



## **WE 031: How to learn English?**

Dear listeners, it is me again, or I should say it is us, I mean the Spikkeo online language coach team, the World of English podcast. And before I reveal the subject of today's meeting, I will start with a little anecdote. The other day, when talking to one of our students, I received a very positive feedback as regards the podcast, so the student is this listener of the World of English podcast. He, because that was a man, was praising last episode and said that it actually must be really hard to prepare such an episode and I need to be very focused to manage to read this whole piece for twenty, twenty-five minutes. I was not following. I needed to ask him what reading he meant and what he meant was reading the text of the podcast. Guys, let me say it very openly, there is no reading here. All you hear is this natural flow, natural speech. The best way for me to reach you is to talk to you, it reminds me of this radio broadcast or a meeting with friends because it reveals my emotions. And this is the advice I have for all of you who are preparing for an oral exam of any kind, remember that the examiners do not want to listen to robots who have prepared a speech before him, that doesn't work. They want to listen to real people, real conversation, natural speaking. And the same goes for delivering presentations, be it in English, be it in French and Polish, in any language. Do not read, just talk to people.

OK, so that was just the beginning and now we are going to cover the subject of the meeting. And what I have prepared for you today and the subject I'm going to cover is how to study the language and how to be effective. Again, the subject came into being through the class and through the experience, through my observation as I look at people struggling to study the language and I repeat that, I repeat that very often that it is not that hard, it is not rocket science, all you need is just these good materials, a good teacher, effective method and you will be good.

So, if you are among these people who have been studying English for the last five, seven or ten years and the only thing you can do is just go to a restaurant and buy yourself a cup of coffee, you know that there is something wrong, that



something is not working and any or one of these elements, the elements that I have just named, some, any of these elements, one of these elements may not be working and you need to change that. But the effective study of the language, it is a process, right. It is this process that needs to be covered in a couple of areas. And here I will tell you what you need to pay attention to in order to be successful because I want you, I do want you to be successful. I want you to finally learn the language because English is this skill, English is the skill, just like a driving licence. And it is hard to imagine today, nowadays, to live without that skill. And I know, I have told you this in a couple of times in some other episodes, I repeat that whenever I reach students, whenever I have this opportunity to talk to people, I know that this lack of knowledge, lack of knowledge of English, it will stop you, it will stop you from growing, from developing, from being promoted and getting a better job and I want you to be there, right, I want you to make your dreams come true and English, the language, it can help you, it is this tool through which you can really make your dreams come true.

I will start with defining what that really is, I mean this effective study of the language. And the effective study of the language is that you put some kind of effort in it and you get the effect. As simple as that. What is wrong is that you put this effort, you study a lot, you enrol in a course. Mind you, you can use this expression in the following way, I mean you enrol, you enrol in, you enrol on or you enrol for a course. Mind you that *enrol in* is this American version and *enrol on* and *for*, they are these British versions. So, if you want to be part of any course, any programme, you would use the expression *to enrol in*. So you enrol in this course and you do not get the effect, you are demotivated, you don't want to continue, you don't want to follow and I have heard these stories like a lots, right, on numerous occasions, and this can be changed, believe me.

The mistakes that you make and I'm sorry because I'm going to reach you today and I'm going to talk about the mistakes that you as learners of the language make, is that you are unaware of what it actually means to study the language and how to approach this subject. But you don't know it because very often the people



you work with, the coaches you work with, the programmes you take part in, they do not tell you how to do it. So, the very common mistake is that you enrol in this course and you think that this is enough. I mean, you choose this course, I know that you know it all because you've been there, like, you studied individually, you have been part of this group class, you studied offline, you studied online but you just, you are just there, you take part in the class and this is not enough.

We all know that in order to be successful you also need to do a bit of your homework. I know that all depends on how busy you are but I just want you to be aware of the fact, I want to draw your attention to this fact that the more you work, the more effective you will be. And if you do not have any time at home to cover the subject of the language outside the classroom, the effect will come much later. And when I talk about, when I talk about homework, what I mean here is not this lengthy studying for hours every evening but it has to be just this little bit of regular work, fifteen, twenty minutes a day. And believe me that this is enough because you study the language the same way you train your body, so it really is similar to this activity of attending a gym and I will talk about it later on.

Another thing that you have to be aware of is the materials, of course in order to be effective and study the language you have to have access to this great variety of materials. So the materials that you work with they have to be simply good. But at the same time, the idea of downloading something from the internet or listening to some materials or buying the materials or getting them from your teacher this is not enough because, of course, you have to be there as well. So you have to study, you have to revise, you have to work with them. This seems to be obvious but for many reasons it is not and for many reasons that does not seem to be working and that's why I'm addressing these problems today.

