Chatterbox #232 – Interview with Matt vs Japan

Episode description

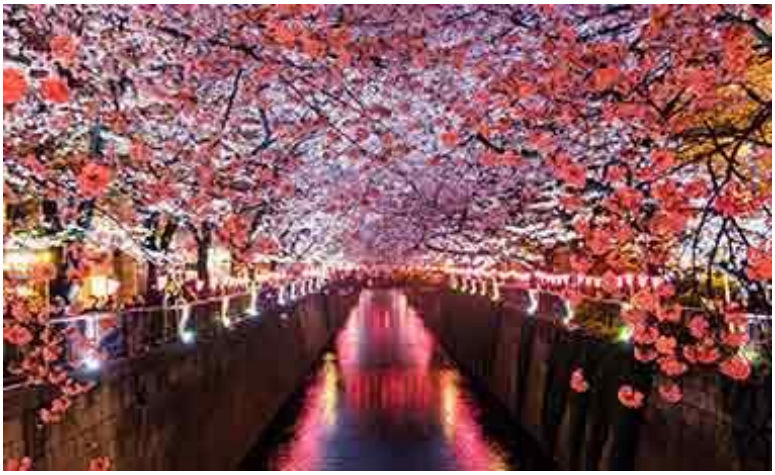
Talking about learning a language, even one you are not learning yourself, can be a great way to improve your skills. In this Chatterbox episode, Andrew speaks with special guest Matt from the YouTube channel Matt vs Japan. Even though Matt is a learner of Japanese, he shares so much great insight and many interesting techniques on how to learn any language. We can all benefit from this chat!

Fun fact

Matt vs Japan is a YouTube channel that has been up since 2010. It nearly has 2 million views. Not bad!

Expressions included in the study guide

- To immerse oneself
- To meet in the middle
- In the wild
- To integrate
- A discrepancy
- To zone out



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey, guys, how's it going? I hope you're all doing well. Welcome back to another addition of Culips. Today's episode features an interview with a YouTuber named Matt vs Japan. Now Matt is an American, but he learnt Japanese to a really high level. And, in this episode, we talk all about how he learned Japanese and he shares some of the things that he discovered in his Japanese language journey that can help you when you study English.

Matt's a really interesting guy, and I talked to him for a long time, and so this episode is a little bit long. So don't feel bad if you need to pause it or take a break and come back to it or listen to it multiple times, 'cause I think there is a lot of good information here that Matt talks about and I want you all to learn from this episode. I learned a lot as well.

So some of the things that we both talked about today were how Matt learned Japanese to a high level and what the Mass Immersion Approach—and this is his website and his idea, the Mass Immersion Approach—what this is. We talked about input, which is listening and reading, and also output, which is speaking and writing. And we discussed what's more important for language learning, input or output?

I also asked Matt to share his three tips for Culips listeners with us. So you'll hear Matt's three tips that you can apply to your language learning right away. We talked about the concept of adopting a native speaker as a role model for your language learning. We also chatted about shadowing and how that can be good for improving your accent, but it has to be done the right way. And, finally, we talked about meditation and whether meditation could be helpful for language learning or not.

So, without any more waiting, let's just get right to it. It's a great conversation and I hope you enjoy it. Here we go, my interview with Matt vs Japan.

Matt, welcome to Culips. How are you?

Matt: Oh, thank you. I'm great. How are you?

Andrew: I actually have a little bit of a cold right now and our regular listeners, I think, will be able to hear it in my voice. But this is my first time meeting you, so I think you probably can't tell.

Matt: I might be able to hear, just a little bit.

Andrew: Just a little bit. I'm happy to talk to you, Matt. I've been watching your YouTube channel for maybe about 6 months now. Your channel name is Matt vs Japan. And could you briefly just introduce what your YouTube channel is about?

Matt: Yeah, well, initially my YouTube was really focused on just how to learn Japanese, because I, you know, spent 5 years pretty much fully dedicating myself to studying Japanese and I had pretty good results. So I just kinda wanted to share what I had learned, help other people do the same. And, as time has gone on, it's kind of spread out to more than just learning Japanese and kind of more just language learning in general. And I'm trying to make my content more accessible to people learning other languages.

Andrew: Yeah, and it's kind of funny that I came across your channel because I don't study Japanese and I've never studied Japanese before. But I do study Korean, and I think that a lot of the content that's on your website and on your YouTube channel is applicable to anybody studying a foreign language. And I've definitely found that some of the information that you've talked about has been applicable to me studying Korean. And so that's why I wanted to get you on here to Culips, so that you can talk about some of the things that you have learned, so that our listeners who are learning English could maybe apply some of this to their own studies, as well.

Matt: Yeah, sounds great.

Andrew: So, yeah, Matt, your Japanese is very impressive. We have a Japanese member on the Culips team and I asked him, "How is Matt's Japanese?" And he was very impressed, so you're legit. And I was wondering if you could just talk about why you started to learn Japanese? What was your initial motivation to tackle this language?

Matt: Yeah, well, I gotta say, it wasn't the purest of motives. When I first became interested in Japanese, I was just 16 years old, I was a high school student and I got into watching anime initially because, you know, I watched anime when I was a child, Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh.

At the time, I didn't really realize that those shows came from Japan but, as I got older and realized that, you know, my childhood favourite shows did come from Japan, I got more interested in that and started watching, and I just really liked how the language sounds. I thought it was really cool. And, also, I wasn't so popular at my high school and I think somewhere deep down, kinda subliminally, I thought, "Hey, maybe if I go to Japan I'll be really popular." And I think that was part of my motivation then, initially.

Andrew: Well, yeah, that's cool. That totally works, whatever or wherever your motivation comes from is totally fine. It's interesting, maybe Japanese people don't know this, I don't know, but in North America growing up, we watched a ton of Japanese cartoons, like all of the cartoons that I watched after school in Canada were from Japan, mostly. Of course, they were dubbed into English, but there's a lot of Japanese content on TV. So probably you're not alone in that, there's probably a lot of people that have that initial start.

