



Episode Transcript

This transcript should be 100% correct but if you notice any errors, please let me know so I can correct them

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[Luke]

Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. How are you doing today? I hope you're doing fine.

Here is another episode of my podcast, which is here to help you improve your English by giving you something interesting to listen to on a regular basis, but also by providing you with inspiration, advice, guidance, and general help to help you along your learning English journey. Today on the podcast, I'm talking to a very interesting guest. His name is Ivan Doan, or is that Ivan Doan?

We will see. Ivan is an actor and someone who speaks lots of different languages, is a very international person. He's a very interesting guest.

This interview happened because Ivan's assistant got in touch with me and suggested that Ivan could be a great guest for my podcast, and that he has plenty of things to say about learning English, working in English, and things like improving your accent and pronunciation. I thought to myself, okay, that sounds good. I'm always up for speaking to new guests.

Ivan is an actor. I had a quick look at his IMDB page. That's the International Movie Database.

He has a page there. The brief description of Ivan is that he is an extremely versatile actor, born in Kiev, Ukraine, to a Vietnamese father and a Ukrainian mother. He trained at the National University of Theatre, Film, and Television in Kiev.

Ivan is a multilingual actor speaking six languages. Can you guess what those languages might be, considering his father is Vietnamese, mother Ukrainian, and he's on this podcast? That accounts for at least three of those languages.

What could the other languages be? I'll let you guess. He's a multilingual actor who performs in different languages.

He's also been practising martial arts since a very young age, and he's a singer. So, definitely some very interesting things to explore. I particularly wanted to ask him about his international background and his cross-cultural experiences, particularly in the world of acting and casting for film and television.

His six languages, which languages does he speak? How did he learn them? Especially English, of course.

How did he learn that to a high level, a level good enough to be able to act in English? Does he have any specific insights for you, my listeners? Is Ivan a special case, or is his approach transferable to anyone hoping to achieve similar results?

Is Ivan just one of these lucky people who just happens to be talented at learning languages, or is it something to do with a specific approach that he's taken to this? How does he deal with accents, learning different accents in English for different roles? How has his approach as an actor helped him with all of this, especially with accents?

If we can learn anything from his example, which you can then apply to your learning in terms of working on your pronunciation, as well as everything else in English. There's also the martial arts side of things, which is interesting to me. I've always been curious about martial arts.

I've read about it and just generally been curious about it, but I never actually did it. I've never actually done it. Probably because I just don't really want to get punched in the face, or kicked, or thrown, or choked, or any of those things.

If you're a martial arts master, you're probably thinking to yourself, Luke, that's exactly why you need to do Kung Fu, to control your fears and to defend yourself. I think to myself, can't I just defend myself with English teaching skills? Can I not just do that?

If someone tries to attack me, I can just talk really quickly at them in English to confuse them. Maybe I can just explain grammar rules at them until they just give up. The present perfect continuous is when you're talking about an action which, hold on a second, it's an action which started in the past and may or may not continue in the present, but depending on the length of the action, and then they're just like, you know what, never mind.

That's my version of Kung Fu. Anyway, I'd never spoken to Ivan before. I had this conversation with him this morning, so I wasn't completely sure what to expect.

I had the interview earlier, and I'm happy to say that the resulting conversation was great. Ivan was a very chatty guy, a great guest. He was able to talk to me about all the things I was hoping for, and I'm very glad to present this conversation for you here today for your listening pleasure.

As you listen to this, I suggest that you do these things. First of all, try to note any particular approaches or methods that Ivan has applied to his work and studies and learning of English, which you could apply to. What can you take away from this conversation in terms of insights into learning English that can help you?

Also, you could consider Ivan's general mindset and the way he thinks about both acting and language learning, and decide if this provides us with a good example for learning English and how. And obviously, just enjoy this chat with another interesting person on the podcast, living internationally, being an actor, learning languages, working on accents, and how the mindset of an actor can combine with the mindset of a learner of English. There's a PDF available for this.

You'll find the link in the episode description. There, you will find a full transcript for this episode, including all the things I'm going to say at the end of this conversation. So, stick around, because right at the end, I'll come back and I'll speak to you again, and I'm going to list specific insights into learning English, which we can take from this episode.

So, listen until the very end to hear me wrap this all up in a very nice, neat little bow, by getting straight to the point about what you can learn from Ivan about learning English effectively. And I have about 11 different points to go through, and I'll do that at the end. But now, without any further ado, let's get into this.

Let's start this conversation with Ivan Doan, the multilingual actor. And here we go. Ivan, or is it Ivan?

How do I say your name?

[Ivan]

That is a good question. I mean, everybody pronounces it differently. You know, it depends like what your native language is.

I think most native English speakers would pronounce it as Ivan. My mother would pronounce it as Ivan, as a Ukrainian speaker, you know. And in France, I think you're in Paris, right?

So, they would pronounce my name as something like Ivan, you know. So, it's different. But I think the original name is Ivan.

But you can do it Ivan, if that's more comfortable.

[Luke]

Ivan is definitely the way that the name is pronounced in the UK. So, you've got a very interesting background. Can you just tell me about it?

Your origins, your background. Can you tell me about that?

[Ivan]

Sure. So, I was born in Kyiv, Ukraine. But my father is Vietnamese, and my mother is Ukrainian.

So, I'm a mix. And that's where I grew up, went to school, and also studied acting. Went to a drama academy.

Yeah, so that would be my background. And I work as an actor, as you probably know.

[Luke]

Yeah. So, that's an interesting combination, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. I mean, I suppose that, you know, do you feel like a very international person?

Has that affected your worldview at all?

[Ivan]

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I would say so.

I never felt like that this particular place is my home. So, I feel at home. I travel a lot, and I feel at home in many places, like in Asia, and in Europe, even in the States.

Because in the States, it's just a country of immigrants, you know? So, everybody's from somewhere, someplace. I just was recently in San Francisco, and I kind of just like the vibe that, you know, everybody speaks with some kind of an accent.

There's like maybe 40% of people, I don't know, with some kind of Asian accent. And nobody cares. It's just like normal, you know?

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. So, yeah.

I would probably consider myself like a citizen of the world, something like this.

[Luke]

Did you spend a lot of time in Vietnam growing up?

[Ivan]

I didn't really grow up in Vietnam, but we went pretty often. Actually, the first time we went was... I was born before the Soviet Union collapsed.

I don't remember anything about the Soviet Union. I was like super little. But we actually went there, I think, in 1989.

That was the first time, when I was maybe two or three. And then like in the 90s, several times in 2000. So, I mean, I remember even how the country changed.

You know, every time you come, it's a bit different, you know? But I didn't really grow up there. I grew up in Kyiv, as I said.

[Luke]

But you've lived in lots of different places as well, right? Yeah. And you live in Germany these days.

Is that right? Is that basically your home?

[Ivan]

I'm based in Berlin at the moment. Yes. This is like my base where I come back all the time.

But yeah, but I just for work and also for just for myself, I travel a lot.

[Luke]

Where else have you lived in the past?

[Ivan]

As I said, Ukraine, even before the whole thing with Russia began, like before 2014, I even worked in Moscow for some time, because I speak Russian as well. So, like in Ukraine, people usually speak both. At least if they speak native Ukrainian, they will speak fluent Russian, which is, I mean, it's not the other way around.

And the Russians don't speak Ukrainian and understand maybe about, I don't know, like 40%.

[Luke]

Something like this. Are they sort of radically different languages or not?

[Ivan]

Well, it's the same. They come from the same origin in a way, but Ukrainian was developed earlier. And it's in a way, it has a more complex grammar.

And it is different. It is different. I mean, if you speak Ukrainian, actually, you will understand a lot of Polish, let's say a lot, like some Serbian, you know, like those Slavic languages, Czech.

But if you speak Russian, that probably won't happen. I see. So they are related, but they are quite different.

They are quite different. There's usually interesting enough, there's usually more words in Ukrainian to describe like a similar emotion or feeling. Like a simple example would be, there's only one word for love in Russian, but there's like, at least I can think of two, you know, in Ukrainian.

One would just describe love as a general feeling, like, I love my dog, I love my country. And the other one would be like a specific romantic love, you know, there's a different word, but in Russian, they would use the same word. Okay.

Yeah. So Moscow was for some time, I worked on stage and Paris for some, I have some relatives in Paris, too, like my Vietnamese side, there's my cousins, I have there an aunt. So I know, I know the city quite well.

[Luke]

Yeah, you know?

[Ivan]

Yes. So like that, I mean, sometime in Poland and other countries is just like, I mean, UK, I would visit also for work, you know, but to live probably like, I would say, for the longest period, that would be Ukraine as a base, and now Berlin as a base.

