

English the Smart Way

Podcast Session 5:

From adult English learner to professional English teacher in England

Show Notes: <http://englishthesmartway.com/session5>

Introduction

Ivan: Hello everyone, Ivan Ottinger here. Thank you so much for joining me here in another session of *English the Smart Way Podcast*.

Well, I can't believe that, just a few months ago, I decided to start podcasting. First I thought what a crazy idea. But you know now it's real. And even though I am still learning how to record podcast, how to edit them properly and so on, it's been a great journey. And I hope you enjoy the shows as much as I enjoy preparing them for you.

This year, we will be having many interesting people on our show and today our special guest is Yeşim Beğen from teachingboard.com. Yeşim is such an inspiration to me. She started learning English as an adult and her passion for English took her all the way to England where she did a masters degree in teaching English and today she works as a professional English teacher in the UK. She offers a wide range of lessons from general English to business English and exam preparation. Yeşim's students value the fact that English is her second language, simply because she knows what it takes to become fluent and confident in English. So without further ado, here is the interview with Yeşim Beğen from Teaching Board. Enjoy!

Interview

Ivan: Hello everyone, this is Ivan Ottinger. Let me welcome our today's guest Yeşim Beğen. Hello Yeşim and welcome to the show.

Yeşim: Hello Ivan, thank you for having me.

Ivan: Tell us a little bit about yourself so that we can know you better.

Yeşim: Sure, I am an English teacher, I have been teaching English as a foreign language for over 10 years. I live in southeast England, in Kent area which is about 2 hours from London. I'm self-employed, I work for myself, and I run my business under the name Teaching Board. If the learners are local, I offer home tuition, or organise classroom lessons if there is a group and I also teach on Skype a lot, which seems to be very popular these days.

Ivan: Thank you for the introduction Yeşim. Considering that you are not originally from UK, what were your thoughts when you first arrived to England?

Yeşim: Loved it, I loved it. I did feel like a fish out of water, cos everything was so different than what we are used to in Turkey and it's sad to say that I don't have that excitement anymore, it is like this is home too, that's home and this is home, but it was quite exciting,

Ivan: What did you find the most difficult on your way of becoming a fluent English speaker?

Yeşim: What did I find most difficult? I mean like I said the beginning was really difficult, no chance of speaking Turkish, but I loved the language was so much that you know there was nothing, I mean there were difficulties, writing was difficult. But then, writing in Turkish is difficult too for me, cos I wasn't... you know, if you don't have the practice.

Ivan: So you liked the English so much that you didn't think of English as something difficult.

Yeşim: No not at all, for me the difficulty was having the opportunity. not anything to do with the language itself. But then, you know no books, no internet, no computer, nothing, the only thing you could do was to go to a language school, which is quite expensive or you know any private school, and I was thinking, well, you can't learn it in a month or two even if you go to a language school and I said 'all my friends can speak, what do I do now?' I said 'I have to go to England'. I was working part time in fast food restaurants, McDonalds, KFC etc, and I was doing other jobs as well, and I saved enough money to pay the agent to send me here as an au-pair. And then you don't waste an opportunity when you wait for it that long.

Ivan: Yeah you are right. You know and everyone listening to our interview can hear your clear pronunciation. When we first talked to each other, I didn't know that you are not native English speaker. So could you please share with us what do you think has helped you the most with your pronunciation?

Yeşim: If you are concentrating on speaking more than anything, you concentrate on the sound. So I think that helped. I was sometimes recording my voice. I would pick up a material, that I could also have the script of, I would listen to the original first, and then I would record my speaking - I would record myself reading the same script and I would compare and the first few recordings, God I hated what I heard. It was awful, also you know, you don't like listening to yourself. In fact, I do that with my students, and they're shocked, they've never heard themselves before.

Ivan: You can see their faces...

Yeşim: Yeah yeah, and they're like 'Can you please delete that?' and I send them a copy and I say 'now I am deleting', but it helps, because then you see how you're speaking, then you see where you are getting the pronunciation right and where you are getting it wrong. So I think that helped. And also I was a part of a theatre group in Istanbul, and the language that they used was English and there were lots of expats, we would do musicals. I was listening and acting out, or reading, even if not out loud, in my head. I think that helped, cos that kind of sorts out your intonation, and your, the rhythm that you need to have, if that makes sense.

Ivan: So it is like, you are also not thinking about it, because you are in the state of like performing, and, you are in the flow

Yeşim: Yeah, yeah. And in fact, you don't even think you are performing, if you can relax enough, you are living it. And then I got feedback from friends, if I mispronounced words here and there, they would correct me. That also helped...That's why I was saying, do welcome all the feedback, because you need it. You know that is useful, you can't just say, 'oh it's too embarrassing, I don't

want to be corrected) If you find somebody who will correct you, you know, just grab them and say 'Hey thank you and say 'do correct me'!

