

## 703. Walaa from Syria - WISBOLEP Competition Winner (Transcript)

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[00:00:00] **Luke Thompson:** Hello, everybody in podcast-land. I hope you're doing okay today. Here is episode number 703 and before we kick off properly, I just wanted to let the premium subscribers know that I've uploaded parts five and six of premium series 27 and you can now find them in the app and on the website. PDFs are available for both parts as usual. The episodes continue the error correction series, looking at a few errors, correcting them, and then using those errors as a jumping off point for some language practice, with the usual vocabulary and grammar tips, plus some pronunciation drills. Essentially what I'm doing there is not just correcting errors, but upgrading your English in various ways. If you'd like to access those episodes, or you just want more information about my premium content, go to [teacherluke.co.uk/premiuminfo](http://teacherluke.co.uk/premiuminfo)



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[00:01:11] Hello listeners. In this episode, you're going to listen to me talking to Walaa Mouma from Syria, who was the winner of the competition I launched at the end of last year. Just in case you don't remember or you haven't heard those episodes, the competition was called Why I Should Be On Luke's English Podcast or WISBOLEP for short.

[00:01:31] I asked listeners to send in short recordings in which they explained why they should be on the podcast and then I published the recordings and asked the audience to vote for the people they wanted to hear. The winner of that competition was Walaa, and I'm trying to pronounce her name correctly. She has taught me how to do it. There's a little glottal stop at the end of the word, Walaa.

[00:01:53] Anyway, so the winner of the competition was Walaa by quite a large margin, and so I [00:02:00] interviewed her last week. It was really great to talk to her and I'm very happy to present this conversation to you in this episode.

[00:02:08] By the way, I'm also going to publish conversations with a few of the other people who entered the competition, pretty much the top four or five runners up, and those episodes will arrive slowly over the next few weeks or months, but Walaa being the winner is the first person to be featured on the podcast.

[00:02:27] So let me tell you about Walaa Mouma, the competition winner. Walaa has a very interesting story, which she hinted at in her two minute competition entry. It involves growing up in Syria during the time of the civil war, which as you can imagine, was very hard for her and her family. We don't dwell on the conflict too much in our conversation, but you can imagine how difficult it was to be displaced from her home and to live with the uncertainty, danger and fear of [00:03:00] war as an ever present concern in her life.

[00:03:03] But despite these hardships Walaa doubled down on her studies, especially English and emerged as something of a success story academically, but also in terms of the real world skills of being able to use English for communication, which she managed to develop. Walaa is now living in England and is studying a master's degree in Teaching

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English to Speakers of Other Languages at Warwick University, and she's absolutely loving it.

[00:03:33] I went into our conversation wanting to find out all about Walaa's story, how she dealt with the challenges I mentioned and how she got her English to be as good as it is today.

[00:03:44] I'm always inspired by people's language learning stories. They show us that people can really improve if they put their heart into it and take certain steps to make it happen.

[00:03:55] I really hope that you can take some inspiration from this episode, as well as pick up a few [00:04:00] specific practical tips for how to improve your English on your own. So I'll just stop talking now and I'll let you listen to my conversation with WISBOLEP competition winner Walaa Mouma from Syria, and here she is.

[00:04:15] So, hello Walaa.

[00:04:21] **Walaa Mouma:** Hello, how are you doing?

[00:04:23] **Luke Thompson:** Fine. How are you doing?

[00:04:25] **Walaa Mouma:** I'm doing amazing. I mean, since I'm talking to you, I must be very happy.

[00:04:31] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah? I suppose so! I hope so! Congratulations on winning the competition.

[00:04:38] **Walaa Mouma:** Thank you. Thank you very much, and I want to thank the people who voted for me wholeheartedly because they gave me this chance and I'm so happy for it.

[00:04:48] **Luke Thompson:** Well, you deserve it. You're in England at the moment. Aren't you? Are you in Warrick?

[00:04:55] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh, yeah, actually I'm in Coventry, but at the University of  
[00:05:00] Warwick.

[00:05:00] **Luke Thompson:** Now, I'm going to ask you about your life story, Walaa in this conversation. I'm going to ask you about growing up, the sort of hardships that you've experienced, and learning English, and then ultimately coming to the UK and studying for a master's and stuff.

[00:05:19] Before we do that, I just want to ask you what life is like in England. What's it like living in Coventry or Warwick or Warwickshire?

[00:05:29] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh yes. Actually, it's been always my dream to come to the UK and to study here. But there are lots of things that are not normal, let's say because of the COVID-19 things.

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[00:05:40] So I was expecting myself to go and visit lots of places and explore different things in the UK, but because of the COVID, I have to stay indoors, but I'm enjoying a walk in the evening every now and then, because The University of Warwick is so rich with beautiful [00:06:00] greeny places and I can walk to nearby places like Kenilworth, Lemington Spa, even the city centre of Coventry.

[00:06:10] I love the weather. So many people complain about the weather, but I love it because I love cold weather, rainy, I don't mind if it rains all the time. I love this. What do you think about the weather?

[00:06:24] **Luke Thompson:** Well, I don't mind, you know, I don't mind. What I don't like, what I don't like in England is the winter. The winter can be very long. It can be very dark and cold and a bit miserable.

[00:06:37] **Walaa Mouma:** Some people think it's dreary, but for me, no, I think it's romantic and it gives me time to think about myself and enjoy this.

[00:06:47] **Luke Thompson:** That's wonderful. That's so nice to hear. And it actually reminds me of some of the students I used to meet from the Arab-speaking world, from various places, and they were always the ones who would say, [00:07:00] "No, we love the weather. It's amazing. I love it when it rains". And I'm just like, YES!!

[00:07:05] **Walaa Mouma:** I mean, one of my friends told me, I mean, he was in love with the rainy weather and stuff when he was in Syria but when he came to the UK, he told me, no, he stopped loving that.

[00:07:15] And he said, the same case will be with you. But now I've been here for like almost four months, but I'm still in love with this weather.

[00:07:26] **Luke Thompson:** That's that's music to my ears. It really is. Are you on your own basically? Did you just come to England on your own?

[00:07:35] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh yes. There are lots of other people who were elected to the scholarship I am in, but we live in different buildings. I live on-campus, like student accommodation, so I got to meet new people. And luckily, I don't know, I think it's a good thing that I live with people from different countries and I don't have any Arabs with me. So I'm exposed to new [00:08:00] cultures right now. I have in the same building I live in, friends from Indonesia, Russia, China, Britain, and Italy as well.

[00:08:11] Oh, Germany as well.

[00:08:12] **Luke Thompson:** Wow.

[00:08:13] **Walaa Mouma:** So yeah, lots of cultures. So I'm learning a lot from them. At the beginning it was difficult, because, you know, you don't know how to express yourself. You don't know if you said something and it was not acceptable by the other person. And then you need to, you know, mind the way you speak.

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[00:08:30] But now I'm learning a lot from them and it's an enriching experience because you, I mean, we are, we, people need to grow and this happens when we connect and communicate with people from different cultures and different countries, right?

[00:08:46] **Luke Thompson:** Absolutely. Yeah, definitely. Wow. So you're getting a real international, a fully international experience with all these other people.

[00:08:54] Have you had a chance to actually sort of hang out with any British people very much?

[00:09:00] [00:08:58] **Walaa Mouma:** Actually I have a friend called Katie. So I'm saying hi to Katie! [Hi Katie!!] She is from Coventry and she's with me in the same course. So she takes me, like before the tier 5 in Coventry, she took me to the city center of Coventry and she started telling me stories about the historical places in Coventry, like the cathedral and the statue of Lady Godiva and the story about the peeping Tom and everything and every time she takes me in a tour to Kenilworth where there's a very old castle, she would tell me stories. So, this is amazing because sometimes you see people who know the area, but they don't have lots of things to tell about the history.