Matt: Yeah, of course, just a point, just to mention real quick that my motivations did evolve over time and I kinda did grow out of that initial, you know, love for anime and thinking that Japanese people will like me 'cause I'm foreign or something. But gotta be honest where my roots came from.

Andrew: So, it's really cool that you started learning Japanese in the USA, right? It wasn't like you moved to Japan and then started, this was a completely foreign language to you when you started?

Matt: Oh, yeah. I mean, I spent, like, I had a year or two where I was just kinda studying the way that, you know, most people try to study a language, like by a textbook, go to class, and didn't really make that much progress. And then I came across this website called All Japanese All the Time, which was written by the guy who claimed to have gotten fluent in Japanese in just 18 months while living inside of the United States. And he did it with this crazy method where he tried **to immerse himself** within Japanese, as close to 24 hours a day as possible.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: And, you know, he also combined that with using a spaced repetition system to study efficiently, and he had a bunch of other pieces of his philosophy. And so, actually, I showed a video of him speaking Japanese to one my Japanese friends. And my Japanese friend told me that he was legit and so I was like, "OK, let me give this a shot." And I started trying to replicate his process and so the first 6 months of doing that, I was just inside of the United States and then I went to Japan for 6 months for study aboard during high school and then I came back and I've been in the United States ever since.

Andrew: OK. Wow. And so this all Japanese all the time method, which I think you can refer to as AJAT, right? Some people call it AJAT? The AJAT method, how hardcore did you go into AJAT?

Matt: I mean, the first couple of years, I was pretty hardcore because I mean my mindset as a 16-year-old was that I just wanted to replicate this guy's success, the guy who made AJAT. And so I didn't really know what was important and what, you know, not so important.

Matt: And so I just tried to replicate it to the T as much as I could. So the guy said that he did it like as close to 24 hours a day as possible, so I tried to do the same. And so, I mean, I didn't actually go as crazy as he did, meaning, like, I didn't listen while I was sleeping or anything, listening to Japanese while I was sleeping. But I probably spent, you know, maybe 3 to 6 hours a day, like, actively doing something in Japanese, whether that was trying to read a book or just watch a Japanese TV show with no subtitles and maybe like an additional hour going through flashcards, using a spaced repetition system. And then, also, I tried to keep Japanese playing in the background as much as possible while I was just, you know, making food or cleaning or, you know, taking a walk or whatever.

Andrew: Right, really just try to set up an immersive environment as much as possible, it sounds like.

Matt: Yeah, so the first couple of years it was probably, like, I mean, I was listening to Japanese each day much more than I was listening to English, you could probably say.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: Wow.

Matt: I lived a pretty secluded life.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: So I don't necessarily recommend or think that it's realistic for most people to like replicate what I did when I was 16. But what I did learn is that you get out what you put in.

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And so, you know, if you spend 6 hours a day listening to Japanese and work on Japanese, you're gonna make at least twice as much progress as someone who's putting in 3 hours a day. And there's a lot to learn when you're learning a foreign language, especially one so different from your native language, so.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, I completely agree with you there. Do you think your age was a factor, learning so young? Like, I started learning Korean when I was maybe 24 or 25, I started and I wish I had started when I was 16. I think that I could have gone more hardcore at a younger age. Do you think that was a factor for you?

Matt: I mean, I think it was a factor in the sense of I had very little responsibilities and obligations, and so that made a huge difference. I mean, when I was able to do study aboard, that basically allowed me to just study Japanese literally all day because when I was living in Japan, I wasn't actually receiving credit for the classes I was taking at Japanese high school because I didn't understand most of the material. So it was kind of hopeless, and so really it was kinda almost like a 6-month vacation in Japan where I just got to study all day.

Andrew: Wow.

Matt: And so, of course, that's not feasible for most people who have a life.

Andrew: Yeah, I wish it was, but I think in my situation learning Korean, you know, I have to go to work and I have other responsibilities. And I think a lot of our listeners, too, they're trying to do as much English as possible. But they have families and careers and it's really hard to do it. But, yeah I think we just have to try our best and get our practice in where we can.

Matt: Yeah, I think it's important to, you know, compare yourself to who you were yesterday, right?

Andrew: Sure.

Matt: Like, really don't try to compare yourself to other people on the internet or other friends you have. But try to be realistic about, like, how much time is possible for you to put in day to day and try to slowly improve over time, try to slowly find more cracks in the day you can fit in a few more minutes of listening or a few more flashcards and try to just incrementally improve over time.

Andrew: Totally. I completely agree with you there.

OK, Matt, I wanna ask you about the Mass Immersion Approach. So this is your website, right? What is the URL of your website?

Matt: Yeah, well, massimmersionapproach.com.

Andrew: OK, OK. And you took this AJAT idea that you found on the internet and you've been developing it and making it into something that's a little bit different, which you've termed the Mass Immersion Approach. Could you describe what this is?

Matt: Yeah, well, so basically almost 2 years ago, I started being more active on YouTube and making videos about how to basically do all Japanese all the time, because the website, if you actually do to go the all Japanese all the time website, it's a bit of a mess. It's not very organized.

Andrew: I've seen it before, yeah.

Matt: The author has a very quirky writing style that turns a lot of people and there's just kind of a lot of craziness in there. It's hard to sort out the gold nuggets that, you know, are inside of it. And so I was kinda making videos trying to, you know, take all those gold nuggets, present them in a way that was gonna help it reach more people, and fill in all the blanks that he didn't really explain.

And as I was doing that, I kind of realized that there are a lot of, you know, smaller improvements that I made through the process of my own experience. Sometimes it was actually changing something for the better, sometimes it was just filling in a blank where he was just like, you know, listen to Japanese all day, but he didn't really give that much instruction on, well, what kind of Japanese should you listen to? Like, should you listen to the same thing multiple times or should you always listen to new stuff? There's like tons of questions people have that I had kind of worked out my own answers to through trial and error and you know, looking into other people's language learning methods.

