

## Simplified Speech #073 – Interview with Mohammad Fahimnia

### Episode description

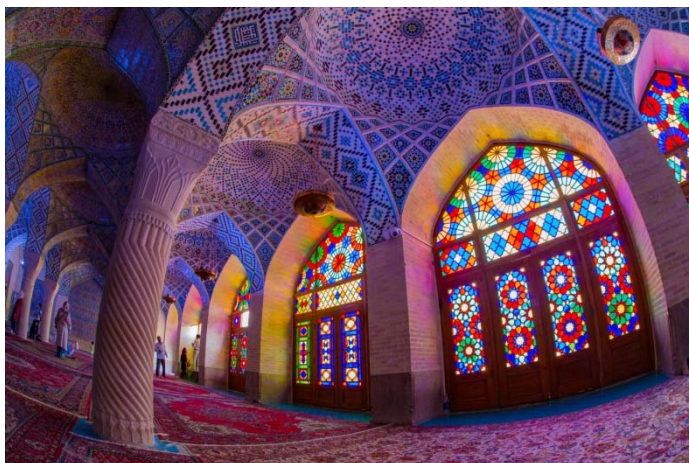
In this Simplified Speech episode, we have a very special guest, Mohammad from Iran. Along with our host Andrew, Mohammad discusses how he achieved such a high speaking level in English and shares tips on the best techniques you can use, as well.

### Fun fact

Did you know there is a species of cheetah that lives in Asia? The Asian cheetah, or Iranian cheetah, can only be found in Iran. However, it is unfortunately a critically endangered species.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To be psyched
- A springboard
- A hunch
- To put in the time
- To rub elbows
- Deep down



## 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.

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Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English Podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, [Culips.com](http://Culips.com), [C-U-L-I-P-S.com](http://C-U-L-I-P-S.com).

Hello there. My name is Andrew and you are listening to the Culips English Podcast.

Hey there, everyone, it's Andrew, and we have a Simplified Speech episode for you today. Simplified Speech is a series that's aimed at high beginner level and intermediate level students, and it features natural English conversations that have been simplified just a little bit, slowed down just a little bit, so that they're comprehensible.

Today's episode features an interview with a Culips listener. His name is Mohammad and he's from Iran. Mohammad and I talk a little bit about how we got to know each other at the start of the episode, so you'll hear that story in just a bit. But basically I wanted to invite Mohammad onto Culips because his English was really, really impressive to me when I first heard it and I thought he would be a great guest to have on to the show to talk a little bit about what it's like learning English in Iran, but also how he learned English to such a high, fluent level. And I thought he could share some of his story with us and perhaps give us some tips. And that's exactly what he does in this episode.

So I hope you all enjoy it. I personally found this episode to be really motivational. I think if someone can learn English to the level that Mohammad did in a country where there's not very many opportunities to interact with English speakers then, really, anyone can learn English. And this gave me motivation for my Korean learning, as well. As many of you know, I study Korean, so thanks Mohammad again for coming on to the show. And, everyone, I hope you enjoy this interview.

Just before we get to it, I do wanna let you know that there's a study guide available that includes a transcript and some practice exercises. So if you'd like to study along with the study guide, all you have to do is visit our website, [Culips.com](http://Culips.com), and you can give that a download. All right, let's just get right to it. Here is my interview with Mohammad.

Andrew: Hi Mohammad, welcome to the Culips English Podcast. Thanks for talking with me today.

Mohammad: Hey. Hello, Andrew, thanks for having me.

Andrew: Yeah, no problem. Mohammad, it's great to talk with you finally, because we've been communicating through Instagram for, wow, I don't know, at least 2 or 3 months, maybe even longer. And you've been sending me voice messages, which I've loved to listen to, and I'm lazy so I just type you responses back. But we've been talking about having you come on to Culips for a little while now, and it's finally happened so this is great. It's nice to meet you, kind of, 'cause you're not in the room with me. You are actually in Iran, right?

