

## Chatterbox #319 – Interview with Jesús Florez (Ad free)

### Episode description

In this episode, Andrew interviews Jesús Florez, a Culips listener originally from Colombia. Jesús talks about his journey of becoming a highly proficient English speaker with an American-like accent. He discusses his background story of meeting his wife online and moving from Colombia to the United States. He tells Andrew all about the intensive work he did to improve his pronunciation and the resources he used to achieve fluency and shares some valuable tips for English learners.

### Fun fact

Long-distance relationships are becoming increasingly common around the world. A recent study found that 14 million couples in the United States are currently in a long-distance relationship, and more than 90% of people living in the UK and Europe have been in a long-distance relationship.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- Too [adjective] of a [noun]
- A flop
- To get [something] off the ground
- To get into the weeds
- Hit me
- To take precedence



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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 number 319. Interview with Jesús Florez, featuring Andrew and special guest, Jesús Florez.

Today's episode is really special because it features an interview with a special guest, Jesús Florez. Now, Jesús is a really interesting guy. He learned English to an extremely high level and has a very, very natural, almost American sounding accent. He's also a wonderful English teacher and a Culips member on top of that.

So, in our interview, we talk about a lot of things, but really, we focus on his English learning journey and how he became such a fluent speaker with a clear accent. And I think probably a lot of you out there want to achieve what Jesús has achieved. You wanna be a fluent English speaker and you wanna speak with a clear, easy to understand accent. So, I hope you will enjoy this conversation that I had with Jesús and find it inspiring and motivational.

I know that the conversation really pumped me up and I don't know about you, but me personally, whenever I talk with a really high-level learner of a second language, it just really inspires me and makes me wanna study Korean, my second language, even more. So, I gotta say thanks to Jesús for firing me up and inspiring me, and I hope this conversation will have the same effect on you as well.

So, without any further ado, let's get started with this episode in earnest. Here it is, my interview with Jesús Florez. Enjoy.

Hello, Jesús, welcome to the Culips English Podcast. Thanks for joining us here today.

**Jesús:** I'm very happy to be here. Thank you for accepting my invitation or my suggestion.

**Andrew:** Yeah, so I should give our listeners a little bit of the backstory here. Jesús, you're a Culips listener, a Culips member. And during, I guess it was in December, I talked about some of my goals for 2024. And one of the goals that I mentioned in that episode was that I wanted to work on my interviewing skills this year. And so, you heard that, and then you reached out to me and said, "Hey, Andrew, let's practice together. You can practice your interview skills, and you can come onto the podcast." And I liked that. I thought, hey, that's a pretty good idea. So here we are, Jesús, we made it happen.

**Jesús:** Yes, and I'm very happy that we made it work. It took some back and forth to set this up, but here we are.

**Andrew:** Yeah, so we're recording here at the end of March. I'm not exactly sure when this episode will come out, but for listeners, it did take us a few months of back and forth to find a time that worked for us. Jesús is a very busy guy, and maybe we'll get into that in a little bit here. But really, Jesús, what I wanted to focus on in this interview is about your English learning journey and how you became such a fluent English speaker, because as our listeners can hear, you speak English really, really well. So maybe we could start at the start. And if you could just tell us a little bit about your background, where you're from, that kind of bio information, that would be a helpful starting place, I think.

**Jesús:** The short version of the story is that I am from Colombia in South America. I'm 34 years old, and I now live in the United States. I've been living in Michigan for almost nine years. It will be nine years this summer. I came here all those years ago to marry my then-fiancée. She's my wife now. We met online through a language learning website of all places.

**Andrew:** Wow.

**Jesús:** If you ask me, I can give you some more details, but the very compressed version of the story is that after we met online, we really liked each other, and we were in a long-

distance relationship for about a year and a half before we made plans for me to come here and meet her in person and decide if we wanted to continue the relationship. And we did. So, I popped the question, as we say, and then I had to go back to Colombia to get my fiancée visa paperwork started. That took about maybe eight or nine months. And then after that was done, July of 2015, July of 2015, that's when I moved here permanently, July 1st of 2015, that's a date I'll never forget because my life really changed completely. And in a real way, I mean, it'll sound cliché, but I really left it all behind because of love, you know?

**Andrew:** Yeah, it sounds like it. Wow, that's an amazing story. I didn't know that about you, but that's... that's incredible. My mind is blown right now because you are the second guest that I've interviewed this year. And that has a similar story. Our study guide writer and Discord moderator, Alina, has a very similar background where she met her future husband online and then she moved from Russia to Ireland to be with him. And then you have a similar story of leaving it all behind for love, as you say, to leave Colombia and to go to Michigan, wow.

