

Cooper: Okay, it's recoding right now I hope. I really hope. So, I'm talking today to Daniel who is an English teacher from Guyana, and if you have him as an English teacher you're lucky because I met Daniel when I was doing my PhD research and he was one of the people that I met who wasn't like everybody else. What I mean by that is he spoke English like a native speaker and even though he'll disagree and he'll say he's gotten much better, he spoke better than any student I had teach, by far. And it's interesting than that, it's that the way he spoke, the words he spoke they weren't Brazinglish, they were authentic English. So, the vocabulary, the grammar, everything was ... If it wasn't perfect, okay, but it was real English. It wasn't the Brazinglish, which is what almost all of my students have, and almost all of my participants in my research had.

Cooper: So, I thought it was very interesting. Anyway, now you're going to get to hear him and I'll ask you Daniel, how ... I know you didn't study English formally, or at least very much, is that true?

Daniel: Yeah, it is true. I mean, hello guys I'm Daniel. So, yeah, I didn't study much as you said but I did study a little, but I wouldn't say that this much that I studied represents like any relevant percentage of the English that I have now. I mean, maybe it did make a difference I can't deny that, especially when I went to college and I had like more advanced classes, but even that, even during that time I was working more by myself than I did at college. And that's something that I ... I actually got sort of, I was let down by my professors at university, I expected much more from them.

Cooper: What about before university? Like, did you-

Daniel: Okay, so I started learning when I was around 16 and the reason why I started learning was because of my friend who already spoke English at the time.

Cooper: Did you speak English before 16?

Daniel: No. Not at all. Like every Brazilian does, right, I know how to count from maybe one to 10 and what else? I don't know. Maybe I knew how to [inaudible 00:02:59] colors but didn't actually ... Maybe I knew how to say, "Hello, how are you?" That kind of stuff, right, that everybody knows but I couldn't speak English. But actually one of my earliest memories of any contact with English that I have was when I was around 10 years old I have an uncle who speaks English. He lived in the US for a while and then he's a pastor, and then he brought this guy from the US and he ... I think I never told you that actually, he brought this guy to my grandmother's house and I was just fascinated. By the way, I didn't know exactly what it was but just the fact that he didn't speak Portuguese and the intonation, and the musicality of the language, I just wanted to just speak English.

Daniel: And I remember like going after, like I was ... This guy was there and he took this guy like maybe two or three times there, and I remember-

Cooper: Who was this guy?

Daniel: I don't know. I actually don't. He was a ... As I said, my uncle he's a pastor and this guy I guess he was probably some kind of priest or something. He came here to his church and something like this. But that actually didn't matter to me, all that ... Everything that mattered was that I wanted to speak English with him, and I just wanted to understand him and try to communicate. For some reason I remember there was much interested in that than anybody else. Like my cousins, even my uncle's sons, he has two sons, and I think that this thing of being fascinated and actually wanting to learn, and as I said, I was after the guy all the time, like I was ... Wherever he went I was going after him and trying to communicate. Probably I was 10 years old, I was just probably annoying and I don't know why this guy thought of me.

Daniel: But the reason that I really, really wanted to learn, and I really wanted to get to know whatever it was about that new language, and I think the reason I actually was successful in my entire let's say career of English learner is because I really wanted to learn. It's because I had the motivation, and ... Go ahead.

Cooper: Can you explain because ... you've already been explaining it, but because I'm sure you're right, from my experience but I just ... Can you explain, because there are people I teach who think that they're motivated, and I feel like they're not motivated in the way you just described. They're more motivated like I'm going to go try to learn the present perfect tense, then get a good grade on a test, or I'm going to learn English so that I can get a job. I don't think that that's what you mean.

Daniel: Yeah, so that happened when I was 10 years old, and then after that I never had any sort of relevant contact with English. Then when I was 16, as I was saying, there was this friend of mine who already spoke English, and he used to watch TV series in English, and I just thought that was amazing. How can you watch TV series in English without subtitles or anything and you can understand it? And he actually never went to an English school. He took maybe like two semesters of English private classes with this guy, but that was about it. And then after that, and I'm sure his English is much better than the guy who taught him for that time, but he was sort of my inspiration like to begin studying English because he could speak English and he didn't go to any school. He didn't have any money to pay expensive courses or anything like this, but he wanted to learn and he did.