And so it slowly shifted more and more over time into being something looks, you know, that had the same fundamental principles, but were kind of slightly different. And then I also met my friend who online, he's known as Yoga, his real name is Lukas, so I call him Lukas mostly, but he was also a very accomplished language learner who had became fluent in three different languages.

And we started talking a lot and we agreed on a lot of stuff and we also disagreed on just enough stuff to make talking about language learning really interesting. We both kind of slowly started **to meet in the middle** about, you know, language learning.

And then we decided that we wanted to kind of start our own thing, like, let go of all Japanese all the time because that had so much of its own trappings, you know? It had a certain reputation, it's so extreme, it's hard for normal people to really buy into it and apply it. So we wanted to take the kind of the fundamental philosophy that works really well and present it in a totally different way that would be more applicable to a much wider range of people. And that was why we decided to make the Mass Immersion Approach.

Andrew: OK. And I like the name, the Mass Immersion Approach. It's a good name.

Matt: Thanks. Yeah, part of it means that, well, there is a few things. First of all, we didn't want it to have a certain language in the name, like all Japanese all the time, because we want it to be applicable to people learning all languages.

Andrew: Sure.

Matt: Also, we thought that approach was a little more open-ended than method because, you know, we wanna kind of build into the approach that it's kind of customizable. It's easy to make it fit your particular situation. And then also the acronym is MIA, which normally can also mean missing in action, which is kind of a play on words, because when you **immerse yourself** in the language, you kind of go missing in action from the world of your native language.

Andrew: Right, wow. OK, so you thought deeply about the name, that's cool. But, yeah, I think that's very fitting the approach, because when you study or when you search on the internet for how to learn a language, you'll come up with just so many ideas and so many people just selling you bad ideas, right? Saying, "This is how you can learn, you can be fluent in 6 months" or something like this, and so the approach is a little bit different, it's more customizable to everybody and you can tweak it. I think that flexibility is a really nice aspect of the MIA.

Matt: Thanks, yeah, I think, the way I think about it is that there's certain principles about language acquisition that are universal for any different particular method that's gonna be effective for people. And so that's what we really want to make sure people understand is how does language acquisition actually happen. Like what's going on in the brain, what are the fundamental mechanisms that lead you to end up being able to become fluent.

But then there's a lot of different, basically, surface level techniques you can use to take advantage of that fundamental mechanism. And that's what's gonna be different from method to method or from, you know, approach to approach. And so it's kind of balancing in a way that there are, you know, some methods work and some don't work and you can't say that one method is the best. But all the methods that are gonna be effective, I think tend to have stuff in common, and finding that is kind of one of our main goals.

Andrew: Very cool. So could you outline some of the main principles of the MIA?

Matt: Yeah, so some of the main principles are that, well, first of all, it's really targeting people who wanna reach a high level in the language, like really become fluent. And one of the things, I think, is easily misunderstood is that there's kind of a value judgment that we sneak into that, meaning that, oh, if you're not trying to master this language and become equivalent to a native speaker, then you're just a chump and you're wasting your time. We definitely don't want to come across that way. Of course everyone learns a language for different reasons and there's value you can derive from studying a language at every level. But we're just targeting the specific

audience of people who really do wanna reach a high level, 'cause that requires its own kind of methodology.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: And so the methodology that we apply to help you reach a high level is to first really focus on input and understanding and safe output or, you know, speaking and writing for later once you have a really strong foundation and understanding. And so, to put that another way, you kind of built your intuition in the language of what's correct, what's incorrect through absorbing lots of language through input with learning to understand it. And then, once you have that intuition, that's gonna guide you when you start speaking so that you can be able to kind of tell yourself whether you, you know, sound natural and correct or weird and funky, and then you can self correct like that to a really subtle level.

Andrew: Right. OK. So that's something I wanted to get into a little bit more because you know a lot of people, especially a lot of English teachers, they will say "You gotta speak from day one, you have to speak right away." And I get this question a lot from our listeners, it's like "I can't speak, I can't speak English because I live in a country where there's no English speakers and this is a big problem for me."

And so we have this two conflicting ideas, right? One where you're being encouraged to speak from day one and the other problem where you can't output because you have nobody to talk to. But I think, especially at a lower level, you know, at the beginning level, at the intermediate level, it's probably not a bad idea if you just focus on listening and inputting. What are your thoughts on that?

Matt: Yeah, well, I think it particularly depends on what your goals are because, like I said, if you're hoping to get to a level where you can just go to the country for a month and, you know, ask for directions and order food at a restaurant then, you know, that doesn't require a very high level language ability. And so maybe you do wanna just practice saying some basic phrases out of a phrase book, right? And practice being able to produce those things, because that's all you're going to need.

But, like I said, if you're really hoping to get to the point where you wanna be speaking fluently and native, like, then you're really not only wasting your time by practicing speaking early on, but you're actually potentially doing a lot of damage, because basically there's a lot of different ways to explain this, but one way that I've been articulating to myself recently is that every language is so unique and specific in kind of unpredictable ways. So to give an example from Japanese, you know, in English we might say, "Have you seen my phone?" Right? Like let's say my friend comes in, I can't find my

phone, hey, have you seen my phone? In Japanese they would actually say "Keitai shiranai ?" which literally means, "Do you know my phone?"

Andrew: Oh, OK, yeah.

Matt: And that's just why do we say have you seen? Why do they say do you know? I mean, there's no real rhyme or reason to it, language is kind of arbitrary in a way. But the important part is that English speakers are always gonna say, "Have you seen my phone?" And Japanese people are going to say, "Do you know my phone?"

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And so what they're really teaching you how to do in more general language learning programs that have that philosophy to speak from day one, if they're basically giving you grammar rules and vocabulary and they're telling you to think in your native language and then use these grammar and vocabulary to translate that into something that appears to be your target language.

But if that is the approach you are taking, you're kind of doomed to sound very weird and unnatural, and perhaps not be understood at all. Because if a Japanese person just thought in Japanese and thought, "Oh, do you know my cell phone, do you know my phone?" and then translate that into English, we wouldn't really know what he was talking about.