Mohammad: Yes, that's right.

Andrew: And what city do you live in in Iran?

Mohammad: I actually live in one of the cities in the western part of Iran, which is called Kermanshah. That's where I was born and raised.

Andrew: All right. So, Mohammad, I was excited to have you on to Culips because your English is so good. As I mentioned earlier, you've been sending me voice notes through Instagram, and I could hear your English and I was really shocked at how natural it sounds. And so I thought we could talk today about how you learned English. So could you maybe tell me a little bit about that process?

Mohammad: Yes, definitely. So I'm really thankful for having me here. To be honest, I was really **psyched** about being here with you and talking about stuff. So I've been following your podcasts, specifically Simplified Speech, and I don't know if I said, I guess I didn't mention, but I'm a teacher of English. So I always have my students listen to your podcast and we do a whole lot of things, like different kinds of exercises, on your podcast. So just wanted to say thank you for all the efforts.

Andrew: Yeah, that's awesome to hear that you're using it in the classroom with your students. Do you teach adults or children or maybe teenagers? Who are your students?

Mohammad: Well, I think I teach all age ranges, like I have some kids that I teach and also teach some adults, teenagers as well. So that's what I do.

Andrew: That's great.

Mohammad: Yes.

Andrew: And you know, this is interesting, you just mentioned you did some exercises with your students in the classroom, because this week I've gotten several emails from other Culips listeners asking how they can study with Culips. And so maybe you could give some insight into this. How do you study with Culips with your students?

Mohammad: Right. So I basically, one of the exercises which is pretty common among my students is that I asked them to actually go and listen to your episodes and then try to understand the whole concept of the episode. And they're gonna have to write down and prepare some sort of, like, lecture or something on that topic. And I would want them also try to figure out the meanings of some of the challenging words and terms that you guys actually use during the episode. And while we're in the class, we would discuss the subject with each other.

Andrew: Awesome. Those are some of the ideas that I suggest to our listeners, too. You can kind of use the episode as a **springboard** for your own creativity, right? Maybe recording yourself talking about the same topic that we use in Culips or writing a journal entry, something like this where you're using your own ideas and you're producing English—not just listening to it, but producing it. But you could stick to the same topic and maybe recycle and use some of the expressions or vocabulary that you learn. I recommend this to Culips listeners, too. So I'm glad to hear that it works for you in your classroom.

Mohammad: Definitely.

Andrew: Mohammad, what about you, yourself? What's your story about learning English? It's really natural, it's great to hear.

Mohammad: Thanks for the compliment. And I guess it all started for me when I was around 10. So back then, I was not really familiar with English because, well, we didn't have any English courses in our school. But I guess I got a gift from my brother, which was a PlayStation 1.

Andrew: Nice.

Mohammad: Yeah, that was a great gift.

Andrew: Yeah, for sure.

Mohammad: And, yeah, when I started playing video games, I realized that I really wanted to know what was actually going on there because, you know, the characters would speak in English in all of them, in all of the video games, and it was really hard for me to understand what was going on. So that became like a motivation for me to want to learn. And right after let's say a couple of months of playing video games, I signed up for an English course in a private institute.

Andrew: Ah, OK.

Mohammad: It all started from that private institute, and then it got pretty serious. I got to know about, like, English movies and everything. I became sort of hooked, you know, to learn more and more. So that's actually how I learned the language.

Andrew: Do you remember which video game was the first one you played that really piqued your interest in English?

Mohammad: I'm not sure if I can recall the exact name, but something like Syphon Filter. I don't know if you're familiar with that video game. It's a pretty old one.

Andrew: Yeah, that really sounds familiar, Syphon Filter. I personally didn't own a PlayStation 1, but one of my best friends did and I would visit his house and play with him. So perhaps I played that game, too.

Mohammad: Cool.