Daniel: And I started just ... I actually like when people ask me, "How can I start learning English?" I just tell them, "Well, first you have to want and then you find a way." Because I just started looking for things on the internet, videos, texts, everything that I could get my hands on. Everything that I could just ... Any kind of source, I was looking for something, and then I started-

Cooper: Would it have been harder if you didn't have the internet?

Daniel: Definitely. For sure, because the internet you can find everything, especially nowadays. I mean, it wasn't a long time ago when I started learning English, but nowadays you have many more things like podcasts, and YouTube is full of things. A lot of things, but then I started looking for things, and as I said, on the internet like podcasts, what else?

YouTube videos and also one of the things that helped me the most was probably watching TV series and movies in English-

Cooper: Okay, so [crosstalk 00:08:55] I have question about watching movies and TV series, maybe you're going to ... I know maybe you were going to say it, but just in case I want to ask you, so if you just say you watch movies and TV series I have students who watch movies and TV series and they don't learn. So, do you think there's something about the way you watch movies and TV series maybe?

Daniel: Definitely, yeah. So, I was going to say that at the beginning I didn't watch them with subtitles in English because I mean it wouldn't make sense because I didn't have like any English basically. So, I was just at the beginning, so I would watch with subtitles in Portuguese, but here's the thing I wouldn't just watch it, I had ... I wasn't just watching for fun, my primary goal was to learn English. So, of course I was enjoying the TV series or the movies and I would laugh, and it was a good time. But I remember like pausing it plenty of times and going back and repeating, I don't know, like saying, imitating the characters, the intonation. Pausing and looking for words. I used to do something back in the days too like I used to have a list of words, at some point I even divided them by verbs, adjectives, expressions stuff like this. And so my primary goal was as I was saying was to learn English.

Daniel: So, I was watching whatever I was watching with the goal of learning English, that's the thing. So, I would do ... it didn't matter if I ... Let's say I was watching a 20-minute episode of a sitcom, it didn't matter if it took me 40 minutes to finish it, but I had to learn something from that. I had to pause, I had to understand, I had to pay attention to what the characters were saying and then compare it to the subtitles. I had to make connections. I had to, as I said, take some notes. I had to imitate them, pay attention to the intonation. There were a lot of things going on. I wasn't just having fun and watching it, even though I was having fun at the same time.

Cooper: Right, so you were choosing material that you liked, that you were-

Daniel: That's right.

Cooper: Do you remember any expression or word that you learn that you thought, "Wow, that's fun. That's going to help me." Did you ever feel like that? Because, that's the way I feel. I have a ... but I don't know, do you ever feel like, "Oh, cool that I know that word, it's going to really make speaking English a little bit easier than it was."

Daniel: That's a hard question because, as I said, most of the things that I learned are from TV series, so like just ... I could say many things, but-

Cooper: [crosstalk 00:12:14] you learned them on the TV series, so when you discovered it did that ever make you feel good or?

Daniel: Oh, I remember like for example, I was watching Breaking Bad and I remember learning the word doable.

Cooper: Doable.

Daniel: Doable. I remember-

Cooper: How did you figure it out? Because I think a lot of people would hear doable or see doable and they would say, "What's that mean?" So, how did you ... What did you do to figure out these words? Sometimes [crosstalk 00:12:45] easy.

Daniel: Okay, so a lot the times you can figure them out by context. Like you try to understand the entire situation so they were talking about ... I remember they were talking about, I guess ... Have you ever watched Breaking Bad?

Cooper: Not much.

Daniel: Okay, well I guess they were talking about smuggling some kind of product to produce meth, and then one of the guys said that it was really, really hard and they had to do this, and this, and that. And then main character Heisenberg or Walter White, he asked, "What is a doable?" And then I figured that you have a word do, right, which everybody knows, and then you have the word able, and then if you put them together, do able, doable. And there's also the context, I put that in context and then I could understand, but if I couldn't I just paused the video, go to a dictionary, I usually used Oxford, and I look it up in a dictionary. I did that many times if I couldn't figure it out by context I did that a lot. But, I remember learning this-

Cooper: [crosstalk 00:14:08] these words. After you get these words, because I have students and I teach them words, and I think, "Okay." It's different, right? Because you figured out the words, they mean more to you. If I tell people the words it means less to them, but still after you get a word did you do anything to try to ... Because people are always saying, "How do I [inaudible 00:14:32]." You know what I mean? Did you do anything? Did you have any tricks to sort of-

Daniel: So, I had ... As I said, I had this list of words that I ... I took notes while I was watching stuff, but also if I learned a new word I would try to use it somehow.