**Jesús:** When I listened to that interview, it struck me that, wow, I can see some similarities here.

**Andrew:** You know, I think that it might not be **too rare of a story**. I think that there are probably a lot of couples that get together because of language exchange.

**Jesús:** You know, certainly like 30 years ago, this would have been unthinkable, unheard of, and probably next to impossible for it to occur. Now it is, it just simply is, you know, quite the possibility. So anyway, that is basically, I guess, by way of where I'm from, where I am now. And I guess to try to finish up that little bit of an introduction, my education in Colombia was to be in English as a second language teacher. I went to school for that. I went to college for about, most programs or at least most academic programs there, take

10 semesters or five years to complete. And that's what I did. I haven't taught, let's say, in an official capacity here in the US. I've had other jobs, primarily office jobs.

My experience teaching is more on the, let's say, the side of online teaching. I've been active, for example, on a platform that some of your listeners are probably aware of, and that is Cambly. I've been there for about two years. And I've had other experiences teaching online. My wife and I, for example, many years ago now, I mean, it was my first year here in the US, we tried to set up our own website. And we did have, I believe, to the best of my recollection, two students that came to us and paid for that tutoring or teaching, but it was very short-lived. I think we only had the site up for about a year. And then it was **a flop**. It was actually harder than I thought to get one of those things **off the ground**, you know? But, you know, there is that, at least. And I guess the desire to teach is still there. And that's one of the reasons why I wanted to sit down for something like this.

One of the things that I like about Culips, and I'll finish on this note here, is that you guys have been active since 2008. And that's an interesting year for many reasons. But if you wanna delve into that a little bit more, I'll let you ask the question, because 2008 is actually, let's say, a meaningful year in my life.

**Andrew:** 2008, OK. Well, you have to spill the beans. All right. Why was 2008 a meaningful year for you? When I think of 2008, I think of global economic problems. That was kind of a meltdown year for the global economy. So, I'm wondering, why was it special for you?

**Jesús:** It was two things. The first thing was that in 2008, I took one of these international English proficiency exams. You might've heard about one that is called the Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English. It's actually administered by the University of Michigan here, well, in the city of Ann Arbor. I took that when I was 18, that was 2008. I passed the exam. It had four parts, kind of like IELTS, I guess. And at least in two of the, I think it was the listening and the grammar, vocab, and reading comprehension, I got high

marks on those two sections of the test. And the speaking and writing parts, I remember getting, you know, passing grades, passing scores. And so that was a big milestone for me, because I spent about a year and a half preparing for that test.

The second reason why 2008 is such a meaningful year for me is because that was when I started a very, let's say a lengthy journey into accent acquisition and modification. I've been cultivating this American accent since then. It started in 2008, and I've gone through several books and resources that are available for free. Some are free, some are paid. But it started me on this trajectory of wanting to really, you know, go really deep into how sounds are made, what makes, you know, native English sound the way that it does, and other things related to it. I guess kind of like to finish up that point, primarily for me, the reason or the motivation was not this idea that I would be able one day to fool people into thinking that I was a native speaker. That was never my intention. My intention, I think, was actually much more, I guess, down to earth. And that was basically, I want to be taken seriously when I speak. And in my mind, in the reasoning that I was, you know, engaged in at the time, that seemed to be very closely connected with being able to speak in a way that is easy for my listeners to understand. And that's where, you know, that primary motivation for really wanting to get, I guess, maybe as close as possible to, I guess, something that is native-like sounding. That was my motivation. I've had some times in my life where I've been mistaken for... for an American.

**Andrew:** One of the things that first jumped out to me when I talked to you is that your accent is very, very clear, very, very easy to understand, and not too influenced by Spanish. Like, it doesn't sound like a very foreign accent. It's a very clear, and like you said, very American-like accent. So, I think you have really piqued the interest of many of our listeners. They're gonna wanna know, what did you do? How did you cultivate this? I'm sure it took a lot of hard work. Of course, achieving any big goal like that is going to take a lot of hard work. But you said you used some free resources. You said you used some paid resources as well. But let's **get into the weeds** a little bit. What did it really look like?

What kind of work did you do to reduce your accent and to cultivate such a clear American-style accent?

