have to be motivated. You have to like the language, you have to want to learn, you have to believe you can do it. You have to put in the time because it takes time. We don't learn...

Lindsay: Oh, yeah.

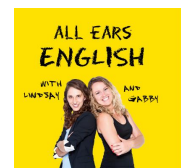
Steve: ...quickly, we learn slowly. So you have to stay with it. So I think the first thing is to realize that all of those things that relate to your attitude are – that's 80% of the battle.

Lindsay: That's huge.

Steve: I can't...

Lindsay: That's huge.

Steve: ...repeat that often enough. 80% of the battle. So that's number one.



Lindsay: Okay.

Steve: Number two is put the emphasis on comprehension.

Lindsay: (Hmm).

Steve: In other words, if you can say a few things, but you don't understand what the other person is saying, you can't communicate.

Lindsay: Right.

Steve: Because language is about communication.

Lindsay: (Uh-hmm).

Steve: It's not about you saying some things. It's about understanding what the other person is said, has said, sometimes anticipating what they're gonna (going to) say, and you responding. And so, you need vocabulary to do that. And you need to have a-a-a-a good, (you know), ability to understand both the written and the spoken language. And what it also does if you have good comprehension, you're more relaxed. You...

Lindsay: Okay. So the key...

Steve: Go ahead.

Lindsay: You're more relaxed. So the key to good comprehension, in your opinion, is that vocabulary, really focusing on vocabulary, or is that – what is that?

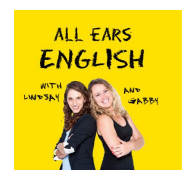
Steve: That's part of it. Like I believe in a lot of listening and reading. A lot.

Lindsay: Okay.

Steve: Every day and not watching movies or TV. Listening. MP3 players, (you know), that type of thing.

Lindsay: (Um), okay.

Steve: So listening 'cause (because) that's very word rich and so the brain now has to make meaning out of these words. And at first it's fuzzy and you can hardly tell where one word ends and the next word begins and you just let



your brain – it will eventually sort things through, especially if you have both the audio and the transcript. [crosstalk]...

Lindsay: (Hmm), that's huge.

Steve: ...you don't need the transcript, but for an initial period, to make sure you're picking up words and phrases and expressions...

Lindsay: Right.

Steve: ...it's a good advantage to have both. So...

Lindsay: So a lot of – yeah.

Steve: Go ahead.

Lindsay: Go 'head (ahead).

Steve: No.

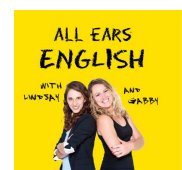
Lindsay: No, please go 'head (ahead) Steve.

Steve: If you achieve a, a comfortable sense of (compre-), or the ability – you're confident you can understand what they're saying, you're so much relaxed. And when you're more relaxed, you speak better, you do better. You're not tense, you're not under the gun. So the emphasis, I think, should be on comprehension.

Lindsay: I see. So it becomes kind of a positive snow ball effect where we get more comfortable, therefore more confident, therefore we're (ea-), it's easier to actually speak. It's a beautiful, virtuous cycle.

Steve: Absolutely, and it gets back to this whole, (uh), (y-you know), (uh), liking it if you're doing well, if you're understanding it, if you're not under pressure. Then you like it because you've achieved some success now. You understand more than two months ago. So that feeds our – the brain likes that. We achieved something.

Lindsay: Yeah. I like that.



Steve: Go ahead.

Lindsay: A lot of our listeners wanna (want to) use movies, and TV – things like *Friends*. Everyone loves the show *Friends*. What's wrong, in your opinion, what's wrong with using shows like *Friends* and movies to practice your listening.

Steve: There's nothing wrong with it. I find it as less efficient because...

Lindsay: Okay.

Steve: ...if you're dealing with, strictly with sound, you can take it everywhere you go.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: In the car, on the train, walking the dog, washing the dishes. If I couldn't learn languages while washing the dishes, doing tasks and so forth, I wouldn't have the time 'cause (because) you've got...

Lindsay: Right.

Steve: ...to put in an hour or more a day. You have to. And...

