

## Chatterbox #314 – Interview with Alina

AD-FREE

### Episode description

In this episode, you'll be introduced to Culips Discord moderator and study guide writer Alina Morozova! She shares the story of how she became fluent in English, how she met her husband and moved to Ireland, and her personal tips and recommendations for learning English.

### Fun fact

Alina's hometown, Komsomolsk-on-Amur, used to be a part of China during its last imperial dynasty (the Qing dynasty). It was ceded to Russia in 1858.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To throw shade
- To click (with/for)
- To light a fire under [somebody]
- Aha moment
- To have egg on [one's] face
- With [one's] eyes closed



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## Transcript

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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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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**Andrew:** Chatterbox episode 314. “Interview with Alina.” Featuring Andrew and special guest, Alina.

Welcome back to Culips everyone. You are listening to Chatterbox and today we have a very special episode for you indeed, because in just a moment, I’m going to be joined by our Discord moderator, Alina. So, if you are a part of our Discord community, then you’ve probably met Alina already. She’s very, very active on our Discord server. But if you haven’t had the opportunity to join us on Discord yet, well, then maybe you haven’t met Alina yet, but you’ll be introduced to her in today’s episode. And guys, we had a wonderful conversation, I really enjoyed chatting with Alina and we talked about so many things. For example, we started our conversation off by talking about what growing up in Russia was like.

And then we talked about learning English because as you’ll hear in just a moment, Alina speaks English really, really well. She’s got a super high degree of fluency. In fact, she’s almost like a native English speaker. So, I think many of you will be interested in the steps that she took to become a really fluent English speaker. So, we go into a lot of details about her process of learning English. We also talk about how she met her husband and how she ended up leaving Russia and immigrating to Ireland. And we talked about some other things as well like what she likes to do in her free time and her hobbies, and what her favourite TV series was for helping her learn English and much, much more. And now it’s time to listen to this interview. So, I hope you all enjoy it as much as I did. Here we go. Here’s Alina. Enjoy!

Alina, welcome to Culips. Finally, we have you on the podcast. Welcome.

**Alina:** Yeah, thank you, Andrew. I'm super happy to be here, finally.

**Andrew:** Yeah, and I think some of our audience will be familiar with you, Alina, especially those Culips listeners who are also a part of our Discord community. But we only have a fraction of our wider audience who are members of our Discord. And for listeners who are wondering, Alina is our Discord moderator, and she helps us run the Discord community. So that's why the Discord users are familiar with you, but maybe our wider audience is not exactly. So, for listeners who don't know you, Alina, that's why I want to have this interview with you today, so that we can introduce you to our whole Culips community, and they can learn about how interesting and wonderful of a person you are. And then they can come over and join us on the Discord server as well and get to know you even more. So, I'm just going to ask you, you know, some questions about your life, Alina, so we can get to know you. And especially, I want to focus on your English language learning journey, because, well, I think maybe some people might even be confused about this, but you're not actually a native English speaker. You had to go through the process of learning English, just like all of our listeners are doing right now. So, I think they'll really enjoy hearing about that part of your life. But yeah, let's start at the beginning. So, could you just maybe tell us where you're from to start?

**Alina:** Sure. I'm originally from Russia, just like you said, I'm not a native speaker. And I was born in a small town in the far east of Russia called Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Amur as in the river. And yeah, when I turned 16, I moved to St. Petersburg, went to university there. And yeah, now I live in Ireland. I moved here to join my husband, who is Irish.

**Andrew:** I wanted to ask you, Alina, actually, I was thinking about this. This is quite a big move going from Eastern Russia to Western Russia, right? That's like almost the other side of the world. And you did that when you were 16. What was that move like?

**Alina:** Oh, I mean, to be honest with you, I feel like I did it just at the right time when I didn't really think much because, you know, now that we're older, we're always

overthinking things. And back then I was 16, my mom was like, “Do you want to go to St. Petersburg?” And I was like, “Sure, why not?” You know. No problem at all. Let’s do this thing. And, you know, like now that I think about it, it was obviously a great idea, you know, great decision. I guess the credit, you know, should be given to my mom, because I didn’t really know what I was doing, to be honest with you, like maybe a lot of us at that age. But yeah, I’m happy I did that, for sure. I don’t think I would be where I am now if I hadn’t moved to St. Petersburg.

**Andrew:** Yeah, it’s interesting, because moving around that age, usually people don’t want to move, like teenagers don’t want to move, because they have their high school and their friends, and usually they’re sort of against moving at that time. I know some of my friends who moved at that time in their life were really angry that their parents were moving, but it was the opposite situation for you. So that’s great it worked out well. Eastern Russia is more in Asia, and then St. Petersburg is more like European Russia, right? Is there a big difference in the culture or the feeling of the country from the Asian side to the more European side?

**Alina:** Yeah, not really, to be honest with you. You know people ask that a lot. They think that just like, for example, take Europe, if you go from country to country, it’s a completely different world. But in Russia, even though it’s such a big country, it doesn’t really change that much as you travel around the country. And people also like to ask me about the language. Do we have different accents and stuff like that? And yeah, some people might argue, you know, that we have like dialects, but it’s not like you wouldn’t be able to understand each other. Definitely not like England, you know, something like that.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that’s really interesting how such a huge country could have not that many accents. In Canada as well, you know, huge country, and I think we could count all of the different accents on one hand. There’s not too many different regional varieties of Canadian English. It sounds like Russia’s sort of the same way, but then you look at a small country like the UK, then there are hundreds of different accents. And yeah, it’s

really interesting. So, I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about Russia. I was thinking, you know, what comes to my mind when I think of the country. And when I think of like things that are really interesting or really great that have come out of Russia, I think about chess, and I think about ice hockey, and I think about maybe science and tech, especially during the Space Race. And when we released our Culips episode about space exploration a little while ago, maybe last year, I had a lot of Russian listeners chime in and give me some feedback about that episode, because apparently, I didn't give enough credit to Russia as I should have. And so, I learned that maybe is a very big point of pride for Russians as well. I also think about literature, of course, all of the great writers out of Russia. Are those the things that Russian people are also proud of?