[00:09:43] Right?

[00:09:44] **Luke Thompson:** Yes.

[00:09:44] **Walaa Mouma:** But she is so knowledgeable. She's amazing, and I'm learning from her a lot of things. I mean, although I studied English literature in Syria, when I came to England, it's different. Like, the actual, everyday life is different. [00:10:00] So getting in contact with real British people teaches me lots of things.

[00:10:07] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah it's the best way. It can be difficult to find people to make friends with, but when you do, it's brilliant. It's like scratching below the surface and all that sort of thing. So you're hanging out in like Lemington Spa and Coventry and Warwick and places like that. So that's pretty much where I grew up.

[00:10:24] **Walaa Mouma:** I think I knew once, maybe from the email you sent to me.

[00:10:30] **Luke Thompson:** Yes. I think, probably. Yeah so I went to college in Lemington Spa for a year and I lived down the road in, um, well, I won't say exactly where it is, but it's sort of on the border between Warwickshire and Solihull and yeah, I love that part of the world.

[00:10:48] So all right now, this is where I read out a paragraph of text that I wrote earlier as a sort of second introduction sort of thing, but it won't be 15 minutes long [00:11:00] I promise. So, Walaa, you're someone who's... and by the way, am I saying your name correctly? Because whenever I say your name, it sounds like a French word.

[00:11:09] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh, okay. Let me tell you about my name. It's "Walaa" and it ends with a glottal sound. So, yes. And Walaa means loyalty.

[00:11:21] **Luke Thompson:** Oh, that's nice.

[00:11:23] "Walaa", like that?

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[00:11:25] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh yes.

[00:11:26] **Luke Thompson:** "Walaa", okay. Uh, okay, good. So, Walaa, no, that's not how it, that's not it. Walaa, that's it!

[00:11:36] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes! That's brilliant.

[00:11:38] **Luke Thompson:** So, Walaa, you are someone who's grown up in a very complex situation, I think, I mean, I don't know everything about your life. I'm just basing all of this on the, what is it? The one minute or two minute recording you sent, but a complex situation you've faced many challenges. You've faced setbacks, hardships, and yet you have managed to emerge as a successful, positive and [00:12:00] inspiring young woman.

[00:12:01] This sounds cheesy now.

[00:12:03] But you've had various academic successes, including the fact that you graduated as a top student, and then you won a coveted scholarship, which I think led you to study at Warwick University. So I'd like to, I'd like to know about your story. I'd like to know about your life experience and how you managed to improve your English to its current level.

[00:12:24] Okay. So, where should we start? Where, where did you grow up?

[00:12:28] **Walaa Mouma:** I grew up in Syria and just for the people who do not know where Syria is, it's located in southwestern Asia, in the middle East, on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It's a very beautiful country. I grew up in the capital, which has Damascus and it's a very old city, one of the oldest cities in the middle East, and in the heart of Damascus there's an old town, which is a place that I love and adore. So it's a beautiful [00:13:00] country and it's full with history and exoticism, and everything was all right in Syria. It's been like a lovely life before 2011 because in 2011, the war was launched and lots of people needed to flee the country and others were displaced.

[00:13:23] I myself was displaced for like kind of three months and also at one point, I lost lots of loved ones in Syria, and that really affected my study because the war started when I was in my ninth grade and that was very difficult because sometimes before the final exams, I would be told that maybe I will not have that chance to go and, you know, have my exams because of the war and things.

[00:13:53] And then the next day I discovered that, oh, now I can go. So you feel that there are lots of contradictions that [00:14:00] you can't understand and you would be expecting that at any moment you might, you yourself might, might, you know, die or lose some of your close ones.

[00:14:13] So it's very difficult at that stage, but I needed to be very strong. So I remember the difficulties. I mean, the, the difficult time was when I was displaced, because at that point it was the first time I leave my area and I was the kind of person who is not really used to connecting with lots of people but to be honest, that was like a double-edged sword. It was negative, but at the same time was positive because it gave me a chance to connect with people and, you know, make some new friends and...

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[00:14:49] **Luke Thompson:** You just heard me go [intake of breath] as if I was about to start a question. Sorry, carry on. I always do that, but I was going to say something, but you hadn't finished. So do continue, please.

[00:14:59] **Walaa Mouma:** Thank [00:15:00] you. So that was a critical stage stage in my life. And then when I came back to my area, I was in high school and in Syria the high school is a critical age in any student's life because it decides which faculty you're going to study in. So there's lots of pressure and stress and you feel that you need to do the, more than 100% in order to be satisfied.

[00:15:25] So I was working very hard because I wanted to study English at university.

[00:15:30] **Luke Thompson:** When you say you were displaced, can you give us an idea of what that really means? So, you were living in Damascus.

[00:15:37] **Walaa Mouma:** I was living in Damascus, which is the capital and I needed to move to the countryside of Damascus because the area was not really safe because of the war. So I needed to move to another area. So everything was closed in my original area, schools and everything, almost everyone left. So I moved to a different [00:16:00] area and there we didn't have a house of our own. We didn't have, like, my family didn't have like stable job or anything and I was just a student and I'm the eldest amongst my siblings. So it was difficult in terms of like, you feel all the time that you're in tension and you are under pressure. And at the same time, you need to study and you need to socialise, and at that stage I was thinking, Oh, I don't want to continue my studies because I think I'm going back home in a couple of days, and then the couple of days became a couple of months and you know? So that they didn't last for a short period of time. It was long and I needed to go on, otherwise I think at this stage I would have been a girl who achieved nothing in her life.

[00:16:49] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah, so much uncertainty. Okay. So you were displaced for a, for a number of months and you, you then did come back to your home, did you?

[00:16:58] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes.

[00:16:58] **Luke Thompson:** Okay. Was that then a [00:17:00] bit more normal or was it still a kind of dangerous period?

[00:17:05] **Walaa Mouma:** It was safer in terms of security and things, but at the same time, lots of things were, you know, destroyed. So just like seeing the places that were hit hurt the eyes, but in terms of like being safe, it was safer, yes. And I went back to normal. I started my high school at that stage.

[00:17:30] **Luke Thompson:** So we're talking about age... what kind of age is this? 16 or something?

[00:17:34] **Walaa Mouma:** 18-ish.

[00:17:36] **Luke Thompson:** OK. All right. So you started high school at that age and what condition was your English in at that moment?

[00:17:45] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh, at that time?

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[00:17:49] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah.

[00:17:49] **Walaa Mouma:** I couldn't speak English actually, because this is something that I'm working very hard to, which is raising people's awareness towards the importance of English because at that stage I didn't speak [00:18:00] English. I think I would count the name of, the names of songs that I knew at that stage. So it's like, my English was so poor.

[00:18:08] I could read texts in English, like as a normal school student. I could get high marks in terms of grammar and everything. But when it comes to the real communication skills, like, you know, talking to someone or listening to something and an understanding it. I didn't have any kind of that skill, you know?

[00:18:30] **Luke Thompson:** Okay. So what changed then? I mean, how did you get from that to where you are now in terms of your English level? Was there a... That's 18 years old as well. It's only four years ago, isn't it? It's only four years ago. So what, what...

[00:18:47] **Walaa Mouma:** What happened?

[00:18:48] **Luke Thompson:** What went right?

[00:18:50] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes. At that stage, I decided I wanted to study English at university because I love English, but I didn't know, at that stage, that English is [00:19:00] more than grammar.

[00:19:01] English is more than a textbook. I didn't know that when I was a high school student. So I used to get full marks. I got a full mark in my final exam in my high school. And based on that thing, I was able to apply for the English language and literature department in Damascus University.

[00:19:18] But I didn't know that English is more than that. So, my department was mainly about literature, so it's not grammar, it's not just language, [it's] literature, plays and novels and things and the lecturers were speaking all the time in English, and I was shocked at that stage because I didn't know that I was required to understand everything that's being, you know, conversed and said in English. I didn't know how to express my opinions. So I can't understand and I can't make myself understood.