And so basically because language, human language, is something that is so, you know, patternized in this kind of arbitrary way, you have to basically already know how a native speaker would express a certain idea ahead of time, and express it that same way. There's not really room for being creative. It's not like math where you can just apply a formula and deduce the answer, you have to know the answer ahead of time.

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And so basically that just requires lots of input, right? Lots of absorbing the language to find out, OK, what do native speakers say in every, you know, realistic situation that comes up.

Andrew: Right, yeah, that's very interesting and, you know, we can see that happening all the time when we speak with people who are learning English as a second language. Though depending on what your mother tongue is, people make certain mistakes in English when speaking English, and we know these mistakes are happening because they're thinking like their mother tongue language, right? They're thinking in that way but applying it to English, and it causes an error. So, yeah, I guess the way to start

thinking in your L2 is just to get tons and tons of input and have it slowly remold the way that you think in the L2.

Matt: Yeah, totally, because not only do speakers of different languages express the same basic ideas in unique and different ways, but they also just express different ideas in the first place.

Andrew: True.

Matt: Like, you know, one example I like to give is in Japanese there's this really funny word "Gyakugire," which you might literally translate to reverse anger, which is basically, let's say that you know you put a yogurt in the fridge and you're like, "Hey, Matt, don't eat the yogurt?" And then I go eat it anyway, right? And the next day you're like, "Matt, what the heck? Why'd you eat the yogurt?" Well, maybe I get angry at you and I'm like, "Why'd you put it in the fridge if you didn't want me to eat it?" Right, I would get angry to try to defend myself.

Like, that's called "Gyakugire," right? 'Cause I'm obviously in the wrong, but I'm getting angry anyway. And so in Japanese there's a word for that and it's like, "Hey, why are you Gyakugire?" Right? Why are you getting reversed, like, angry? And so it's like we just don't have that word in English, right? So we'd never think to say it. Whereas Japanese people say it all the time 'cause it's just part of their mental vocabulary, right?

Andrew: Right, right. Yeah, totally. And I mean if you were to learn that in textbook, it could be useful for someone to point that out to you. But I think seeing it **in the wild** and just exposing yourself to people talking like that is probably gonna be the best way for you to acquire that kind of vocabulary item or that kind of thinking.

Matt: Yeah, exactly, like that's how I learned it, right? I just watched lots of TV shows, read lots of books. I saw that used so many times, and then one day I was hanging out with my Japanese friends and it popped into my mind and now sometimes when I'm hanging out with my English friends, it pops into my mind and, like, I wish that we had a similar word in English.

Andrew: Yeah, I love when that happens when something just naturally pops, like a word in the L2 pops into your head when you're speaking and you apply it for the first time. It's such a fantastic feeling.

Matt: Yeah, and that's basically if you get enough input that will just start happening to you more and more. Like the metaphor I like to use is that we probably all have had an experience of, for example, of when we were kids, you know TV shows would always have the same commercials over and over, and a lot of times you end up memorizing this whole 30-second long

commercial word for word. You can recite it back. Even though you never tried to memorize it, right?

Matt: And that's because the brain is just a basically a pattern recognition machine and when you just exposed it to the same patterns long enough, it just sucks it up. And so if you watch enough Japanese TV shows or Korean TV shows or whatever English TV shows, like, your brain picks up on these set patterns, these expressions that native speakers always use in the same way over and over. And then it just starts being natural for you to use it as well. It just pops up when you need it.

Andrew: So that brings up an interesting question, and that is repeated listening vs extensive listening. What do you think is a better listening approach to take, like one podcast or one audiobook or one YouTube video and just repeatedly listen to it over and over again, or is it better to, you know, just listen to tons of different varied content? And not really piggyback over and over again the same audio?

Matt: Yeah, well, I think that repetition can be very useful and because, you know, I'm sure we've all had the experience of, like, if you're studying a foreign language, you watch the same TV show or same podcast twice in a row or three times in a row, you notice more stuff every time, right?

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, for sure.

Matt: And so using repetition to your advantage, you give your brain a lot more chances to pick up more stuff. But at the same time, if you listen to the same thing like 10 times, you reach a point where you kinda have sucked up all you can suck up at your current level, right? And also repetition can be extremely boring, you always gotta be careful playing with boredom because, you know, none of us have that much willpower. So you gotta keep it fun and engaging.

And so I try to take the approach where you have a balance between repetition and keeping new stuff. And the way I do that is whenever—what I recommend to people and what I did was—whenever you're sitting down and you're going to give something your full attention, like, hey, I'm going to watch a movie with no subtitles and I'm gonna try to really understand as much as I can.

Always do something new, but then after you've watched something actively kind of put it into a folder later or put it on your phone and then when you kinda wanna do more passive form of listening, like, oh, I'm gonna also listen to English or whatever while I'm shopping or while cooking or cleaning, then that's a good opportunity to listen to things you've already watched once actively. And then you get more repetition, but it's not as

tedious because you're not fully paying attention anyway. You're kinda multitasking.

Andrew: Sure.

Matt: And then you kind of get the best of both worlds. Every week I used to take all the things I watched that week actively and then put it on my immersion pod, that I called it, which was just this little MP3 player, just for background listening, basically, to keep it really easy.

Andrew: OK, yeah, that's cool. I read, I think it was on your website or maybe it was on the AJAT website, about people that had a dedicated phone or dedicated iPod just exclusively for listening to Japanese so there will be no distractions with other content. And I haven't tried that out myself. It's cool.

Matt: Yeah I highly recommend it.

Andrew: Yeah, you recommend it?

Matt: Because, yeah, first of all, if there's nothing but Japanese in your MP3 player, then it's impossible for you to cheat, basically.

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And also you don't even have to make a choice, right? Because there's a lot of research on decision fatigue, which basically the idea that every time you make a decision you're kinda wearing down your decision-making muscle. And then you make worst decisions throughout the day. And so if basically you have this immersion pod, that I like to call it, where anything on it is good, then you just put it on shuffle and you don't have to make a decision.