**Alina:** I mean, sure, absolutely. I was just scared for a moment there that you're going to ask me questions about space.

**Andrew:** Oh, no.

**Alina:** And, you know, I'm no expert, by any means. I was like, oh my God, what do I say? Yeah, for sure. I mean, we do pride ourselves on all those things, you know, and some more like art as well, music, stuff like that. And historically, if you look back, there's so much to learn about Russia. Throughout the years, we've been through stuff.

**Andrew:** Yeah, very interesting country. And one day I would love to visit. I think that list, you know, I was wondering, is that just my biases? Because I really love all of those things, right? I love chess, I love hockey, I love literature. But then I was like, ah, you know, I think those are the things that Russian people are also proud of as well. And so, yeah, someday, definitely, I'd have to visit.

**Alina:** You can start with, you know, the part where I'm from, because it's just closer.

**Andrew:** Yeah, exactly. Eastern Russia, like Vladivostok, is actually not that far away here from Korea. And yeah, as an ice hockey lover, I think it's one of the closest places that I could visit to see like some really high-quality ice hockey. And there's a team in the K League there. So, one day, definitely, it's on my bucket list to visit.

**Alina:** You should do that for sure.

**Andrew:** Alina, could you tell us a little bit about what English language education is like in Russia? Is it something that you learn when you go to public school? Is it something that most people are exposed to? Or what's it like in Russia?

**Alina:** Yeah, so I'm going to speak from my own experience. It could be different, slightly, but I don't think so. But I started learning English when I just started school from the very first year. I was seven, I think. Yes, I was seven. And yeah, we had it all the way until the end of school. And yeah, that's basically how I think it works in most schools, at least public schools. And we don't really have any other languages, as in Russian, of course, any other foreign languages. So, we're supposed to be fully focusing on English.

And I, you know, like don't mean to **throw any shade**, but I feel like, yeah, it wouldn't really be the best if I were to be honest. And that's why I guess it took me quite a long time to advance in my journey. And I guess up until the time I entered university, I wasn't really that proud of my English at all. And I actually, I thought I didn't really have a knack for it at the time. Funnily enough, I haven't been always very good at English. But yeah, things changed when I met a teacher at my university, and she really helped me to kind of, you know, how do I put this? Like, everything just fell into place with her, all these pieces, like scattered pieces of knowledge I got from here and there from school. And yeah, that's how basically I, at some point, decided that I actually wanted to teach English as well.

**Andrew:** OK, excellent. So, I want to get into all of that. But just before, I wanted to back up, just for a second, to talk more about learning English in school, because it's really

funny, in my line of work, I obviously get to talk with lots of English learners. And there are so many people from so many different countries who have exactly the same story as you, Alina. They had to learn English at school. It was like the main second language focus from elementary school or middle school all the way up until graduation. And so many people say, "It was just terrible. The classes didn't help me. I didn't learn anything." So, I'm wondering, like, globally, do we need to really revise the way we teach English at school, because it seems like everybody has exactly the same story? And, you know, as a Canadian, I had to take second language classes as well. And I think every Canadian in my situation where we had to learn French at public school, we always say the same thing, like, "Oh, the French education was poor." So, something there, I think, but obviously, eventually, things **clicked for you**, as you said, things fell into place once you got to university. What was it that was different about that teacher that you had the special connection with?

**Alina:** Oh, that's a very good question. I'm not sure I could give you like a specific answer. I don't know if I can put my finger on it, exactly what was different about her. But she somehow managed to get through to me. Maybe it's to do with me, you know, maybe it's to do with age, maybe we're just not old enough in school to be ready for another language. But she just had this way about her, you know, in particular, she inspired me a lot as a teacher. So, I think I kind of took a lot from her approach wise, maybe in my own teaching practice. So yeah, I guess it was just she was able to get us interested in the language, just the way she was talking about it, you know? You probably know what I'm talking about as a teacher.

**Andrew:** Yeah, yeah. No, I think that's one of the things that I keep in my mind, one of my big goals as a teacher as well, because when you think about really learning any subject in a classroom, there's just not that much time to do it, especially at the university level, where I teach, students meet with you maybe once or twice a week for a few hours. When you think about learning English, you need hours and hours and hours of practice and exposure. And, you know, it takes time, right? Everybody listening to this can agree that



learning a second language takes time. And so, you've to wonder, like, how much can you actually achieve in a classroom? And so, because of that reality, I think what I can do for my students and what your teacher did for you, it sounds like is they **lit a fire under you**. They motivated you, so that you would go probably outside of the classroom and do a lot of study and learning outside of the classroom as well.

**Alina:** For sure. Yeah, I think as well, maybe another factor that was probably there is that I was living in St. Petersburg. It was kind of closer to, you know, some other countries. And back in the far east of Russia, I didn't really see how I could use English. I think that's another kind of thing that changed as well when I moved.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense as well, it becomes real for you. It's like not just another school subject, but something that you can actually use as a tool in your real life for communicating with other people or for travel or for whatever reason, right? It became alive for you. So, Alina, I've heard you call yourself an anglophile before, and I was wondering, I think that's a cool word, and I think maybe there are some listeners who could also identify as an anglophile. Could you sort of explain what that means and how being an anglophile helped you to learn English?