[Luke]

Okay. And so you work as an actor. Has your sort of multicultural experience, has that contributed to your work as an actor?

How is that involved in your acting?

[Ivan]

Yeah, absolutely. Like in my case, definitely, in my case, definitely. Because, you know, acting is general.

I mean, as an art, it's one thing. And as a business, it's a different thing. I mean, everybody watches shows, and you see that many roles are very ethnically defined, you know.

So usually, if you have a very particular ethnicity, that's where how they usually see you, you know, and it kind of repeats. But in my case, it's a bit different, you know, because I'm ethnically ambiguous. And I'm a bit like weird, you know, so.

So in my case, in my case, it's a bit different. And I have played like, characters from different countries, like, from, I also speak French, so it's like from French people, you know, to US Americans, Russians, you know, it depends. Interestingly, like, this is a good question is interestingly enough, in, like, in different countries, they would look at me, and they would have a different opinion of where I could be from, you know, that's, that's so interesting.

So it's like, it shows that every every country is kind of sort of conditioned to see things in a certain way, you know, like, in Ukraine, in Russia, they would definitely see I mean, Russia, particularly, they would look at me and think, Oh, maybe Kazakhstan, you know, yeah. And, and if I'm in India, they would think I'm European, you know, like, well, he's, yeah, they would say something like, you're Russian, yes, you're Russian, Russian, you look Russian, you know, as in no.

[Luke]

And if you're in, if you're in sort of like Vietnam, or a part of Asia, they would not identify me as well.

[Ivan]

I mean, they wouldn't see if I suddenly start speaking Vietnamese in Vietnam, or even actually in Berlin, there's so many Vietnamese people, you know, because they came like in the 80s, you know, to work, and many of them remained. So if I suddenly start speaking Vietnamese, I mean, they're like, huh, you know, they don't recognise that the guy actually is half Vietnamese, they don't see it. But I think I've seen that with other people who are on mixes, like, I have some friends who are like, half German, half Japanese, they also don't really identify that, you know.

[Luke]

Right. So then, as an actor, do you tend to get casted in particular roles?

[Ivan]

That's the thing, not really, not really. I mean, there's no one kind of type of role that I would be cast, you know, because of the way I

look, I think, and also maybe also because of the skill set and languages, and like things like martial arts that I also do, there's a bigger variety, you know, of things that how people can see me. Yes, like, ethnically, I'm really not, I think, mostly to casting directors, I am not ethnically defined, you know, like, they can't say like, Oh, he clearly looks like this.

And I even I speak constantly with different casting people. And some of them, like in the States, I'm saying, Well, you can look like you can be Italian, you know.

[Luke]

So that's an advantage, then, isn't it? Right, that you can kind of fit into various boxes and stuff like that.

[Ivan]

Well, I think so. I mean, for me, yes. You know, maybe it's a bit difficult to get acting jobs when you are very clearly ethnically defined, what they call like, it's actually a negative word typecasting.

But you know, there's this old Hollywood kind of saying typecasting is casting. Oh, yeah. You know, which means which means like, you get to, you know, you work, you know, you actually do your, you actually do something, you know.

Yeah.

[Luke]

If you fit a very clearly defined sort of role, then they know how to cast you. And exactly. It's like, well, just get this guy, because that's the this mould that we're looking for this archetype.

Yeah, okay.

[Ivan]

So Yes, and they have seen you already, you know, doing that, you know, so they know what to expect in a way, you know, but with me, it's just not like not my karma, you know, it's not my thing. So I have to work with what I have, you know, even in Ukraine, you know, like when I was living there, and I was like, studying acting, still, to them, I looked really Asian, you know, I didn't look like Ukrainian, you know, so they might not like if they met me on the street, you know, they, they probably wouldn't think right away, or maybe he just looks foreign, you know, he doesn't look like somebody who, who knows the language, although I speak the language, of course.

[Luke]

I'd like to get into the language, the languages, and your learning of different languages. So you speak how many six, six languages? Is that right?

[Ivan]

Six plus, I would say, because I constantly improving, you know, I constantly learn, like, for example, last year, I did a show in India. So, you know, on, on the way, I like kind of like, got some Hindi, you know, here and there. And also, because they knew about my multilingual skills.

So they even asked me to play some lines in Hindi. And when they saw that I can actually do it fast, you know, that they started throwing more lines, you know, so come and say this, you know, this, it means that, you know, okay, let's do it, you know, so you

just learn, because if you have this memory, like, well, you can quickly memorise how things sound. And plus, if you have a native speaker who can pronounce it the way it's supposed to be pronounced, I can very quickly kind of pick that up.

And sort of, it will look like I actually speak the language, you know, when I do.

[Luke]

This is very interesting. So you have a sort of aptitude for picking up languages, then?

[Ivan]

Yes, languages, and then, and pronunciations, you know, accents. I can even tell you how I noticed it, you know, first, it was, so I studied in Kiev, then I went right away, I got invited to work in Moscow. And I flew there, I spent like maybe two months there, you know, and the accent in Moscow is different.

You know, you clearly know when it's somebody who's from Moscow by the accent, almost like, you know, if it's, you know, London, people will hear, like people over UK would know it's somebody from London, you know.

[Luke]

Which is in Russian, is it?

[Ivan]

Yes, we speak like in Russian, yeah? Yeah. So, and then maybe two months later, I came back to visit my family in Kiev.

And they said like, huh, what's wrong with you? You know, you sound different. You sound like you grew up there, so it just changed, like, without even me noticing that, you know, like, it's just sort of a, the ear sort of had adapted, you know, to how it sounds, you know.

So I know, okay, I have this kind of funny thing, you know, and then I started exploring it. And I saw that I can quickly pick up languages and the way, you know, people talk.

[Luke]

So six languages, I'm guessing you've got Ukrainian, Russian, Vietnamese, you live in Germany, so German, you mentioned French, that's five. And then, of course, English. English, yes.

Right, so that's your six languages. And so, when did you learn them? Which ones did you learn in childhood?

And which ones have you learned later? I mean, have you learned any of those languages as an adult?

[Ivan]

Yeah, of course, all of them. I mean, English was like, English was always like a school, but it was pretty much basic English. I mean, anybody who studies English at school in any of those post-Soviet countries doesn't really speak English, you know, it's like pretty big.

I mean, I'm sure you've had many students from that part of the world, you know, so you know what the issues are, because the English structure and grammar is quite different from, you know, Slavic languages, you know. So yeah, I mean, most of them like

consciously, I would say, when I was already like in my maybe early to mid 20s, something like this.

[Luke]

Okay. All right. So how, how did you do it?

Should we talk about English? What's your, what's your story with English then?

[Ivan]

Again, it was motivated by acting, you know, so I was for some time in Moscow, I didn't really like it. So I, and it was, we're speaking like the end of 2000s, you know, so I thought, okay, I'm more interested in, you know, in the Western direction. So you got to do something in English.

I started doing some things in English, like producing at that time was this web series format was super popular. So I got some people like Americans, some Brits who were living in Kiev, and we started doing some small episodes, you know, in English. And that was one thing, you know, the communication, I would say within that environment, really made me learn it, like progress super fast.

You know, apart from that, of course, conscious listening and looking for situations where you, you have to be in that environment. I would say like, this is more like my method. I'm not so much into theory, you know, into kind of like reading grammar books.

I mean, I can look at, you know, how, you know, what the grammar is, but it's, I don't, I don't feel this is like my method. You know, I feel it's my method is more like more natural, organic, kind of like a,

how children learn, you know, children don't really read grammar. And the funny thing is I can tell you another story.

Like at that time I was like to learn, I was, so I was communicating with people who speak English. And some of them were, you know, Mormon, Mormons, you know, who, who, who will go around the world and in Ukraine, what they were doing, they were, they were teaching English, international Mormons, English teaching Mormons. Exactly.

[Luke]

I didn't know that they, that was a thing. And they, are they trying to convert you to Mormonism as well? That's the point.

[Ivan]

That's, yeah, that's the, that's the thing, you know? I mean, there was, it's difficult to convert me, me into anything, you know, so I'm just a very, my, I have my own thing, you know? But I got, I got really, I mean, I had really, couple of really nice buddies there, you know, and at some point some of them started calling me, you know, like, and they would call and say, Hey, Ivan, I have this, I have this guy here, like, and he's asking me like, what is present perfect?

I say like, what, you don't know? I'm like, no, I have no idea, man. Like what present perfect?

You know, I have been, I have all that, you know? Oh, that's present perfect. So, I mean, native speakers have no idea, you know, like how, how it actually is, you know, what, what it is linguistically speaking.