But now I'd like to talk to you, I'd like to continue with something that is extra crucial for myself and I think that this is the very basis of the language and this is the very basis of studying the language, I mean how to get to know new vocabulary. The very common mistake and the thing that I hear very often is that when you study words, you think that the thing you have to do is you have to



translate them. So, very often what I encounter is this list, sometimes this very lengthy list, of words. They are either in Polish or they are either in English, they are translated back and forth. Then you come to me and you show me these words and you say *OK, so I know these words, I know the language*. This is not true. Believe me, if you ever want to study the language this way, of course I'm talking about English because that's the expertise I have, I mean I've got this expertise in English, but I do believe that it applies to other languages as well, I mean French, German, Spanish etc., etc., if you learn the language this way that you just try to memorize back and forth these words, usually this list is composed of many, many words, it is not effective, it is a waste of time. Please don't do it because, sooner or later, you will be frustrated, you will be frustrated with that very much because you spend this time, you invest your time, you invest your money as well and the effect is not coming. I will tell you why. Because the brain doesn't like it. The brain doesn't like this, these pairs of words because if you train this way, this is the only thing you actually teach your brain, so you teach your brain the translation.

And I repeat this in my class, if you want to study the language, you are not enrolled in a course that is supposed to teach you how to translate, we are not producing translators. We, I mean the teachers of English, the teachers of the language, we are producing speakers of the language. So if you want to avoid that kind of mistake that your brain will remember just the translation, don't do it this way. Of course, you may come to me and you may say *But how are we supposed to know what the word means*. Well, of course, you have to know the translation but the translation it is just one little element of how to get to know new vocabulary. Because another element that is there and another element that is of great importance, it is the spelling and the pronunciation of the word.

I will start with the pronunciation of the word. It is very much disregarded. I have no idea why. But it is. So I have experienced this, I have seen this way of studying, for instance, these past forms of verbs in English and what I see is the way that students, very often they are students of primary or secondary schools, and they study them this way that they just learn by heart the meaning, they learn



by heart the form, so they learn how to write them but they never know how to pronounce them. And then, when they are approached by this native speaker or by any other person who is supposed to, who wants to communicate with them in English, they not know how to pronounce the word. So if you mispronounce the word, you close this communication channel.

Pronunciation is very important. I had an episode, there was this World of English podcast that covered pronunciation or accent. You have to know of course that there are many different accents and that you may travel through Britain, for instance, and you may meet people who use this different accent than the one that you know from your class. This is all OK, but the pronunciation that you need to know, it has to be the standard one, the crucial one. But you can't make mistakes. If you make mistakes, the speakers will not understand you and even if you do not study that at school or in your course, please do it on your own. Pronunciation is crucial, super crucial. It is not less important than the translation. No, it is as important as the translation.

And then, I used this word before, I mean spelling, so I will continue with spelling. Please, please remember that you also have to know how to write given words because communication, it is both oral and written and written one. So if you know how to speak the language, it is all fine, but then you are also, you may also face that kind of situation in real life that you will be asked to write something, to write an email, this is a very standard, crucial skill that you need to possess in order to work for somebody, right, because you need to exchange emails in English, so you need to know how to write words.

Then I will go to context, and I do believe that you may be smiling right now listening to this word, because I repeat this word all the time, all the time, all the time. I don't want you to get bored with this, I just want you to be aware of how important it really is. So what I do whenever I learn a new word and, mind you, I'm still learning words, I'm still learning English as I read, as I try to expand my vocabulary to give you this better variety of the language. So what I do is I of course translate the word, that's true, but then I check the word, the word that



I'm supposed to learn, in this English-English dictionary and I look for the verb pattern, I look for the word pattern, I need to know how the word is used in context.

I use this Longman dictionary very often. I recommend this dictionary in my class. Because what you get there, you get there the definition. Definition is a fantastic way of studying the language because in this way you can learn not only the very word but also other words and it reminds me a little bit of studying how to read, this is also great. Then you have different verb patterns, then you have different phrases, then you have different expressions, collocations how to use the word and you have, and you've got sentence examples. A great thing.