**Alina:** I guess what it means to me in particular, you know, like languages, it has been always something that, like now that I think of it, even though English wasn't always my strongest suit, I feel like languages have always piqued my interest. Because, like, I was very interested in the Russian language for many years. I was, like you know, very intrigued by all of these etymology, phraseology, you know, all that jazz.

**Andrew:** Hmm, like all the linguistics of the language.

**Alina:** Yes, yes, I was always into it. I've always been kind of all about this, and years later, same thing happened to me, you know, in terms of English as well, and then I went to learn Italian, so I can speak three languages pretty much. Anglophile, to steer us back



to your question. It's just my kind of passion towards the language itself, and I love teaching it. I loved seeing, you know, this like moment, **aha moment**, when my students suddenly, you know, it clicks, and they realize how things work. So yeah, I guess that's maybe what I mean by that.

**Andrew:** OK, and I actually wanted to ask you about that, that aha moment, or that moment that it clicks. So, you said you had that moment with your teacher when you were a university student. But I understand that was more like your teacher sort of motivating you or pushing you to learn the language more deeply. Do you remember, or do you recall, the point where you felt like English went from just being something that you had to study to, "Wow, I can understand what people are saying, and oh, I can express myself with like fluency, and people understand what I want to say, and I can communicate my ideas!" Did you have that kind of aha or click moment in your learning journey?

**Alina:** Yeah, I feel like I did, you know, I wouldn't be able to pinpoint exactly at what time it happened. It was also maybe kind of more of a gradual process, because like it started off being just little moments of, "Wait, I just got it! I know what they said." Something like that. But I guess the biggest moment was when I was like suddenly able to understand the native speakers, because it didn't, you know, come that easily. It wasn't always a smooth sailing for me. It took years, you know, and I guess when I think about it, when I look back at my journey, I definitely would say that I made some mistakes focusing maybe too much on all the aspects but speaking, because it was always about grammar, it was about reading, and I had this massive, I would say, fear and barrier, and I couldn't really bring myself to speak.

And maybe I could tell a quick story about how I met my husband, because it's kind of a cool story, I guess. So, at some point, I guess when I, you know, first realized that, oh, English is kind of cool, you know, and maybe I could be good at this, I realized that I need to focus on my speaking skills. And that's when I went and explored the world of apps, and I found this app called HelloTalk. It's like a language-exchange app where you can, you

know, find partners and practice their native language with them, and they can practice your language with you. So that's when I met a guy from Ireland who was interested in Russian at the time, and I was interested in practicing English, and that was kind of a serendipitous encounter, should I put it this way? Fancy way.

So, that guy ended up being my husband, and he was the very first native speaker I ever talked to, like, in real life, because he came to Saint Petersburg shortly after we met online, and the first couple of days were a disaster. Like, it was just terrible. I had **egg all over my face**. I couldn't understand anything, you know, and even though in my head, I'm sure a lot of people would be able to relate to this, in my head, I was speaking like Shakespeare, you know? But as soon as I had to actually produce any kind of basic sentences even, but, you know, luckily, he was patient enough, and I was really motivated.

So yeah, here I am now, being able to express myself a lot better.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that's awesome. I don't want to pry too much, but I'm imagining that first meeting, it must have been such an interesting first meeting. I imagine you guys had some kind of, like, romantic intention before he came to visit you, because that seems like a long way to go to visit a language partner?

**Alina:** Well, you know, he claims that there was no such thing, and I mean, we didn't really talk about it openly. Like, I don't mind, you know, going into details about that, but we were more like, you know, friends at first. Because we kind of wanted to meet in person first, before we, you know, jump into any conclusions or anything like that. And I mean, we, like, continued being friends for years, until 2020, actually, before we decided that maybe it could go, you know, some other direction.

**Andrew:** So, it started as just friends, but still, that must have been quite nerve-wracking to have to meet this guy from the app, and then have to have that conversation for the first time. Wow, that's so interesting, but it worked out for the best.

**Alina:** Oh yeah, luckily.

**Andrew:** Alina, I wanted to go a little bit more into the weeds about your study routine, because for one, I'm interested in this kind of thing as a fellow language learner myself. But also, I know our listeners are very interested in this kind of thing. So, if we could go back again in time to that point in your life where, you know, you were maybe around that intermediate level with your English, you could understand, you know, maybe some podcasts like Culips. You could have conversations, but maybe you still felt like, "Ah, I still want to hit that next level with my learning journey. I still want to, you know, go to that really advanced level of fluency." So, if we could go back in time to that point in your life, what were you doing on a day-to-day basis? What kind of study techniques? You mentioned that you studied a lot of grammar and read a lot of books, but like what was your typical English study routine like at that time in your journey?

**Alina:** OK, as I mentioned, there was a lot of grammar studying, mostly in school though. It was mostly something we focused on with my school teachers, and that's why my speaking skills weren't that great. But I guess when I realized that I really need to work on all the skills, I guess, yeah, that's one important thing I would say that the key is to kind of evenly distribute your focus, because it can't just be grammar, or it can't just be like listening, or just reading. Ideally, you would want to focus on all of them. You would want to like organize yourself, and I think that's exactly what I did. As I mentioned, we had a very good teacher that was able to take me from pretty much like one level to the next level, and yeah, I was able to take my B2 level exam, upper intermediate, and pass it, thanks to her. So, what we did, we would follow this book, but she would always kind of add to it a lot more than just the book had to offer, and that's what I do with my students as well. You know, we don't usually just follow some book, because again, books tend to focus on, you know, the grammar, reading kind of part, and you need to practice speaking, because all we need to do is to be able to communicate, right?