In German, it's the same thing, you know, like, because learning German, when people learn German, it's more complex than English in terms of like all these cases and then genders and English, no genders, you know, they're, so people are really, they are, they get crazy learning German, you know, and Germans cannot help, you know, Germans, they just know it sounds right. It sounds wrong, you know? So if you ask them like, wait, is it the dative case here or accusative case or genitive case?

[Luke]

This does tell us about how people learn their languages, right? That you, you learn it from the top down rather than from the bottom up. Except that when you, when you're an adult and you approach the task of learning a language, it can be difficult and mysterious to try and learn it in the same way that native speakers learn their language.

And you have to try and find other routes and other ways. And a lot of the time you do have to kind of like, look at the rules and sort of like break it down in other ways in order to try and get to it. But, but often that's very unnatural.

I mean, yesterday in my classroom, I was teaching my students about telling anecdotes, you know, telling stories. And what came up was some stuff about, you know, using past perfect and past perfect continuous and past simple, all these things. And basically, I mean, it became so unnatural.

I've been through this so many times where you get into the thing about, well, past perfect is you're describing events that happened before the main events that you're talking about. So here's the main things. And then these things happened just before, but it

comes after in the sentence and it very quickly becomes very abstract and completely unnatural.

And we ended up having that conversation where I was saying, are you okay? Is everyone all right? Cause that's the effect that teaching grammar often has on my, my students is that I feel like, I don't know, I feel like I punched them all in the stomach or something.

And I'm like, are you, are you all right? Is everyone okay? And one person said, this, this seems very unnatural.

And I had to agree. I was like, yeah, of course it is. It is unnatural.

But, um, you know, it's just one of the things that you, it's just like one of the ways you had to do is it's difficult to learn it naturally. So you kind of have to, uh, you end up having to kind of break it down. Um, but anyway, um, certainly like, uh, it's very important to do things and be, be active in the language that you're learning.

And through that process, you can sort of, you know, acquire it, pick it up and develop your skills through practise. It seems to be what you were doing. Your, your English was quite basic then I suppose, or sort of intermediate or upper intermediate at the time you started doing this.

[Ivan]

I would say intermediate. Yeah.

[Luke]

Okay.

[Ivan]

Yeah.

[Luke]

And through interacting and you had these lessons with these Mormons.

[Ivan]

Uh, well, I mean, those are funny lessons in a way. So eventually they just invite you to their church and they just show a couple of like phrases and they say, oh, that's British slang. That's American slang.

So they wouldn't explain the grammar because you see they had no idea. Like what's the grammar? They would write a phrase and usually there's two of them, you know, there's like two guys, they never go alone.

There's two guys and they would write a phrase, something like, like, give me the skinny, you know, like they said, that's British slang. And there's like, give them, give me the skinny. I think it was something like this, you know, like, yeah.

And the other ones say, is it, are you sure this British?

[Luke]

And you're sitting there just having a good laugh over this.

[Ivan]

Exactly. Yeah. It was not really like English, English.

It was just their thing, you know? Um, but just listening how, how they, because I mean, I think one of the most important qualities of an actor is, uh, listening and observation, you know, that's how you learn, you know? So to me, observing how these guys communicate, you know?

So if I, if I wanted to learn to play a Mormon, for example, I would just like sit and look at those guys, you know, like what kind of words they choose, you know, how they look at each other, you know? So to me, it's part of, uh, this process, how, how this works for me, as they say, like this, how I, uh, my, my language level goes up, you know, just by observing people. And then when I start communicating, you know, they try to maybe use it, you know?

[Luke]

It's very interesting because I was just reading yesterday. A lot of things happened yesterday, apparently, but yesterday I was, I was reading about, um, uh, the way that the brain processes language and, um, some research that helps us to understand how we learn English and other languages and, um, that we do it best when we were involved in what's called multimodal communication. So that means, for example, um, uh, learning English, not just through, let's say grammar rules, which everyone knows, but also combining it with all sorts of other things like, uh, observing body language and, um, different forms of learning, learning through doing, you know, learning through, uh, like, uh, including the way you move, um, listening, reading, all sorts of things.

So it's interesting that you were kind of observing these guys and the way that they were interacting and their body language and probably their tone of voice, their facial expressions and things, all of it together means that you, your brain sort of makes all these

different connections because it's all one thing really. Um, yeah, that's interesting. Okay.

Yeah. Did they ever, did they, did they try to convert you though, to Mormonism at some point? At what point were they like, right.

Okay. We've given you enough English. Now you have to, now let's talk, let's start talking about the church.

[Ivan]

I mean, they, they talk about the church all the time, but they just show some movies, you know, that kind of thing, you know, like they're not really extremely aggressive, I think, you know, but they just, they would show movies, you know, speak about, uh, what's the book, the book of Mormon, uh, John Smith, John Smith, you know, the prophet, they would just speak about it. They just talk about it, you know, but it's never really too aggressive in my opinion, as I said, because maybe it's also because of my background, because of this multicultural kind of cultural kind of a thing and seeing different cultures, traditions, religions, all that stuff, you know, so I, I can in a way compare and be somewhere in the middle, you know, just look at that. Okay.

That works for those people. This works for these people, you know, just like with language learning. I think there's people who learn in different ways, you know, but what we actually said about all these different components that works for me, I think a language is not just a grammar, just this, just that, just that.

And, um, I can give you a very good example of, uh, like this cultural difference. For example, if you remember, there was, I just remember you were saying, I just remembered this, uh, there was a

show, uh, maybe like five years ago, six years ago called Chernobyl. Oh yeah.

It was a British. So about, you know, great, great programme.

[Luke]

Yes. About a sort of dramatisation of the Chernobyl disaster.

Exactly.

Exactly. Yeah. Really good.

[Ivan]

So it was a really good show. Uh, but because I speak Russian, they all play kind of Russians or Ukrainians, you know, Ukrainians, I mean, but mostly those are like British actors.

[Luke]

Yeah. Right. Yeah.

[Ivan]

So, uh, and I watch it because I know the language, I know, um, I know how people actually, uh, communicate. I know the body language, I know the expression, you know? So I see, I mean, they all, they all do great.

I mean, the accents are good and everything, but it's just like something in the, in their eyes, in how they, uh, it shows me they're actually British. They're not Soviet, you know?

[Luke]

Also, also, uh, they're, they're doing it, um, cause in these sorts of situations where let's say there's a movie or a TV show about, uh,

people in a different country where they speak a different language, in this case in, in, in Ukraine, um, there's, if it's an English language production, they have to make a decision. Do they try to do some sort of like Ukrainian accent in English or do they just use their normal accents? And also in the casting, I suppose, they have to try and choose actors that maybe have an, you know, what accent do they choose?

And in Chernobyl, they all spoke with this, with these sorts of like, a lot of them had these kind of Northern English accents. And it was an interesting thing because they managed to map these because it's sort of like English archetypes, kind of like, uh, guys who would work in a nuclear power station in England, the middle managers from the North of England or something. And that was like the closest thing they could get to something, but obviously, yeah, they ended up with the sort of English vibe.

Yeah.

[Ivan]

Yeah. But I think it's only people who are from Ukraine and know the vibe will see the difference, you know, but I think people in the UK might not notice that just like, actually, if we speak about accents, I would like, if you watch a Hollywood film and you hear somebody, uh, like they need to speak with a Russian accent, let's say, I mean, I would say 95% of the time, it's, it's not exactly the Russian accent, which is real, you know, it's, it's a Hollywood vision of the accent, but, but the, the majority of Americans, I would even think even Brits and like people who are from English speaking countries, they probably won't, won't notice that it's actually not authentic.

You know, you have to really know, you have to know, you know, maybe you have to go there, you know, to here and you would just see as it's just, it's just a bit different, you know?

[Luke]

Yes. Yes.

[Ivan]

Okay.

[Luke]

So perception plays a huge role here as well. Absolutely. Yeah.

So you basically started kind of working in English and doing these projects and things, as well as, you know, talking to these Mormons and so on. Um, and, um, so then how, where did that take you next? I mean, did you then go to the States or go to the UK or did you, you know, was it through your acting work that really your English, you forced your English to improve?

[Ivan]

I started getting some projects like English language, English language projects, essentially, you know, some Americans, some UK, some European where they would need, uh, it in English.

[Luke]

And yeah, that, that, I, I think, uh, that way I further, you know, so through, so I was going to say, uh, uh, these projects, were they like a hundred percent scripted? So were you kind of dealing with a pre-written script, which you then had to kind of learn, remember, or was there a lot of improvisation spontaneity?