**Jesús:** One of the first things that I would say is that I really started to pay very close attention to the way that people talked. I think that is key to gain that awareness, to be able to identify all of the individual discrete sounds. And English, at least compared to Spanish, has a much more expansive phonological repertoire. And certainly, that is a challenge. And so lots, and I mean lots of listening, I guess the word nowadays is input, is key. Once I was able to discern all of the sounds in the language, once that was, you know once that foundation has been laid, that's when I started to drill all of the individual sounds. That takes time, as you can imagine. But think of those phonemes, sounds, as the building blocks of language. And so first, you should be able to identify them when you hear them. And then, just using that, you replicate it, you reproduce what you're able to identify by listening. I mean, nowadays, there's like hundreds of YouTube channels that you can go to, and they break all this down for you beautifully. It took, I guess, more practice when I started doing this, because basically, I was limited to some audio CDs. We're talking about CDs now.

**Andrew:** Yeah, back in the day in 2008, right? It's not that long ago, but yeah, it's amazing.

**Jesús:** There were podcasts already, but there was nothing that was specifically designed for this idea of modifying your accent. Everything was basically still in a print format and on a CD format.

**Andrew:** Right.

**Jesús:** And that's what I had to use. And I guess let's just say that it was more tedious back then, because it was not as easy or convenient to just, you know, rewind and then

just play back the thing. So, I guess you could say that there was more of a little bit of an annoyance when it came to that.

**Andrew:** It must've been very tedious to learn that way with a CD and pressing play and stop and play and stop and rewind and going back and forth. Yeah, I could imagine it would have been quite tedious.

**Jesús:** And certainly, looking back, I realized that wow, that also plays into, you know, all of that process. Nowadays, you know, everything is basically at the tap, you know, of a screen.

**Andrew:** Right.

**Jesús:** So certainly, it has become, let's just say it has become, it's been streamlined. I like that term. I think it's been streamlined.

**Andrew:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

**Jesús:** Just considering, you know, where we were 16 years ago.

**Andrew:** For sure. Jesús, I wanted to ask you something that you mentioned just a second ago. And that was that first you did a lot of listening and you were able to hear English. And then after you were able to produce it. And this is a little bit of a controversial point in the language learning world. Some people think that you can produce all of the sounds, even if you can't understand them first of the foreign language that you're trying to learn. But your experience mirrors my experience with learning Korean too. There are some sounds in Korean that we don't have in English. And I felt like I was never able to properly produce them and say them until I was able to hear them. And it was kind of a aha moment for me. Once I could distinguish the differences between some sounds that we have in English, and we don't have in English in the Korean language. And I was like,



ah, now I can hear it. Now I can say it. And I could notice myself. I could see if my pronunciation was target-like or not target-like. So that matches your experience as well with learning English pronunciation is that first you had to be able to hear it. And then after you would be able to pronounce it?

**Jesús:** Yes, certainly. At this point, I guess that it's, I mean, and it just seemed, I guess, to me quite intuitive at the time. If I can't hear the difference, I have a really hard time believing that I'll be able to reproduce it or to replicate it. Because what's gonna happen is that your first language will act as a filter. And two sounds, for example, will be conflated into one.

**Andrew:** Sure.

**Jesús:** And you lose the distinction or the difference. And you know, you get a foreign accent, you know from that. And so, I mean, for me, it just seemed like it was so, you know, there was kind of like a no-brainer about it. I need to be able to hear this and to realize that this is not what I have in my first language. This is different, has a different feeling to it. And I need to be able to perceive that so that I can then adapt it, you know, into my own speech. And actually, Andrew, that takes me to another point. And that is that I think that for me, there was also an element of, let's say, acceptance of the fact that when you are speaking your, well, your second, third, or however many languages you speak, there's the realization that you're gonna feel different when you speak each language. And so, there was in my case a realization and also an acceptance, like I said, that this is gonna feel different, and I'm gonna sound different in my other language. And for some, there is, let's say, a bit of an obstacle to overcome in this feeling of perhaps embarrassment of adopting, you know, a different way of speaking. There's also, this also goes into matters of identity and things like that. So, I think that that plays a role. Some, I guess, are more resistant to the idea of just taking on a different way of speaking because they're probably gonna feel that they're putting on some kind of a strange persona that's not them.