Lindsay: Okay.

Steve: ...most of that is dead time. It's time you're waiting for something, you're going somewhere. So, that's the big advantage of audio. The other thing is, (uh), *Friends* or sitcoms, they're actually quite difficult.

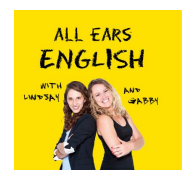
Lindsay: Yeah, they are.

Steve: Okay.

Lindsay: They are.

Steve: Be very clear on this. An-and so if people get frustrated because they don't understand movies or they don't understand *Friends*, they're putting an unfair demand on themselves. (Uh)...

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).



Steve: ...if you are just listening to the sound, the brain is being trained. (Uh), it's less colloquial. A lot of the dialogue in these sitcoms is not natural. People...

Lindsay: Really?

Steve: ...don't speak that way.

Lindsay: Interesting, interesting. I never thought about that. (I mean), so you don't get to start that positive cycle if you're sitting down in front of *Friends* and you're only understanding about 10% of *Friends*. Right?

Steve: Forget it.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: (I mean), I lived in Japan for nine years – I speak Japanese.

Lindsay: Okay.

Steve: I was doing business in Japanese. And of course, I did a lot of listening and reading. That's what I always do. And I spoke every chance I got, but for me to understand the Japanese soap operas, that took like five years. (I mean), that, that's difficult stuff. So if you like it, fine. (Uh), go for it. But it's not, to my mind, th-the prime learning, (uh).

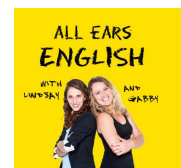
Lindsay: Oh, I see. So maybe the key, maybe the key is knowing when we're just trying to have entertainment like watching *Friends* and when we're actually learning to learn.

Steve: Right. Now, what's very important of course is interest. So, if you're only interested in *Friends* and you're not interested in listening to All Ears English for example, or you're not...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: ...like I like listening to podcasts on history, which I find...

Lindsay: Yeah.



Steve: ...on the internet.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: [crosstalk] interest. So, if you're interested in *Friends*, fine, go for it. but, (uh), if you could somehow rip off the soundtrack and listen to it away from the TV and listen to it many times, and if you're able to find the transcript, you'll eventually get used to that language, even if it is a bit artificial. So if that's what interests you, it drives you, fine, but for me it's not the prime thing. But I was gonna (going to) add the third point. So...

Lindsay: Yeah, what's the third point?

Steve: The third point is you – the first point is, of course, you're, you're liking it, you're determined, you're gonna (going to) do it, you're (con-)...

Lindsay: Motivated. (Uh-huh).

Steve: ...the same thing is focusing on comprehension.

Lindsay: (Uh-hmm).

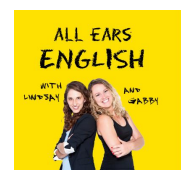
Steve: The thing is don't be hard on yourself.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: Give yourself credit for what you can do. And don't worry about what you can't do. (Uh), if you communicate it, even not so well and people start to say, "Oh..." (You know), sometimes you feel like it. "Well, all this time and I didn't do well this other time." Think about it.

Lindsay: Yeah, I hear that a lot from students. "So today was a good speaking day, yesterday wasn't good. I don't know why," (right).

Steve: Speaking is about – there has to be a meaningful communication. That's one reason why I put so much emphasis on comprehension. Without comprehension, you don't have meaningful communication. So when you speak, it's not a performance. It's not figure skating; you're not being



judged. You're just communicating, and if you communicate it, you say to yourself, 'Wow, look at me. I communicated in another language.'

Lindsay: I see.

Steve: So don't put unnecessary tension, demands, (uh), pressure on yourself and I see so many people – and, and – so tension and pressure is the enemy, the enemy of success in language learning. So [crosstalk]...

Lindsay: So to get on your own side. Yeah.