[00:19:51] **Luke Thompson:** Wait a minute. What, so, you went to university and you studied English, what was it, sorry? English [00:20:00] language and literature. Okay. And at that point, so what was your level of English, would you say?

[00:20:08] **Walaa Mouma:** The thing is that when you make a placement, when you do a placement test in Syria, they don't, most of the places they, don't test your speaking skills, or listening skills. So. I don't know what my level was. I had a full mark in my high school, but this has nothing to do with whether or not you, let's say

[00:20:32] you can actually be a good student in that department. So that doesn't, a full mark in your high school, doesn't make sure that you would be doing okay at university.

[00:20:44] **Luke Thompson:** You mean to say that a full mark doesn't mean that much in terms of your actual English skills. Is that what you mean?

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[00:20:52] **Walaa Mouma:** Exactly, exactly.

[00:20:54] **Luke Thompson:** Okay.

[00:20:54] **Walaa Mouma:** Because, I mean, at school we're only tested in like reading texts [00:21:00] and answering some questions and grammar. That's it. But you might listen to something and not understand it. And if you're asked to talk about yourself, I would say at that stage, "My name is Walaa". That's it. So yeah, it was very difficult at that stage.

[00:21:19] **Luke Thompson:** So there you were, you were chucked in at the deep end with your university course where you were expected to read literature and listen to lecturers going on in English.

[00:21:30] **Walaa Mouma:** It was a paradox. Like I know deep inside that I was one of the top students in my high school and got a cool mark in English, and I'm expecting myself to be, wow, the nerd of my cohort at uni, and then, boom! I don't understand anything.

[00:21:47] **Luke Thompson:** And the others? Did the others not understand? Because it were they not the same as you? Weren't they just high school students who got good marks and then suddenly, "Aah, oh God!"

[00:21:55] yes.

[00:21:55] **Walaa Mouma:** Most of the students have the same, the same situation. That's why [00:22:00] lots of them decided to either quit or enroll in a different department or something like that.

[00:22:06] So they stopped attending lectures because attending lectures in my department is not a must. It's not mandatory. Right? So lots of them decided not to attend lectures, but in my case I would try. So I was like, "Oh, I need to work harder. I need to attend, even though I might not be understanding everything, but I'll try."

[00:22:26] So I tried and tried and tried and tried to write for example, the headlines of everything that I'm studying, the main points, the main ideas. So even though I was not really able to understand the full details, I managed to understand or get the gist, you know? And then, the head of the department. I remember that very well.

[00:22:50] Her name is Dr Rima Al-Hakim and I love her so much. She told all the students, "Do you listen to English? Listening is the [00:23:00] key. Download some podcasts from like BBC learning English and develop a habit of listening. Listen daily, it would be very difficult at the beginning, but later on, it becomes easier and easier.

[00:23:13] And you will feel that you're improving and developing your skills fast." So I listened to her and started to download lots of podcasts.

[00:23:23] In Syria there's traffic jam and streets are busy all the time. So I was downloading podcasts and instead of wasting my time, you know, hours in the bus, I would be plugging my earphones and listening to podcasts while going to university and coming back home.

[00:23:42] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah, exactly. Why not use that time for something useful?



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[00:23:46] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes, use it wisely. So I was listening and at the beginning it was difficult because I was as if listening to gibberish.

[00:23:54] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah. Gibberish. Yeah.

[00:23:55] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes. But then it became, it became like a habit. [00:24:00] I feel the thirst for knowledge, like to listen more as if it's like an ocean that I need to drink, like a drop, every drop of it. So. Yeah, it became like a habit and I was so enthusiastic about it. And now, like when I listened to people who speak in English, I feel like it's like a musical rhythm that I want to listen to more and more and more and more.

[00:24:25] **Luke Thompson:** That's very beautiful. What were you listening to? The BBC's 6 Minute English, something like that?

[00:24:31] **Walaa Mouma:** Yeah. Six Minute English, because I had like a, kind of a technique for doing that. I would first listen to the voice record, in full, even if I didn't understand anything. So I would listen once, twice, three times, and then I would read the transcript.

[00:24:48] So I won't look for the individual words at the beginning. No, I give myself some time to focus on listening skills and then I would move to the actual [00:25:00] transcript and, and see the words and listen again and try to, to read like my eyes are following the words while I'm listening to that voice record.

[00:25:10] So I can see the word and have it in my visual memory. Right? And look for the new words as well. So that was really good. And then the same, the same doctor, Dr Rima Al-Hakim advised us to apply a technique called shadowing. It's based on you listening to someone and trying to copy the way they speak. Right? So while I'm listening to a podcast or a voice record, I would try and I would be trying to imitate the native speaker, like speak in the same pace, the same pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and everything. So this will help the listener develop a better, like, better speaking skill because you're trying to speak like natives do.

[00:26:00] [00:26:00] **Luke Thompson:** Yes.

[00:26:01] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes

[00:26:02] **Luke Thompson:** This is great. This is great.

[00:26:06] You've been shadowing me recently.

[00:26:07] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes. When I knew about Luke's English podcast, I even advised my, the people who follow me on Facebook to listen to you and shadow you afterwards.

[00:26:16] **Luke Thompson:** Thanks a lot. I wonder what you've been shadowing. Like, what have I been saying? What have you been saying too?

[00:26:24] **Walaa Mouma:** Anything, anything. I would just play the voice record and try to imitate. I remember a very special podcast.

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[00:26:32] Well, okay okay. I need to tell you something first. I was using an app for practising English and I met a girl in her seventy... She's in, like she's 17 years old. She's from Algeria, and she told me, "Walaa..." that was in 2020. She told me there's a British podcast. It's called Luke's English Podcast, and it's amazing. You have to listen to it.

[00:26:56] Because I was shocked with the English level she has got, I thought she was  
[00:27:00] British. And then I knew that she's never been to the UK and she's been just like following you and listening to your podcast.

[00:27:07] **Luke Thompson:** Wow. That's amazing.

[00:27:08] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes.

[00:27:09] **Luke Thompson:** Hello 17 year-old Algerian girl! Maybe you're not 17 any more, but hello!

[00:27:15] **Walaa Mouma:** She loves you! And yes, so she told me about the podcast and when I listened, I was like, "Oh my God!" and started listening to the podcast, right from the first one, and then there was one episode in which you were saying "You might be listening to me right now wondering, 'how didn't I know about this podcast before?'"

[00:27:38] Yes!

[00:27:39] So that bit was my favourite. I would repeat it over and over again. I was like, "Wow, Luke, you could know this a long time. You could predict that some, at some point in time someone would be listening to you and regret not having the opportunity or the chance to know about you in the past.

[00:27:58] **Luke Thompson:** You know, that's one of the most [00:28:00] common things that people say to me, they write to me and they say, "I've just found your podcast on Spotify and I've just realised you've been doing this for like nearly 12 years", and then they say, "Oh, I'm devastated or gutted that I couldn't discover you earlier.

[00:28:17] Yeah, it must be quite a common thing, but oh I'm glad, I'm very, very glad, Walaa that I actually got through to you there.

[00:28:25] That's what I'm always trying to do, especially in the early part of an episode. I really just want to grab someone's attention. I just really want to, kind of like, "Hey you!", you know, like put my hand through the internet and grab someone by the lapels and go, "Are you actually listening?" But it works apparently because you were listening.

[00:28:44] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes, and I would be happy because like your podcasts are very entertaining. You don't just feel that they're informative and that's it. No, you enjoy, you find them interesting. You laugh, you, you just like feel it. And also you get to know more about  
[00:29:00] cultural things and about what's happening around in the world.

[00:29:04] So it's, it's interesting and informative at the same time.

