

# English the Smart Way

Podcast Session 4:

## Non-traditional English Learning Techniques with Jeremy Kemp

Show Notes: <http://englishthesmartway.com/session4>

### Introduction

**Ivan:** Hello everyone! This is Ivan Ottinger from [EnglishtheSmartWay.com](http://EnglishtheSmartWay.com)

Welcome to the English the Smart Way podcast, session number 4.

Last time we could hear the English success story of my very good friend Massimo. Today we have another special guest to our show. His name is Jeremy Kemp, the owner of Moxon English school. Jeremy, originally from London teaches English online. He uses non-traditional teaching methods which he summarised in his newly released book. The book's title is **Keep Calm and Learn English**.

So I'm really happy that you are joining me today. Let's enjoy the conversation and learn from the experience of Jeremy. Here we go.

**Ivan:** Hello everyone! It's a pleasure to welcome our today's guest Jeremy Kemp to our podcast. Thank you very much for accepting the invitation, Jeremy, and welcome to the show!

**Jeremy:** Thanks very much. It's a pleasure, pleasure to be here.

**Ivan:** Tell us something more about you so our listeners can know you better.

**Jeremy:** Sure! So... Well, my name is Jeremy and I'm originally from London in the UK, although I chose to study in Scotland, in Edinburgh. I studied psychology in Edinburgh University. To cut a long story short I spent some time in Italy and I started teaching English really as a way to earn some money to pay for my studies. I was still studying at the time, but I discovered I really love that. I found my passion in teaching. And that was really the beginning of a long journey of trying to help people to learn English.

**Ivan:** Yeah. And when you started teaching English was there anyone who asked you to, you know: *"Could you please help me with English?"* Or how did you get to the, you know, the teaching?

**Jeremy:** Sure, sure. So I started teaching in a traditional language school, a local language school in Padua, where I was living at the time. I was teaching very traditional business English to groups of maybe 5 to 15 people, but I quickly saw that the traditional methods that we were being asked to use, weren't really working. I had the sensation that people enjoyed lessons, people thought that lessons were fun but there wasn't a real progress and real learning on behalf of the students.

**Ivan:** And so what do you think was the biggest issue with this traditional way of teaching?

**Jeremy:** There were quite few things. One of the big ones is maybe the number of people in the groups made it very difficult to give everyone the chance to speak. Okay? Of course we had conversation, we encouraged participation but when you have ten people, twelve people, fifteen people in a class, it's very difficult to give everyone the opportunity to speak. Another big reason is when you have mixed abilities in a mixed class you have people travelling at different speeds and so some people are travelling too fast, some people travelling too slowly, and lots of people were either confused or quite frankly bored because of this difficulty mismatch.

**Ivan:** Yeah, I believe that many listeners can relate to this, because me to, I also studied in a traditional way. Also the time I was at the university and well it was just how you described it.

**Jeremy:** Another big reason, if I can, is that the course books that we used in the school were very much focused on written grammar exercises. And so for homework or during the class students had to maybe complete ten, twenty, thirty exercises on a particular grammar theme. They did ok, they did some wrong, some right, but what was missing was the chance to really apply those grammatical rules speaking. There was lots of theory that... there was never the jump to practice and to application and to communication.

**Ivan:** Yeah, I understand. So after your experience with this system you decided to do something else, right?

**Jeremy:** Exactly! Yeah, yeah. And so what I did was I borrowed, I borrowed a little bit from my psychology training, my university training. I borrowed a little bit from my work with children with autism and children with social skills' deficits and the result was a method that really emphasized the practical skill, so going straight talking, it emphasised the use of pictures and photos and images, in order to facilitate information of memory, the memorization of vocabulary, and also a big thing to really try to give the students confidence. So I give them lots of little successes to really increase the positive feelings about the language because another thing I saw was that people were frustrated, they were upset, they were anxious that their progress wasn't as fast as they would have liked.

**Ivan:** And after all of this experience you have had in teaching English so far, is there any... some technique, you know, something you think can help the English learners the most in their learning?