Ivan: And you know, when my subscribers reach out to me, they usually ask me for help with their English. And over the months I have noticed one specific problem that many English learners describe to me. So let's say they are in a conversation with another person and they suddenly can't remember the specific word they want and need to use in the sentence. So they get stuck in their speaking. Did you experience anything like this?

Yeşim: Did I experience that? I did, but I kind of learned to simplify when I wanted to express something. Like, I wouldn't hang up to an individual word if I couldn't remember it quickly enough. It wouldn't bother me.

Ivan: So you just moved on and...

Yeşim: Yeah, I would quickly move on to something that I could use, maybe it wouldn't be exactly the same as what I wanted to say, but it would be good enough, still. And I think, if I worry about finding that particular word, that stops me. But you make the decision in a split second, and you move on to something that you know you can say. You also make a mental note. So probably next time you speak about the same subject, it is quite possible that you will remember the word.

Ivan: That's a really interesting point. Yeah, I've never thought about this.

Yeşim: And how does that work with you? Do you want to remember the exact word and you stop yourself?

Ivan: Yeah you are right,

Yeşim: and then all of a sudden, you become a foreigner to the language, yeah?

Ivan: Yeah, you are right. I know, and I keep thinking 'what was that word? the conversation is like paused and I am just thinking and I am immersed in my own thinking and I am not realising that you know that the conversation is going further.

Yeşim: Or the person is looking at you, and waiting when you'll come back to the world and join the conversation.

Ivan: Then suddenly and then, you know all these emotions come, you know that I start thinking about 'Ahh, I just can't speak English, and you know I become stressed at that moment, and all of this makes my speech even worse, because,

Yeşim: Because you become too self-conscious. There the problem is not your English, the problem is the process that you are going through, because you cut the flow, by being perfectionist, by saying that 'No, I must find the correct word', and that is being too hard on yourself.

And as our director would say in the theatre, he would say: 'If you forget your lines, and I did, I didn't even have many lines, I was just supposed to act the pretty girl who sings a little bit and that was it, and I forgot my line. And the other leading character he dragged back me on the stage and he said 'oh do you mean bla bla bla...' and I said 'YES!' ... this is not a rehearsal, this is in front of the audience, real. In fact I think it was the recorded version, we had like 4-5 performances and

one of them was recorded and I think that was the recorded version. You know, so embarrassing... Yeah. The director would say, 'if you forget your line, make up, you know, move on, do something, continue smiling, do not panic, because the audience don't know the script. Other than yourself, nobody will judge you, or your friends who you put in trouble. Because when you forget your line, you put them in trouble as well, cos they don't know what to do. 'So Yeşim is not delivering her line, what to do now!'

Ivan: Was this performance in English, or was it in Turkish?

Yeşim: In English. That was in English. It was so much fun.

Ivan: So you think it has helped you in becoming a better English speaker?

Yeşim: Yeah, yeah. But it was on and off. It wasn't something that I was doing all the time. It's a combination of things, but if you ask me, it was love and passion more than anything. If you really want something, when you have the opportunity, you don't take it for granted. You make the most of it, and you thoroughly enjoy it.

Ivan: Wonderful. It is interesting, because two weeks ago, I applied for like a drama course, here in Bratislava.

Yeşim: Lovely!

Ivan: It is not anything like professional. but it is in the theatre. But it is not in English, it is in Slovak, but you know I was interested in something like, some experience like this. So maybe in two weeks I am starting the course, and every Friday for two hours in the evening for 3 months.

Yeşim: Brilliant. You will love it Ivan, because the other thing we're talking about the language aspect of it. But the other thing, you'll feel freer, Because when they give you a role, when you are practising, you become, I don't know a horrible person for example. You know you have to act someone who is absolutely horrible, so mean, so naive, someone so stupid. You know, it could be any kind of person. And you kind of find a piece of it in you, but you exaggerate it. You know, sometimes we want to be silly, but we don't have the chance, cos it is not accepted. When you are acting, you let it out. Sometimes you know you want to be so angry and again, socially not acceptable, you know you can't do it in public, and in the role, you get so angry and you are horrible, this and that, and you punch a person in the face for the role, and then...

Ivan: So it is expected from us as actors, I would say, yeah, to behave in a strange way, in unusual ways?

Yeşim: Yeah but we all have those elements and characteristics in us already, but when we let it out through acting, I don't know what your experience will be like, but I felt so much healthier as a person and a lot happier. Cos as if I got a chance to express those sides, those parts of me. Does that make sense? I don't know if I sound crazy now.

