



All Ears English Episode 234:

One Way to Stop Thinking Too Hard When You Learn English

Lindsay: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 234: “One Way to Stop Thinking Too Hard When You Learn English.”

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, downloaded more than 5 million times. We believe in connection, not perfection. You’ll finally get real Native English conversation with your American hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Michelle Kaplan, the ‘New York Radio Girl’ coming to you from Boston and New York City, USA.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In today’s episode, you’ll learn about Michelle’s Hebrew learning hack or trick and what this could mean for your English.

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[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, Michelle.

Michelle: Hey, Lindsay. What's up?

Lindsay: Not much. What's shaking?

Michelle: Not too much. Everything's good here. Thanks.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm). That's cool. So today I wanna (want to) talk about an inspiring story and a little hint for our listeners, (um), that they can take from this example on how to maybe get better at English by taking the pressure off of themselves and focusing on something else. Do you wanna (want to) hear my story Michelle?

Michelle: Oh, of course.

Lindsay: Okay. Good. You're supposed to say that. All right, so I have a student here in Boston and I think he's probably listening to this, (um), to this episode because he's one of our listeners. He's going to school here in Boston and he went through this awesome transformation this fall.

Michelle: Oh, really?

Lindsay: Yeah. Yeah. Lemme (let me) tell you what happened. So, (you know), he started – (um), he came here to (Bost-), he came to Boston, (uh), back in – I don't know – August, September, sometime in the summer and when he first started learning English, he was quite nervous, quite embarrassed and shy and feeling awkward, and feeling like his progress was very slow. And then something really interesting happened.

Michelle: What happened?



Lindsay: Good question. What happened? So what happened was that he realized that he had amazing exceptional skills in one aspect of his business degree. So one aspect of his schooling, he had better skills than his classmates.

Michelle: Oh. That's interesting.

Lindsay: So they asked him to tutor them.

Michelle: Oh, my goodness.

Lindsay: And guess what language he had to tutor in?

Michelle: I can take a guess.

Lindsay: Can you imagine? So, all of a sudden he was, (you know), at the student center tutoring them in a – I think it was – I don't know if it was economics or business strategy or something along those lines, but he was tutoring them in English.

Michelle: Wow.

Lindsay: And guess what happened? He lost his sense of, (um), inhibition, lost his sense of, of focusing on mistakes and getting nervous and worried. All of a sudden he had a greater goal to reach.

Michelle: (Um), that's wonderful. Good for him.

Lindsay: I know. I'm really proud of him and I think that's so cool. And, an-an-and so now when I, when I work with him, when I meet with him, it's like it's a different person.

Michelle: Wow.

Lindsay: (You know), I can see that change and there's a real sense of ease when it comes to breaking into English for him.

Michelle: Wow.



Lindsay: And I just wanna (want to), (you know), recommend this for our listeners, but let's go into a couple of more examples. (I mean), Michelle, has this ever happened to you in, in language learning?

Michelle: Yeah. Oh, of course. All the time. (I mean), I think that i-it's very... it can be a little intimidating to learn a new language, right?

Lindsay: Oh, yeah.

Michelle: So I think that sometimes we focus on little mistakes and are we nervous and everything. So I was actually recently – actually just last week, I was taking a Hebrew class. (Um)...

Lindsay: Aww.

Michelle: ...and I realized that I was hesitating a lot. I was really hesitating a lot because it's been a long time for me since I've really been working on the language.

Lindsay: (Um).

Michelle: So I was a little intimidated and just thinking too hard, I think. Too...

Lindsay: Okay. Okay.

Michelle: I was thinking too hard and all of a sudden the teacher said, "You know what..." – we were working on a role play and she said "Why don't you just try and confuse your partner?"

Lindsay: [inaudible]

Michelle: Yeah. [crosstalk] "Why don't you just kinda (kind of), (you know), try and, try and trip up your partner, try and confuse him, (right). (Like), ask him a bunch of questions." And I said, "Okay," and I kind of thought that was an interesting suggestion. And then I realized that I was focusing more on, (um), confusing my partner. Even though it sounds a little funny, it did... it shifted my focus...

Lindsay: Oh.



Michelle: ...and instead of thinking about my fear of the language, I thought about my partner and (kind of) almost made it a game and then I realized wow, I remember so much more than I even realized and I felt much more confident and it was a lot more fun.

Lindsay: Oh, that's brilliant. So that's a really good example. It's the same thing as what happened to, to my student here in Boston, (right). So it's, it's the moment when someone snaps their finger, (right) and they say, "Bam, do this," (like) it's like someone claps in front of your face and say, "Do this now." And all of a sudden you're taken out of your (kind of) self-consciousness...

Michelle: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...or inhibition, or whatever, or that focus is no longer on yourself. And that's where we can find more moments of brilliance and where we can actually get something done...

Michelle: Right.

Lindsay: ...when it comes to learning languages.

Michelle: I think that's such a good point. (I mean), has this ever happened to you?