**Andrew:** Right.

**Jesús:** I mean, there are just different experiences there. I mean, for me, this language or this accent modification acquisition journey entailed a lot of accepting that this has to be different from me speaking my first language. If it doesn't feel different, at least the way that I saw it at the time was, that if it didn't feel different, it's not gonna, I'm not gonna feel that I'm, I guess, accomplishing what I'm setting out to do here, which is to make my speech unmistakably clear when I use it. And so, there was some of that psychological aspect to it as well for me.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I think that's a good point. And that just seems kind of natural, right? Like when you are learning a foreign language, you're going to have to move your mouth in ways that are different. And that can feel really uncomfortable. And I think that is something that maybe we don't talk enough about when it comes to learning English or we don't think enough about is that you do have to articulate differently when you speak English. It's not going to be the same as your native language, even though some things might be the same. Some vowel sounds might be the same or some sounds might be the same. But in many ways, we have to move our mouths in different ways. And that can even be tiring, right? Because you're like using muscles in your mouth or muscles in your tongue that you haven't really worked before because you have to use them in a different way in the other language.

**Jesús:** And also, for example, one thing that I think this relates to is this physiological awareness of the difference or of the differences in the sound systems of the languages that you speak. This is a very physical, bodily activity. These muscles are being stressed and used in ways that you're not, or that are not, let's say, second nature to you. You know, you're going to get a workout out of this. You know, I believe if you're doing it right, you're going to get that workout.

**Andrew:** It's true, it's true. Yeah.

**Jesús:** So yeah, there's that also. There is one thing that I kind of want to circle back to here. And that is that I talked about listening, replicating sounds. Another thing that I believe also played a role in my continuing this accent trajectory or path was that I believe I had plenty of opportunities and I sought them out of practicing output.

**Andrew:** OK.

**Jesús:** It seems to be the, you know, those are the buzzwords these days.

**Andrew:** Right, input, output. Yes.

**Jesús:** I sought out these opportunities. And I think I was very fortunate that going back about 10 or 11 years now, there were Peace Corps volunteers in Colombia, in my city where I used to live. One of them had this idea of starting a conversation club. It was meant originally, interestingly enough, as a language exchange. They would speak Spanish, we would speak English, and so we would all benefit. That changed very quickly, and it became an English only conversation club. And I played a very active role in managing it and promoting it. I'll give you two examples.

**Andrew:** Sure.

**Jesús:** For a little while, I managed a Facebook group that this conversation club had. And on other occasions I, out of my own money, I printed flyers, and I handed them out on campus so that people, you know, would go to it.

**Andrew:** So, you were very active in making sure that you had enough participants to keep the English-speaking club going and active?

**Jesús:** Yes.

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**Andrew:** That's great.

**Jesús:** I think that was also, I know that this is, you know, something that is, it keeps coming back. You know, it's a recurring theme in language learning and that is that you have to be willing to put yourself out there, in a way. You have to seek out these opportunities to speak. Certainly now, there are just so many, it's really hard to, I mean, where do you even begin?

**Andrew:** Right.

**Jesús:** There are just so many of these language exchange sites and apps and services. It was more difficult back then. I would say this though, I do feel that it was probably better. And this goes into where I guess your preference is. I mean, are you more of an online virtual environment person or are you more of a kind of like on-site, in-person? I think that for me, the in-person interaction with these Americans was invaluable in improving my confidence and also my willingness to try out all of this language that I had been acquiring. And I feel that if it had all been virtual, I don't think I would have seen the same results.

**Andrew:** Well, you're getting into a real-life situation, right? You're throwing yourself exactly into the environment that you wanna be in for your end goal, speaking English with Americans in real life, right? So, I tend to agree with you that it's going to be better in person. Now, you were very lucky that you had those Peace Corps volunteers. I think a lot of our listeners will be like, "Oh, I wish I had that same opportunity!" I know here in Korea, there are different language exchange groups and in-person meetups. So, there are some opportunities for exchange, but I've also seen a lot of just like English groups where Koreans will meet and speak with each other. And I'm sure that's good and helpful, but they don't have the English native speakers there at the same time.

**Jesús:** Yeah, this is also quite controversial as well. I mean, is native always better or at least is native always, I guess, like a positive? I personally believe that there is a place for both, the native and the non-native teacher or tutor.

**Andrew:** I agree, I agree.

**Jesús:** Certainly, with the native speaker, the short of it is for me and a very compressed, I guess, like soundbite here is that what you get from a native speaker is an intuitive knowledge of the language. And from a non-native tutor or teacher, what you get is a more analytical understanding of the language. And I think there's definitely a place for both.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I completely agree. And people like yourself and people like Alina, they're great role models as well, right? You get a role model in having a teacher who's gone through the process of learning English and has done the hard work and can tell you some tips and hints. It's almost like having a coach, right, for a sport, somebody who's done the hard work and can help you in that way. So, I completely agree that there's valuable roles that both native speakers and non-native speakers can play.