[Ivan]

Mostly scripted, but it's always like, uh, if like in, in the real, uh, movie set situation, any script can be changed quickly, you know, because, uh, one thing it's on, on the page, it's one thing. And then you were in the actual situation. You see that some things are not the way you thought they would be, you know, and, uh, then you have to adapt, you know?

Yes. So it is scripted, but it can be, it can get changed super quickly.

[Luke]

So you need sort of skills beyond language skills, beyond what's written in the script. I'm just sort of wondering if, if like working to, to be able to deliver the script was a, was a potential way that you levelled up your English. Um, but I, yeah, I suppose it's all part of the process.

[Ivan]

And also, and also not only the work itself, but auditions. Uh, I mean, I think most actors today have a pretty good memory, you know, because most of the, like 90% of the time you just do auditions. So it means, and also today before COVID as well, but like during COVID and after COVID is like 95% or 99% of the time it's a self tapes.

So you just record like yourself and just send it, you know, that's it. You don't go there, you know? So, and usually the deadline is really short, like two days, you know, sometimes three days, if it's a huge scene, they can give you several days, but it's like one scene.

Sometimes you have 24 hours, you know, sometimes it's super fast. So you have to, you know, your memory should be super active, you know, to, you can't, you don't have a lot of time. So I think that also helped to, uh, learn faster because you have to learn, you just have to memorise a lot of text very fast.

Yeah.

[Luke]

That's, that's kind of what I was thinking. And it's interesting that there are several crossovers between sort of like working as an actor and learning a language. And, you know, they're quite complimentary things.

As you said, like, you're like, you've got to have this really good active working memory to be able to recall sort of strands, chunks of, of, of language. And then there's the multimode, multimodal aspects of not just remembering words and grammar, but being able to deliver those things. And that includes all those other things we talked about before, you know, like the, the, there's the pronunciation, uh, and then there's the, the naturalness and all that stuff.

Um, in a way, like language learners potentially could sort of imagine that they're actors, uh, in order to improve their language skills.

[Ivan]

I think because, because, uh, in acting, the most important thing is emotion. Of course, it's not, I mean, anybody can read lines, you know, but it's about authenticity. It's about understanding this human being in this particular situation.

So those lines that you learn and say, they are related to emotions.

[Luke]

Yeah. And this, this again, makes me think of my English lessons where I'll do something about pronunciation and I like to work with sentences or even texts. And I'm encouraging my learners to know when to, when they should be going up, when they should be going down, where the pauses are, where the emphasis is the rise and fall of the voice and all those things.

And it gets to the point where I'm working with the room and I'm trying to encourage them essentially to put some feeling and emotion into what they're saying. And it becomes like a little acting workshop. So yeah, that's, that's interesting.

The crossover between the two things.

[Ivan]

I think it's great. I think it's a great, great approach, you know, and I think, I think what I actually saw back in Kiev and post-Soviet countries, the way they would teach English was very theoretical. So people would read a lot, they would do exercises, but then they actually need to speak, you know, they just have a hard time doing it.

You know, they might understand a lot, still an issue with that. Because if you, if you learn from a teacher whose accent is like local, like let's say Ukrainian accent, then you have to listen, hear like people from the UK. I mean, from London, it could be still okay.

But if it's somebody from, you know, Scotland or, you know, from, I don't know, maybe Liverpool, you know, you're not used to that accent, you know, so they have, it's difficult for them, you know.

[Luke]

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Okay. And so, yeah.

Then did you, did you, you got work in the States or the UK? What was your first sort of international acting role in English speaking country?

[Ivan]

It was actually in Kiev. It was in Kiev because many Western productions actually shot, they would shoot in Kiev and Ukraine back then. I mean, before we're speaking before 2014 more like before the Russians took the Crimea, you know, because Crimea was a pretty popular spot for filmmaking because nature is so great and the ocean and everything.

Yeah. So it was actually back then it was even still in Ukraine and then some stuff in Europe. I haven't actually shot in the US.

I worked for us productions, but many of them are shot in Europe. So for financial reasons. Yes.

But now I don't know what's going to happen. You know, the US presidents, he has mentioned that he thinks about also putting high taxes on anything which is shot abroad. So he hasn't done it yet, but I don't know.

[Luke]

Who knows? Who knows? Who knows what's going to happen?

So in terms of your successes, then what kind of experiences or, I mean, you said you don't really use methodology theory as much, or certainly don't sort of like study grammar and things like that. Have you noticed any particular methods or approaches or experiences that you've had that have really helped you, like notice noticeably helped you improve your language skills in English?

[Ivan]

Yeah, absolutely. Well, I mean, listening for sure. If you listen to the same, like today in this age of podcasts, I think it's super useful because you can listen to the same thing several times.

You know, if you didn't understand something, you can look up the words and then listen to that stuff again. You know, I would do that. I mean, I did that with German, let's say, you know, and I would also identify which words they tend to use several times, which means like this word keeps popping up.

You know, I don't know what that means. You know, in German is a particular case, they throw in words that actually don't mean anything. And I just like to throw them in.

So like, why do they keep throwing that word in, you know, and then you look at, okay, that means that. Okay. And then you understand why it's actually there, you know, so I would say listening and repetition.

I would also make lists of words that I want to learn, you know, especially if it's some more complex vocabulary, you know, more

technical, maybe in some situations or like for filmmaking, you do have to learn like particular filmmaking vocabulary if you want to work in an English speaking country or with English speaking teams, you know, because filmmaking vocabulary is always different, you know, it's not normal language, you know, you kind of have to, you need to know those professional terms that they use on the set, you know, to be able to communicate quickly, understand what they want from you,

[Luke]

you know? Yeah, of course. So that's quite a high pressure situation, because you know, everyone's time is, is, is precious.

So you have to react pretty fast. And if they're shouting out sort of like, orders at you or something, and it's a lot of jargon, I suppose that you have to Yes, that's what I meant.

[Ivan]

Yes, exactly. The jargon, the, you know, those particular words that people use, you know, I mean, some people like most people know, like some basic words like action and cut, you know, but not everybody uses that, you know. In Germany, for example, they don't use action, they don't, they don't even use the German word for that.

They just say, bitte, you know, which means like, please, please. That's interesting.

[Luke]

In English action. Yeah, which sounds pretty awesome, doesn't it? Although you can say that in lots of different ways.

Apparently Clint Eastwood, what does Clint Eastwood say? Oh, I can't remember now.

[Ivan]

When you're ready.

[Luke]

Yeah, that's it.

[Ivan]

That's great. That's a good approach.

[Luke]

Yeah, that's nice. It's really good approach. Okay, so well, I guess, I mean, I'm just thinking about you and comparing you to other learners that I've met.

And thinking about my listeners, and just thinking to them, thinking, what are they thinking at this point? Are they thinking, well, you know, Ivan, you know, he's a special case. He's just one of these lucky people who's able to pick stuff up.

Is that is that the situation you think or?

[Ivan]

I get this response from people sometimes, but I always say like, well, it's not that I don't have to do anything. I mean, you do have to have a lot of discipline. I mean, if you're an actor, you definitely have to have a lot of discipline, more discipline than in most jobs.

I think Adam Driver actually said that he wanted to be in the military. He wanted actually to go to Iraq, you know, but I think he had to want it. Yeah, he won.

He had damaged something. I think either his hip or something. I don't remember.

He broke a leg. So he could, you know, and then he went to study in Juilliard, you know, it's the acting school in New York. And what he noticed that he said was interesting enough, acting, acting is not so different from the military, because like discipline plays a huge role.

I mean, if you're not disciplined, it just doesn't it's not it's impossible. Yes, it's the first thing you have to be super. So I mean, it's similar with languages.

I mean, discipline comes into play. To me, it's a little bit I would say not only because the these the ability, but also because my background like in martial arts, which also all about this, I was I started when I was like seven, I still like workout every day, you know, so it also it is also part of that, you know, so you know, just you have to do it again and do it again and come back to that. I think I still haven't mastered that thing.

I still haven't understood this expression, you know, and it keeps popping up, you know, so it's still it bothers me that I don't understand it. So you have to have the discipline to go back and look at it again and or listen to that again. You know, I always say like people have different abilities, but even if it's somebody who is not super talented, let's say, but he has super high discipline, he

might progress even faster, faster and go even further than somebody who is talented, but it's sort of like wasting his time.

And, you know, it doesn't really focus that much. I've seen those cases, you know, like actors are actually good example. Acting is a good example for those kind of people.