[00:29:09] **Luke Thompson:** Well, that's the plan. Thanks.

[00:29:11] **Walaa Mouma:** Pleasure.

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[00:29:12] **Luke Thompson:** Okay. So you're, you're sort of like 18, 19 starting to get used to all the English that you were being exposed to at university, and you're starting to use podcasts based on the advice that you got. So did you find after doing these exercises, and it's very impressive that you basically said to yourself, "Right, I'm going to do this and I'm thirsty for knowledge", and you looked at the ocean and you thought "I will drink this", and in fact, not only that you thought "I want to drink this". I can't wait to, to consume all of this. Was there a point when things started to feel different in terms of, you know, your English abilities?

[00:29:50] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes. Actually, towards the end of the second semester, in my first year. A lot of colleagues of mine started to ask me, "Walaa, are [00:30:00] you enrolling in like private classes or something like that?" because they felt that I'm improving. At that stage I was brave enough to participate in lectures and speak, although I was not that fluent. Right? And my pronunciation was not that good, but I had the courage to try, because if you don't try, you never know.

[00:30:23] And at that stage, I was convinced that my English is excellent and I want to participate. I didn't know the troubles I was having at that point.

[00:30:31] **Luke Thompson:** Oh, you didn't even know.

[00:30:32] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes I didn't know. I felt like "my English is great", but now at this stage, when I compare some voice records of me, like in the past, and now I could see the troubles and problems that I couldn't see at that stage, but that was good because it was always pushing me forward to study more and learn more and improve myself. Some other colleagues of mine were just like laughing at me, you know, and giggling and saying "Whoa, her English is [00:31:00] poor and she's trying to participate. She's not embarrassed" or something like that. I would hear them, but I would be "Okay. Okay. I'm exerting my efforts. No, you're jealous. That's why you saying that."

[00:31:12] **Luke Thompson:** This is really interesting because if we use you as a case study, then this is sort of interesting from a psychological point of view that you weren't really affected by, what other people thought.

[00:31:26] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes, and Luke, my lecturers were supportive because I remember it happened lots of times when lecturers asked for someone to do a presentation. So I would volunteer and they would support me saying, "Wow Walaa! You did great. You did [a] great job." And that was empowering. And that taught me the great role of teachers. They play a great role in supporting in either motivating or de-motivating students.

[00:31:55] **Luke Thompson:** Yes.

[00:31:55] **Walaa Mouma:** So at that stage I was inspired to be a really good [00:32:00] teacher because this would change someone[s] whole life forever.

[00:32:05] **Luke Thompson:** Yeah, absolutely. When, okay, here's a question. If you... So when you listen back to those recordings of yourself from a few years ago, and you think "Ooh my, ooh my my English wasn't so good then, but I didn't know". If you'd known then

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that your English was by your current standards, not that great, how do you think that would have affected you?

[00:32:30] **Walaa Mouma:** I think it would, would have been negative. Especially that I was listening to people like criticizing me and things like that, but I was telling myself "oOh, because they're jealous".

[00:32:45] **Luke Thompson:** But if let's say you had met your older self, and your older self had said, "Oh, err, Walaa, we've got some things to fix here with your English. So you're saying this, and you're not saying that correctly. You need to say like this, or that's wrong. That's wrong too. Here's how you fix [00:33:00] them." Do you think that, do you think that the younger version of you would have been positively or negatively affected by that intervention?

[00:33:08] **Walaa Mouma:** To be honest, I think it would have been negatively affected. That's why, Luke you touched upon a very important, critical thing. That's why when deep inside I think about it, I know that lots now there are lots of people who are similar to my older version and they're aware that they're not really good, but now I want to motivate these people to let them know that you can.

[00:33:35] You know what I mean?

[00:33:36] **Luke Thompson:** Yes.

[00:33:37] **Walaa Mouma:** So even if you know that your level is not really good, it means that you're working hard because, because I told you in my high school, I couldn't speak a full sentence, but later on, although my pronunciation was terrible and things like that, I was trying, so this means that there's, there was some kind of progress or improvement.

[00:33:57] So we always need to look at the [00:34:00] half full glass, not the half empty.

[00:34:04] I agree.

[00:34:05] **Luke Thompson:** All right. So, your English then did it just develop kind of on its own or did you get, I know you were doing a language and literature course, but did you receive any kind of feedback? How did you know when you were doing something wrong or right?

[00:34:22] **Walaa Mouma:** To be honest, my actual study, the modules and things, most of them were related to literature. So that has nothing to do with improving my actual skills, but there was one module about British phonetics and that was my favourite because I learned the sounds. So at that stage, I started to know that, "Oh Walaa you should, you know change the way you speak!" And then that was really good because, when I was listening to podcasts, I wouldn't, for example, know why the British are dropping the R in that word and pronouncing it in a different word. But [00:35:00] after I learned the phonetics, I started to know why they do that, why they insert, for example, a linking R /r/ when saying "the idea is" instead of saying "the idea is".

[00:35:14] **Luke Thompson:** Yes.

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[00:35:14] **Walaa Mouma:** So when I learn about these things and I listen to a voice record and see the transcript I could see and know and tell how words are being connected, what happens in rapid speech, why people speak this way, why they would reduce the vowel in that word and things like that.

[00:35:35] **Luke Thompson:** That's very interesting. This is phonetics though, which is great, you know, every road leads to the same destination in terms of language learning, but, what about your grammar and your vocabulary and stuff?

[00:35:48] You said before that you made lots of mistakes and things like that and you don't seem to do that now. So how? Is that just from exposure or were you actually doing... Well, wait a minute. You did do [00:36:00] formal studying before. You had your background in grammar from, from school.

[00:36:03] Yeah. I'm just trying to work out. Like, how did you, how did this happen? It's not just surely, not just from listening to podcasts and listening to people, reading literature and studying phonetics, where did the grammar and vocab and all that accuracy come into it?

[00:36:16] **Walaa Mouma:** Actually there is another technique that I used to follow and that was as well important.

[00:36:22] And that was recording my voice and every like one, two months I'll have a different goal. The thing is that Luke maybe my accuracy in terms of grammar is excellent when it comes to me reading something. Like, I know what is right, what is wrong in terms of what do we call it? Prescriptive grammar.

[00:36:44] Right. But when I went to apply it I might not really apply in it the right way when I speak, but if I record my voice and then listen to it, I can spot the mistakes. So I used to record my voice for like, let's say for the coming three [00:37:00] months, I would say I would focus on fluency even though I might be making so many mistakes.

[00:37:08] My focus right now is just fluency, and then for the next three months, I would focus on using like a variety of words, vocabulary and things like that. And the next time I would focus on grammar. So every three months I would set a new goal and then repeat. But when I record my voice it's not just enough to listen to the voice record.

[00:37:33] You need to focus on the mistakes that you made and why you made them so that you try to avoid them. So giving myself a chance of three months to focus on grammar, for example, I would make that regular. So for example, I would force myself to talk about general topics. So I know that in these voice records, I'm using present simple tense.

[00:37:59] So [00:38:00] everything I'm using has to be in simple present tense, and then continue the same way. And then it happens like when you practice when you talk to people using different apps and continue recording your voice and listening to it, spotting the mistakes and try to avoid them in future records, you, you get it.

[00:38:22] **Luke Thompson:** It's amazing. I mean, you literally taught yourself it seems.

[00:38:25] **Walaa Mouma:** Oh yeah. Thank you.

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[00:38:27] **Luke Thompson:** So these voice recordings that you would do, how often would you do them?

[00:38:32] **Walaa Mouma:** I record myself every day. Even now, I shadow.

[00:38:36] **Luke Thompson:** You're still doing it, yes.

[00:38:37] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes, and it's not about the quantity. It's about the quality. So if you record yourself for two minutes, you listen to a word and try to repeat it again.

[00:38:47] So you take maximum 15 minutes every day, but it's consistent, then it's better.

