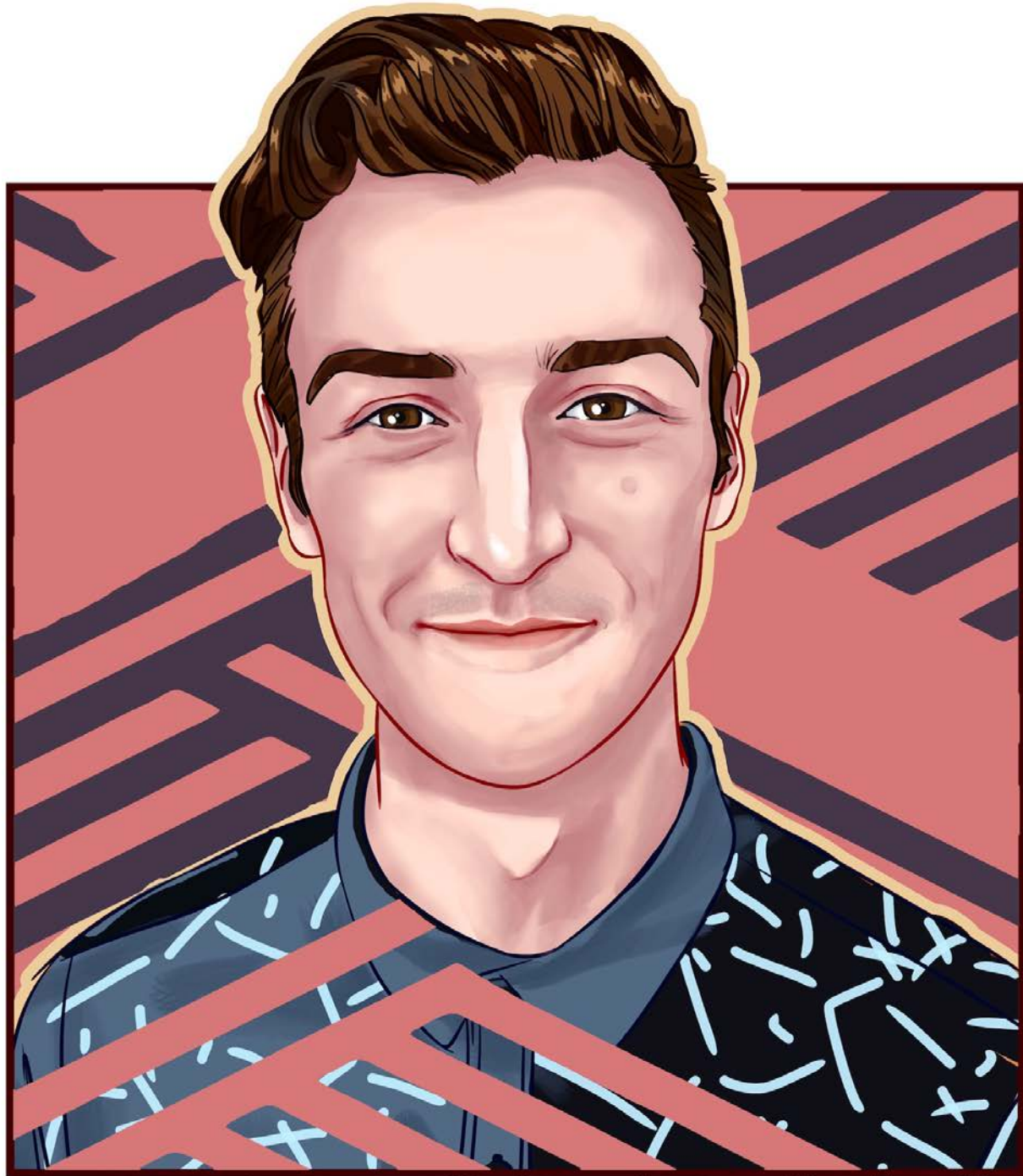


Jeremy's English Tips

Episode #14:
What to do if you don't understand



Culips English Podcast

Transcript

Hello everyone, this is Jeremy and you're listening to Jeremy's English tips, a series by the Culips English Podcast where I teach you interesting expressions or share language learning tips.