Andrew: Yeah.

Matt: And one thing you could do now, if you have some money lying around is, if you get like a smartwatch.

Andrew: I wish.

Matt: You can use a smartwatch for that. That's what I've been doing. It's pretty cool because it's on your wrist at all times, right? So you can get some wireless headphones and a smartwatch and make it as easy as possible.

Andrew: Maybe that's a better idea, because it's actually pretty difficult to find an MP3 player these days, surprisingly.

Matt: Yeah, for a while I used this little iPod Nano, the one that had a clip. I don't know what generation it was; it was like $50 on eBay. But I used that for years, it was nice.

Andrew: Oh, cool.

Andrew: OK, man, I wanted to ask you, specifically ask you, some things that our listeners who are learning English could apply to their studies. Do you have, like, maybe three tips or something of things that people could start right away that would be a good idea for them to do?

Matt: Yeah, well, first of all, if you don't regularly spend time consuming things in English, and I mean consuming things that were meant for native English speakers. Like it's OK to also use material that was designed for learners, but I think it's also important to, from very early on, spend some, like, time, very regularly with real English content.

Andrew: Sure.

Matt: So, like, real books meant for native speakers or real websites or real YouTube videos. It doesn't matter what it is, but the kind of slogan is "by natives, for natives." So stuff that's real. And, really, at first you might not understand very much of it and that might be very difficult because, as adults, we're all so used to being so competent and feeling like we know what's going on.

So it's really hard to put yourself back in that position of being a child who doesn't really know what's going on and who's missing so much, not understanding so much. But, basically, you're never gonna get to that point where you can understand everything comfortably without going through that period of not understanding very much, right?

Andrew: Right.

Matt: So, you gotta jump into the pool if you wanna learn how to swim.

Andrew: Totally, totally.

Matt: And so that's one big thing is, I think that's really the most important thing is just consuming real content in the language. That's gonna make the biggest difference.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: And then another really good technique that I like to use is using a spaced repetition system.

Andrew: OK, so what do you mean by that?

Matt: So the most popular one is Anki, which is free space repetition software. It's basically a smart flashcard software where you can either make your own flashcards or you can download pre-made sets of flashcards that other people made. And the program basically has an algorithm that helps calculate when you should review what material so that your studying is as optimal as possible. So you're not wasting time reviewing things that you don't need to, 'cause you already know it well and you don't end up forgetting things, so that you don't have to spend more time relearning it later.

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And so what the technique that I like to use is really combining the space repetition study with consuming real things in the language. And so, for example, if you're learning English you could be reading a book in English or watching a movie with English subtitles and then you wanna wait until a sentence pops up with a word you don't know, and then you take that whole sentence, you put it on the front of the flashcard, and then on the back of the flashcard you put the definition of the word you didn't know.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: And this is just because a sentence is a larger unit of meaning than a single word. It's easier to wrap your head around, it's more natural. It's more similar to the situations we run into in real life, 'cause normally in real life we're dealing with sentences, not individual words floating around.

Andrew: Yeah, good point.

Matt: And then through doing this, your now active study is more **integrated** with your kind of real-life use of English. You learn whatever is relevant to you at the moment. If you're into cooking and you're watching cooking YouTube videos, then you learn the words related to cooking. And that, I think it's really important to have your study and your real life in the language **integrated** so that they help each other out as much as possible.

Andrew: Absolutely, absolutely.

Matt: And then maybe the last tip I would give is to try to use an English-to-English dictionary as soon as you can. So, for example if you're a Japanese person, you're gonna start by using an English-to-Japanese dictionary. But as soon as possible, you wanna move onto to using an English-to-English dictionary because basically, especially if you're dealing like for example, you're native Japanese, Japanese and English are just too different, and so when you're trying to read a Japanese explanation of an English word, there's a limit with how close and accurate you're gonna get.

Andrew: Sure.

Matt: And also you're reinforcing this habit of connecting your Japanese part of your brain to the English part of your brain, when really you want your English part of your brain to kind of branch off and be independent. And so if you can learn to use English to learn more English, then you kinda get this feedback loop going. And your ability to kind of really comprehend the mechanism of the language, in my experience, it will start to grow really quickly if you can get into the habit of doing that even though it's difficult at first.

Andrew: And there are some fantastic learners' dictionaries out there that I think people could use as a first step.

Matt: Oh, yeah, totally. I forgot about that. That's a benefit that people learning English have that learners from other languages don't, because English is probably the most learned language in the world.

Andrew: Sure.

Matt: So, like, they didn't have a learner's Japanese-to-Japanese dictionary. They have ones for elementary schoolers, but those were a little bit too dumbed down to really be useful. But, yeah, that's a really great resource, you could probably start using one of the learner dictionaries from very early on. So I definitely recommend that.

Andrew: Yeah, I think Oxford and Cambridge and all the big dictionary companies, they all make English dictionaries for language learners that have simplified definitions, but they're still totally natural English sentences. So I think that would be a good first step towards making that transition to an English dictionary for sure. That's a good point.

Matt: Totally.

Andrew: Cool. Matt, there's a couple other things that I wanted to talk to you about, and we'll do this quickly because I don't wanna waste too much of your time here. But the first is about shadowing, and I've heard you talk about this idea of adoption before. Adopting a dad?

Matt: A parent.

Andrew: Adopting a parent. Could you describe what you mean here by adoption when it comes to shadowing?

Matt: Yeah, so basically, well, it goes beyond just shadowing, the idea of adopting a parent. It's kind of the idea that, you know, whatever language you're dealing with, especially if we're talking about English, right, there's so many different varieties of English. Like, there's you know, Australian English, New Zealand English, American English, British English, but even within the UK or within the United States, there's so many other dialects of English, right? Like people on the East Coast speak totally different than people on the West Coast.

Andrew: True.