You see many people who are super successful, who might not be the most talented people in the world, but they're so focused, you know, they just extremely focused in music. You see that a lot, you know, who maybe not the best singers, but they're just like, I mean, something's like, if I think of Lady Gaga, you know, he's just, I think she just works like a horse, you know, she's just super active, you know, although there might be singers who like, who can do it easier, you know, like Aretha Franklin or something who's just like, it seems like she just opens her mouth and it's so easy, you know, it's so easy. Maybe she doesn't have to work that much, you know, but, uh, discipline. Discipline.

[Luke]

Yes. I mean, absolutely. And so when we talk about discipline, we're talking about being willing to keep doing something, even when it's difficult, even when it's not pleasing, persevering, uh, keeping, keeping going and, um, having sort of high standards for yourself.

Yeah. I mean, sure. That totally makes sense.

And being, being willing to put the time in and to keep going, coming back to it and yeah. And basically kind of like being stubborn as well, which I think is a lot of it. And I can relate that to people I know who've learned languages effectively that they just

kind of, they're bothered by the fact that they haven't got it quite right yet.

And they just go back in and just keep, keep persevering.

[Ivan]

And, uh, yeah, you have to find what, what motivates you, you know, like your personal motivation and just stick with that, you know, like if, if it's this anger that motivates you to stick with that, you know, but also set realistic goals. I think like if realistic goals are better than unrealistic goals, you know, like you set like a timeline and it's like, I want to reach that level. You know, I don't want to be, it's not perfection, but it's something very concrete and specific, you know, this, I mean, this is the way my approach in many things, you know, like because sport and martial arts, they are very clear.

I like to get, bring this example because so obvious, like, like this famous kiss formula, keep it simple, stupid, you know, like, so it's, it's like that martial arts is so simple, you know, I need to learn this form or this stance, you know, and then you give yourself two weeks to do that, you know, and then this complex form, two weeks, unrealistic, you need six months, you know.

[Luke]

Yeah. What kind of goals have you set for yourself in terms of your English or other languages?

[Ivan]

In English, I would usually, like when I was learning it, the goal was first, uh, uh, having like a normal everyday conversation, you know, and then when I got that, you know, like having more advanced

conversation, you know, and when I have had that as a improvisation, just like no need to think and, and to prepare, you know, like at this point, of course, I mean, in English and other languages, you can give me a script or you can tell me what the scene is about.

I'll just improvise it, you know, just like I can do it in other languages, you know, but if I, if that was the first goal, you know, in the beginning that would not have been possible, you know, so you have to have realistic goals, you know, and, uh, step by step, step by step.

[Luke]

What about accents? Um, and I'm talking about accents in English then, um, because obviously this is a very big thing, um, for an actor, um, that you have to be able to adapt your, uh, English accent for different roles. Uh, for my listeners or my learners of English, obviously their concern is trying to perhaps lose their, their, the influence from their first language on their accent in English, or at least trying to be as clear as, as possible and as natural sounding as possible.

But for an actor, it's, it, it, it goes even further than that because you also have to seem to be an, you know, you have to be authentic. You have to pass yourself off as being American or English or from a particular part of the States or particular part of the UK or something. So what's your approach to kind of dealing with accents in English?

[Ivan]

I would always, uh, I mean, authenticity is key of course. And, uh, uh, if I know where the guy's from that I'm supposed to play, I

would, uh, typically identify a couple of people, you know, who are from that place. And I, I would listen to recordings if possible.

I would communicate if possible, not, not always possible, you know, but at least recordings, uh, I could give like a tip to those who want to improve their accent. Like another useful tip I find, I find is that it's good to identify somebody who is somewhere like of the same, more or less the same age that you are and same gender, like somebody who could kind of represent you in that place, you know, in the way, because you're close to that, you know? So that would be easier than like, for example, I want to learn, I don't know, a Manchester accent.

I'm listening to a woman in her seventies, you know, then to listen to a guy like my age and, you know, uh, that would be better, you know, with maybe a similar voice in a way, you know, that's what they do. There's even the profession called the dialect coach, you know? So when, when they work with an actor, they do that.

They sit with the actor and they find people who are kind of similar to this actor, you know, because that's a better entrance point, entry point than, you know, just go. If you, when you just go general, you know, like I just like general Manchester or whatever, you know? Yeah.

So B being specific, being specific and having a real source, like realistic store, like from life, you know? And then, um, the first thing you do is, uh, before you do the accent, uh, uh, is a listening. And so like, if it's a very particular type of listening, you know, because if you cannot hear, you can't reproduce, you know?

So first you really have to hear precisely what the difference is and what, what exactly the change is from the way you speak at the moment, you know? So like, it's almost like you have to design a map of this accent for you because it's different than for everybody. You're like, for me, it's, it's, it's a different map.

If I, for example, do the, uh, London accent or something for me, it's a different map than somebody who is from Texas, you know?

[Luke]

Yeah.

[Ivan]

But actually I think, I think it was, uh, what's her name? Renee Zellweger. I think she, she did a pretty good job, uh, um, Bridget Jones.

[Luke]

Yeah. She did a very, very good job in Bridget Jones and it's not always the case with American actors.

[Ivan]

Yeah. I think she is from Texas actually.

[Luke]

That's why I just remember this example. So yeah. Yeah.

Okay. So you find your archetype and sort of map out the difference between the way you speak English and the way they do it. And then, you know, does it get more technical than that?

Do you start to like identify specific sounds or specific sort of, um, spellings and relating to, you know, sounds and things?

[Ivan]

I mean, if you have your map, if you have your map, then you work on each specific point on that map, like vowels, for example, the vowel differences. And then you, you try to get that vowel, for example, as close to that original as possible, you know, I mean, uh, or the constants or something. Of course, I mean, it can go fast.

It can go slow. I mean, it depends. Some accents can come super easily, you know, like, like I've been to India many times.

So if I start talking like with the, you know, it's, it's easier for me to get the music because I've heard it so much, you know, like, uh, and I've communicated with people of my age, for example, but having said that Indian accents are also different, you know, like if you're in Delhi, it's one accent, you know, if you're, if you're somewhere in South India, I can't, I can't kind of identify from like, from those actions that I know in India, let's say, I wouldn't know that this guy sounds like he's from Delhi, you know, but that guy, I'm not sure, like, I haven't heard that one, you know, it's just a different accent, you know, uh, you hear it's Indian, you know, but you don't really know where it's from, you know? So, yeah.

And then you have this map and then it's just like with sport and, uh, or martial arts, you start working on each particular sound, let's say, and then you try to combine them. Yeah. Then you try to create a flow because in the end you have to have the flow.

Like any native speaker has a flow. You don't, you don't, we don't communicate like saying sounds. We just, we create a flow.

Yeah. Yeah. So, and also the rhythm, I mean, the big, big, big, big thing here is the rhythm.

Every language has a different rhythm, you know, like you live in Paris and France and French has a different rhythm than English, you know, in French, it's a pretty, I mean, they, they split this, they have this, uh, like two, I think, uh, two, two types. They, they discuss two types. Like one is a thing, syllable stressed, uh, language.

And the other one is, uh, syllable timed and stress time, something like this, you know, I don't know.

[Luke]

Yeah. Yeah.

[Ivan]

So, but I can, even without even knowing the definition, I, I, I hear clearly I can English. That's why when French people speak English, they, there's always like the same rhythm, which repeats, you know, I want to talk to you, uh, today I am pretty busy, you know, like, uh, I mean, of course, different, uh, stresses, but, but it's pretty much the same kind of rhythm, you know, like I never studied, I never studied English in school, you know, like it's something like this, but in English it doesn't work like this.

[Luke]

French people speak like this and this is how we speak and this like that. So, and, and also, um, uh, so the, the rhythm, but also the

intonation and they're, they're tied together. So for example, I will say a sentence like, um, you know, could you give me some tips for learning languages?

Could you give me some tips for learning languages? You know, we have these quite complex, uh, intonation patterns, but for a lot of French learners, because they don't have a stress times language, that's not their, their background. It's much harder for them to identify when we're going up and how we go up, down, up, and these different intonation patterns, um, and things like that.

So, um, yeah, so identifying these, yeah, the rhythm, the flow of, of, uh, uh, a language or an accent. Yeah.

[Ivan]

Yeah. I can give you another example, which is super obvious, like with German, for example, in German you have, um, well, let's say two types of verbs. One type is stressed on the first syllable and the other type of stress on the second or third, you know, it's very important because all those verbs were just stressed on the first syllable.

You have to split them when you use them in the sentence, you know? So the stress, uh, it has to be extremely clear, you know, like, it has to be on, if you say, you're saying something else, they don't get it, you know, because that's not the verb. So you have to be very clear if the stress is on the first syllable or on the second or the third, you know?