Andrew: Yeah, so let's see, Mohammad. There's something that I wanted to ask you about and I don't know if you have an answer to this question or not, but I'm curious. Perhaps you've heard me mention on Culips before, but I think Iranians are really good at English and I'm trying to figure out why this is. Out of all of the second-language learners in the world that are learning English, I think Iranians are some of the best. And, yeah, you mentioned that you didn't have English education in school, so how are people in your country learning English then, and how are you guys getting to such a high level?

Mohammad: So we indeed have English courses in school, but it does not start from, like, right from primary school. So as soon as you are a secondary school student, you're gonna get some English courses. But about people and how they learn English, I think, you know, I've been talking to people from other countries, mostly Asian countries, and I realized that, for whatever reason, I'm not sure, Iranians are, like, they have this tendency to learn English. Maybe it's because that they like to communicate with people from other nations. Or it is something like it might have a scientific reason, since a lot of people in Iran are highly educated and for that they definitely need English.

Mohammad: And since I'm an IELTS instructor I can see that a lot of people annually want to take the IELTS, and it's just another reason for learning the language. So I'm guessing that it might actually be the reason why Iranians you know speak English well, as you said.

Andrew: Yeah, I'm also wondering now that you mentioned it, if I compare it with Korea, where I'm living right now, there's a lot of Koreans that are learning English as well. But, you know, Korean kids that are like 10 years old, they have video games in the Korean language and all of the foreign movies are subtitled or dubbed into Korean and there's tons of Korean media for them to consume. So there's not many outside influence that you may have had in Iran. I wonder if that has something to do with it, as well. Do you think that could be a factor?

Mohammad: Of course. So something that I see here is that there is a lot of exposure. Like, as you said, there's video games, there's movies, and people are easily communicating with others around the world, and there's also podcasts that everybody listens to. So I think because maybe it's not really that hard to get your hands on English materials and you could easily find them anywhere, yes, that might actually be a good reason why people are, you know, more inclined to learn English than any other languages, and they're doing it pretty well.

Andrew: Recently I was talking with Jeremy, one of our other Culips hosts, and we're actually talking about this same issue, why are Iranians so good at English, and I was wondering if there's any similarities between your native language, which I believe you call Farsi, right? Is that correct?

Mohammad: Yes, that's right.

Andrew: So are there any similarities between Farsi and English? Or are they completely different languages?

Mohammad: Well, they're, like you said, completely different languages. But here is something like that I've been thinking about and I've been studying about, there's like the effective mother tongue when you want to learn a language.

Let's say English, so if your mother tongue, let's say, has all the vowels and sounds and different articulations that are in the target language, you have good chance at, like, mastering that language pretty well. Like, I'm comparing, let's say, the Indian language or, as you said, Korean with Farsi and how people from these three nations might actually learn English.

Mohammad: And I think because of, you know, like, the room that Farsi provides its speakers for articulating words, they can do a pretty good job at dominating how to pronounce, let's say, English vowels or words. While as you could like understand, like, really see this when you're speaking with people from some other nations, you can easily detect, like, some accent. But for Iranians, I've noticed that this is pretty much less. So that might be the effect of the mother tongue.

Andrew: Like you said, too, Iranian people, even when they're not amazing English speakers, even when they're only around the intermediate level, their accent is still very good. So I think, I mean I don't know for sure, but my **hunch**, my guess is that in Farsi, perhaps you have a more complicated inventory of sounds. So that when you're learning English, maybe it carries over and helps you to have clear English pronunciation, as well.

Mohammad: That probably would be the reason, yeah.

Andrew: But we'll save this issue maybe for some linguists, Mohammad, to discuss.

Mohammad: Yeah.

Andrew: Let's see. I wanted to also ask you about what the most difficult thing was for you while you were learning English?