[00:38:54] **Luke Thompson:** Right. Yes. Yes. Wow. Wow. Really [00:39:00] great.

[00:39:00] **Walaa Mouma:** And in parallel with that, with me improving myself, I was aware that other colleagues of mine needed some kind of support and to know what I was doing. So I created the groups on Facebook for all different cohorts, in the English department, I was helping them till I graduated.

[00:39:20] And then, you know, it feels great to hand on the torch. So the people whom I helped started to have new cohorts, newer generations, and this is something to point out at this point, which is although Syria is going through a very difficult time and harsh war, the Syrian people are so strong and they love life.

[00:39:41] They're kind, they're helpful. And they're so strong. They, they are ambitious. They always have dreams and things to fulfill and achieve, and I was one of them and there are lots of people like me and even better than me and Syria.

[00:39:58] **Luke Thompson:** This is a really great story. [00:40:00] I feel like I'd like to continue talking to you about, let's see.

[00:40:05] Tell me about your studies when you were in Syria, you did the language and literature course. What were you reading in your literature classes?

[00:40:14] **Walaa Mouma:** Yeah, it was like, I had lots of modules, so I would be having short stories, novels plays. I even had a full module about Shakespeare and it was interesting, but to be honest, literature is not my favourite.

[00:40:30] I love it to enjoy myself, but not as a career. So I was focusing more on the modules that have to do with language like linguistics, semantics, phonetics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and things like that. These were my, like my favorite and the teaching related modules.

[00:40:51] **Luke Thompson:** You're sort of a language geek, really.

[00:40:54] **Walaa Mouma:** Yeah! I like this word, geek.

[00:40:57] Yeah. So that's why Luke, I was [00:41:00] trying to really enhance my teaching skills. So while I was a student I was teaching private classes or even in summer holiday, I would teach in a private institute or things like that, and I actually started my own project in

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2017, it was English with Walaa channel on Telegram, right? And everything I learned about phonetics, I taught in that channel. So I made a set of voice records about everything I learned about British phonetics. In order to, you know, spread the knowledge because I mean, there's nothing greater than spreading knowledge and giving everything you know, to other people to help them grow because it's lovely when we grow together.

[00:41:49] When you grow alone, it's sad. We should give a helping hand to each other. So I was doing that. And that [00:42:00] was very helpful in, you know, polishing my leadership skills and networking skills as well.

[00:42:11] **Luke Thompson:** Do you think that someone who is not a language geek can do it too?

[00:42:17] **Walaa Mouma:** Well, if they can just, like, listen to English and apply shadowing on a daily basis, I reckon they can. It has to be consistent. So if they listen for, like, five minutes and they make like, they do shadowing for one to two minutes max, but over months they can see the gradual improvement, right?

[00:42:42] **Luke Thompson:** Yes, yes.

[00:42:43] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes. And the most important thing that has ever happened to me was that since I was a second year student, I always had that passion that I wanted to pursue my higher studies in the UK, and everyone would laugh at me saying "You want to pursue your higher studies in the [00:43:00] UK? Hah!" It's like, it's very expensive.

[00:43:03] I mean, no one, even, like most rich people can't afford coming to the UK and study here. But to me it was like, it was a case that I want to defend. It was a passion. It was my passion, my dream. So I worked, was working very hard to fulfill that passion. So I knew that there was, um, there's a scholarship called Chevening.

[00:43:25] It's supported by the British government. Usually 50,000 people apply every year from different parts of the world and they select something like 1,200 1,300 applicants. So I was doing everything it takes to get it and pursue my studies and get to my passion. And that's why I was looking for the eligibility criteria since I was an undergraduate student and I got the experience required to meet the criteria [00:44:00] and I was improving my English and focusing on what I really want to do in the UK as a course. And I found that everything that I'd been doing is related to teaching English. That's why, when I graduated, I applied to Chevening scholarship and the year that I applied

[00:44:19] I applied in late 2019, and I was selected, along with 1,300 applicants from 60,000 applicants.

[00:44:35] **Luke Thompson:** Wow.

[00:44:36] **Walaa Mouma:** Yes. Thank you.

[00:44:38] And I'm the youngest Chevenor in the Syrian cohort that applied, because usually those who get it are older in age, but my case was special because I had the experience while I was a student.

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[00:44:52] Because usually graduates don't have experience. So the [00:45:00] toughest time in my life was the moment I graduated because when I graduated, at the same time, I was applying to the scholarship and I was applying for a master's course in Syria, just in case. If I had, if I don't get this scholarship, I would be pursuing a master's course in Syria.

[00:45:17] And at the same time, applying for teaching ESP English for Specific Purposes at the faculty of pharmacy. So doing all of this, like handling different stuff, like juggling lots of things, juggling in my plate. So, what happened? I was accepted in [the] master's course in Syria and I started the first year.

[00:45:41] And in parallel with that, I was teaching ESP at the faculty of pharmacy as the youngest lecturer in Damascus University, at Damascus University. And after I finished the first year, imagine the process of applying to Chevening took me one whole year.

[00:46:00] [00:45:59] Yeah

[00:46:00] So after I finished the first year of teaching at the faculty of pharmacy and getting the experience in everything, in one year of applied linguistics master's course in Syria, I was selected for a Chevening scholarship.

[00:46:14] Congratulations!

[00:46:15] Thank you!

[00:46:16] What was the process? Did you have to do an interview or anything? Oh yeah.

[00:46:20] I actually wrote the dates so that you just get a flavour about how patient someone has to be in August 2019, I applied and in 14 February, I was shortlisted for an interview, and 19th of March I had an interview. The 15th of June I was conditionally selected and in 10th of August 2020 I got my final award letter, and on the 28th of September, I traveled to the UK. So one whole year of being [00:47:00] patient and wait all the time, and it was not easy because I was looking for something. And if that thing doesn't happen, I had a plan B to do in Syria.

[00:47:10] It was not easy at all.

[00:47:14] Yeah, but I mean, you've applied yourself so well, just three different backup plans or two backup plans and the main plan which finally came through. But yeah, a whole year, I suppose like that, the main one is like from August to February. That's such a long wait after sending in your initial application. Maybe, well, they did receive 60,000+ applicants, so they probably had a lot of work to do. I wonder how big their office is. Okay. And then, so then the big day arrived, the day that you had to travel to the UK. Had you left Syria before?

[00:47:50] Oh, actually I left it only once to Lebanon when I applied for my visa.

[00:47:56] Really?

[00:47:57] Yes. Because in Syria we don't have... [00:48:00] A lot of embassies are closed in Syria. So I needed to travel to Lebanon to apply for my visa. That was the only time I left Syria. And to me, I was like, Oh, I love, I love Syria. I love the Syrian people. I love my



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family. So I felt like. "Oh, God!" It was just like one day, but I wanted to come back to my country and now, every now and then, I feel homesick, but I know that what I'm doing is my passion.

[00:48:29] It's the thing I am living for, and it was not easy. Getting this scholarship happens rarely and it was not easy. And even the university I applied to, it was not like a random thing. It took me months in choosing three different options as university choices and Warwick is by far my favourite.

[00:48:54] And four of my lecturers graduated from here. And two of them were the ones who wrote me my [00:49:00] recommendation letters. I send them "Hi!" Dr Emani Fahir [Spelling?] My favourite. I love her and Dr. Hassan [Sorry if I spelled the names wrong! ~Luke] as well. So like I came to Warwick and I have ideas, preexisting ideas in my mind about how the University of Warwick looks so the first moment I landed in the airport and I found people speaking in English, I felt like I'm in a movie. Wow. Everyone is speaking English.

[00:49:29] Even the driver, like when he was speaking in English, I was like, "God, you speak, beautiful British English!" And he was, he thought maybe there's something wrong with me or something like that.