Matt: And even if we're just talking about, like, Oregon, right? My dad speaks a lot different than, like, my little brother does and there's, like, you can talk like a skater punk or you can talk like an educated, sophisticated guy or you can talk like a dimwit girl, whatever, right? So basically there's so many varieties of the language and so this kind of poses a challenge when you're a learner, because of course you wanna be able to understand all of it, but how do you choose what you wanna replicate yourself, right? Like, how do you find yourself in English?

And so, the idea is that if you just choose someone who you kind of resonate with, who you like the way they talk and you try to be like, OK, well, when it comes to speaking, I'm gonna try to imitate this guy, then that helps you. First of all, it's gonna make your speaking style more consistent, probably more appropriate for your age and style and personality and stuff. And also it's like the smaller your target is that you're aiming for, the easier it's gonna be to know whether your hitting it or not, right?

So if your goal is I want to sound like a native speaker, but then there's this huge range of what it means to be a native speaker, that's gonna be quite difficult to know whether you're heading in the right direction or not. Whereas if you're like, I wanna sound like this guy, then it's a lot easier to know like, OK, I'm good in these areas and I need to work in these other areas.

And so basically the idea is that you could find, for example, a YouTuber who makes videos of himself talking to the camera, maybe there's hundreds of hours of him just talking to the camera. And then you just start spending a lot of your time with English, just listening to this one guy and then just by getting a lot exposure, you'll passively pick up a lot of his quirks.

But you can also make a conscious effort to try to pay attention to like what words does he use a lot? How does he use filler words, you know? Like what intonation patterns does he use a lot? And then when you speak, you can try to think of yourself as an actor trying basically play this role, and that's going to allow you to very quickly sound really natural in the language. It's kind of like this hack to really sound good.

Matt: And then shadowing is basically a technique to kind of help you fine-tune that, where you're basically listening to a native speaker in the language and then repeating it back in real time and trying to listen to the **discrepancies** between your voice and their voice. And that can help you with subtle pronouncing things or intonation things, or just rhyme and flow things. And so, I like to, so when you're shadowing, and this is a technique that I think you should save until you're pretty advanced because basically, in my opinion, pronunciation, good pronunciation relies very heavily on your listening abilities, right?

Andrew: Yeah, yeah.

Matt: For example, a lot of Japanese people learning English, when they first start out, they literally can't hear the difference between L and R. So if I say, "Right and light," they literally think that those sound identical. And so that means that, like, to the Japanese untrained ear, those two sounds sound the same. So if a Japanese person, if they're ever gonna try to shadow, and they were messing up L and R, they're not gonna be able to tell they're messing up because they can't hear the difference, right?

Andrew: Right, yeah.

Matt: So the whole idea of shadowing is that you're correcting yourself by hearing where you're, when you're off the target. But that relies on being able to accurately hear what the target is saying. And just through getting lots of input in the language and building a high level comprehension ability and intuition, your ear naturally gets more and more tuned. And so that's why I say at the beginning you wanna just focus on really tuning your ear through input and then later focus on shadowing, because shadowing really isn't going to help you that much if you don't have a really highly tuned ear.

Andrew: Right, yeah, I completely agree. And the further that you go along in your language learning journey, you start to hear yourself when you speak and you're like, "Wow, that's bad." You know? And I think maybe at that point, that's when you can start to fine-tune things. But if you don't notice it, then it's really hard to correct, right?

Matt: Yeah, totally, like the metaphor I like to use is basically if you can't hear where you're off, then you're kind of like a blind person trying to draw a self-portrait, right? 'Cause a lot of people think, "Oh, I'll have native speakers correct me to perfection," right?

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And, like, “Oh, I’ll just have a native speaker tell me when I’m off.” Well, that’s really similar, imagine the blind person trying to draw the self-portrait and someone goes like, “Oh no, your nose is a little bigger.” It’s, like, that’s not gonna help him too much because he has no idea what’s going on, right?

Andrew: Right.

Matt: So that’s why really you have to rely on your own ability to correct yourself. You need that intuition, right? Like that native, like, intuition of what’s it supposed to sound like, if you wanna have any shot at really getting there.

Andrew: OK. Cool. So, finally, Matt, I wanted to ask you about meditation. I think there are probably some links between meditation and language learning, and I’ve heard you talk about this as well. What are your thoughts on meditation and language learning?

Matt: Yeah, well, first of all, of course meditation can mean a lot of things to like a lot of different people. And some people are just allergic to the word unconditionally and, as soon as they hear it, they get really turned off. So it’s like tricky territory, but basically the way that I, what I mean when I say meditation is, well, one of the simplest ways to think about it is just training your ability to concentrate and also train your ability to just know what’s going on in your mind, right?

Like a lot of times, we get lost in thought and we don’t even realize that we’re getting lost in thought, right? Like, you know, if you’ve ever have had the experience of trying to read a book and you realize you have no idea what you just read for the last paragraph, right? That meant that your mind was doing something and you didn’t know what your mind was doing.

So the idea of meditation is just sitting down and training, just like you would train a physical muscle to first of all have higher ability to concentrate, have more control over what your mind is doing. And then also just have more awareness of what your mind is doing moment to moment. And there’s lots of really practical techniques that can just help you improve these very basic skills that, you know, meditators have been working out for centuries and millennia.

And so, when it comes to language learning, I think that there’s kind of, there’s some really direct benefits, and then there’s kind of like ancillary benefits. So the direct benefits are especially at the higher levels of language learner when you’re really trying to, for example, you’re already at a high level of fluency but you wanna make the gap between you and native speakers increasingly smaller.

Matt: It really comes down to just noticing lots of really subtle patterns and quirks about native speakers, right? Like really noticing like, oh, when exactly do they use this word and when exactly do they use that word? Like how exactly do they mush the sounds together when they're speaking fast, right?

Andrew: Right.

Matt: And so I find that you pick up a lot of stuff naturally just through osmosis, through getting lots of exposure. But you kind of level out after a certain point. And to continue to improve after you reach a high level, it's really up to you to go out of your way to notice these things. And so the better concentration abilities you have, then of course the more successful you're gonna be at noticing subtle patterns when you set that intention too, right? Like especially when you train your concentration, it makes it easier to use your mind in the way that you wanna use it and so instead of just **zoning out** and watching a TV show, it's easier to hone in and be like, "OK, for the next 30 minutes I'm going to pay attention to how natives slur their speech when talking fast."