Mohammad: Well, that's a pretty tough question, because, you know, like at first everything seemed pretty hard to handle. But as you go along the learning path and you get so many things down, I think the most difficult part of learning the language is how to become fluent. Because, well, eventually you're gonna learn how to memorize words. You're gonna learn how to improve the way that you pronounce words and you're gonna learn the grammatical rules and everything. But putting them all together while you're speaking, that's a very difficult level of learning. And, like, the problem that I see with all people that are struggling to learn the language is that they're not as fluent as they wish to be.

Andrew: Right. Yeah, so learning some of the grammar rules of English learning, some of the vocabulary, is not really too difficult if you just **put in the time**. But trying to figure out how to use all of this knowledge in a fluent way when you're having a conversation in real time. I think many people would agree with you that this is one of the most complicated things.

Mohammad: Yeah.

Andrew: By the way, I'm curious, how easy it is for you to have a conversation with English native speakers in Iran? Are there English speakers in the country that you can talk to? How do you get conversation practice?



Mohammad: Um, well, actually, that was and still is one of my difficulties for having a conversation. Like when I want to practice my own English, I have to talk to people at my own level. So since you cannot really find a lot of native English speakers here, I mean, I haven't really talked to a native English speaker here in Iran. So the thing that I have is, I try to join the social media and there are indeed some websites where you could, you know, like **rub elbows** with people who manage to speak English at a good level or, like, they're near native like or even some times native speaker.

Andrew: So it's mostly through the internet then that you get your conversation practice?

Mohammad: Exactly.

Andrew: Yeah, that's one of the amazing things about the internet, right? It's really just revolutionized the way that people can learn languages by connecting with other learners and with native speakers and getting access to materials like podcasts and YouTube and tons of stuff. I don't know where we'd be without the internet for learning languages. I heard it was way, way harder back in the day.

Mohammad: Yes, indeed. So online you can have everything at your fingertips.

Andrew: Mohammad, I'm conscious of your time here, I don't want to eat up too much of your time, but, I have a couple more questions, if that's all right?

Mohammad: Yeah, it's OK. Sure.

Andrew: The first would be maybe you have one tip or a recommendation that our audience could use in their own English studies. Maybe something that you've seen or done with your students that you've noticed is really effective. Do you have a tip that you could share with our listeners?

Mohammad: So I have to go back to my own experience of learning. And, like, the thing that all the time worked for me when I was feeling that I was, you know, that I had actually hit a wall in learning and I was not making progress was to try to find a reason why I would want to learn English. To sort of motivate myself to keep on going. And the thing that all the time that helped me here was trying to watch movies and sort of find a connection with the culture that was represented in the movie, because I think nothing could stop you if you really truly want to do something.

If you could feel it **deep down** that you really want to do something because of some reason that is related to you psychologically, you can figure out that you really want to do this. I think that's the best thing. So motivating yourself through something. I'm not saying the movies, maybe it's not something that a learner would like, but finding an attachment to the culture would be good.



Andrew: I think that's great advice. By the way, what kind of movies do you like?

Mohammad: I basically love TV series, like, more because you can get a whole lot of dialogues there. And the other thing that makes me like TV series is that you can sort of form a relationship, like understand the characters over the long haul because, yeah, they go on one episode after another. You can relate to them somehow. And I think Supernatural, the TV series Supernatural, was amazing. And when I think of a TV series, that's the one that pops up in my head.

Andrew: All right, Supernatural. I haven't seen that one. But all of our listeners out there, you can check it out, it's probably on the internet somewhere, I am sure.

Mohammad: Yeah.

Andrew: I totally agree, that's one of the advantages of TV series, right? They have so many seasons. Western—American and even British—TV shows usually go on for like five plus seasons, and you can really see the characters develop and change over the course of each season. And this gives you a lot more bang for your buck compared to maybe a movie that is maybe an hour and half or 2 hours long.

Well, Mohammad, thank you so much for joining us on Culips today. And just before we wrap up, I wanted to ask you if you had any websites or social media presence that you wanted to plug?