**Jesús:** Yeah, we both have something to bring to the table.

**Andrew:** Jesús, we'll wrap things up here in just a moment. Maybe some quick questions that I could ask you here before we finish though.

**Jesús:** Hit me.

**Andrew:** I'm curious, when you were doing all of this intensive study when you were going through the process of improving your accent and studying with the CDs, how many hours a day were you putting in? It seems like you were pretty intense about it. Do you remember? I know it's going back a while, but do you remember how many hours a day you were spending with the language, studying it?

**Jesús:** I wanna say that I must have been putting in at the very least an hour or two. Certainly, I guess there must have been times when I was probably just tired. I just didn't wanna think about it. So, I probably, you know, had my moments when I would just not do it, just forget about it, and get back to it. But I think I was definitely spending at least an hour, maybe two. I remember my parents, especially my mom, you know, commenting on this later that, "Something really funny is going on here. You're contorting your mouth in all of these really weird ways and stuff!" I remember that.

**Andrew:** So, another question that I had for you was about the visual aspect of pronunciation. Did you ever spend any time watching English TV shows and watching how people move their mouths? Was there any visual input that you were getting as well or was it just mostly listening?

**Jesús:** Probably a combination. But I'll tell you this, this is an interesting aspect of my own language learning journey. And that is that right around this time, or actually that same year of 2008, I also got into anime.

**Andrew:** OK.

**Jesús:** Specifically, the English dubs of these shows, which were produced here in the United States. Obviously, you miss the lip flaps of real-life people when you're watching these things. But the language output, I mean, the language that these voice actors were producing was, I mean, I'm just gonna say it was perfect. I mean, it was perfect, basically. And it was also something that motivated me because lots of these actors, you know, they're trained in, you know, using their voices very effectively. And that's something that I wanted to imitate as well. But later on, I did, you know, start watching other live action TV shows and documentaries and all kinds of things. And so, yes, there's definitely an aspect of, you know, visual recognition of the different ways that the mouth, you know, moves and stuff. But I think that the auditory input is more important because you're gonna encounter

lots of native speakers that mumble what they say, and they have very lazy lips. So, I think just the auditory part of it is definitely, I think it **takes precedence**.

**Andrew:** That's a really interesting point about watching anime. I never thought of that, but come to think of it, you know, the voices are voiced by voice actors, right? So, they're gonna have perfect articulation. It's different than just actors on a set speaking, you know, in a sitcom situation or something. An anime is going to have specifically trained voice actors in a pro studio with the best mics right up close to the microphone.

**Jesús:** And it's also, I guess, a way in which you can, obviously, this is a little bit different. All of us have picked up bad habits, you know, as we grow up, or as we grow, I should say, in our speech. And listening to these actors, at least to me, was also a way in which I saw an opportunity to try to correct some of these bad speech habits and to acquire better ones. So, you know, think of it as a twofer there.

**Andrew:** Twofer, two for one, yeah. Did you have a favorite anime series that you used to watch?

**Jesús:** Wow, that's a very good question. I watched hundreds of them.

**Andrew:** Hundreds of them, OK.

**Jesús:** I really liked "Naruto."

**Andrew:** OK.

**Jesús:** And I followed it for maybe a couple of years. OK, I think it comes down to two. It was "Naruto" and "Bleach."

**Andrew:** Bleach.

**Jesús:** There we go.

**Andrew:** OK, I'm just starting to get into anime a little bit. My wife is really into it. She watches many of them. I'm just starting to get into anime a little bit. So maybe I'll check those two series out. Thanks for the recommendation.

**Jesús:** No problem.

**Andrew:** Jesús. let me think. I had one more question here, and I guess I wanted to know if you could tell us when was the moment that you felt like English was clicking for you? When you went from maybe, you know, that intermediate level where you could understand some English, you could speak, but maybe it was always with some difficulty. Do you remember the moment where things fell into place and you felt like, "Oh, I'm not an English learner anymore. I'm more of an English user." And I'm always very curious about that moment in people's journeys. Do you remember that... that moment?

**Jesús:** Yeah, my Eureka moment, yeah. It can be something like this. Let me give you an example. And I think that that was the moment for me. I remember when I was in my last year of high school that, this is 2006, I remember that some of the TV service providers would have maybe a handful, maybe three or four international TV channels. And one of those was CNN. I remember not being able to follow, you know, the news broadcast in English. That was a challenge. But then I think the aha moment for me comes right at the time that I start to watch all of these anime shows dubbed in English. After a few months of watching and being able to understand every word that was being uttered, that was that realization that, wow, I've really made the leap here. This used to be something that would have been terrifying for me just a couple of years ago, but now I can do it and I can follow it. So, I think that was my moment.