Andrew: Right.

Matt: Like you can really set a target and then notice, and that can be very fruitful. And of course you can do this without training and meditating, but you're gonna be more successful the better you can concentrate.

Andrew: Right, so if you get that focus up, then you can, like you say, hone in on some of these aspects of the language that perhaps you couldn't have without this kind of mental training.

Matt: Yeah, and another thing is that a lot of times boredom can be a real issue. Like it was a big issue for me getting to this level of language learning where it's like, man, just trying to notice all these subtle patterns, like I can already understand it, but I'm still trying to find all the little things. It was pretty boring and tedious, but a lot of times things are really boring because you're not really paying attention to them, right? No matter what you take, if you really pay attention to it closely, you're gonna find something interesting there. Even if I just look at my hand and I look at all the little intricate lines and patterns in my hand, right? And normally I would never notice, it's like, oh, wow, my hand's pretty intricate, right?

Andrew: Right.

Matt: Anything is pretty intricate when you really examine it closely. Like imagine if I had an actual microscope how interesting it would be to look at my hand. And so basically training your attention, your ability to concentrate is basically kind of upping the resolution on basically your consciousness, so

that you're gonna be noticing more. And the more you're noticing, the more entertaining it is, the less boring it is. And so it's useful in that way, too.

Andrew: OK.

Matt: And then the ancillary benefits that I was talking about are kind of like also just the fact that it's easier to be gentle with yourself. To not be hard on yourself, like, for example, if you try go have a conversation with the native speaker and you didn't understand something they said and it was really awkward and bad. Like, I think most people would go home feeling really awful, right? They might drag that on for days, just feeling, "Oh god, that was so bad, I never wanna speak the language again, I suck."

Whereas, when you kind of get through practicing meditation, you can get some distance between those thoughts and emotions. And of course you'll still have those emotions, but they won't really effect you as strongly, because you'll just realize like, "Yup, I had a bad experience, I messed up, now I'm feeling sad. I'm feeling embarrassed but that's just an emotion, it's gonna go away. It's a normal thing and I'm OK." And that kind of mental resistance is really important, I think, on pretty much any pursuit. But definitely language learning as well, you're gonna have lots of moments where you just feel like you suck along the way.

Andrew: Yeah, not a few. Many, many, many. But, yeah, that's really cool. I have been meditating, not for very long, for maybe only 3 or 4 months. But I'm starting to notice some of these benefits that you talk about as well, here. So I would encourage any of our listeners to give it a try and to look into it a little bit and see if it could be right for you, because I do think that there are some connections here and that it helps us be more focused and stronger language learners. And it's also nice just to do in the morning, it's a good way to start your day.

Matt: Yeah, totally.

Andrew: OK, Matt, I'm gonna wrap things up here, but, before we go, I would be doing our Japanese listeners a disservice if I didn't let you give them a little shout out in Japanese. Could you say hello to our Japanese listeners quickly?

Matt: Cool, cool. (Speaking in Japanese) *Hello to all the Japanese listeners. I know that studying English can be difficult, but there is a lot of information out there that you can only access in English. And once you master English, you will be able to connect with people over all the world. So please don't give up! Keep at it and good luck!*

Andrew: Matt, I hope you didn't just troll me in Japanese.

Matt: Oh no, no.

Andrew: I'm just joking. Matt, it was a really interesting conversation. Thank you so much. And could you just remind our listeners about your websites and where they can find you on the internet?

Matt: Oh, yeah. If you search on YouTube for Matt vs Japan, you can find my channel. Also, my website is massimmersionapproach.com. And I have a Patreon account too, patreon.com/massimmersionapproach.

Andrew: Awesome. So, everyone, go check out Matt on the internet, follow his stuff because, yeah, there's lots of good information on all of his websites, and we really just scratched the surface here. There's so much more that we could talk about. And maybe I'll have to get you back in the future, Matt, onto Culips again.

Matt: Yeah, it would be a pleasure.

Andrew: Awesome. Well, have a great day and, thank you Matt.

Matt: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Andrew: Well, guys, that brings us to the end of today's episode. And I certainly hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. Do us a favour and check out Matt's websites, OK? We have them linked in the YouTube description box for this episode or, if you're listening to the audio podcast, then you can find all the links on our website, which is Culips.com.

Culips.com is also the place where you can download the study guide for this episode that is just jam-packed full of great resources for you. So if you're interested in studying with our study guides, just navigate to Culips.com and you can find all of the information you need to learn about how to get our study guides. Thank you again, and we'll talk to you next time. Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To immerse oneself
Idiom

One of the main topics of this episode is the idea of immersion. In terms of language, **to immerse oneself** is to fully live in that language. Everything you do during the day is in this language. In Canada, there are school programs called French immersion, meaning you take most, if not all, of your classes in French in order to get maximum exposure to the language. You can also use **to immerse oneself** when talking about learning a different skill, such as playing the piano or playing billiards.

Here are a couple more examples with **to immerse oneself**:

Martha:	Wow, you play the guitar so beautifully. How long have you been playing?
Dara:	I started about 6 months ago.
Martha:	Only 6 months and you're that good? How come?
Dara:	I've always wanted to play. So when I finally had some free time, I completely **immersed myself** in learning and playing the guitar. I play all the time. I always have my guitar in my hands.
Martha:	The results are great.

Craig:	I'm studying German these days. Do you have any tips for me?
Jan:	I think you should **immerse yourself** in the language as much as you can.
Craig:	It's a little difficult doing that here in Canada.
Jan:	I guess. But there are many ways you can do it. You can read, Skype, listen to movies and TV shows. And, of course, you can go to Germany!

To meet in the middle
Idiom

To meet in the middle is to compromise. In this episode, Matt talks about his experience with fellow language learner Lukas. They had very different opinions on some things, but they eventually **met in the middle**. That means they came together and focused on what they both agreed on. **To meet in the middle** can also be used when referring to negotiating a price.