Lindsay: Well, I would say, (hmm)... Yeah, (I mean), I know the feeling, (right). So going beyond language learning, (I mean), I know I've had moments where boom, you wake up...

Michelle: Right.

Lindsay: ...and, and you're awake and you're alive and you're totally in the moment, but, but with language learning – I know I was living in Guatemala...

Michelle: (Umm).

Lindsay: ...for about three months back in 2008 and I was living in a small town called Totonicapán. And it was in the highlands above Zha-la. And I went there to learn Spanish, but I was living in a really poor town.



Michelle: (Uhn).

Lindsay: And there was a lot of poverty and I was volunteering at a school, a kids school, (um), and, (you know), just being in that kind of environment made me realize (like), (you know), my skills are needed here, I'm doing something to really help these kids. These kids are, (you know), in a tough situation and I – that's another situation where you're taken out of your self-consciousness because there's something else going on that needs you more.

Michelle: Yeah. That...

Lindsay: That situation needs you more than your own inhibitions...

Michelle: (Uhn).

Lindsay: ...need to consume you, (right).

Michelle: I think that's a great example. Yeah, I think that so often, especially, when we're sitting in the classroom, we can just get, 'Okay, I need to get every single word right.' And we get so bogged down in thinking about that that we don't actually, (you know), just say it. And I think that this is really helpful for fluency. I always tell my students, (you know), that you should be confident and I think that part of the way to be confident is to distract yourself and instead of focus on every little detail, right?

Lindsay: Yeah. Totally. You're right. (I mean), so what's the answer, (you know), 'cause (because) you made a good point here Michelle, that I don't think that a classroom is necessarily the best environment to cultivate this, this sense of being in the moment and outside of your head, like in a (nu-), (um), being focused...

Michelle: Right.

Lindsay: ...(right). The classroom is kind of conducive to self-consciousness and apprehension and, (you know), just (sort of) feeling awkward and afraid to make mistakes.



Michelle: Right and, (uck), that's, that's so true because I, I think that mistakes are actually a really good thing. (Um)...

Lindsay: Totally.

Michelle: ...and I think that if you are taking an English class, you should realize that. (You know), I think an English class can be a really positive experience if you (sort of) just don't think of it as a class really. Just think...

Lindsay: (Uhn).

Michelle: ...I'm experimenting, (right), like I'm experimenting, I have a goal, and this – we're just gonna (going to) see, we're gonna (going to) see.

Lindsay: (Uhn).

Michelle: And once you let go of your inhibitions, like you said, Lindsay, I think that you, (um), are really gonna (going to) notice a difference.

Lindsay: Yeah. Absolutely. (I mean), maybe one of the methods is to – as you said, (you know), go with that idea of experimenting and then take it one step further. And I am thinking about, (um), a guest that we had on the show. His name was Tony Marsh. He's an iTalki, (uh), teacher and he talked about little experiments where he would go up to people on the street in Chinatown in New York, actually, and he would practice his Chinese by just saying, "Hello." Is it *ni hao*? I think it's something like *ni hao*.

Michelle: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: I'm sure this is – our listeners from China are definitely laughing at me right now. But that's okay. So, so going up to them and just – an-and so little experiments. How many people can I say, "Hello" to or "How are you two today?" And how many people can I get to engage in a conversation? Focus on that.

Michelle: (Uhn).

Lindsay: And that's another way to not get so self-conscious.

Michelle: I really like that. Like setting little benchmarks or little goals for yourself.



Lindsay: (Uhn).

Michelle: I think that's really wonderful. I, I couldn't have said it any better. I think that's a really cool idea. (Like), give yourself maybe every day or every week a small goal and try and achieve that, right?

Lindsay: Yeah.

Michelle: And don't worry about all the little things.

Lindsay: Yeah. I think that's it. So, I think that's the takeaway guys, that's the action, that's the actionable thing that you can do after today's lesson. So if – after today's episode. So if you feel like you're struggling with inhibition, self-consciousness maybe in your classroom, (you know), take one little goal, one little experiment, one little benchmark for each week or even each day and just go out and focus on executing on your goal.

Michelle: That's – I, I think that's really exciting and I actually am gonna (going to) take that tip for my, my own language learning. I think that's really wonderful and don't worry about every little mistake.

Lindsay: Absolutely. And Michelle, I wanna (want to) wish you the best of luck with your, with your Hebrew classes. So, so we're gonna (going to) wanna (want to) hear how it, how it goes...

Michelle: Okay.

Lindsay: ...with Hebrew, (you know), 'cause (because)...

Michelle: Thank you.

Lindsay: ...you're, you're, you're learning. So just working on it here and you can let us know, (you know), what methods work for you when you're learning Hebrew. So we're excited to hear about that.

Michelle: Thank you. I will let you know.

Lindsay: Cool. Talk to you soon.

Michelle: Thanks Lindsay. Bye.



Lindsay: Bye.

[Instrumental]

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