**Andrew:** And one final question about the anime here. Were you watching it with the English subtitles turned on or with no subtitles?



**Jesús:** No subtitles. I remember I really wanted to immerse myself there. So, I wanted to just rely completely on my listening skills.

**Andrew:** Awesome, OK. Well, Jesús, I think this is a good place for us to wrap things up here. Thank you so much. It was a fascinating conversation. I think you fired me up. I'm motivated. I wanna go study Korean now. I'm gonna do it after we finish this interview. Please tell our listeners where they can find you online. You said you were teaching online. I don't know if you have a website or anything that you would like to promote.

**Jesús:** Not at the moment, but if some of the members of the Culips community are active or have an active subscription on cambly.com, you can find me there under the display name, Pronunciation with David. David is my middle name. And I use that there on that platform. I guess it makes me sound more American.

**Andrew:** OK, well, Jesús, we'll leave it here for today, but thanks again and take care.

**Jesús:** You too, bye-bye.

**Andrew:** Thanks again to Jesús for coming on to Culips. I really enjoyed our conversation, and I hope you did as well.

Well, everyone, that is it for me for now, but we'll be back soon with another brand-new Culips episode. Until then, please take care, and I will talk to you soon. Thank you, happy English learning, and goodbye.

That brings us to the end of this episode. Thanks for listening. Bye!

## Detailed Explanations

### Too [adjective] of a/an [noun] Construction

In this episode, Jesús tells a story about meeting his partner online, which eventually led to him relocating to the U.S. Andrew notes similarities in his experience with another podcast guest, Alina, who also met her husband online and moved to a new country for love. He suggests that it might not be **too rare of a story** and there are a lot of couples that get together because of language exchange.

When we say something is **too [adjective] of a [noun]**, it means that the noun has more of that adjective quality than we thought or wanted. In the episode, Andrew uses this structure to suggest that the story of meeting someone online and moving for love, which seems unique at first, might actually be more common than people think.

We use this structure to show surprise or disappointment about something being or not being more extreme than anticipated. For example, if someone says, “it’s **too scary of a movie**,” it means the movie is scarier than expected. Or if a task is “**too difficult of a job**,” it means it’s harder than we thought it would be.

Please note that this structure is typically used with countable nouns. For example, it wouldn’t be correct to say “It’s too cold of a water”, since the noun “water” is uncountable. In this case, you can just say “The water is too cold.”

Here are a couple more examples with **too [adjective] of a [noun]**:

**Josh:** Hey, Kate! We’re going for a picnic tomorrow. Do you want to join us?

**Kate:** Sounds great! I do need to be back home by dinner, though. How far is it?

**Josh:** It’s not **too long of a drive**, just about 20 minutes or so.

**Kate:** Okay! See you tomorrow, then!

**Leo:** Do you think your friends would be interested in a tour of the abandoned factory downtown?

**Pam:** I like that idea, but I think it might be **too unusual of an attraction** for them.

## A flop

Noun, informal

In this episode, Jesús talks about his teaching journey, especially online. He mentions working on platforms like Cambly for about two years. However, he also tried starting his own teaching website with his wife. Although they had a few students at first, the website didn't do well and had to be shut down. Summing it up, he says, "It was **a flop**."

When we describe something as "**a flop**", it means that it didn't go well or failed. It's a casual way to say that something wasn't successful. It's often used in conversations about businesses, projects, or personal experiences.

For example, imagine someone tries their hand at stand-up comedy, but nobody laughs at their jokes and they fail miserably. They might share about that experience afterwards and say, "It was **a flop**."

**A flop** is often used with words like "complete" or "total" to emphasize the extent of the failure, for instance "the project was a **total flop**" or "the performance was **a complete flop**." You might also hear the verb "to flop" used to convey the same idea, though the original meaning of it is to fall or drop heavily, like when someone "flops" onto their bed when they're very tired.

Similar nouns conveying the same idea include "a disaster," "a failure," and "a fiasco." On the contrary, "a hit" is the best word for the opposite meaning. When something is incredibly successful, you can refer to it as "a hit."

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

**Mindy:** Hey, Tim! So, how did that baking workshop go?

**Tim:** It **was a complete flop**. I followed the recipe step by step, but the cake turned out burnt on the outside and raw in the middle.