Cooper: What do you mean?

Daniel: Like in daily conversations maybe, or I'd try to put it in my active vocabulary. Even though sometimes it didn't make a lot of sense to be saying that word, I'd have tried to use it somehow, or I'd be repeating that word and making, like creating sentences like talking to myself with that word. That's something I did a lot actually. I don't do that much nowadays, but I used to talk to myself all the time in English. I'd be like walking around describing things, naming things.

Cooper: One thing I wonder is, because I have that same strategy and one thing I wonder is sometimes I say to my students, "Well, try to keep it in your head." Now, for me if I have a list, and I just look at that list three times a day, people think it's hard. But after the third time you're looking at the list it's very fast because you've been looking at the list

so many times that it's just really very quick to look at the list, because ... And just by looking at the list three or four times the word is more likely to stay in my mind, and then I'm more likely to talk to myself with it. Is that how it worked with you?

Daniel: Sometimes, for example I remember that I have learned certain words, but I couldn't remember what word it was. So, sometimes I even remember the meaning of the word but I didn't remember the word. So, the list helps in that sense, so what's that word again that I learned watching? Then I would go back to the list and see it and then I remember it. But you also have to create something out of that word. You can't just look at the word and that's all, that's the word. As I said, like maybe you have to even sort of forcibly introduce it to your active vocabulary, like use the word. Talk to people, make sentences, talk to yourself, whatever. You have to do it somehow.

Cooper: But you did that because you really, you really wanted it.

Daniel: Yeah, it was kind of crazy. I was obsessed.

Cooper: What about this, because like you have ... If I listened, you haven't made a mistake since you've been ... You made one mistake this whole time, and you corrected it right away. If you want I'll tell you what that was, but-

Daniel: Go ahead.

Cooper: You said, "I paid something," and then [crosstalk 00:17:33].

Daniel: Paid for.

Cooper: Paid for, and like, well, obviously that's what ... if I have a student I would love my student to do that, to like be aware of it and fix it, but that was the only mistake you've made. And so what I find interesting is I try to teach students for example, listen to okay. When you say listen what you listen, you use to and then you put what you listen to, right? Like listen to music, listen [crosstalk 00:18:04], listen to your heart, okay. Now, or with look, maybe that's even a better example, look. When you ... Oh yeah, you look at something, but in Portuguese you say, you look something or you [Portugese 00:18:19]. You say [Portugese 00:18:21], so it's different in Portuguese. The same way look for is [Portugese 00:18:28], which is totally different. So, why do you think it is that you have basically all of them prepositions? Did you also pay attention to those or did they come, you picked them up naturally? Like, you-

Daniel: Okay, yeah.

Cooper: You know the collocations, you know the words that go with what words, and [crosstalk 00:18:47] before too, and so how much of it was actively looking for those things and how did you know?

Daniel: Yeah, I did ... Okay, so I did learn a lot from just simply watching, let's say, absorbing the language but not doing much, just watching things. You can learn a lot from that. But I

think it's also important to learn certain things, certain [inaudible 00:19:13] bits and you can also do that by yourself. I mean, of course if you have a teacher who knows about what they're talking about, I say that for example if I had a teacher at the beginning, if I had a good teacher, I'm talking about a good teacher. I'm not talking about most of the teachers that you have around there, but if I had a good teacher at the beginning I would certainly have evolved and improved much faster. So, I'd probably have better English at this point right now. But [crosstalk 00:19:50]-

Cooper: Your English is perfect, what are you talking about?

Daniel: But what I'm saying is you have to understand that your English, your development depends mostly on you, not on somebody else. But of course if you have a good teacher that helps a lot. Okay, but let me answer your question-

Cooper: Yeah, I just want to tell you that my students, I think I'm a good enough teacher at least to tell them these things, they still don't learn it. It's funny. I don't want to criticize them but they still don't learn. They still don't learn lesson two most of them, some of them do but-

Daniel: Yeah, some people have this kind of mindset they think if I have a good teacher, if I go to a really good school that's going to be it. I don't need to do anything else because I have this good teacher I have this good school, no. It's you, it's about you. It's not about anybody else, it's about you. Of course, again, if you have a good teacher that helps a lot, but it depends mostly on you. But prepositions, I think prepositions is like it's something really hard to learn actually. It's just very confusing, I don't know for other like people who speak other languages, but for us Brazilians it's usually ... I can't say that as a teacher too, like my students ... and talking also about my experience it's usually really confusing prepositions. So, I had to look for grammar tips, and I had to watch videos about prepositions.