[00:49:43] Oh, that's lovely. So you're doing a master's in TESOL. That's Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Okay, so this is a teaching qualification. Is it a one-year course?

[00:49:56] Oh, yes. It's. It's a full-time course.

[00:49:59] Okay. And [00:50:00] so what's the plan? Back to Syria when you finish or something else, or...?

[00:50:04] Actually, I would love to get a PhD scholarship because if I want to be a lecturer at Damascus university, which is my big dream, I can't do this unless I have, a PhD degree

[00:50:20] Oh, are you going to do a PhD then?

[00:50:22] I'm planning to do that. I'm writing a proposal and I need to apply for different scholarships and see how it goes.

[00:50:31] Okay. That's great. What are you doing at the moment in the MA then? What's the current project you're working on in your teaching MA?

[00:50:39] In my first term there are lots of modules. Each module has an assignment, but they teach us about different things like spoken interaction, written discourse, and then about how these are related to teaching, how these can qualify you to become a better teacher, and we did a project. In my innovation [00:51:00] course I did a project about an innovative thing related to the experience I had in teaching ESP at the faculty of pharmacy. So that was like a plan that I can develop if I went back to teach ESP. And now in my second term, every module, I mean, it's just like the second week in my second term.

[00:51:25] Oh is it?

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[00:51:25] And we will be working on different projects.

[00:51:29] Every module has a different thing, right? So this term I'm taking modules that are related to teaching young learners, teaching and researching young learners. I'm taking this just for a personal side, like for my children in the future, not for teaching career, and modules related to designing curricula

[00:51:52] and here I'm going to be doing something that's very innovative. I haven't told you in 2019, I [00:52:00] created my big project, which is English with Walaa, but this time on Facebook and now I have over 66,000 followers, and I want to do it in my project, in this module. I want to do something that would be like making videos that are educational, but they're related to a certain project I'll be doing for that module.

[00:52:24] Yeah yeah yeah, that's a great idea, because you can specifically make videos based on the things you're doing at the moment. 60,000 that's amazing. That's great. How many do I have? I'm just checking how many people, how many people follow my Facebook page?

[00:52:42] And they love you by the way.

[00:52:44] Do they? That's nice.

[00:52:46] Because I said, like, I post things... The other day I posted something like, "Do you know guys, what makes me happy these days is listening to Luke's English Podcast before I sleep and make some shadowing" and they would ask "What is [00:53:00] shadowing? Who is Luke?" and things like that, and when I actually told them about the competition, they were like, "Whoa Walaa! We love you, we'll support you."

[00:53:11] I love them because when you love people, they love you back. When you show them care, they show you care when you support them and you really, really care about helping them and spreading awareness towards an important thing that would be helping them in, you know, getting a better future they will help you when you need them. So when I told them about the competition, they were like, "Walaa, we got your back. We love you!"

[00:53:39] This might account for the, you know, the fact that you, you took 50% of all the votes.

[00:53:46] But I think...

[00:53:46] I didn't believe it! I didn't believe it. Luke, when you were saying the results. I was like, "what??"

[00:53:55] You... really? When you've got 60,000 people on your Facebook page? I've got about [00:54:00] 25,000 people who like or follow my page on Facebook. So it's far fewer than, than yours, but yes, I don't know what people think when they know that you've got a Facebook page and that, you know, you encouraged your followers to vote for you, but I think that you deserve it fully.

[00:54:20] I think you're a great teacher in the making and you've obviously got a very inspiring story. You're so devoted to learning English and now teaching English. I can just

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tell, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if you made it to Damascus University, which I think would be a good thing for Damascus, for Syria, for the world. Whoever's listening, all right, so that people who work at Damascus University, because obviously they're listening to this because everyone listens to this. Give Walaa a job, okay? Obviously, it's going to be a good idea. So there you go. We all know. I didn't [00:55:00] even need to say that. I mean, they've already written it down. They were like, "Yeah, Walaa, give Walaa a job in a couple of years. Yep, fine. Tick! We'll tick that one off the list".

[00:55:08] You're very inspiring Walaa, and it's really great. Is this it, then? Is it just Facebook and you had your Telegram thing. You're not going to try and take over YouTube?

[00:55:23] Are you going to do a podcast or are you just going to focus on the master's course?

[00:55:27] Actually I started a YouTube channel, but I'm not really focusing on it that much because now I'm focusing on my study. Because I know that my study will let me get a clear idea and picture about how I can help my followers and people.

[00:55:45] So I prefer to focus on my study right now and then see what I can do for my YouTube channel, but I told you in parallel with my study, I'll be doing projects in relation to my Facebook page now. [00:56:00] This is the plan. So the focus will be on my Facebook page and yes.

[00:56:07] It's English with Walaa on Facebook.

[00:56:10] Do you think anyone would find your video content there to be interesting, or do you have to be an Arabic speaker?

[00:56:19] Oh, well, the person has to be an Arabic speaker. What I do in my videos is that I make them in a fun and funny way, so you laugh and things, and you learn something.

[00:56:30] Sometimes I make a story in a written post, so you read it and you enjoy it, and then "boom!" you learned something. But when I went to apply my project that's related to my university now, I have to make content only in English and I can write the translation in Arabic. So I think the things that are related to my university project, my master's course project now will be beneficial for even non-Arabic speaker[s].

[00:56:59] **Luke Thompson:** Okay. [00:57:00] All right. So we can look forward to seeing that stuff arriving on your Facebook page.

[00:57:04] Really great to listen to you talking and, you know, best of luck with the MA and say hello to Warwick for me.

[00:57:12] **Walaa Mouma:** Thank you. May I say one last thing?

[00:57:14] Yeah.

[00:57:15] I just want to take this chance to send a message to the whole world and to the people who follow you.

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[00:57:23] There are lots of ambitious and great people in Syria, just like me, or even better than me and they're full of life and energy and passion to do lots of things, and I love these people, and I love my country and I wish them a great successful future because they deserve, and I'll try as much as I can to help in the simplest things I was given, and I'm so happy Luke, that you gave me this chance and I thank the listeners because they gave me their time to listen, which is something that I value and appreciate. So thank you.

[00:58:00] [00:57:59] **Luke Thompson:** Great really, really nice. Walaa. Wonderful. Thank you very much for talking to us.

[00:58:05] Pleasure. Thank you.

[00:58:07] Have a lovely day and keep in touch.

[00:58:10] Let me know what's going on. Let me know if you get your PhD and so on. I'd love to know. So do keep in touch.

[00:58:18] Inshallah. Hopefully.

[00:58:20] Okay. All right then. Well, for now, bye-bye!

[00:58:27] Bye!

[00:58:29] So that was Walaa. Can I say her name correctly? Walaa from Syria, and I must say that it's been a pleasure to talk to her. She is energetic, positive, hardworking, and generous, and she has a lovely voice. So what's not to enjoy? It was also just very interesting to hear her talking about the ways that she worked on her English in the past.

[00:58:55] Actually, I would like to point out, again, some of the things that Walaa [00:59:00] has done to improve her English. So here is a little summary.

[00:59:04] Now this is just what I picked up from talking to her. So forgive me for restating what's already been said, but I think it should be useful as a way of recapping the main points and just kind of giving some comments about, Wala and the way she's improved her English.

[00:59:22] So first of all, she mixed different types of studying. She did study grammar and do more formal, perhaps old fashioned types of language, practice, or language studying, you know, the traditional, kinds of grammar work that is often frowned upon these days. But I think that there's still a place for it.

[00:59:45] So anyway, she did do some of that, kind of, grammar work, let's say, or old-fashioned language studying, but she also did plenty of other stuff like authentic listening, shadowing, speaking, and things like that. I think this [01:00:00] is a good way to get rounded skills, covering all the bases.

[01:00:04] In terms of attitude, Walaa is ambitious and motivated, and I think this has helped her English. She wants to do well for herself, her family, and the people of her country and I think this gives her a sense of purpose and drive, which is always important as a way to help you put in the time and effort required to improve your English.