**Mindy:** Don't worry about it! The first time is always a learning experience. You'll nail it next time!

**Alex:** How did the meeting with the new client go?

**Beth:** Oh. It **was a total flop**. The presentation didn't impress him at all. He seemed more interested in his phone than our ideas. I don't think we'll see him again.

## To get [something] off the ground

Idiom

When explaining why his online teaching business idea didn't work out, Jesús mentions that **getting it off the ground** was harder than he thought.

We use the expression "**to get [something] off the ground**" when talking about starting something and making it successful. This expression is believed to originate from the idea of a plane taking off from the ground. Starting something new and challenging might be difficult, just like getting a plane off the ground, but once you start making progress, like when a plane is flying higher into the sky, you're on your way to growth and success.

This phrase is commonly used in business and project contexts, and it implies that a lot of effort and hard work is put into something to set it in motion. When a project or initiative faces challenges or doesn't start smoothly, we might say it **takes a long time to get off the ground**, or that it **never gets off the ground**. On the positive side, when a startup or a program starts and becomes successful, we can say something like, "The program **got off the ground** and produced great results."

Here are a couple more examples with **to get [something] off the ground**:

**Peter:** Now, as for that online course... We've been talking about launching it for months. Any progress?

**Rae:** It's been a slow process, but we're **finally getting it off the ground**. The website is live, and we've had some people join it already.

**Peter:** Fantastic news! Keep me posted on any updates.

**Vivian:** Last time I saw Holly, she mentioned you're renovating your kitchen. How's that going?

**Nate:** It's been a lot of work, but we're slowly **getting it off the ground**. We've ripped out the old cabinets and flooring, and now we're in the process of choosing new fixtures and finishes.

**Vivian:** Cool! I can't wait to see it when it's finished.

**Nate:** We'll be sure to invite you over when it's done!

## To get into the weeds

### Idiom

In this episode, Jesús talks about working on his accent and trying to sound more like an American. Andrew acknowledges that Jesús's accent indeed sounds very clear and American-like. Andrew invites Jesús to **get into the weeds** of how he accomplished it.

**To get into the weeds** means to talk about small, detailed parts of a particular topic. We typically use this expression to invite someone to have a more detailed conversation and explore the topic on a deeper level. In the episode, Andrew wants to talk about the specific ways Jesús improved his accent. By saying "**let's get into the weeds**," Andrew shows he wants to talk about the small details of Jesús's accent journey.

The word "weeds" means unwanted plants that grow in gardens or fields where they're not supposed to be. They prevent other plants from getting enough sunlight, water, and nutrients, so farmers and gardeners usually try to get rid of them. In the expression **to get into the weeds**, the word "weeds" refers to minor details.

You can use this expression in different situations where you want to discuss detailed aspects of something. For instance, someone might say "**Let's get into the weeds** of our strategy" during a business meeting, or a software engineer might want **to get into the weeds** of a program they're developing.

The phrase "**to get into the weeds**" is often used with the negative "not" to show that someone wants to avoid talking about tiny, unimportant things. For instance, if someone says, "**Let's not get into the weeds** here," they mean they want to stick to the main ideas in the conversation and not talk too much about small details.

Here are a couple more examples with **to get into the weeds**:

**Interviewer:** AJ, before we **get into the weeds** of your work, could you just tell me a little bit about your background and how you ended up volunteering here?

**AJ:** Sure! I've always been passionate about community service. I found this organization a few years ago and have been volunteering ever since. It's been really rewarding.

**Caroline:** Should we plan out every step of the project before we begin?

**Simon:** **Let's not get into the weeds** too much. Let's focus on the main tasks first.

## Hit me

Expression, informal

Towards the end of the interview, Andrew says that he still has a couple of questions for Jesús. In response to that, Jesús says, “Go ahead, **hit me**.”

The expression **hit me** originally comes from the card game blackjack, where players ask for another card by saying “**hit me**”. This usage of “**hit me**” comes from the action of physically tapping the table to signal the dealer. However, in everyday conversation, the phrase is used as an informal way of saying “go ahead,” “ask your question” or “tell me what you were going to say.” In the latter sense, it often means that you expect to hear something interesting, exciting, or shocking.

For instance, if a friend says that he wants to tell you something they learnt from a podcast, you can respond with “**Hit me**,” which would mean that you’re interested in whatever they have to say.

This phrase can also be used as a casual way to ask for a drink in an informal social setting. For example, if you’re at a party, and someone is pouring drinks, you can request one by saying “**Hit me**” to that person.