And that's, I guess, one thing that I would definitely recommend is to focus on listening and speaking maybe a little bit more, because at some point you already, you know, you got it, like you got the grammar. You can speak, you have enough of it, at least, you know, some kind of basic intermediate-level knowledge. But another important aspect of it was not just the studying itself, but like the attitude. I think the attitude also shifted, you know, at the time for me, I started seeing this as some kind of fun thing as well, because it's important, right, to make it enjoyable. And I have a feeling that all these years ago, when I was in school, it wasn't exactly fun. We were kind of, you know, forced to do all these boring, repetitive exercises. And that's another thing I changed first of all, that teacher, the university teacher, helped to change. And then when I kind of got the idea, I was able to implement in my own study routine. So, yeah, I just started watching a lot of movies and TV shows, which wasn't easy at first. I gotta say, and I see my students struggle. It's, you know, difficult. They're like, "Ah, I have to sit down and focus, and I don't wanna ..." And I'm like, "You have to!" That's just something you gotta do, you know, if you want to advance.

If you want to improve your skills, achieve some fluency, you gotta work hard. And that's what I did. Because a lot of people, you know, I think expect some kind of an overnight success thing. You know, if I just like study a lot for a week, I am gonna be, you know, a proficient speaker. But it takes a lot, you know, more than that.

**Andrew:** So, were you one of these people that were watching series like again and again? I have some students who are really fluent English speakers, and I always ask them, you know, "What do you watch on TV?" And they always say like, "Oh, I watched like the "Friends" series 15 times or something back-to-back." I'm like, "What? Oh, that's why you're so good at speaking English. You have hundreds and hundreds of hours of listening practice through watching that show." Were you one of those kinds of students as well, who just really binged a lot of English TV and movies?

**Alina:** Oh yeah, absolutely. I believe that's kind of a very effective way, and I guess that's why the Culips podcast is so good because repetitive listening is one of the most effective ways to learn, you know, to kind of get these words and phrases stuck in your head. And then they just come naturally when you need to use them. That's exactly how it works, especially if you, you know, get this practice in of course, the speaking part.

**Andrew:** Yeah, yeah, I completely agree. What was the series or the show for you, or the movie that was like the one that you spent the most time with? Usually for English learners, it's "Friends" or "Big Bang Theory".

**Alina:** Oh no, I have a different one. I have a different one, actually. I'm so happy I get to talk about it because I love this show. Yeah so, the show is "The Office". It's the American one, and you must have heard of it. Maybe even watched it.

**Andrew:** Yeah, yeah.

**Alina:** So yeah, it was actually the very first TV show I watched without subtitles. And I am very proud of this because, you know, it was, again, not easy. And you would have to just sit and focus and eliminate all the distractions around yourself and just fully kind of concentrate on it. But I love this show. I can't even tell you how many times I watched it. And I wouldn't maybe say like I recommend this show to beginners or anything like that. Of course not. Like, it's quite an advanced level, I would say, but it's a good show. And I really did enjoy watching it, re-watching it.

**Andrew:** Nice. Yeah, no, I love "The Office" as well. I'm a little more partial to the UK version with Ricky Gervais. Did you ever watch that one?

**Alina:** So, OK, that's kind of an embarrassing thing.

**Andrew:** Oh, yeah?

**Alina:** But I have to, I guess, at some point do that. So, I have tried watching the UK version, and I think I made it past two episodes. But that was like maybe, you know, a couple of years ago, no, 3 years ago. And I would say that 3 years ago, my understanding of the English accents was still kind of left much to be desired, you know? And at this point, I feel like I'm a little bit more ready. So maybe if I tried it now, because it was really difficult, like the way they speak is just so different and not as clear as the American accent, of course, if you were to compare.

**Andrew:** I agree with you. Yeah. And the humor in the American series is a lot more obvious. In the UK, in general, this is a cultural difference between America and the UK. The humor is a lot drier and a lot darker in the UK. So, I don't know, I saw the UK version first. And I think it's, you know, whatever that you watch the first time maybe has a bigger impact on you. And then when you watch a remake from a different country, it's hard to escape that bias of the first impression that you got. But yeah, check out the UK version sometime. I think you'll enjoy it as well.

**Alina:** Will do. Yeah. I mean, I feel like I have to just to, you know, to have this like full picture, the original.

**Andrew:** Yeah, no, it's so funny. And yeah, I highly recommend either the American series or the UK series of "The Office" to all English learners. Like you said, it is difficult, but it's really, really funny and a lot of good stories in there as well.

**Alina:** Oh, yeah. Good quotes.

**Andrew:** For sure. Alina, just one final question about learning English before we move to a different topic. I was just wondering, like, these days, do you think that you still actively study English? Or do you feel like you're just using English now?

**Alina:** I don't think I will ever stop learning. That's, you know, one thing I've got to say. And one should never be like, "OK, I know everything now. I'm just going to stop." So, I would say I'm both using it and learning it. And I'll be honest and say that I learn a lot with Culips as well. And it might be not just like completely new expressions, but maybe the ones that I've like heard before, but never really actively used. So, I try to use them too, use them more in my daily kind of conversations, because it's kind of nice to be able to show off the knowledge. But yeah, I would say that it's a never-ending process, you always learn.