**Jeremy:** Yeah, I think there is no magic bullet, I mean there is no one single thing that will help you to learn. There are lot of ingredients and you got to have a good measure of each of those ingredients to successfully learn English. But certainly, the element of speaking is very, very important, ok? And it doesn't just mean in formal conversation but this is important as well, ok, but it also means quite frankly verbal exercises, repetition, reading out loud, pronunciation, practice, all of these things together, shadow reading, so you may be listening to an audio book for example and reading out loud along with it. All of these verbal exercises I think are very, very important. And often they are neglected. Often people tend to hide behind the grammar book, hide behind the iPhone at an event without speaking, without moving their lips and engaging a non-verbal behaviour of their speaking.

**Ivan:** Using the language in the most practical way that is speaking.

**Jeremy:** Absolutely! You know, to put it the other way, people are too silent in their studies, people spend too long in a quiet of their bedrooms, or their classrooms not making a sound, ok? Whereas if you want to learn and if you really want to learn in a deep way and in a meaningful way you have to speak, you have to verbalize those concepts and verbalize those words.

**Ivan:** You mentioned that many people have problems with confidence in speaking. Have you found the solution or I don't know, how to say, or some technique to help people to get more confident in speaking? Because I myself had problems with, you know, starting speaking, starting conversation and you know I was afraid of making mistakes when speaking and so on, and so on.

**Jeremy:** Sure, sure. It's not easy but I think the first step is to acknowledge it. You've got to be open with students and let them notice it's normal because I think often students think that they're the only ones who are anxious, the only ones who find it hard and they think that everyone else is fine and is learning quickly where is actually most adults who learn English feel that anxiety, feel that lack of confidence when they're speaking. And after acknowledging it I think it's important to learn to accept it a little bit, to learn to live with it, and say: *"Okay, I can improve and the anxiety will reduce, but it's going to be with me, it's going to be maybe not friend but a fellow traveller, let's say on a journey of the English learning trip, let's say."*

**Ivan:** Thank you. And so now you teach people English, English speaking. How do you teach?

**Jeremy:** So, I try to do two things, so, on my website MoxonEnglish.com we have lots of advice and articles and guides to help people maybe with the first steps when they're still on their own and they are still trying to make the first progress. We also provide English lessons on Skype. So these are individual one to one lessons and so you can learn from anywhere in the world and obviously we are for flexible timetables as well for the students.

All the teaching is online. I work now with the team of teachers, I work with 15 teachers who work to apply our method that we call the **Moxon method** which is the name of the school and again it's a method which really tries to encourage speaking and confidence and the sort of fluidity that often learners aren't able to develop on their own.

**Ivan:** This leads me to another question because I know that several weeks ago you published your new book and if you could tell us about this new book and, you know, why did you decide to write this book and what is the book about?

**Jeremy:** Sure, sure. So this is a book that was written for the Italian market because most of my students are Italian and most of our web users are Italian, although we also have our website in English. So the title of the book in English is **Keep Calm and Learn English** and really in this book in ten chapters I explain the Moxon method. So I explain how you can learn English speaking in a structured way first and then slowly, slowly in a more natural and a fluent way. So there are lots of things in there, we talk about how you can use television and film, how you can use reading, how you can increase your vocabulary and always using these non-traditional methods which really focus on speaking and memorisation.

Yes, so then if you want me to talk more about rhetorical, more about some of the ideas.

**Ivan:** Yeah, if you could it would be great. Maybe to share some..., well the book is..., you know it contains many ideas, but maybe few of them...