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[01:00:27] But as well as that, I think she's very curious and always interested in the English language and I think for quite a long time, she worked on English just because it was interesting and fun for her. The language itself was what she wanted. It wasn't just a means to an end. It wasn't just a stepping stone to something else.

[01:00:47] Some people see English like that. It's just a means to an end. It's just something to attain, which will then let you get access to other things. I find that students who just want to study [01:01:00] English for its own sake are the ones who do the best.

[01:01:04] Walaa loves English. Also, she doesn't seem to be bothered about what others think of her too much.

[01:01:11] I mean, I'm sure she cares to a certain extent what others think of her, but I mean, she was basically willing to be a bit different and to break certain little social conventions, but in a totally harmless and actually very charming way.

[01:01:26] What am I talking about? Well, she had the initiative to speak during her lectures, even if she didn't really know how to do it, and her friends laughed at her a bit.

[01:01:37] She wasn't like so many students I've met who kind of blend in with the furniture and just sit in class quite passively. Walaa, for some reason, didn't do this. She took initiative even if it meant appearing to be a bit different. Also she took the initiative to shadow.

[01:01:57] Which means listening to some audio and [01:02:00] repeating it out loud. I think it's a little embarrassing for some people to speak out loud in a non-social situation, including when you're on your own and shadowing, or just talking to yourself even, can feel a bit weird when you first do it. It's not the conventional way that people study.

[01:02:18] So a lot of people don't do it because it makes them feel slightly uncomfortable, but that's a pity because they miss out on the benefits of doing it.

[01:02:28] And another thing that Walaa did was record herself, which again, some people don't fancy doing, or just don't do because it's not part of their routine.

[01:02:39] Also, she listened a lot and continued to listen, despite not understanding everything. So basically don't give up, keep going. Most people will give up because they don't understand it all, but don't be one of those people keep listening. Keep trying to work out what is being said and tolerate the stuff you don't understand.

[01:03:00] [01:03:00] And slowly but surely you will understand more and more, and when you understand language, you learn it.

[01:03:07] Walaa listened and then checked transcripts and then listened again and so on. So find some audio with a script. Episodes of my podcasts with scripts maybe, or other things like BBC 6 Minute English, which has transcripts on their website, or in fact, any audio with a script.

[01:03:28] Listen to it, try to understand it, then check the script to see what words are actually being used. Check them if necessary in an English to English dictionary and then

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move on and do it again the next day and the next day and the next day, and it doesn't have to take ages, just 10 or 15 minutes of that every day is great.

[01:03:49] As well as this, she also started shadowing the audio she was listening to, as I mentioned.

[01:03:56] She listened and repeated at the very same time, trying to [01:04:00] just copy exactly what the speaker said and not having time to really think about it that much. I've spoken about shadowing lots of times on this podcast. Recently, dialect coach Jerome Butler mentioned it too.

[01:04:13] And another point to mention there is that Walaa didn't just pick any bit of audio to practice with, she picked bits of audio that she really liked for some reason. Like, I think, that bit in one of the episodes of the podcast, when I was talking about, "Oh, I bet you feel... I bet you feel gutted that you never discovered this podcast before."

[01:04:34] Something like that. Anyway, she really enjoyed that section of the podcast and so that's what she chose to repeat, which is obviously a great idea because you're going to be really motivated to do it. Uh, also Walaa recorded herself and then analysed her own English, fixing certain things as she went. Now, I love the way she focused on different things each time.

[01:04:54] So when she recorded herself, speaking. She would just focus on being fluent and saying [01:05:00] things without hesitation or pausing, or she might just focus on, you know, some other aspect, but then when she listened back, she used her grammatical knowledge to analyse and correct the English she used in her recording.

[01:05:13] This is a great idea, work on different things at different times. When you practice your speaking, just try to be fluent and get your ideas out. Try not to worry too much about the grammar, because that's going to block you. Don't worry too much about making mistakes. Although you obviously you've got to try to be accurate, but don't let it block you. Focus on the fluency in your speaking practice and if you're recording yourself, you can go back and correct those things later and do it again and again. Okay. So do some speaking perhaps on a topic or in response to some discussion questions maybe record your speaking and focus on being fluent and communicative, and then listen back and correct it.

[01:05:56] If you focus too much on being accurate and having [01:06:00] perfect grammar when you speak, you won't really be able to speak properly. You'll be blocked by it. Maybe there's a part of the brain devoted to fluency, and this is what you need to exercise when you're doing speaking practice, then use the, I don't know, other part of your brain, the grammar part, to analyse and fix things that you got wrong during fluency work.

[01:06:20] This could be part of that shadowing that we talked about before, perhaps talking about the topic of the audio that you were shadowing earlier. So you could shadow me or someone else and then talk on the same topic and record yourself and just try to focus on being fluent and getting the right rhythm and so on, getting your words out in the right kind of rhythm, and then when you listen back to the recording, pick out the grammatical mistakes and, and, and fix them and learn from your errors.

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[01:06:52] Walaa also focused on things she liked and that struck a chord with her, for example, that, as I said, that [01:07:00] part of, one of my episodes where I said, "I bet you're annoyed that you never found this podcast before."

[01:07:05] I can't remember all the things I said in that moment, but it meant a lot to Walaa. So she chose to repeat that part many times and surprise surprise it had a much more profound effect on her English than just repeating things you don't really care about, or just working on English in a kind of soulless way.

[01:07:22] Walaa studied the phonemic chart and how it works, including the various sounds in English and how they are made, not just the individual sounds too, but the way that the sounds connect and are used in sentences and how words connect, you know, the whole pronunciation system in English. She studied it.

[01:07:44] So this is definitely worth doing, because it allows you to understand the parameters of how English is spoken.

[01:07:50] Doing that allows you to start getting a more organised picture of how English is pronounced. It allows you to practice specific sounds, [01:08:00] and it generally raises your awareness of the way that speech happens.

[01:08:04] And this is very beneficial, not just in terms of improving the way that you speak, but also in your ability to understand others and as a result, this can help your grammar and vocabulary too. So it all helps. It all goes into the mix.

[01:08:19] I just want to say to that, ahem, "hello!" I've been telling you all to do those things for years in various episodes of this podcast.

[01:08:29] Perhaps even since the very beginning of this podcast, and if you needed proof that all those things are true, then I'm glad that Walaa has basically provided a living example of it.

[01:08:41] Having said that I don't want to make you feel bad if you're not doing those things. I don't want to, I don't want you to feel that I'm guilt tripping you into improving your English because I couldn't do that anyway.

[01:08:54] The point is, look, Walaa did these things and they helped her. So why not give it a [01:09:00] try too?

[01:09:01] But ultimately, everyone has to find their own way to improve their English. Everyone has to find the things that work for them. The main thing is to find the inspiration and motivation inside yourself and go with that, follow that, and then spend as much time with the language as you can.

[01:09:21] Also don't compare yourself to others too much.

[01:09:26] Try not to feel bad if you observe others doing well.

[01:09:31] It's normal, I have to say. I mean, it's kind of normal human nature that we are competitive, but hopefully you can just get inspiration from other people and then apply it to

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your own learning. In any case, I would like to wish good luck to Walaa. All the best for your studies and for whatever you choose to do next.

[01:09:52] So there we go.

[01:09:53] Right everybody, I've got a few other WISBOLEP interviews lined up with runners up in the competition.

[01:10:00] [01:09:59] They'll arrive on the podcast over the next month or two. I'm not going to just upload them all in one go. There'll be a WISBOLEP person, and then some other episodes and then another person, and then some more episodes.