**Andrew:** Yeah. I wonder if you ever have this experience with your husband. I have sometimes this experience with my wife because my wife is also not a native English speaker. So, kind of similar. Our relationship is sort of similar to yours, where you have one native English speaker and one non-native English speaker. And, you know, sometimes when I'm speaking Korean, I'll use an expression or some vocabulary with her. And she's like, "How did you learn that? Where did you learn that?" Or sometimes she'll do the same thing with me. You know, she'll be speaking English. And I'm like, "Whoa, where did you get that expression from? Where did you learn that from?" Does that ever happen to you guys as well?

**Alina:** Yeah, absolutely. Sometimes, you know, I manage very rarely, though, but I manage to even teach him some new expressions. And, you know, these moments are just priceless. And I'm like, yes, I know something my native English speaker husband doesn't.

**Andrew:** That's awesome. I hope one day my wife could teach me a new expression in English. Hasn't happened yet. Although there are some Konglish expressions that she's taught me. Konglish is like the variety of Korean where it's using a borrowed English word, but sometimes in the process of borrowing that word, the pronunciation and the meaning changes so much that I can't even understand it. But yeah, she's taught me some Konglish before. Alina, before we wrap up here, and we will wrap up soon, I don't want to



take up too much more of your time. But I did want to find out about just your life in general, apart from teaching English, apart from learning English. I know you're a more well-rounded person than that. Could you tell us about some of your hobbies and what you like to do in your free time?

**Alina:** Yeah, sure. I mean, as you said, yes, English takes up a lot of my time and our Discord server and the Culips and everything stuff. But yeah, I do enjoy a couple more things in life. I love cooking. It's one thing that, you know, brings me joy in life and something I could do. And like in the middle of the night, I could wake up and be like, oh my gosh, I just want to go and bake something right now. OK, these things don't really happen as much lately, but yeah, they used to. But I do love, you know, kind of like combining different ingredients and experimenting with different dishes, maybe even inventing, creating some new dishes that never existed before. So, I feel like in some, you know, parallel universe, this could be my life. You know, I could be like a cook or something. Like a chef, if I weren't that much into English.

**Andrew:** What's your best dish? Do you have like a dish where you feel like you're really confident in cooking it?

**Alina:** Like specialty?

**Andrew:** Yeah, specialty.

**Alina:** It's very hard to choose, I would say maybe like kind of like, cakes. I guess for me would be something I could do like **with my eyes closed**, you know, because I've done it so many times.

**Andrew:** OK, interesting. So, are you more a baker or you like cooking and baking both equally?

**Alina:** I feel like I'm more into baking, though, you know, I don't mind like cooking everything else pretty much. But baking just kind of inspires me, I feel like more than anything else, because, you know, it's always like a little bit of a surprise. You never know what's going to happen. You never know if it's going to work out, especially if you try something new, if you like tweak the ingredients. So yeah, definitely more into baking.

**Andrew:** Awesome. And now that you've moved to Ireland, you've been there for just over a year, is that correct?

**Alina:** It's actually less than a year. OK, no. It's a bit more than a year. Yes, you're right. It's a little bit more than a year.

**Andrew:** So, I know when I moved from Canada to Korea, it was a huge adjustment in terms of food culture and trying to find ingredients. You know, I like to cook as well. I'm not a very good cook, but I do enjoy it. It's fun to do. And so, when I'd want to cook some food from back home, it was like, oh my gosh, what can I use? What can I buy? All the food is different at the grocery store. So, I had a difficult time locating ingredients. And then even apartments here and houses in general will have like a gas range for using as a stove top, but they usually don't have ovens. So, I couldn't really do any baking or anything that I was used to back in Canada. I imagine that homes in Ireland do have stoves and ovens so that you can bake and cook like you would back home. But what about the ingredients? Was it like a challenge to adjust to the local food culture at all? Or was it a pretty easy transition? I guess you're going still, you know, you're still in Europe, so maybe there would be a lot of crossover. I'm not sure. What was that like for you?

**Alina:** Strangely enough, and I actually did kind of, you know, notice that I don't want to like take it for granted, but I was very happy to see that not much is different here in terms of ingredients. You know, it's actually very easy. And if anything, the ingredients here are way better. I don't know, like they taste better and there's more flavor to them. But like in

terms of choice, there isn't really much exotic, you know? I would imagine in Korea, it would be a completely different world of flavors and ingredients.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I mean, it's the best place in the world for making Korean food. If you're into Korean cooking, they have all the ingredients you need. It's very specialized for cooking Korean food. And I do have to say, you know, I've been here for over a decade now. Things have changed dramatically and it's a lot easier to find ingredients for cooking all sorts of different foods from all over the world. But when I first got here, it wasn't as much so that way. So yeah, it's great for cooking Korean food, but maybe, I don't know, you might have a difficult time if you're trying to make some Russian or Irish dishes or breads or something.

**Alina:** So yeah, thankfully, you know, I didn't have to deal with any of that here. I mean, I barely even noticed in terms of food. It even feels like they have pretty much the same like kind of traditional dishes here. I don't even know how it's possible because Ireland and Russia, you know, are obviously not that much like very related, but somehow, you know, yeah, very similar in terms of food.