**Jeremy:** Sure, sure. I'll give you some more details about what we talk about in the book. So as I say unfortunately at the moment it's available only in Italian, but hopefully in the future we'll be able to publish it in English as well. And there are two main sections, so one is all about practice, and the other is about immersion. So you can think of it as a football analogy. So you have your training, where you train with your teammates, it's very practical still, ok? There might be some theoretical foundations but still your training is very practical, but it's structured, so you might kick the ball the same time in ten ways or try a particular formation with your teammates, ok? The second half is immersion and that's bit like football game, ok, where you're actually on the pitch and you try to beat the other team, ok? And that's bit like speaking in real world situations. So let's talk first ..., I told you first about the practice part, the training, ok? So for example, reading is a perfect training activity, but in the book I argue that reading shouldn't be silent, it should be spoken. So I strongly encourage my readers and I encourage your listeners as well to use reading with listening and with speaking and actually it's far better if they can listen first to a track or to a book for example and not to go... and only later read. Because what happens when you read sometimes is that there's what I call **pronunciation contamination**, ok? In other words, you read the English word which has a strange spelling and in your mind you pronounce it in a particular way, but it maybe isn't the correct way and that incorrect version becomes reinforced. Rather, when you listen for the first time, ok, the correct pronunciation, it is that version that is reinforced, ok? So in a practical way what you can do is you can buy an audiobook, ok? Either by buying a CD online or there's services like Audible, which is the Amazon's service and you can buy the physical book, so the traditional book, either in ebook format or actually in a paperback or hardback and using these two instruments together you can really get the most out of reading, really transform what unfortunately is often a silent and I think fruitless, ineffective approach into something that really boost your confidence, pronunciation, etc., etc.

**Ivan:** I totally agree with you said because when I was reading several books I picked up some new words and I thought I know how to pronounce them, but when I tried to speak to someone and I used these words I just learned from the book no one could understand me because I pronounced the words in completely wrong way.

**Jeremy:** Sure, sure. It is a very common problem. I'll give you another example of these training activities. So another training activity could be with television and maybe, for advanced learners films. So often students will simply watch television passively, they sit down, they turn on the television, maybe they turn on the subtitles and they listen. What I really advise your listeners to do is to turn it into an active activity, ok? And this means adding some verbal production, some speaking, ok? And you can do this in lots of fun ways. So for example, one way is to pause the television program and simply repeat the last phrase or two that you've heard. Again this is a way of transforming a passive receptive viewing of a television program into something, which is more active and expressive as well. Or another thing you could do is listen to a scene a couple of times and then take on the part of a character and say out loud the lines that the actor would be saying, you can do it with the audio or without the audio if you feel more confident. These are all ways of making sure that your learning is rich and that your learning is deep as well.

To go back to the football analogy, they say that a footballer's brain is in his feet, you know, and in fact that's very true, it's the same thing with a language learner. Your brain is partly in your lips and your tongue and your mouth and it's really important to use those muscles and to use those neural networks in order to create learning and to improve performance.

**Ivan:** Yeah, I totally agree with you!

**Jeremy:** So these are couple of examples of the practice chapters. When you may be still at home, not ready to go out and perform and speak English freely, but once you got a good practice then you really need to immerse yourself in a language. And so In the book as well I talk about some creative ways to apply what you practice, ok, in real life situations. So it could be meeting with native speakers in your city, it could be organising maybe a meet up with other English learners, it could be even travelling to London or to New York or to another English speaking city to really have an opportunity to speak English in a wild as it were.

**Ivan:** To be immersed in the environment and...

**Jeremy:** Absolutely, absolutely. And I explain in the book that doesn't mean simply being in London or being in Edinburgh or New York or in Washington D.C. it means interacting with people, it means being in contact with people. It means being in difficult situations as well, you know, challenging yourself to communicate, to relate to express yourself.

**Ivan:** I know that for the purpose of writing the book you interviewed several people, people who have some experience in learning or teaching English maybe. Is there anything you have learned from these people about English learning?

**Jeremy:** Yeah! I learned a lot during while I was writing the book and while I was interviewing other teacher, other bloggers about English learning. There're lots of lots of things, for example there is a guy called Giuseppe who teaches English on YouTube and he is very interested in identities, for example. And I found this very interesting. That in order to speak English, well he believes and I think it's absolutely convincing, you not only have to engage in a technical aspect of learning new words and new phrases, which is something I'm very interested in, but you also in some way need to take on the identity and a culture on a English speaker. I think it's a very, very powerful idea. In other words, don't just speak English but drink tea as well. Drink a cup of tea.