Ivan: No no no no, I understand what you mean, yeah. It's like, drama, it gave you the opportunity to behave in any way without anyone judging you.

Yeşim: Exactly, yeah, spot on, yeah.

Ivan: Thank you very much for sharing your interesting experiences with drama school with us. And so, if we go back to your teaching experience, what do you think is the biggest problem or problems that the learners struggle with when they speak English?

Yeşim: Good question. I think there are quite a few things that many learners seem to have difficulty with. But perhaps the biggest issue is confidence. Learners don't feel confident when they speak English.

Ivan: How can we become more confident in English speaking?

Yeşim: Ok, there are things that you could do from the outside by changing your body language, and there are things that you could do from the inside, by changing the way you see yourself and your English.

Ivan: So what can we do with our body language for example?

Yeşim: Smiling would be a good start, because it is very difficult, almost impossible to smile and think negatively about anything at the same time. And generally the problem with confidence is, learners begin to lose confidence when they start worrying about their English or whether they worry about what kind of impression they're giving. But if you smile, it makes it difficult for you to think negatively. So even though it is indirect, it still helps you with your confidence because you are smiling and that changes your psychology without trying.

Another thing that I could recommend, make sure that you have an eye contact with the person that you are speaking with. This is generally what happens: You are speaking with somebody in English, and you begin to worry about your vocabulary or whether you're using the right grammar and you completely forget the person who's there listening to you. And you look at the ceiling, you look to your left and you look to your right, because your mind is busy trying to find the perfect word or the right sentence structure. And then you come to realise that you completely forgot the person who is there, and that realisation makes you feel less confident. Because you know that's what you're not supposed to be doing. So make sure that you keep an eye contact with whoever you are speaking with. because that will help you concentrate on the meaning that you wish to convey rather than your individual words or whether your speaking is mistake free.

Ivan: So it helps the get our focus where it needs to be.

Yeşim: Exactly, yeah.

Yeşim: And this is not actually body language, but I think it would be good to mention here. Make sure that you're speaking at a pace that is comfortable to you. Some learners want to speak quickly, because they feel they will be fluent if they're speaking quickly. But that creates anxiety, plus if you are speaking too fast, you don't pronounce the words properly. And then you realise that you are not pronouncing properly and again that realisation kills your confidence. And anxiety doesn't help. But similarly, if you are speaking too slowly, that is not very good either, because that gives you too much time to analyse your vocabulary and grammar, and that's the point where again you know, you question too much. So make sure that you are speaking at a pace that is truly comfortable.

Ivan: Yeah I really agree with you. You also mentioned that we can work on our mindset to improve our confidence.

Yeşim: Yes, you can also change the way you see yourself and your English and that can help you with your confidence tremendously.

I think one of the biggest issues with confidence that I see in my students is they feel like an outsider. They feel that English doesn't belong to them. For that reason they hold themselves back. But it's quite interesting because according to statistics, there are more non-native speakers of English in the world than native speakers of English. To put it differently, if you are using English as your second language you are in fact in the majority, not minority. So don't feel like an outsider, because you are not. You are in the majority. And regardless of your current level, English belongs to you as much as everyone else. It is for all of us. As soon as you start learning English, it becomes a part of you. So don't feel like an outsider, be in the game.

Ivan: Yes, it is really a good point.

Yeşim: The other thing to help you with confidence. It's got to do with expectations. Don't expect to know everything, you don't have to and you don't need to. But let me give you an example. One of my students once said that she wanted to be able to talk about economy in English and I wondered and I asked if she was able to talk about it in her first language, the stock market, and exchange rates, and the Chinese growth and all that. She said 'absolutely not, I have no idea, I don't understand anything when I listen to the finance news'. In most cases, if you don't need it in your first language, you don't need it in your second language. So don't come up with some unrealistic, unnecessary scenarios as if you have to be able to talk about everything. Because you don't.

Ivan: Sometimes we are too hard to ourselves, and expect too much from ourselves.

Yeşim: Exactly. Your learning objectives need to be relevant to you, and they need to be realistic and they need to be about what you need.

Ivan: Yeah, something that we can use in our real lives.

Yeşim: Yeah. And another thing. Your self-talk is very important. Some learners say 'I'm sorry but my English is not good enough', and they use this as their opening line to any conversation that they have in English. Don't do that to yourself. The person in front of you doesn't think that your English is not good enough. But you almost condition yourself that that conversation is not going to be very good in terms of the quality of your English.