**Andrew:** Well, it's just like a lot of meat and potatoes, right? Is that kind of, yeah?

**Alina:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And we love, you know, meat and potatoes in Russia as well.

**Andrew:** Sure.

**Alina:** That was easy.

**Andrew:** Yeah, it was easy transition. That's awesome. OK, well, Alina, right before we wrap up here, I just wanted to circle back and talk about our Discord because we started

our conversation by saying that you were the mod on the Discord. But yeah, for all of the listeners who haven't joined us yet over on the Discord, I do want to invite everybody and encourage everybody to come and check us out there. Alina, I looked earlier today, and we have over 3,500 people who are a part of the community. So that's awesome. It's been growing really well and there are lots of people who are practicing their English every day on the server, but there's still room for more. So why don't we just talk a little bit about Discord before we finish? And maybe you could just tell us about your role on the server as the mod or the moderator and the kind of work that you do there for us.

**Alina:** Sure. I mean, I guess I'm just kind of taking care of the server, you know, and everybody on it. And if anyone has any problems, questions, you know, just need some guidance, I am there for them. And remember when we just started, you know, you kind of had to walk everybody through every single step. It's a lot better now because people are kind of finding their way around our server on their own. And the best part is that our members are now also helping each other. So, I feel like, you know, I got some support. It's like a little team, but yeah, it's pretty much like assistance on like whatever problems, issues that come up. I am there to help. And I mean, of course, not just server, you know, it's questions about English, any kind of problems, things that are not clear. I'm always there to explain and help and see if I can make it more clear, if I can make it a little bit more obvious.

**Andrew:** So, listeners, there is a little bit of a learning curve when it comes to Discord, especially if you're not familiar with that kind of application before. So, it can feel a little bit overwhelming. We do have a tutorial video, although I think I have to redo the tutorial video because the channel has grown and changed so much from when we first made that I think probably an update is necessary. So, I'm going to work on that sometime soon. But once you do join the Discord, guys, don't feel overwhelmed, although it can be overwhelming. If you need help, you could always just ping Alina or DM Alina and she can try to help you out. Or as she mentioned, there are so many users of the Discord server on

our community that are super helpful and welcoming, and you can feel free to ask them and the community can help you out as well. Now, on the Discord server, we have many different channels. And could you just talk a little bit about the kinds of practice that English learners can do on our channel? What can they talk about or how can they practice English? Why is it good for English learning in general?

**Alina:** Yeah, I mean, we do pretty much all sorts of practice, you know, starting with just like texting each other, exchanging messages, kind of sharing our life stories, experiences. Sometimes, you know, we would like ask a question and everybody would share their opinion on it. So basically, it's just like a good place to practice speaking about all sorts of things. And yeah, we have a lot of channels on different topics. I don't know, like food, say, news and current events, music, movies, travel. I kind of try to make sure we have, you know, all the kind of common topics there. And any time, you know, somebody comes up with a new one, I'm always kind of trying to see if I could add that as well. So yeah, we also have voice channels where you could practice your speaking skills. And I think it's the best part, honestly, something that, you know, we were missing before our Discord server, because like we were training our listening skills with the podcast. But now it's kind of amazing because you can go and practice your speaking skills and meet people from all over the world. I see, you know, a lot of people actually kind of very excited about that. And they often text me and be like, "Alina, I just met so many cool people. Thank you so much." And I mean, I'm like, "Yeah, great. Enjoy." Yeah, pretty amazing.

**Andrew:** Yeah. And I think probably maybe you felt this in your path to English fluency as well is that when you are learning, it's easy to practice grammar because you can just buy a book. It's easy to do English listening because you can just download a podcast, right? It's kind of easy to do those skills and practice those skills, which is why people probably spend a lot of time doing them. And don't get me wrong, I think they're very important. But like, you can't just ignore your speaking, as you said, especially once you get to that level where, you know, you're understanding a lot of English that you're hearing. I think if you

can understand this podcast that you're listening to right now, guys, you're ready to start speaking and ready to practice speaking. So, the Discord server gives you that opportunity, right? We have many different rooms, and you can just go into a room and message the community and say, "Hey, I'm ready to chat." And I think often when you do that, people will come and they'll get that message and be like, "Yeah, let's do it." And it's really up to you about the topic that you want to talk about or how long you want to talk about things.

And, you know, I've jumped in chat rooms. And when I say chat rooms, I mean like a speaking room, not like an internet chat room where you're typing, a voice chat room. And, you know, I've participated for 10, 15 minutes, just had a little chat and then I had to go. But, you know, it was awesome to practice with people for a little while. And I think doing that for a little bit every day is better than just doing nothing at all, right? So yeah, it's free. It's available for the Culips community. So, we hope a lot of you guys will take advantage of it, challenge yourself. And I think you'll end up meeting a lot of interesting people from around the world and also practice your English skills at the same time. So, it's a win-win. Well, Alina, I think we'll leave it at that for today. Was there anything that I didn't talk about that you wanted to mention?

**Alina:** Not really. No, I mean, we've talked about a lot of things.

**Andrew:** Alina, we'll leave it at here for today then. Thank you so much for your time.

**Alina:** Thank you, Andrew. Bye.

**Andrew:** Well, that's gonna bring us to the end of this episode. Thank you for listening. I hope you found it interesting and helpful for building your English fluency. I know speaking with Alina really motivated me, she really fired me up. She's an awesome example of how you can achieve amazing things in your second language, with hard work, consistency

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and by pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. So, thanks again Alina for coming on to Chatterbox to speak with me. That's it for now. I'll be back again soon though with a brand-new episode. Until then, take care and talk to you soon. Bye, bye.

That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye!



## Detailed Explanations

### To throw shade

#### Slang

Andrew asks Alina about her English language journey. She explains that students begin learning English around age 7 in Russia and continue all the way through high school. However, she says, although she doesn't want **to throw any shade** at the teachers in her school, the quality of the English education wasn't very good.