[01:10:12] So every now and then, I'll publish conversations with other competition runners up. So by the way, if this episode was your kind of thing, talking to someone who's learnt English to a good degree to a good level. If this episode was your kind of thing, and you'd like to hear more conversations with successful language learners, in fact, with competitors in the WISBOLEP competition, if you want to hear more than just the handful of people I'm talking to over the next few months on this podcast there, why not listen to Daniel Goodson's podcast, which is called My Fluent Podcast.

[01:10:52] Daniel is an English learner from Switzerland, and he's also a podcaster documenting his journey with English and also [01:11:00] interviewing various interesting people who have a lot to say on the subject, including various members of what we are calling the Brave 85. Those LEPsters who didn't make it into the final 16 of the competition.

[01:11:13] Daniel has been speaking to some of them and the interviews are really great. You really should listen to them. Tons of advice, insights, and motivation for your learning of English and just some really great people to listen to. Let's see, hold on. Who has he spoken to? Which LEPsters has he spoken to?

[01:11:33] Let me just check. I've just Googled My Fluent Podcast. The first result is My Fluent Podcast Episodes on myfluentpodcast.com Here's some of the recent episodes. Come on. Let's have a quick look. Okay. I think, I think the first one that... I think the first one that Daniel spoke to was Hamid from Pakistan, who's got some really cool things to say. You've got to check out Hamid. He's [01:12:00] brilliant. Also listen to episode 84 of My Fluent Podcast, or should I call it Daniel's Fluent Podcast, which was with Alvaro from Spain, from Madrid, who was a fascinating person to listen to, all about how he overcame his stuttering.

[01:12:19] Stuttering is a kind of a... how do I describe it? It's something that affects the way you speak and it can cause people to repeat certain syllables and causes them problems in getting the words out. A stutter.

[01:12:35] So Alvaro has a stutter, but he overcame it and also has learned English to a good degree and lived in I think in Scotland or Ireland.

[01:12:46] But anyway, a very interesting conversation. Also, you must listen to episode 86, which is the Ricky Sindy Show and that's Ricardo from Spain. Do you remember the funny recording that Ricardo sent to me?



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[01:13:00] [01:13:00] On that point actually listeners, another thing I must say... just so many things have been going on recently, it's hard to contain them all in my head and remember them all and tell them to you, even keep notes of them all, but Ricardo recorded a full length, Ricky Senny Show and it's up on YouTube. I put it on a listeners' page on my website. You may have heard me talking about this idea of creating a listeners page, well I've done it.

[01:13:30] If you go to my website, where do you find it? Let's see. Hold on a minute. I'm just going onto my website now. [teacherluke.co.uk](http://teacherluke.co.uk)

[01:13:40] Sometimes it, sometimes the website, you need to give it a second shot. You load the website and your browser might go "Sorry. No, I can't load this website" and then just load it again and it's fine.

[01:13:55] Okay. So if it doesn't load first time, it will load the second time. I promise.

[01:13:59] I think [01:14:00] for most of you, it's fine. Anyway, on my website, in the menu, where's the... yes. Hover your mouse over EPISODES in the menu and then at the bottom it says LISTENERS' PAGE click on the listeners page, and you'll find a few different things that some listeners have sent to me, and I suggested that they do that in the WISBOLEP series. These are people who I feel had things to say, and I, I invited them to send me their recordings as YouTube videos, and I've shared them on the listeners' page. So check out the listeners page. There is a full Ricky Senny Show, which is basically his interview with me.

[01:14:37] But what he's done is he's taken samples of me speaking from various episodes of this podcast, and he's simulated a conversation with me and it's very funny. So I do suggest you check that one out. The Luke Thompson interview. There's also Miriam from Italy who shared various stories, including [01:15:00] stories about living in Cambridge for a while and some of the things that happened to her there. There's Nick who is presenting himself as a tutor on italki, and don't forget, Zdenek's English Podcast as well. Zdenek is still going with his podcast as, as I'm sure many of you are aware but do check out his Zdenek's English Podcast.

[01:15:22] He's now up to episode 345. Although I think he's probably recorded more than that, but officially 345 episodes. He continues to have conversations with interesting people and do different experiments on his podcast, and then of course My Fluent Podcast by Daniel Goodson. And more stuff on, on the listeners' page.

[01:15:44] So do check that out.

[01:15:46] Okay. So where was I? Yes, My Fluent Podcast. Have a look at it, check it out. See if you can find it wherever you get your podcasts.

[01:15:57] I've just mentioned him, but I'm going to mention him again. [01:16:00] Zdenek Lucas, who is always working on something, Zdenek is still doing his podcast, as I said, but also these days he's managing a Discord server, on Discord.

[01:16:13] So he set up this server on discord for learners and teachers of English. It's a community. It's called Learn English Online. Now it's a little bit difficult to find because there

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are quite a lot of servers on Discord with similar titles, but Learn English Online. It's got the icon of a globe. Is it a globe?

[01:16:35] It's got a picture of a globe as its icon. Maybe the best way for you to find this is if I just provide a link on the page for this episode, which I will do.

[01:16:45] Okay. But otherwise, go to Discord and search for, um, learn English online. And there's a little globe icon. It's actually a hand holding a globe. Otherwise just click the link that you'll find on the page for [01:17:00] this episode.

[01:17:01] So, this is a place where you can do loads of things from just social networking with other learners, including plenty of LEPsters and also conversation groups. You can do voice and video calls through Discord, board game sessions and more. So it's a place where learners and in fact, teachers can mingle and share thoughts, ideas, and make friends.

[01:17:24] So go and check it out. Okay. Now if you do find it, you must make sure that you read the welcome page before you are accepted into the server, into the group. So just read the welcome page and click the green arrow to confirm that you've read the welcome page, because there are certain rules and regulations that have been put in place to make sure that the group works effectively and that everyone abides by the rules and that it's a nice, good, proper functioning community.

[01:17:57] Okay. So read the welcome page [01:18:00] before you are accepted. Zdenek is doing a good job of keeping everything ship-shape there. So check it out. Learn English online on Discord. I'll add a link on the page for this episode.

[01:18:14] But that is it for this episode.

[01:18:15] I sincerely hope you've enjoyed it. If you're watching on YouTube, because there is a text video version of this episode on YouTube, please do hit the like button using any verb that you prefer. You can click it, tap it, nudge it, hit it, smack it, smash it, or completely obliterate it. It's up to you, but do just click the like button.

[01:18:41] Please do Like & Subscribe. It helps the podcast get noticed by the mysterious YouTube algorithm.

[01:18:49] Do I need to mention LEP premium again? Well "need to", yes, I do need to, because it helps me put food on the table. So [01:19:00] basically check out LEP Premium

[01:19:02] [teacherluke.co.uk/premiuminfo](http://teacherluke.co.uk/premiuminfo)

[01:19:06] It's not just putting food on the table.

[01:19:08] It's also a chance for me to do, you know, the other thing that I do, which is not just talking to you, but actually teaching you stuff. So I focus on grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation in those episodes, LEP Premium [teacherluke.co.uk/premiuminfo](http://teacherluke.co.uk/premiuminfo)

[01:19:25] Also the Luke's English Podcast App in the App Store. Search your app store for the Luke's English Podcast App.

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[01:19:31] It is your home for Luke's English Podcast on your phone and all of the episodes are there. If you're an Apple Podcasts user, you don't have all the episodes in the Apple Podcast app, but you do in the Luke's English Podcast App. Oh yes. Plus loads of extra stuff that you can't find anywhere else.

[01:19:51] All right. So search the app store for Luke's English Podcast App, but otherwise have a lovely day or night or morning or evening or whatever time of day it is. [01:20:00] I hope that it's just fairly nice for you.

[01:20:03] Be excellent to each other and take the best of care, and I will speak to you next time, but for now it's time to say goodbye, bye bye bye bye bye.

[01:20:17] Thanks for listening to Luke's English Podcast. For more information, visit [teacherluke.co.uk](http://teacherluke.co.uk)