[Luke]

It's actually true. It's true in English as well, that, uh, I've heard that sent that word stress is actually more important for being clear

than, for example, a vowel sound, because if you think about it in English, there are so many different accents and a lot of them are about the way we pronounce vowels, certain vowels, or the way we pronounce certain, uh, consonants. But, uh, often the thing that will make you understood is whether you're stressing the right syllable in the word.

So, you know, my story, I always tell is my wife in England, she's French, trying to order a banana in a shop. And she said a ban, a banana. And the woman in the shop had no idea what she was talking about.

And she's like, there are bananas right there. Can I have a banana? Cause in French is banan, you know?

And so she's like, can I have a banana? And I was like, what, what, what? Sorry.

Sorry, Donna. I can't understand what you're saying. And I was like, it's banana, banana.

Can that, sorry, can I have a banana? Or she wants a banana. Oh, a banana.

You know, just getting that, uh, syllable right is so important. So it's, it's, it's the same in English.

[Ivan]

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. The syllable stress, like word stress, syllable stress.

And today, until like, I can tell you like for people whose native language, let's say is Russian, uh, to them, uh, the way British people talk is almost like music. I mean, there's so too much intonation Germans in the way as well, you know, because if you hear like real Russian accent, uh, there is not so much intonation. It's, it's very pretty much, it's like very similar intonation, you know, it's almost, there's no, like, there's no, like this kind of, like, it's not, it's not in their mentality, you know, they don't communicate like that.

[Luke]

On the flip side, someone who speaks like that for us seems like so kind of cold. Exactly. It seems pretty cold.

That's why I guess like Russians can be cast as baddies in movies. I mean, it's not just that it's not just linguistic reasons. Of course, there's all sorts of other stuff going on.

Um, but yeah, that's very interesting. The way that these different sort of language systems, um, affect the way that we see each other and stuff.

[Ivan]

Yeah. Yeah. I think like if you want to learn an accent or you want to improve your pronunciation and you, you, you, you know, which direction you want to go in a way, it's, it's good to understand how those people actually express themselves, you know, cause it adds, it's, it's part of that, you know, they, they speak that way for particular reasons because they are like that, you know?

[Luke]

Yeah. Yeah. They just are like that, you know?

And then going back to the multimodal thing again, um, which this just shows that it's important not just to, uh, reduce language down to the bare bones of grammar and vocabulary, but to understand that there's this whole other vital thing, which is this delivery system of pronunciation and understanding the importance of getting the rhythm, the intonation, right. So that's, you know, um, you're, you're, you know, uh, you are able to sort of express yourself, uh, in the way that people will understand you. Um, what about things like shadowing?

Do you do that? Do you kind of like, uh, listen to someone and repeat what they're saying while they're saying it at the same time? Or do you do list like specific listening repeats exercises?

[Ivan]

Uh, yeah. I mean, sometimes I do, I, I can't do that for a particular accent or a particular scene that, but I think I also do it subconsciously just like in daily life. When I hear somebody, I like, I think in my head, I can almost repeat it.

I can do it quietly not to bother people, you know? Uh, I do it because I want to hear like, okay, what kind of, what kind of rhythm was that? You know, like you hear somebody, uh, I do that all the time subconsciously as well, I think, but, but consciously for a role I can, if I, again, if I have identified a person who speaks with that accent, for example, that I need, I would do that.

I would, I would not, I would not start practising the lines actually, because this is actually something similar, uh, to, uh, this, uh, language, as I said, like first thing or intermediate level, then advanced level, then improvisation. So what do you want to do

when you, when you learn pronunciation is, uh, you don't just want to learn how to pronounce those words that you're going to say, like in the scene, because even if you do them, uh, correct, if you do pronounce them correctly, um, there was still some kind of freedom missing. You know, you will still almost feel like you see sometimes in some acting in some roles, it's like everything is correct.

This is something feels like he's not exactly real. If you know what I mean, you know, I've seen some good, even some good actors play, uh, uh, play a character whose accent is super different from them. Like playing a Russian or something actually happens quite often with the Russians, you know, it's like, yeah, you know, it's not bad, but it just doesn't feel he's real, you know?

So I, I, I generally don't start with the scene. Don't start with the text that I have to say. I just start listening to the guy and trying to try this, try that, you know, copy this and then try this.

So when, when I actually start feeling that I can, I think I'm catching the rhythm. I think I'm catching his intonation, you know, even within one language, this is actually, this is a really good topic. Even within one language, if you play a particular, this is interesting when you play a real person, when you play a real person, because every person has, even if it's like, let's say all Americans, but like, uh, Steve Jobs had his own very particular way of stressing things.

So if I would play him, I would really listen to him a lot. You know, like last year I did, I said about the show, it was in India, but I played a French guy. He's a real guy.

He's actually a serial killer. I mean, the show should come up, uh, Charles Sobhraj. There is a, um, show on him on Netflix called the serpent.

I know if you've seen it came out maybe two, three years ago. Um, so it's played by real French guys. So he just works with his accent, you know, but to me it was good because, uh, this man actually, uh, he, uh, came out of prison in 2022.

And after that he gave like two or three big interviews on French TV, on British TV. Uh, they, they also call them the bikini killer, you know, because bikini killer. Yeah.

Cause he killed people like in the seventies, you know, and most of them were like, uh, um, hippies, you know, and there was all funny kind of situation for that time.

[Luke]

Uh, so yes, I, I did have to listen to that a lot, you know, to get, uh, his, you know, particular French way of speaking, you know, in English, you know, everyone has, uh, you know, we talk about dialects, you know, different, different ways that groups of people, um, you know, speak a certain language, but then there's idiolect as well, which is like how individuals speak. And that's a very interesting thing, certainly for an actor or for a comedian. So, you know, I do a bit of standup and I try and occasionally do some impressions.

I do that in my free time as well, just for fun. And I guess it's a similar process. Like if I'm trying to learn how to do Robert De Niro or how to do Christopher Walken or something that you watch a lot of his, I'll, I'll, I'll just be watching an interview with De Niro and

then, you know, you start to kind of like, you know, so then I was kind of thinking, Oh, this is pretty interesting stuff.

You know, you know, you can get this kind of certain kind of rhythm and, you know, pretty interesting. Um, that, um, kind of following along, listening to someone and playing around a lot of the time, you just keep playing around until you get to a comfortable spot where you're able to, comfortably inhabit that kind of thing. Do you, do you ever spend time just like talking to yourself, uh, on your own?

[Ivan]

Yeah, absolutely. I can do that. I mean, if I'm preparing a character, I do that all the time.

I mean, like I do, it depends what the kind of character, because it also, you have to know like who the, what kind of, like, if, if it's the kind of guy who definitely will speak to himself, you know, or something, I would do that for sure. Like you try to do things that the person would do in his life, you know, for myself. Yes, of course.

I would try to repeat the pronunciation like 500 times, like of some word, you know, I would do that until I feel, okay, that's close. You know, it has to be at the point where you don't have to think about it, you know, but what he actually said that like to inhabit, you know, to, to become that, that, that is, I think important. There's a, there's a good example, not from writing, but not from acting, but from writing, um, uh, Ray Bradbury, he was, uh, asked to do a script for, uh, Moby Dick.

[Luke]

Oh yeah.

[Ivan]

So, and he had never, he hadn't read the book, you know, is that like, I want you, the producer told him like, I want you to do the, let's talk tomorrow. He hadn't, I hadn't read the book. Like, here's the book.

So you have a night to read the book. So he started reading, you know, he read maybe 300, 350 pages. He came and said, it's crazy, but, uh, he wanted to do it.

So then they moved him to London. He came to London. He lived in London like for three or four months.

I don't know, just to focus on the, on the script. So, I mean, he had to change because you cannot shoot the whole thing. You have to cut it and modify it, you know?

And he said it was not working, not working, not working and not working, not working. But at some point, like when he kind of started, he got the feeling of Melville in, in, in, in, in his work, he said, one day I just woke up. I look at the mirror and said, you are Herbert Melville.

And then it went.

[Luke]

Yeah. It's interesting. Inhabiting the thing.

And you know, that thing of like talking to yourself, um, uh, I think it's a really important way of practising. And if we go back to like,

you know, learning English and my listeners that I always encourage people to talk to themselves in English. And I think it's a good thing.

It doesn't mean that you're mad or anything. It's totally fine. It's totally normal to just be wandering around your house, and just sort of muttering away to yourself in, in that language.

Because it's all about, yeah, familiarising yourself and attempting to inhabit this other sort of, this other dimension, this other paradigm, which involves, yeah, all those rhythms and almost like a different way of thinking. It's kind of like, you're just training your brain to operate in this different um, rhythm.