**To throw shade** is a slang expression that has gained mainstream popularity in recent years. It originates from black drag queen culture in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. **Throwing shade** means insulting someone without directly confronting or criticizing them. **Throwing shade** is often subtle or indirect. For example, if you told someone, "Your outfit looks ugly and cheap," that would just be a direct insult. However, saying, "Did you buy that outfit at a discount store?" is a better example of **throwing shade**. You're not saying the clothing is ugly and cheap, but you're hinting that it is.

By saying that English language education in Russia wasn't the best, Alina says she doesn't want **to throw shade** and blame her teachers. She probably means that the system of learning or curriculum wasn't very helpful for her.

Be careful using this one—because it's slang, you should just use it among friends and family, not in the workplace!

Here are a couple more examples with **to throw shade**:

**Emily:** Rebecca's new haircut is an ... Interesting choice.

**Robby:** Girl, are you **throwing shade** right now? I think it looks fab.

**Emily:** Well, that makes one of us.

**David:** Did you see that actress' interview at the Golden Globe Awards?

**Julia:** No, what happened?

**David:** She was **throwing so much shade** at the director and her co-stars. She was acting like she was the only one with any talent. She'll never win her Oscar nomination acting like that!

## To click (with/for)

### Verb

Alina says that she began to become more interested in English and improve significantly when she entered university. She gives credit to a particularly good English language professor for this. Thanks to that professor, English grammar and conversation really began **to click for** Alina.

When talking about knowledge, **to click** means to finally or suddenly understand something. We use the prepositions “with” or “for” to specify who feels that something **clicked**. For example, you could say, “I was studying geometry for hours last night and then it suddenly **clicked for** me. I finally understand the rules and formulas!”

When talking about people, **to click** means to immediately get along well with someone. For instance, you could say, “I started my new job last weekend. Fortunately, I **clicked with** my colleagues immediately!” We use the preposition “with” (NOT “for”) to specify the person you felt a strong connection with.

To remember this verb, think of the sound of a click; clicking often happens when an object fits or locks securely with another object. Just like the click your seatbelt makes when you secure it, you can imagine that same “click” sound when you finally understand something difficult or when you feel an instant connection to another person.

Here are a couple more examples with **to click (with/for)**:

**George:** Kylie, have you ever met my friend Sam?

**Kylie:** No, I don't think so.

**George:** Oh, I think you two would really **click**. He's really into music like you. I'll be sure to introduce you at Angie's birthday party.

**Kylie:** OK!

**Hannah:** How are you so good at English? I still struggle to understand anything our teacher says in class.

**Benjamin:** I don't know, I've just spent a lot of time studying. If you keep practicing every day, doing things like grammar worksheets and watching English-language series on Netflix, eventually it will just **click for** you.

**Hannah:** I hope it **clicks** soon! My grades are really suffering this semester.

## To light a fire under [somebody]

### Idiom

Andrew says that one of his goals as a teacher is to inspire and motivate students to learn outside of the classroom. English takes a lot of effort and time to learn, so if he can **light a fire under his students** so that they will want to put time into studying, then they will improve. Alina says she believes that her English language professor **lit a fire under her**, too.

The idiom **to light a fire under [somebody]** means to inspire or motivate someone to take action, work harder, or become more energetic. It is often used in situations where a person was lacking enthusiasm or a sense of urgency and someone else tries to make them change. For instance, you could say, "Carl's serious medical diagnosis **lit a fire under him** to exercise more and eat healthier." In this situation, Carl was not exercising or eating healthy foods until he received bad news about his health. After that, there was a major change in his behaviour.

This idiom is easy to remember if you imagine someone actually starting a fire underneath your seat. Would you continue to sit if there was a fire burning below you? No, you would get up right away! So, if **a fire is lit under somebody**, that person will take action right away.

Here are a couple more examples with **to light a fire under [somebody]**:

**Will:** As soon as I told the team that Paula from headquarters was coming to visit our branch next week, they all began frantically working twice as fast as before.

**Beth:** Wow, I wouldn't have expected such an extreme reaction from everyone.

**Will:** Me neither. I guess they take Paula pretty seriously. Next time I need **to light a fire under them** and get everyone motivated, I'll just say Paula's visiting again!

**Joe:** Wow, you got an A- on your essay? Last semester you were only getting Ds.

**Natalie:** I've been working really hard to improve my grades. My advisor told me that I might actually flunk out of university if I didn't make some major improvements. That really **lit a fire under me**.

**Joe:** Well, great job! I'm impressed.

**Natalie:** Thank you!

## Aha moment

Noun

As an English teacher herself, one of Alina's favourite things is when things click for her students. When they're studying with her and they suddenly understand and have an **aha moment**, it's a wonderful feeling for Alina and for the students.

You may have heard the exclamation "aha!" before. This is something people say when they have made a discovery or realized something important. For instance, you might say, "Aha! There they are!" after searching for your lost car keys. You might also exclaim, "Aha!" when you finally understand a difficult math formula.

An **aha moment** is that moment where something clicks and finally makes sense. This term is often used for important realizations in one's life, like when you realize what you want to do for a career. For example, you could say, "Taking the Intro to Biology course with Professor Smith was my **aha moment**. Everything she said made so much sense and I knew for certain that I wanted to become a biologist."

**Aha moment** can also be used for less important realizations. For example, you could say, "I was trying to remember the name of that actor for hours and then I finally had an **aha moment** and remembered it."