So this is a thing, this is the step I follow every single time I want to learn a word in English. And you should also do this. In this way, if you do what I'm suggesting to you, you should do, if you do that, you will avoid this mistake of thinking in Polish and then trying to speak English. In many, many situations the verb pattern is completely different because you have to know that these two languages, Polish and English, they come from two totally different systems of the language. And if you think in Polish, if you have the structure of Polish in your mind and then you try to produce a sentence in English, you will always make a mistake. Maybe *always* is too strong, like, the word is a little bit too strong, because of course there are sometimes these sentences that can be copied, they look the same, for instance, *I have a dog* or *I have a cat*. But these sentences that can be copied, they start at the very beginning, so if you were the A1 learner, well, yes you can copy your sentences but if you are a little bit more advanced, I would say A2, A1+, you can't copy sentences because it doesn't work at this way. You are really bound to make a mistake and, of course, I want you to stop making mistakes.

And I will come back also right now to the translation. So, I do encourage you of course to translate the words. I also do translate words. But then you have to check the context, this is what I would like you to be aware of. But I will tell you why translation is not very effective. If you just rely on the translation, the only thing that stays in your mind, and of course, if we want to study a foreign language



we need to train our brain. I will quote a phrase or two, a sentence from Miłosz Brzeziński, I really enjoy his speech, I listened to him, to his presentation about studying foreign languages and how to stay motivated. I will also cover this motivation later on. But he, what he said and how he compares the study of the language to this very hard work because if you want to train a language, you have to train your brain and it is a lot of physical work really.

So the first thing you do, the first thing your brain does as you start studying a foreign language, it wants you to stop because it seems so not natural, yes. And I know that the beginning is usually very difficult because the brain as you produce a sentence in a foreign language, the brain even screams to you and says *hey what are you doing, this is not you, this is a different thing*. So that's why this motivation that you, you need to have this motivation because if you don't have it, you will stop and the brain needs this encouragement, this motivation. So there is a lot of physical work and that's why we have to be so systematic and we have to be motivated all the time.

So, now I will cover this idea of systematic work and it seems all so easy and natural. Everybody tells you to be systematic but there is this physical process that I have just mentioned. If you want to be successful in studying a language, I do believe it applies to all studying as such, really, because I think that if you want to study just anything, practically anything, you have to be systematic. But again, what I can talk about is just the language. So, this systematic work is so important because it reminds me of this study at the gym. If you go to a gym and if you go there just once a month and you stay there for two hours, it has no effect. But if you go there twice or three times a week and you go there for thirty minutes, the effect will be there. And the same happens to the language. It is really better, or I would say it is necessary even, to study the language bit by bit, every day with little time and with just a couple of words. Please don't learn by heart these lengthy lists of words that have fifty words and their translation because it is not effective. You will waste your time. It is better, really, to listen to a podcast, it's better to watch a film than to do that because the effect will not come. What you



have to do is you have to try and study, like, five, seven words a day. Of course you have to remember the rules that I have just presented to you, so you do have to translate the words, you do have to know how to write them, you do have to know how to pronounce them and you do have to know how to use them in a context.

Another issue that I would like to cover today it is this study, but this study that cannot stop. What I mean here is that the mistake that is made and the trouble that I hear very often is that you start to study and then you stop. You start and you stop and it takes, like, ten years. If you want to study a language, don't start and don't stop. So if you want to study a language, start and continue. I know it is hard, I know it is difficult but if you think about starting to study a given language, English in this respect, and then you know that you have just three months or you just have six months and then you know that you will stop, don't do it, don't stop, really, be smart here, don't waste your time, don't waste your energy. Because if you want to study the language, you have to tell yourself you need time for this. And if you just have these breaks all the time, the time will be very long for you to study. It is better to reserve, like, these two years. Of course I'm talking about people who have just started, the ones that want just to come back, of course, they would need less time. But if you want to do it, like, once and for all, you need to start, you know that you need like a little bit of time, you need these two years, let's say, and you cannot stop and this motivation that is very easy to lose, at the beginning you may have this greater motivation because you see the results, the results come very early, very soon. And later on, as you keep on going this, you may get demotivated because you do not see the results. You study, you learn, you can already communicate and you just ask yourself, *well where is the effect?* Well, the effect is just like with reading or just like with speaking your mother tongue, it is there, it is this, like a level of dust or level of rust, so it keeps on building very slowly but after some time you will be there. And this is what happens to the students I work with. You will be there because you will start thinking in English. And the most wonderful thing is when I hear them talking to me, reaching me and saying *Hey, I really started thinking in English.* So, as I want to speak a language, as I want to speak English, I do not think in Polish, I think in





English. It is possible, you can really do it, but you just have to follow the rules that I have just presented to you.