[Ivan]

Absolutely. I agree. I, I actually look at, uh, when people also ask me about like all this multilingual thing, I say, I don't translate in my mind.

I mean, if I'm, if I've have mastered the language, I don't translate. I just like, when I speak this language, it's almost like a, you know, like in the car, the first gear, second gear. So I switched gears, you know, it's like I switched gear and with accents, it's similar, you know, you just switch gears ideally, you know?

So you, you've switched it and that's it. You're just in that stream, you know, and you keep going with that, you know?

[Luke]

Yeah. I think for some people it's, there's a certain unnaturalness and inauthenticity in, in that or something like that people feel a little bit reluctant to sort of make that switch because let's say if

I'm, if I'm trying to speak French and I can be speaking French as myself with a, with this heavy English accent, because there's a switch that I have to make. Maybe it's easier for you as an actor or just you as a person, but there is a certain weird feeling where I kind of like, okay, I'm going to start speaking French as a French person now.

Then it doesn't, it feels weird. I feel self-conscious making that switch can be quite a difficult thing for a lot of people to do, you know, where they're like, okay, so I'm going to speak English, but I'm going to drop the accent. I'm going to actually do it as an English person does some, you know, people can be able to feel a bit funny about that, but for you as an actor, that's just totally normal and natural.

That's natural.

[Ivan]

Yeah. But I think if it's easier if you live in the country, like if you live in Paris, you see the French people all the time. It's already part of your daily kind of a mainstream, let's say like an experience, you know?

So I think this switch is slightly easier for those who are there, you know, who are in that language zone or the accent zone, you know, and you've had all these experiences with this lady who sells baguette, you know, that you've seen these people, you have these images in your mind, they're real, you know? So I think, uh, it's a bit easier because, because I mean, even if you're not an actor, other people influence us somehow, you know, daily experience, they shape us, you know? And, uh, because you have, you have these experience in, uh, inside of you, then it's, it's kind of easier.

[Luke]

I think if you're there, if you're mindset as well as part of it, that you've got to sort of be open to, accommodate to, to other people. And that's often about sort of letting go of something kind of, uh, being, being open to, to, to other people. I, the thing that happens with me though, when I speak French, when I make that switch and try to speak like a French person, it comes off like a terrible kind of, uh, what's the word for it?

Caricature. My friends are like, what? That's how, that's how French people speak for you?

I'm like, well, I'm just trying to sound like a French person. I just make, I just sound like I'm making fun of French people.

[Ivan]

I don't think it's actually bad. I think, I think, uh, even in any acting work or language work, this can be like a good first step to overdo it, to make a caricature, you know? Uh, I don't think it's a problem because you can, you can always bring things down.

Like you started with the caricature, let's say, and then, but at least you got the general direction, right? You know, like at least you, you have been able to get away from your natural direction. Like when you're, if you're a Brit, that that's your, so you, at least you've been able to get away from that.

So now you're here, you know, it's not, it's a caricature we know, but if you consciously know that I'm still in the zone of character, that's great. And you know, you keep moving. And at some point

you start, start dropping this aspect of caricature and it just starts becoming more natural and natural.

Now you do it, you do it in acting as well. Sometimes if the scene doesn't work, uh, even some, some directors will say, okay, let's overdo it. Let's overact it like this, let's do something over that, something unreal, you know, but at least you'll get the direct, you'll get some energy, which is right, you know, and then just, you know, bring it down.

That's, that's, that's okay.

[Luke]

You know, that's, that's that step-by-step thing you were talking about. And also, again, it makes me think of my English lessons because often when I'm trying to encourage my learners to repeat after me, get the sentence stress, right, get the intonation, right. I will say, right, let's exaggerate this so much, you know, and I'll say, let's read out this text.

Like we are a really typical presenter on the BBC and you end up doing that kind of presenter voice. And if we can exaggerate it so much that it's ridiculous, then, you know, you push them there and then you kind of, yeah, shoving them in the right direction sort of thing.

[Ivan]

It's also method. Why not? Why not?

So I don't say, I don't see any issues with, with that, you know, whatever works. My, my, my approach is whatever works, but, but the philosophically, I would say like, every time I move from one

place to another, I try to not to bring my past into that place. You know, like it's just, this place works like this, you know, like if you're in Germany, this is how they communicate.

You know, if you are in UK, this is how they communicate. You know, I think people have many people have issues with that, you know, like, like for example, to most Eastern Europeans, people in the UK would seem to be in a way fake or in the way too chatty because they're so polite. They would say things that, you know, like even maybe they might not mean that, you know, but they just say it because it's a matter of politeness.

Like, oh, yeah, it's such a nice dress. You know, like people don't say that in Eastern Europe, you know, because it's like, if you don't think it, you don't say it, you know, to them. Like I've, I've, I've heard that from, there's many Polish people in, in, in London.

I've heard they're all so fake, you know, but I don't, I don't see that as fake. I see it's just, it's just like, that's how people communicate there. So it's like, you have to understand, you have to adapt to that if you want to function in that environment, you know, but then you go to Warsaw, you change.

Yeah.

[Luke]

I've heard that as well, of course, you know, that English people can come across as sort of insincere or there's something fake in, in that kind of like, hi, how are you? So nice to see you. Okay.

Bye. I remember, you know, Polish friends in London sort of saying, why do, why do English people always do this? Bye.

At the end of the conversation, I'm like, well, what do you do? We'll say, well, thank you. Bye.

Goodbye. Click. I mean, that sounds so unfriendly.

So it's just sort of like goes both ways, but yeah, that's, again, that's an interesting thing. You've got to kind of like just decide, okay, that's just the way it's done. And that's, so that's how I'm going to do it, which kind of makes me think of that, what you said earlier about feeling like you're a citizen of the world that you're kind of fairly what's the word untethered.

You're not like firmly attached to one thing. So that allows you to move perhaps more easily between these different modes of communication. That's in, that's very interesting.

[Ivan]

So, and you learn, you learn faster that way.

[Luke]

Yes.

[Ivan]

Yeah.

[Luke]

You're more open, you're more open, you know, but it is an identity issue. It's a difficult transition to make. And, you know, people, a lot of us, we hold onto our identities quite, quite strongly.

And, you know, like I do as an English guy living in France, I still feel very much like an English guy. In fact, even more maybe, you know, coming here, I'd suddenly became even more English by, just by contrast. And I don't think it helps me learn French.

But it's, I think it's a thing that many people experience just this sort of like, there's, there are obstacles or things that hold you back in terms of letting yourself go and letting yourself become like an English speaker, let's say, which includes so many, so many things, so many cultural, psychological things. So you've talked about martial arts, which is interesting. What kind of martial arts do you practise?

[Ivan]

Well, my basic style is Kung Fu, you know, that's how I started. But along the line, on the way, I kind of like have learned from here and there. I always take things from like what I like in this style I take.

I mean, I have base, my base, as I said, Kung Fu, you know, but if you have a base, then it's really easy to incorporate something from other styles, you know, because the principles are all the same, you know, because it's the same body, which is also related to language, you know, like we have, it's the same body, whether it's martial arts or language learning, you know, it's one body. So I think if you have, if you know how it functions, you know, if you know how to find the balance, you know, if you know where the power comes from, you know, then you can quickly, again, adapt if you need to learn a new style. If you like within, again, film environment, if you work like there's some kind of stunt situation or fighting choreography situation, most of the time, if you work with guys with a fighting coordinator, he's not, his style is not your style, you know, like his basic style, usually the guys are from karate, or,

you know, many guys from many stunt guys are from Taekwondo, actually, this Taekwondo is more about high jumps, and legs, because legs are look better on camera than he has a lot of action.

[Luke]

Taekwondo is always so impressive. You know, a lot of high kicks and exact sort of, yeah, it's really, really powerful stuff. Exactly.

[Ivan]

So but but I mean, you work with this guy, okay, but if you have your base, then you can quickly understand how he wants you to work for that scene, because it's not about you so much. It's about the scene, you know, so it has to work. On Matrix, for example, you know, the old Matrix film 1999, they actually worked with the team from Hong Kong.

You know, that's why the action looks so good. And it doesn't doesn't look typical Hollywood of that time, you know, Hong Kong, like it was the best team from Hong Kong doing those martial arts sequences.

[Luke]

That was one of the great things about the Matrix. It was one of those first crossover films where, yeah, they managed to take the action from Hong Kong, Hong Kong style action movies, which were way ahead in terms of fights, fight scenes and fight choreography. The Hong Kong movies were just like so far ahead.