Hello there, English learners. Thank you for listening to Culips. Today, I have an episode for you, in which I will share my opinion about what to do if you didn't understand what someone said to you. So, I'm sure all of us language learners have found ourselves in this kind of situation before. When I was learning Korean, there were many many times in which someone said something to me in Korean and I didn't understand what they said. However, I needed to respond to them in that moment. This happened so many times that I developed a strategy to help me to deal with these kinds of situations.

Now, I know most people say that you should just ask the other person to speak more slowly or to repeat what they said. However, I disagree with this, because usually, most native speakers are not very good at slowing down their speech. They may slow down for a sentence or two, but the longer they speak, the faster they will get. In other words, it is difficult to speak slowly, and for that reason, **I recommend not asking the other person to slow down.** Of course, sometimes asking them to repeat what they said, is a good idea and perfectly acceptable. However, if you ask too many times in one conversation, it can be very annoying for the other person.

My opinion is that **forming relationships through conversation requires a balance of effort on both sides.** And asking someone to slow down their speech, or repeat what they already said, can disrupt that balance. What I mean by this is that if you ask too much of them, if you ask them to change the way they speak very dramatically, it will require effort on their part and could cause them stress as well. I feel that the best way to learn a language is to form long term relationships with native speakers of that language. For this reason, I have always done language exchange. We have another episode about this, that you can check it out if you're curious. But basically, language exchange is the exchange of time and energy between two people. So you can do language exchange with someone who is learning your native language, your mother tongue and help them in exchange for them helping you. So,

instead of asking them to slow down or repeat what they said, **I recommend using simple questions to keep the conversation going.** For example, you can say, "Oh, is that a good thing?" Or, "Hmm.. why is that?" Or "Hmm I didn't know that." "Hmm I didn't know that."

These kinds of questions or comments, show the other person that you are participating in the conversation. And they hide the fact that you did not understand what the other person said. Hiding this fact will help them to relax and speak more naturally to you. In my experience with Korean people and Spanish speakers, if I show that I didn't understand what they said, from that point on, they speak to me differently. They change the way they speak and speak much more unnaturally.

If you are really stuck, if the person says something to you, and you have no idea what they said, **you can also ask a question about a single word that they said**, even if you already know that word. This is a good tactic, because it requires the other person to repeat what they said. For example, if someone tells you a long story about something and you don't understand much of it at all, but you did hear the word "exposure" in the story, then you can say, "Oh, what does exposure mean?" And when you ask that question, it signals to the other person, that you are still a learner and they may gladly explain the meaning of the word for you. However, if you just told them, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand anything you just said." They may be very frustrated, and they may not want to repeat what they said. So asking a simple question, or a question about a word can make them repeat themselves without feeling annoyed or stressed.

Finally, I just want to say that I know this is a difficult process learning a language It is by no means easy, but just trust that **with time, exposure and practice, things will get easier and easier.** The sky is the limit, so it can only get better from here.

Enjoy your English study, friends. I'll catch you in the next episode.

Key Points

- Jeremy believes that it is more important to keep the conversation flowing than to try to understand everything.
- Forming relationships through conversation requires a balance of effort on both sides. Asking someone to slow down their speech or repeat what they already said disrupts that balance.
- Use simple questions to keep the conversation flowing.
- If you are really stuck, ask a question about a single word that was said, even if you know it.
- Trust that with time, exposure, and practice things will get easier and easier.

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What have you usually done when you didn't understand something that was said to you?
2. Do you agree with Jeremy? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever spoken slowly to someone learning your language? Share your story.
4. Are you a good listener? Why or why not?
5. Aside from the Culips podcasts, has anyone ever spoken English very slowly for you? Share the story.

Study Challenges

1. Try focusing on keeping the conversation flowing with a friend who speaks English.
2. Try speaking your native language very slowly for 5 minutes - do you start to get impatient or annoyed?

Credits

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