Don't think of English as a difficult project either, because it is not. Anyone can learn a second language and you need to be a good friend to yourself. You need to say things like 'My English is getting better all the time. Every day I learn something. Ok, I make mistakes, but I also get lots of things right. You know, be kind to yourself. In fact, you know, it is not even about being kind. See the big picture. Yes you are making mistakes, but it is true that you are also getting lots of things right. So give yourself a pat on the back. Say 'Well done!' You know, you are doing it.

Ivan: Yeah, you are right. You know when I receive emails from listeners, many times they start the email with words like: 'Sorry Ivan, my English is not very good.' then they continue the messages, but almost every time, I can see that their English is quite good, and they use proper grammar.

Yeşim: But they can't see that.

Ivan: They just are hard to themselves.

Yeşim: Yeah, It is not very healthy, I mean I know, I can see where they're coming from, but this is basically apologising in advance in case they make mistakes. But that's not the point. If the learner feels the need to say a sentence like that, it means they are too worried about their English. But we need to see the big picture. English is a tool through which we communicate with the world and we express ourselves, and we understand other people. Your English doesn't have to be perfect. That's not the point of learning a second language. You use it to communicate. I mean it is important that you become aware of your mistakes so that you can improve and become better at English, but that is the journey of learning. When you look at it from the communication point of view, it really doesn't matter.

Ivan: Yeah, you are right.

Yeşim: So feel good about your English, regardless of your level, I think feeling good is so important, cos when we don't feel good, when we're questioning too much, that kills our confidence, but then the thing is when a learner doesn't feel very confident, he or she holds himself back and misses the opportunities to practise.

Ivan: Yeah, I can completely relate. I had the same experience, I was always questioning myself, you know, if I make mistake, if I am not making mistake.

Yeşim: and by the time you have the courage to put a sentence together, maybe the others already moved onto another topic and the opportunity is gone! So don't wait too long. Say as you feel, say as you think.

Ivan: Yeah, you are right, yeah.

Yeşim: We are all in the same boat. You know, we all make mistakes, in fact, native speakers of English make mistakes. They make tons of mistakes, they use the irregular forms as if they are regular. They put -ed. Or you know, currently there is a lot of confusion whether to use the adjective form or adverb form of a word. There is this language laziness, especially in the new generations. They like to use the adjective forms, and some criticise it, but on the other hand, you know, language is an organic thing, if there are enough people to ignore the adverb forms, you know, there might be a time where we just stop using them, and that would be grammatically correct perhaps that time. Native speakers of English make mistakes, so it's fine.

Ivan: Yeah, thank you very much Yeşim. I've got a final question for you. It's - What would be your number one tip for English learners around the world?

Yeşim: Just one? Can I give two or three tips?

Ivan: Yes, sure, you can give...

Yeşim: As many as I like? We will need another recording, another interview for that!

Ok, I would like to say that it is so important for the learners to trust their ability to learn a second language successfully. So do not question whether you could do it or not. Anyone can do it. If you don't quit, you're definitely improving every day. You don't have to be talented, you don't have to have the 'language learning genes' as some people refer to it. There is no such a thing. Human beings are naturally linguistic. We are able to learn other languages, second, third. It is only a question of taking it one step at a time, learning something little every day, and not making a big

deal out of it. Learning a language is not rocket science. So don't question your ability, because questioning creates the biggest blocks to our learning. That would be one of my tips. And the other one is, have fun, enjoy your journey. Concentrate on the journey rather than the end goal. If you love the process of learning, it is a lot more likely that you will be very successful. Because we have very little difficulty achieving the things we truly love and enjoy.

Ivan: Thank you very much for all these tips Yeşim.

Yeşim: My pleasure.

Ivan: Where can people learn more about you and your work.

Yeşim: They can contact me via email, or telephone or Facebook. They can find my details on my website, which is www.teachingboard.com

Ivan: Thank you. Thank you very much, I really enjoyed this interview, thank you for all the inspiration and tips, and your time, that you have taken to prepare for this interview. I can see so many great things you said, and it will definitely help many many people.

Yeşim: Thank you for inviting me to have this interview. I feel that this is a great opportunity connect with more people, more learners, yeah, thank you.

Ivan: Thank you.

Outro

Ivan: Alright, thank you so much for listening to our interview with Yeşim. I hope you enjoyed it and learned some new and useful tips you can start using today. As you can see, Yeşim is a proof that even if you start learning English as an adult, you can still acquire excellent fluency and brilliant pronunciation in your English speaking. If you are interested in having Skype lessons with Yeşim, visit her website at teachingboard.com.

And of course you can find the full interview transcript and all show notes at englishthesmartway.com/session5.

Don't hesitate and leave a comment there of what you think of today's episode. Thanks again for listening, enjoy English and see you soon. Bye bye.

Links and Resources Mentioned in This Episode:

- TeachingBoard.com