**Ivan:** With milk, right? :)

**Jeremy:** Another piece of advice, which comes to mind, another Italian guy called Claudio who developed an app called Bliu Bliu. And we talked about this earlier, his advice was really consistency. So a magic ingredient is getting up every day and doing something, not letting days and weeks and months pass by. And if they do you simply have to wake up and be determined to get back into the good habit of learning every single day because, as I said before, learning English is about building up all sorts of skills and ingredients and muscles and you can only do that gradually with constant effort. So I think that stuck out as a great advice.

**Ivan:** Dedicating for example one hour a day to practice.

**Jeremy:** Sure. Even if it's ten minutes, five minutes, you know, the important thing is to insert to introduce that daily habit into your repertoire of habits, you know. You have a habit of cleaning

your teeth or going to the bath, your coffee, or going to the gym, whatever it is, whatever you do daily, learning English, practicing English, speaking English has to in some way be part of that repertoire of daily habits.

**Ivan:** Yeah, I agree. And it's great when we can somehow connect it with a fun activity like you mentioned for example watching movies in English, you know.

**Jeremy:** Yes, absolutely! You know, start with something which is fun, start with something, which comes easily, start with something, which fits in your life. If you never watch television because you don't like television, there's no point in thinking that you're going to have success through that, you know. If you spend five hours a day in your car because you're a salesman, well, try a podcast, if you love reading, try a book, you know.

**Ivan:** Right. Many people ask me the one simple question. It's like a problem of everyone, everyone is struggling with. People have problems with remembering vocabulary. They write me emails like for example: *"Ivan, how should I learn English vocabulary and not forget the new words?"* Do you have any suggestion to English learners, because it seems like a really huge problem everyone's experiencing?

**Jeremy:** Yeah, yeah. So this is another chapter of the book, actually in the practice section. And I know it's a big problem, again here there is not a simple solution. I'm a fan of a **spaced repetition**; I am sure you're familiar with this idea.

**Ivan:** No, I'm not. Spaced repetition?

**Jeremy:** Alright, **spaced repetition**. So this is the fancy term of something which I'm sure you've heard of. So this is basically idea that in order to learn words, at least in the beginning is to, let's say write them down on a flash card, basically you got a classic flash card on a piece of paper and on a one side you write a word in English and on the other side you write maybe the translation in your own language or you draw a picture or you write a definition or you write a phrase in English with the target word missing, the word you want to learn... missing... Anything that makes you think of that word. So you got two sides and with this flash card, again you have to turn into an active expressive activity. So that means looking at the clue or the definition or the picture, so let's say it's a picture of a fish, a very simple example, because you can't remember the word fish. Okay, very easy example. So you look at the picture of the fish and you say out loud, it must be out loud, you say 'fish' or maybe you don't because you got a bad memory, you say *"Oh, yeah, what is it? It's that thing, it's that thingy which a... It's a ... What is it? Pish, is it tish..."* Okay? And this is one, one item. The idea is that you have lots of flash cards of lots of words and lots of phrases and that often, hopefully more than once a day you will be looking through these flash cards and trying to remember and use to say out loud all of these words. So this is the beginning. Spaced repetition is a way of helping you to really consolidate the memory. So at first you want to review these words once a day even more than that, but as you become more familiar with these words, as you are able to remember them and to say them that repetition will become less frequent. So the idea is you move the flash cards gradually between different stages. I use envelopes, so just normal paper envelopes, ok, and you can have... you can decide on your own system but something like as much as possible is your first stage, so several times a day. Then you can reduce to once a day and maybe three times a week, then maybe twice a week, once a week, twice a month, once a month, and so on. So you might have seven or eight different envelopes and every time you successfully perform

on a word, you move it to the next envelope. Okay? If you repeat a word and... if you review a word and you are not successful then it gets moved back in envelope, to a more intense, more frequent stage.

And so obviously, easy words like fish and apple and cat and dog, normally they will progress more quickly through the stages. Strange words and strange phrases, which are more difficult because they are less frequent or simply because they're tricky and they're more difficult to remember they will progress more slowly; and this system, I believe, is much, much better than a list. Often students will have an exercise book and they will write down words in their exercise book. The problem with an exercise book is that it doesn't allow words to travel at different speeds to be memorised at different speed and really doesn't allow you to perform that verbal behaviour of looking at the picture or the word in your language or the definition on one side of the card trying to say the word out loud and then checking by turning over the card. When you have a list of words in an exercise book you can stare at it, you can look at it for hours but you won't be doing anything, there won't be any active consolidation or digestion or internalisation of that word. Is that a clear explanation or is that confusing?