Mohammad: Yes, my Instagram is at Fahim.English. You can Instagram that, I don't know if that word is used as a verb like Google, but let's just say.

Andrew: Yeah, you can do that.

Mohammad: You can look it up on Instagram Fahim.English. And, yeah, that's where I share some points and pointers for learners to improve, so maybe you find that interesting.

Andrew: Right on. So, everyone, check that out and give Mohammad your support.

Well, thanks again, Mohammad, for coming on to Culips. And it was great to talk with you.

Mohammad: Thank you, Andrew, for having me. This was a great opportunity and I enjoyed every single minute of it.

Andrew: I'm so happy to hear that. Have a great day.

Mohammad: You, too. Bye.

Andrew: Thanks. Bye.

So, wasn't that great? I hope you found it as interesting and motivational as I did. Thanks again, Mohammad, for appearing on Culips and for talking with me. It was so cool to get to do that.

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OK, that's it for today. We'll be back soon with another episode and I will talk to you then. Bye.

## Detailed Explanations

### To be psyched

Verb

**To be psyched** is to be excited about something. At the beginning of their conversation, Mohammad tells Andrew that he's **psyched** to be on the podcast. That means he's excited to chat with Andrew.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be psyched**:

Tasha:	You look pretty happy. What's up?
Spence:	I'm super <b>psyched</b> .
Tasha:	About what?
Spence:	The basketball playoffs are about to start next week. It's my favourite time of the year.

Ronald:	Did you go fishing with your son on the weekend?
Becca:	Yes, I did.
Ronald:	How did he enjoy it?
Becca:	He was <b>psyched</b> the entire weekend, so much so that he's begging to go back this weekend as well.

## A springboard

Noun

At one point, Mohammad talks about using Culips episodes in his classroom. Andrew says that these episodes are a good **springboard** for teaching his students. In this sense, a **springboard** is a starting point. Think of a swimming or diving competition and how the athletes jump into the water off a **springboard**; that's their starting point.

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

Maryam:	Do we have any ideas for the spring marketing campaign?
Darren:	I was thinking we could increase our social media presence.
Maryam:	What's your angle?
Darren:	We could target a younger demographic than we usually do. That way, it could be a <b>springboard</b> for our brand for years to come.
Maryam:	Good idea. Can you put something into place?

Inez:	I'm thinking of studying French this semester.
Mindy:	French? Have you ever studied French before?
Inez:	No, but I speak Spanish. I figure that might be a decent <b>springboard</b> into the language.
Mindy:	That's right—they're both Romance languages. I'm sure you'd be able to pick it up quicker than me.

## A hunch

Noun

**A hunch** is a guess. You can have **a hunch** based on the information you know or simply your gut feeling. In this episode, Andrew says he has **a hunch** that the Farsi language has many different sounds, although it's mostly a guess because Andrew doesn't really know much about Farsi. That's why he says it's **a hunch**.

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

Alfred:	I've got a surprise. This weekend we're going somewhere special for your birthday.
Jimin:	That's nice of you. Where are we going?
Alfred:	Guess.
Jimin:	Um ... To a steakhouse?
Alfred:	What? How did you know?
Jimin:	Well, we went last year and the year before. Call it <b>a hunch</b> on my part.
Alfred:	Oh, joke's on me.

Ally:	How do you like my cake?
Darius:	Pretty good. I'm sorry, but I feel like it's missing something.
Ally:	Oh, that's right. I usually put carrots into the mix, but I didn't this time.
Darius:	Why not?
Ally:	I had <b>a hunch</b> that you didn't like carrots.
Darius:	Oh no! I love carrots.
Ally:	I'm so sorry. OK, next time I'll definitely add them.

## To put in the time

### Idiom

**To put in the time** is to spend a lot of time doing something. It also carries the meaning of putting in a sufficient amount of time. In this episode, Andrew speaks of how learning vocabulary isn't too difficult. You just have **to put in the time**. He means to say if you spend enough time doing something, like simply studying vocabulary, you will succeed.