Daniel: I did that and I don't know exactly what percentage of that accounts for my usage of prepositions right now, but I did that. So, that's not a ... Whenever I felt like there was some weak point that I needed to improve I'd go after that. I'd go in and look for things-

Cooper: Although Daniel, I can tell you that you can look all over the internet and it's going to be hard for you to say find somebody teaching, [inaudible 00:21:56] and it's our aim is pay attention to. You're just not going to find it. Nobody has noticed that that's a common mistake. You know what I mean?

Daniel: Yeah.

Cooper: You couldn't have gotten that from YouTube because they don't have it.

Daniel: Yeah, there are certain mistakes which are very, I know, specific, which are very ... So yeah, sometimes you can, but another thing that I did was also pay attention to how people talked of course. So, I was watching a series, if I heard somebody say, "Pay attention to," and as opposed to pay attention in, is that how people say?

Cooper: Yeah.

Daniel: So, I don't know, sometimes it was just automatic, so I heard somebody in the movie say, "Pay attention to," so that's how I'm going to say it.

Cooper: Can I ask you something? Is it possible that because you didn't go to school you weren't hearing the teacher and the students saying, "Pay attention in," if they had to talk? Is it possible that because you only heard television and native speakers talking and mostly that's what you heard? Is it possible that that ... Do you think that-

Daniel: That influenced?

Cooper: Yeah, I mean.

Daniel: Certainly, that's for sure, because my sources ... When you're learning anything you need sources, right?

Cooper: Yeah.

Daniel: Like, where are you learning this from? Where did this come from? So, my sources as you said were mostly real English. It's not that Brazilian English is not real, in some sense it is but it's a long discussion. It's a long ... I don't want to get into that right now, but the thing is my sources were basically movies, again internet articles that I would read, sometimes even blogs, magazines. Stuff like that, like real English as you would put it. So, it's not like I had no other option, that's how I saw, that's how I had contact with, so if that's everything that I'm having contact with how in the hell am I going to see or learn anything other than this? Of course there's my first language influence, like your first language is going to influence how you speak your second language, so of courses there's that but everything that I ever had contact with was basically that. Was basically real English, movies, TV, magazines, internet articles, and that has a huge influence of course then and makes a huge difference.

Cooper: I'm going to have to stop the recording now soon, so I just want to ask you one last question. So, if you could give some advice to a student, besides the advice that you already gave, if you could give any extra advice about learning English, what would you say is one thing extra? Because you said, "It's about you," which I thought was important advice.

Daniel: Okay, one thing that I think is really important is you have to be aware that this is ... This is important, but you have to be aware that you have to have the most contact with English that you can. Like you have to listen to it all the time, you have to read, you have to talk as much as you can because also people usually assume that if you speak English, or listen to English, or read English twice a week, one hour and a half, that's going to be enough. And that's not nearly enough. When I was learning at the beginning I do it all the time, I was always listening to something, I was always reading something, I was always talking to myself [crosstalk 00:26:16]-

Cooper: Isn't it-

Daniel: For you learn you're going to have to have a lot of contact with the language. You have to have a lot of input, as much as you can. The more the better.

Cooper: I think it's an interesting concept, I'm trying to say it to my students that if you just think and talk to yourself with the words, that's studying. People don't realize that. It's a lot of repetition. It's a lot of repetition like going through your head over and over is [crosstalk 00:26:49]. [Foreign language 00:26:51] this is what I've been saying recently. [Foreign language 00:26:54] and it's just pops into my head all the time.

Daniel: That's English in your mind. That's what's going on in your mind, you know, the English right there. You're talking to your ... You're practicing somehow, you're studying somehow, because I was never the kind of guy who sits down answers like answer exercises. I was never that guy, and I think the way I learn English is much more effective than most people who did that I'd say.

Cooper: Oops.