Similar expressions include “ask me,” “fire away,” or “shoot.” All these alternatives convey the idea of inviting questions, requests, or further conversation.

Here are a few more examples with **hit me**:

**Jade:** I’ve got some news that might surprise you.

**Connor:** **Hit me**.

**Jade:** We’re not going camping this weekend. We’re flying to Hawaii instead!

**Reese:** I’ve got a riddle for you. Wanna hear it?

**Evan:** Sure, **hit me**.

**Reese:** What has keys but can’t open locks?

**Evan:** Hmm. No idea! What?

**Reese:** A piano!

## To take precedence

### Expression

In this interview, Andrew asks Jesús if he was focusing on visual input as just as much as auditory input while working on his speaking skills. In response to this, Jesús admits that while recognizing mouth movements can be helpful, listening carefully is more crucial, as some native speakers don't articulate that clearly. He summarizes by saying, "The auditory part of it **takes precedence**."

**To take precedence** means that something is more important or has a higher priority than something else. If one thing takes precedence over another, it means that it comes before it. When Jesús says "**it takes precedence**," he means listening is more important and should come first when learning a language.

This expression is quite formal and is typically used in formal or professional settings, such as academic writing, business communication, legal documents, or official procedures. For instance, during emergency situations, saving people's lives **takes precedence** over saving property. In other words, ensuring everyone's safety is the top priority, even if it means losing belongings. In court cases, the law **takes precedence** over personal opinions, which means that legal rules are more important than what people personally think or want.

The expression **to take precedence** can be used in daily life and work conversations as well. For instance, when managing a project, meeting deadlines often **takes precedence** over other tasks. For some people, taking care of family **takes precedence** over their own problems.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take precedence**:

**Olivia:** I don't think I can join you at the gym tonight. My best friend just called me asking to come over. She sounded kind of upset.

**Damian:** No worries! Friends should **take precedence**. You can always join us some other day.

**Elsie:** Hey, Dom, I know we had planned to work on the marketing strategy today, but the IT team just reported a critical system failure that needs immediate attention.

**Dominic:** No problem. The IT issue definitely **takes precedence**. Let's address that first.

## Quiz

1. **What does it mean if someone says “That was too difficult of a test for the students to complete in one hour.”**
  - a) One hour was enough to complete the test.
  - b) The students didn’t find the test difficult.
  - c) The test wasn’t as difficult as expected.
  - d) The test was more challenging than the students thought.
  
2. **True or false? If someone says that their startup idea was a flop, it means it was unsuccessful.**
  - a) True
  - b) False
  
3. **What does it mean if someone says they didn’t manage to get their project off the ground?**
  - a) They decided to postpone the project for later.
  - b) They achieved their goals ahead of schedule.
  - c) The project experienced delays or setbacks.
  - d) The project was completed without any issues.
  
4. **When might someone use the phrase “let’s not get into the weeds”?**
  - a) When they want to explore detailed aspects of a topic.
  - b) When they want to avoid discussing minor details.
  - c) When they want to get rid of unwanted plants in a garden.
  - d) When they want to end a discussion.
  
5. **In what scenario it would NOT be appropriate to say “Hit me”?**
  - a) Expressing interest in hearing someone’s story.
  - b) Requesting a drink.
  - c) Declining an invitation.
  - d) Inviting someone to ask their question.



## Comprehension quiz

6. What motivated Jesús to work on his American accent?
7. According to Jesús, what were the main benefits of participating in in-person language practice sessions?
8. What international English proficiency exam did Jesús take in 2008?
9. How did Jesús feel about using CDs to improve his pronunciation?
10. What did Jesús say about the roles of native and non-native English teachers?

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## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What was your motivation to start working on your English? Have you ever faced challenges in being understood when communicating in English?
2. Think about how you're learning English compared to Jesús. Are you using any of the same methods he talked about? What are you doing differently? Do you want to give any of his suggestions a shot?
3. Can you recall a time when you experienced **a flop** in your life? How did you handle it and what did you learn from the experience?
4. Can you share an example of a situation where you had to **get into the weeds**?
5. How do you decide what **takes precedence** in your daily schedule?

## Quiz Answers

1.d    2.a    3.c    4.b    5.c

6. To be taken seriously when speaking

7. Improved confidence and real-life interaction

8. Certificate of Proficiency in English

9. He found using CDs tedious and less convenient compared to modern methods.

10. Native teachers provide intuitive knowledge, while non-native teachers offer analytical understanding.

### Episode credits

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