Here are a couple more examples with **to put in the time**:

Elias:	You wanted to talk to me, Coach?
Coach:	Yes, I did. Have a seat.
Elias:	OK.
Coach:	I called you here to tell you that you'll be starting the game tomorrow.
Elias:	Really?
Coach:	Yes. You've <b>put in the time</b> and I think you're ready.
Elias:	That's great, Coach! Thank you for the opportunity!

Teresa:	Why are you wearing your good suit?
Gene:	I'm going to ask the boss for a raise.
Teresa:	Are you? What are you going to say?
Gene:	I'm going to tell her that I've <b>put in my time</b> , and that I think I deserve a raise.
Teresa:	Sounds good to me. I hope the boss agrees!

## To rub elbows

### Idiom

**To rub elbows** is to be in contact with someone. Think of a party where you are close enough to someone that you can rub their elbow with your elbow. If you are that close, then you are close enough to make contact and have a conversation. However, you can also **rub elbows** online in a chat forum or on social media. This carries the same meaning.

Here are a couple more examples with **to rub elbows**:

Shannon:	Are you going to the conference this Friday?
Manu:	Nah. I don't really like conferences. They're too crowded.
Shannon:	That's the good part! It's a good opportunity <b>to rub elbows</b> with a bunch of people and to make new contacts.
Manu:	You're right. I really should go out and meet new people.

Sara:	Where are you going this summer?
Monique:	My husband and I were thinking of going to Monaco.
Sara:	Monaco? What's to do there?
Monique:	<b>Rub elbows</b> with the rich and famous.
Sara:	But you're not rich or famous.
Monique:	I know that, but they don't!



## Deep down Phrase

In this episode, Mohammad says that if you really want something **deep down**, you can do it. **Deep down** means to the core of you. A **deep down** belief is a strongly held belief. It is something fundamental. You can also use **deep down** when on the surface of things you show one belief, but in your heart you have a different belief.

Here are a couple more examples with **deep down**:

Lucia:	Is your son still trying to become a professional baseball player?
Armin:	Yes, he's still at it.
Lucia:	That must be difficult for him. Only a small number of people who try make it to the major leagues.
Armin:	I know. But he has a <b>deep down</b> belief guiding him, telling him that he'll be successful.
Lucia:	That's commendable. I hope he makes it.

Mina:	Are you excited about going to law school next semester?
Domingo:	Um, not really.
Mina:	Not really? I thought you had always wanted to go to law school.
Domingo:	In a way. But <b>deep down</b> inside, I think I was only doing it to please my parents.

## Quiz

**1. Which of the following is NOT true about Mohammad?**

- a) He was born in Iran.
- b) He is a teacher in England.
- c) He uses Culips episodes to teach his students.
- d) He started wanting to learn English to understand what was said in the video games he was playing.

**2. Which of the following is a synonym for to be psyched?**

- a) to study psychology
- b) to be crazy
- c) to be a psycho
- d) to be thrilled

**3. What does it mean to have a hunch?**

- a) to be sure of something
- b) to know something
- c) to have a feeling about something
- d) to have a gut

**4. If you put in the time, that means you \_\_\_\_\_?**

- a) put in a lot of effort
- b) put in a lot of money
- c) freed time from your schedule
- d) put in some thyme

**5. True or false? To rub elbows means to make physical contact with someone.**

- a) true
- b) false

## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Are there many native English speakers in your hometown? Where would be the nearest place where you could find native English speakers?
2. How effective do you think social media is in improving your English?
3. If you were an English teacher, how would you use Culips episodes in your classroom?
4. What is something you get psyched about?
5. What are some situations when you get to rub elbows with people?
6. What is the one area you think you have put in the most time in your life?

## Quiz Answers

1.b    2.d    3.c    4.a    5.b

### Episode credits

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