Here are a couple more examples with **aha moment**:

**Kevin:** Suzanne, please tell us about how you decided to become a doctor.

**Suzanne:** Sure. Well, my mother was very ill when I was little. I remember going to the hospital to visit her every day with my father and sisters. I was so scared that we were going to lose her, but the doctors and nurses were so kind and took wonderful care of her. After a few months, she was finally able to come back home. I think that was my **aha moment**. Ever since then, I knew wanted to provide the same kind of care to patients of my own.

**Kevin:** Thank you for sharing that story.

**Olivia:** How was your French lesson?

**Derrek:** Fantastic. I had a real **aha moment** today—the grammar I had been struggling with for months finally made sense to me thanks to my teacher.

**Olivia:** That's great to hear!

## To have egg on [one's] face Idiom

When Alina first met her future husband in person after chatting on an app called HelloTalk for a while, she tried speaking English with him. However, it didn't go as well as she had planned—she said she **had egg all over her face** and could barely understand anything he said.

The saying **to have egg on [one's] face** means to feel embarrassed because of a mistake or failure. For example, you might say, "Fred thought the exam was easy and bragged to everyone that he probably got a perfect score. He sure **had egg on his face** when the teacher handed back the exams and he got a C!"

You could also **have egg on your face** from a social faux pas (doing something that goes against etiquette). For instance, since brides are the only woman who should be wearing white at a wedding, you would **have egg all over your face** if you showed up to an American wedding wearing an elaborate white gown!

It's unclear exactly where this idiom comes from—it might be from an old tradition of throwing eggs or other foods at actors who are performing poorly on stage. It may also just come from the fact that it's embarrassing to have food, like egg, smeared on your face after eating. Either way, you can remember it by imagining the embarrassment that comes with having food on your face!

Here are a couple more examples with **to have egg on [one's] face**:

**Charles:** Boy, do I **have egg on my face**.

**Wendy:** Why? What happened?

**Charles:** I haven't seen Monica and Ray in a while. Last I heard, they were getting married next year. I was talking to Ray a few minutes ago and I asked him, "So, when's the wedding?" He told me that they broke up 2 weeks ago. I am so embarrassed!

**Nick:** Christina uploaded some really embarrassing pictures of me from the party. I asked her to take them down when I saw them, but they had already been posted for hours.

**Isabella:** Oh no, what were you doing in the photos?

**Nick:** I was really drunk and had beer spilled all over my shirt. Someone had also drawn on my face with Sharpie. Oh, I **have egg all over my face**!

## With [one's] eyes closed Idiom

After discussing her language learning journey, Alina and Andrew chat about Alina's hobbies and interests outside of English. She says that she loves cooking and baking. Andrew asks what her best dish is and she replies that it's probably cake—she has baked cakes so many times that she can do it **with her eyes closed**.

If you could do something **with your eyes closed**, you must be pretty good at it, right? That's exactly what this idiomatic adverb means—**with [one's] eyes closed** is a fun way to say very easily or with almost no effort. We often use this idiom to talk about things that we have done countless times. For example, you could say, "I've jogged this route so many times that I could do it **with my eyes closed**," or "Ask John for help with this recipe. He's been a baker for 30 years—he can bake just about anything **with his eyes closed**!"

Sometimes you will see "shut" instead of "closed." For instance, you could say, "I know a lot about cars. In fact, I could change my oil **with my eyes shut**."

Another variation of this idiom is **standing on one's head** or **in one's sleep**. For example, you could say, "I've filled out these forms so many times, I could do them **standing on my head**," or "I've written code for so many projects that I could program this software **in my sleep**!"

Here are a couple more examples with **with [one's] eyes closed**:

**Ethan:** Wow, Victor is such a good basketball player.

**Sophia:** Isn't he? I bet he could make those free throws **with his eyes closed**!

**Ethan:** No doubt! He's the best player on the team.

**Sophia:** And he could probably make slam dunks **in his sleep**!

**Abby:** Can you help me fill out this paperwork?

**Michael:** Sure ... Here you go!

**Abby:** Whoa, that was so fast!

**Michael:** Well, I've filled in these forms for Human Resources so many times, I could do it **with my eyes closed**.

**Abby:** Thank you so much!

## Quiz

**1. When would you say, “Aha!”?**

- a) when you get hurt
- b) when you discover something
- c) when you're sleepy
- d) when you're struggling to understand something

**2. What's a good synonym for “to have egg on one's face”?**

- a) to be embarrassed
- b) to be confident
- c) to be unclean
- d) to be angry

**3. Your friend says, “I had my first date with Henry. We really clicked.” What does she mean?**

- a) they're not a good match for each other
- b) they had a terrible date
- c) they did fun things on the date
- d) they felt an immediate connection

**4. Your sister says, “My boss told me I would definitely get a promotion if my sales performance improved this quarter. That really lit a fire under me!” What does she mean by that?**

- a) she felt highly motivated
- b) she felt extremely pressured
- c) she felt indifferent
- d) she felt sweaty and hot

**5. What's a good antonym for “to throw shade”?**

- a) to insult
- b) to cover up
- c) to flatter
- d) to hit



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## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Please describe an aha moment you have had during your English language learning journey.
2. When's the last time you had egg on your face? What happened?
3. How was the quality of English language education when you were in school? Is there anything you wish had been different?
4. Have you ever met someone who you immediately clicked with? Who was it and when? What do you have in common with this person?
5. What tips and recommendations would you give to someone who is starting their English language learning journey? Please explain.

## Quiz Answers

1.b    2.a    3.d    4.a    5.c

### Episode credits

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