**Ivan:** Yeah, yeah, I understand. So it means for example that each envelope represents how the word is in the long term memory, yeah? That each envelope has different like stage in my memory.

**Jeremy:** Exactly! Let's say every envelope has a different instruction written on it. One says: "Repeat these word as much as possible", another says "Repeat once a day", another says "Repeat twice a week" let's say and of course on the envelopes, if it helps you can write the dates, ok, that you have to repeat them or you can put them on your Google calendar or your Apple calendar or whatever you use so you really are reminded to regularly repeat those words. So this is really one half, the other half of the equation is really simpler and that is, you can have the best system of spaced repetition in the world, ok, but if you are not using those words in context, in real conversations and real communication with real people, frankly, then you will forget them. Or you'll remember them but the meaning won't be fine-tuned, the meaning will be... especially of more complicated phrasal words and idioms. The meaning will be a little bit unclear in your head unless you use it in real conversation, real communication.

**Ivan:** Thank you very much! I've never heard of this approach.

**Jeremy:** OK, It's often used. This spaced repetition ... This principle is often used in these mobile applications you find Android apps and iPhone apps and ... They will represent the quiz questions for example according to a schedule. And the schedule is based on this idea of spaced repetition.

**Ivan:** Thank you very much.

**Jeremy:** Not at all. Not at all.

**Ivan:** And what would be the number one tip you would give to English learners around the world? I know it may be a tough question because you know, but if there was only one tip that you could give English learners what would that be?

**Jeremy:** Sure, sure. It's very difficult to limit it to one tip. I think if I had to give just one, I would say have fun, enjoy it, enjoy it absolutely.

**Ivan:** Great! Thank you! :)

**Jeremy:** Maybe it's easier said than done. One other thing that we tried to do in our English lessons with Moxon English more than anything, maybe even more than speaking, maybe more impulsively is putting the person at ease, making the person feel happy and comfortable with speaking English. And it's not easy because there's challenge of anxiety and fear that really is the number one piece of advice. Take a pleasure in it, enjoy it, relax and do your best.

**Ivan:** Thank you very much, Jeremy. And where can people learn more about you and about your work?

**Jeremy:** So people can find more about the Moxon English project at MoxonEnglish.com (that's MOXONEnglish.com). There's English and an Italian version of the website.

**Ivan:** Okay. Is there anything you would like to add to our interview and would you like to, you know, share something more?

**Jeremy:** No, I think that pretty much I've spoken a lot I think. About all sort of things. And you've been very kind in listening and letting me share my ideas with your audience so apart from thanking you there's nothing else I want to add.

**Ivan:** Yeah, great, so I think we can wrap it up here and thank you very much for your valuable English tips and ideas and of course your time, Jeremy. I appreciate it a lot and I believe our listeners not just enjoyed our conversation but I hope they also learned many useful tips and tips they can apply in their English learning. So thank you very much, Jeremy!

**Jeremy:** Thank you, thank you, Ivan!

## **Outro**

**Ivan:** Alright, so that was Jeremy, it was the first interview with someone who has experience in teaching English and I didn't know what to expect before. I'm so happy Jeremy joined the interview and shared his wonderful tips and ideas, I learned so much today. Thank you, Jeremy! And also thank you to all of you who listened to the show! Have a great week my friends, enjoy your life and enjoy English! See you soon in the next episode! Bye-bye!

## **Links and Resources Mentioned in This Episode:**

- [MoxonEnglish.com](https://www.moxonenglish.com)
- [Keep calm e impara l'inglese \(Keep calm and learn English book\)](#)
- [audible.com](https://www.audible.com)
- [English Success Story: Interview with Massimo from Italy \(podcast session 2\)](#)
- [shadow reading \(speech shadowing technique\)](#)
- [Bliu Bliu app](#)