Steve: (You know), I went out with a bunch of friends and they were all yacking away in their native language, whatever, in Spanish and I couldn't understand [inaudible] very much. Well, fine, but you were there with them. You picked up a bit. You improved a bit. You're not gonna (going to) get worse, you're not gonna (going to) get worse.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Steve: So just keep doing it. And, "(You know), I'm so, I'm, (uh), (you know), I'm intimidated. It's hard for me to jump in the conversation." Yeah, it's hard. So what. We've all been there. Me too. So...

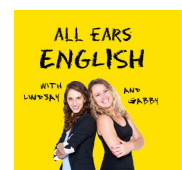
Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: ...say a few things. (You know), "Pass the butter." (You know), whatever.

Lindsay: Yeah, it's supposed to be hard, right. This is language learning, but get on your own side.

Steve: Absolutely. If you wanna (want to) be totally comfortable, just speak your own language.

Lindsay: Right. And don't try to learn a new language. Th-tha-that's one thing I love about learning language is it's an opportunity to push our limits. And actually, I think in that space, we have an amazing opportunity to grow as people, not just language learners, (right). It's really not about language in the end, it's about pushing your limits for life.



Steve: Pushing your limits, discovering new words, (expend-), expanding your personality. (I mean), just [crosstalk]...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Steve: ...I speak 15 languages. I'm – my personality is just a little bit different in each language and I, I can, I can, I can appreciate people of that culture and so – I don't know.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Steve: It's-it's-it's a wonderful thing, and it's – well the big thing about language learning, it's doable. Like I play golf. I practice, I never improve. I won't improve. I haven't improved for 15 years. I'm not gonna (going to) improve.

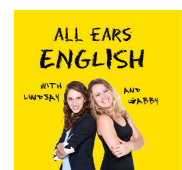
Lindsay: Oh, no.

Steve: But language learning, I know that the more effort you put in, you will improve, so that makes it a very satisfying task. You're going to improve. You just have to – it's slow, it's slow. It is no sudden success...

Lindsay: Right.

Steve: ...stories. It's slow.

Lindsay: There's no 'get rich quick' stories here. I like that. Wow, Steve this is fantastic. Thank you so much for your insight today. (You know), this has been (like) gold. (I mean), I think this is really the way that our listeners can get into that positive cycle and have it become a snowball effect for them because I've seen it happen with some listeners and I know it's doable. And if our listeners take these tips, (you know), first of all, staying motivated and making it about you as a learner, not about your teacher, not about your resources. Second, focusing on comprehension and vocabulary, and third, (you know), getting on your own side, being your own friend in this journey of language learning.



I think if our listeners do this, they can see those results that you've seen with 15 languages. So, so Steve can you tell our listeners where they can find you online if they wanna (want to) check out your work. I think you have a fantastic product or service over there. Can you let us know?

Steve: Sure, (I mean), (uh), the name of website is, is LingQ, L-i-n-g-Q.com. And it basically embodies my philosophy of language learning. So I won't go into the detailed explanation of it. (Uh), people are welcome to contact me, Steve@LingQ (L-i-n-g-Q).com if they have any questions about the site, how it works. People can also find me at YouTube, (uh), Lingo Steve.

Lindsay: Oh, cool. You have a YouTube Channel. Fantastic.

Steve: [crosstalk] channel and I put out videos, oh, once or twice a week. In both – mostly in English about language learning, but also in, (you know), Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, whatever the mood of the moment is. So people can find me there. (Uh), but yeah and come to LingQ and send me an email. But the key thing is, I think, people who are still struggling with their first language – I think that's the biggest obstacle. Get over that and you'll soon discover that you wanna (want to) learn more languages. And I think the service like the one you provide is excellent to get [crosstalk]...

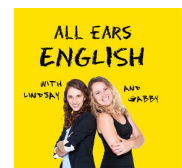
Lindsay: Thank you sir. I appreciate that.

Steve: ...and at the same time a positive message.

Lindsay: Thank you so much. Thanks so much for being on our show (gu-). And listen guys if you wanna (want to) come back and get these direct links over to LingQ, you can actually go to AllEarsEnglish.com/209 [210], and you'll get all the information for Steve and how to find him online. Well, thank you so much Steve for coming on the show today. It's been great meeting you.

Steve: I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Lindsay: Yeah, thank you.



[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.