Here are a couple more examples with **to meet in the middle**:

Liz:	Hey, do you want to go for a jog this afternoon?
Madison:	Sure, that'd be great. Where do you want to go?
Liz:	I have this route in mind. It's really beautiful.
Madison:	How long is it?
Liz:	About 20 kilometres.
Madison:	20 kilometres! I've never run farther than 5 kilometres at one time. You have to **meet me somewhere in the middle**.
Liz:	OK. How about we run out 5 kilometres and then turn around?

Alain:	How much are you selling your car for?
Peter:	$2000.
Alain:	Oh, no. I was hoping to offer you $1000.
Peter:	I'll tell you what. Because you've helped me out so much over the years, I can **meet you in the middle**. How does $1500 sound?
Alain:	I can do that. Thanks.

In the wild
Idiom

At one point in this episode, Andrew talks about the importance of encountering language **in the wild**. **In the wild** means in a natural state. It's like the difference between seeing an animal **in the wild** or in a zoo. Andrew and Matt both support the idea of hearing the way native speakers naturally use their language, as opposed to learning it through basic textbooks.

Here are a couple more examples with **in the wild**:

Malcolm:	I feel like my Japanese is getting really good. What do you think?
Kumiko:	It is. You're making some good progress.
Malcolm:	But I feel like I've reached a plateau. I'm not improving as fast as I used to.
Kumiko:	I think that's because you're only talking to me. You should go out **in the wild** and talk to other people. Then you're going to see what you really need to learn in the future.

Benny:	I've noticed that you often have monkeys on your t-shirts. Why is that?
Victoria:	Obviously, I love monkeys! They're fascinating. Have you ever seen a monkey in person?
Benny:	Only at a zoo. They're kind of sad, I find.
Victoria:	In a zoo, of course. You should see them **in the wild**. Their group dynamics are interesting. Every time I go to Southeast Asia, I make sure to go to a sanctuary or some kind of forest where I can interact with them.

To integrate
Verb

To integrate things is to bring various different elements together into one thing. In this episode, Matt talks about the importance of **integrating** your real life and your language learning. That means that you should bring the two together harmoniously.

Here are a couple more examples with **to integrate**:

Hillary:	Oh, this music is great. Who is it?
Nate:	This is Nujabes.
Hillary:	It's such an interesting sound, like a kind of fusion.
Nate:	For sure. That's what he used to do. He would take elements of jazz and hip hop and **integrate** them into something amazing.

Lucas:	I heard that you lived in Italy for 6 years. How was that?
Paula:	It was a remarkable time in my life, that's for sure.
Lucas:	Did you find you **integrated** well into the society?
Paula:	Not really, at first. There were a few cultural differences I had to deal with. But after 6 years, I'd say I **integrated** pretty well.

A discrepancy
Noun

A discrepancy is a difference between two things. For example, in this episode, Matt talks about the **discrepancies** between your voice and the voice of the person you are shadowing. He is talking about the differences. With **discrepancies**, one of the two things is usually at a higher level, such as someone who scores 60 on a test and someone who scores 80.

Here are a couple more examples with **a discrepancy**:

Sergio:	Sometimes, I find people have a difficult time understanding what I'm saying. But I think my English level is pretty high. I've been studying for a long time.
Vicky:	Your level is high. You have a decent vocabulary.
Sergio:	So what's the problem?
Vicky:	I think there's **a discrepancy** between how good you think you are and how good you need to be to communicate with other people. It might take a long, long time.

George:	Can you take a look at these numbers? I think there's a problem with the company's finances.
Patricia:	OK. Oh, I see. There's **a discrepancy** between our receipts and what we wrote down.
George:	Where do you see that?
Patricia:	Right here. Our receipts say $41,000, but we wrote down $42,000.
George:	I see.
Patricia:	It's not a big difference, but it's important nonetheless.

To zone out
Phrasal verb

To zone out is to lose your focus. It's like daydreaming. You are literally out of the zone of your concentration. It might be because you are bored, distracted, or even sleeping.

Here are a couple more examples with **to zone out**:

Masuo:	Hey, did you get the notes from today's class for me?
Brian:	I'm so sorry. I only wrote down some of them.
Masuo:	Only some of them? What happened?
Brian:	I hardly slept last night. So, in class, I completely **zoned out** for about 20 minutes. I'm so sorry.

Hannah:	We have a meeting at 2:00. Make sure you drink enough coffee before!
Rita:	I know. These meetings are so boring.
Hannah:	I always **zone out** about 5 minutes after they start.
Rita:	Me, too. I don't know why they can't make them more interesting. Everyone thinks they're tedious.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is synonymous with to meet in the middle?

a) to negotiate for more money
b) to go in the centre
c) to meet halfway
d) to meet with good intentions

2. What does to integrate mean?

a) to bring various elements together
b) to be ungrateful
c) to bind a book
d) to speak many different languages

3. True or false? To zone out can mean to sleep.

a) true
b) false

4. Which of the following is a good example of something being in the wild?

a) a lion at a zoo
b) children playing without being supervised
c) fish in an aquarium
d) going to a crazy party

5. Which of the following is a good example of a discrepancy?

a) your friend is tall
b) your car has very dark colours and very bright colours
c) you ordered $15 worth of food but you only have $10
d) you wished you could fly

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. **What are some of the elements Matt proposed that you agree with? Which of them do you disagree with?**

2. **How possible is it for you to implement the Mass Immersion Approach in your daily life?**

3. **What are some of the methods you use to learn English?**

4. **Do you find you need to think differently in English and in your native language? What are some examples?**

5. **What do you think is more important in your language learning, fluency of speech or accuracy of pronunciation?**

6. **Have you tried meditation to improve your language learning? Do you think it can help?**

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.a 3.a 4.b 5.c

Episode credits

Hosts:	Andrew Bates and Matt vs Japan
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Episode preparation/research:	Andrew Bates
Audio editor:	Andrew Bates
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