A couple of more things that I'd like to cover, a couple of more things that may seem very natural but, again, the mistake is there, the mistake is made very often. It is the materials that I mentioned a couple of minutes ago, but it is also the good school, the good course and the good teacher. It seems very natural and easy to come up with, but you make mistakes here. Please, as you choose your teachers, as you choose the course, as you choose your school be very careful here. So, you can also go through recommendation, you can ask your friends, you can just check the webpage, but please do the work. Don't enrol in a course just because you think it is great. Because if any of that fails, I mean you will not get this good course, and good course it is this course that is planned, there is this plan of it, you know what you are going to do every single lesson. If you don't get a good teacher, I told you what makes a good teacher, a good teacher is this person who has this great command of the language, who has this great character, who has this great energy and also who is trained to be a teacher. Let me say it once again, speaking the language, being fluent in a language doesn't make you a good teacher, be careful there. So you need to be sure what course you are choosing, you need to be sure what school you are choosing and you need to be sure what teacher you are choosing.

I hear very often that if you want to be a good speaker of a language, you need to go abroad. I disagree. I disagree because I am this example of a person who studied the language at home, meaning in my home country. And I do believe I am a quite fluent speaker of the language. Of course, I have travelled abroad and, of course, I have been to England a couple of times, I have been to London, I have travelled through England, yes, I have done all this. But what I was very lucky with, I mean I had this pleasure of meeting some very fine teachers on my way and that's why I am who I am right now.

So there is this hard work, there is this motivation, there is this continuity of the study and the great teacher. If you have it here at home, you really don't have



to go. The reason why I am addressing this issue is that very often you go abroad, you have these high hopes and high expectations and then you come back and you tell me *Well it was nice, the country was nice, the course was nice, the people were nice, but I was surrounded by Polish speakers*. If you are surrounded by Polish speakers, it doesn't make any sense because you can do exactly the same here but the financial side here, right, the money that you have to pay for it, it is a lot, really, and it is so much more in comparison to what you have to pay for this course that you do at home.

And the very last thing, the very last thing I want to draw your attention to is how to study very specific elements of the language and I will start with vocabulary again. So I told you that, I told you how to study vocabulary, how to study words, but I never told you what are the techniques of expanding your vocabulary and I will just name a few of them. I will name the paraphrase, the paraphrase is fantastic. I will explain to you what that means. Paraphrase means that you have this sentence, of course in context, and you try to produce the same sentence, rather the same meaning, but with different words and different structures. It works perfectly in English. So, if you have the sentence, like, *I am unemployed*, what you can say is *I am looking for a job*, or *I'm looking for work*, or *I am between jobs*, for instance. So you have at least, like, four sentences that mean the same and this is the paraphrase. A very, very effective way of studying the language.

Another thing is the synonyms and antonyms. So if you have a given word, it is, like, this adjective, please look for another synonyms, please look for other words that mean the same, that have a more or less similar meaning. And you can also look for antonyms, so the very easy example will be big and small, right, and black and white. But as we go further, as we become more advanced, it is great because you expand your vocabulary very fast.

As you read because I know that the reading is this very great, essential thing. Many students read a lot in order to have contact with this natural language. Please do not translate everything as you read. So you have to find a book that is at



your very, at the very perfect level for yourself. And again, mistake that is made very often is that you either just start with very simple books and then you get demotivated because they are so simple that you don't want to follow or they are too difficult and you just open the book, you open the very first page and there are so many new words that you just sit for an hour with a dictionary and you keep translating all the words. You have to find a book in which you will not know, like, two or three words on a page, and as you go, you will understand different things from the context and you have to translate just a couple of words and don't translate, like, everything that is there.

When it comes to grammar, grammar is a thing I really enjoy because I really enjoy showing you that this is not rocket science, this is not as difficult as people say. And I repeat this and I will repeat this in here, grammar it is not tenses. I mean, tenses this is the subject you have to cover, you have to know but this is just one element of the language and there are many more interesting and many more difficult elements of the language that you have to study and what I would say is the most important thing about grammar and vocabulary at the same time, it is the verb patterns. So it really doesn't matter if you produce a sentence in present simple, present continuous, present perfect simple or present perfect continuous, but it does matter if you make a mistake in this verb pattern because then you would start making a lot of mistakes. But if you know exactly how to use a given word, you are sure not to make any more mistakes.

I hope it has been of help again. I hope that your knowledge is growing, I hope that your vocabulary is expanding and I hope that as you listen to this podcast you really get this enjoyment out of this, you derive a lot of pleasure and you keep on studying the language because this is why I am reaching you and this is why I want to talk to you and let me say it very openly and once again that I also have a lot of pleasure out of it. Thank you so much for being with me and stay tuned. Cheers.