And the way that the action scenes were directed, like you look at Jackie Chan's great films, like Police Story or something, the way the fight scenes are done, it's just so different to fight scenes you see in Hollywood movies, where you can't see what's going on,

you've got no idea really what's happening. But all these little techniques that Hong Kong directors would use, like I saw a video documentary about it, for example, a punch lands, and then you actually see it from from a wide shot, like the punch or kick landing, you actually see it striking. And then they instantly go to a close up shot of that fist connecting or the foot connecting.

So you end up with like a kind of almost like a double hit, it really emphasises the impact, all these little tricks, but also a lot of it's just done a wide, wide shot. But I suppose you can do that when you've got actors who've got these incredible kung fu and gymnastic skills. Yeah, absolutely.

[Ivan]

No cinema, cinema. Actually, that's a good thing. And we're speaking about this because cinema is also a language.

It is a language, you know, so it has all those components that we've spoken about, you know, like it has a rhythm, like what you're describing is rhythm. You know, like, how do you use rhythm? You know, how do you use emphasis?

How do you use contrast? You know? Yeah, yeah, it's all there.

You know, it's all there. Like cinema from this perspective is probably the newest language that we have, you know, like, it's just like 100 years old, a little bit more, you know. But it's different because theatre is different.

Theatre is very old. Theatre is language based, like the way we know it, you know, language, language, you know, but cinema is its own language. You know?

Yeah, I mean, those guys are the best. Those guys are the best for sure. And Jackie Chan, in particular, it's I think to him, he approaches this a little bit like a ballet, like a dance.

You know, he understands rhythm very, very well. But also he is inspired by Hollywood, old Hollywood as well, because you see some, some of this stuff, like from the 70s, from the 80s, from the 90s, a lot of it, there are many sequences that look a little bit like a Harold Lloyd, for example, like directly influenced by him, like the scene where he's hanging off the clock. Oh, actually, yes, actually, yes.

[Luke]

Which is a direct reference to Harold Lloyd's hanging off a clock, and some other other stunts like that. Yeah, really good. So do you have what, what are you working on at the moment?

Have you got any, anything coming up? Or is there anything that we can see? What can we see you in, in fact?

[Ivan]

Well, you can see me there's a couple of shows, there's a little bit this, the Indian trial, you know, it will be available on Sony, Indian, I mean, it's called Sony live, but I think you can watch it also online should be soon. It's called the summer of 76. Because it's about the 70s in India, in what's called the emergency, they have that period, very kind of almost revolutionary period.

There will be next year, there should be a there'll be a show called ponies. I have a role there. It's American.

Yeah, so these two, that's that would be the closest. That would be closest, I would say.

[Luke]

Okay, cool. All right. Look, it's really, really interesting to talk to you.

Ivan, thank you for sharing all of your insights and experiences and things. It's been fascinating. Very nice to meet you.

[Ivan]

Thanks for having me. And thanks for this opportunity, because I think it's a great podcast. Lots of lots of good stuff for people who want to learn English effectively.

So I think it's great you're doing that. So thank you.

[Luke]

So there you go. That was my conversation with Ivan. And thank you again to him for taking part in this episode and for freely sharing his experiences, and his advice and for being genuine about trying to share his sincere thoughts and advice about, you know, how he's learned English and sort of how he deals with things like accents in his in his in his work as an actor, and how you can do the same thing.

You know, I appreciate that. And I really enjoyed meeting Ivan. He was really down to earth conversation, chatty person, a great guest, like the ideal guest for this podcast, really.

Now, I said earlier, that I would list some some takeaways, some things you can take away from this episode, conclusions about

learning English practical advice that we can take from Ivan's example from his life from his experiences. And so I'm going to do that now, I'm going to do it as quickly as possible, because I don't want the episode to get very long. But this is going to be a condensed set of tips, let's say for learning English taken directly from this episode.

And you can find all of this listed on the PDF, right within the transcript. So if you just keep going through the transcript, you get all the stuff with me and Ivan. And then at the end, you will you'll see all this stuff listed there again.

So you can you can go back to that and refer to it anytime you want to. So first of all, this is the first of 11 points I have here to share with you. So the first thing is the importance of learning through doing not just studying.

Use English for real things, do things in English. Ivan's English really improved when he started making projects in English, doing the web series, doing acting work, talking to people, and not just sort of studying in an academic way, or especially studying grammar. Now, we all know this, of course, that you don't learn a language just by studying the rules of grammar.

Everybody knows this now. But still, it's worth remembering the importance of trying to do things in English. Make English the tool, not the subject.

Start a small project, maybe a vlog, a diary, an Instagram account, a podcast, you know, movie scene reenactments, some sort of little drama group or something, anything that requires using English. Try to do some sort of project in English, even if it's even if

it's just writing a diary every day, which I have recommended on the podcast before, or maybe even an audio diary where you speak into a recording device about your day. You know, you could just record for a few minutes every day.

Doing something in English makes a huge difference. Use English as a tool. And through this method, you directly work on your English skills.

The theory helps, you know, your grammar book certainly helps, but it's not the engine that drives your English. Real communication is the thing that you should always be trying to practise. Second point, multimodal learning.

So, this means using a variety of different modes of communication in your learning. Just basically, don't forget the importance of all these other aspects that language is not just words on a paper. It's a whole variety of other things.

So, don't reduce English to just rules or even just sort of an abstract thing like maths stuff on a piece of paper, but it's a whole series of interconnected methods of communication. So, I'm talking about body language, pronunciation, tone of voice, facial expressions, rhythm, the general context. It's not just words on a page, right?

So, try to incorporate a variety of different forms of practise and different contexts in your English practise, okay? Watch people when they communicate with each other. If you watch something in English, consider the whole culture of the way that they communicate, the way they look at each other, the way they pause,

what their hands and face are doing when they say something important.

All of it, it's all part of the same thing. And this is what Ivan did when he was learning with the Mormons or when he was learning on set. He was constantly noticing the bigger picture.

And combined skills, listen and read and speak and move, repeat a line while copying the actor's body language and facial expression. Try to inhabit, completely inhabit the English that you're trying to learn. Third thing, listening and repetition, listening and repetition.

Re-listen on purpose. Listen to something more than once. Again, I've said this before, but it's still worth saying again.

Repetition. If you listen to a podcast episode, for example, listen to one of my conversations, you will get a certain amount from listening to it the first time. You'll pick up certain things.

But listening to something a second time, even a third time, you go much deeper and it actually consolidates the things you noticed the first time. And then you notice even more, and you're language, but other nuances and things. So you could maybe listen to something once for general meaning, listen again, and then you could take a more active role and note down unknown words or phrases and check them out.

And then listen a third time in order to notice those items in context. This is the sort of thing I help you do in my premium lessons, of course, when I do vocabulary reviews. But repeat listening, re-listen.

Notice repeat offenders. I mean, notice items of vocab that come up regularly. If a word or a chunk, like a phrase, keeps appearing, it is a sign.

You probably need it. You should put it on a list. You should start using it yourself.

And be aware that sometimes you might, it's hard to notice the words when you're listening. It's hard to notice new words that you don't know because they just, they can be a bit indistinct. So be on the lookout for those invisible bits that you can take on yourself.

Vocabulary lists. Ivan did this for the language of filmmaking. You can make lists of relevant vocab.

It can help you to kind of actively learn language. But beware of just doing, just translations. Beware of that.

Just, you know, writing the word in English and then translation. I've done an episode before, how to learn English vocabulary and not just stare at word lists. That episode was full of that kind of advice.

Basically, write more than just a translation or a definition. Try to include an example sentence or some other little details to help you remember a word when you write it down in a vocab list. But doing that can definitely help.

Fourth thing, on this point about whether Ivan is just a particularly talented person, if he's just like gifted, he suggested that actually it was about discipline as much as talent. He said that you don't need to be gifted at languages. Ivan's message was clear.

People think he's special, but in reality, discipline, hard work and repetition are what may have done most of the work for him. Be stubborn. Basically, don't give up.

Let something bother you in a good way. If you don't understand something, if you can't do something, don't give up. Just be stubborn about it and persevere until you feel like you have got it under control.

Small, realistic goals, step by step. Small goals, one step at a time. How do you eat an elephant?

You eat it one spoon at a time. How do you climb a mountain? You do it one step at a time.

It's the same thing with English. So, you set small, realistic, achievable goals and you deal with them one by one. For example, I want to be able to have a 10-minute small talk conversation.

I want to understand one specific podcast episode without subtitles. I want to be able to tell this story about my life in English. In step 5 here, point 5 is relating to point 4.

It's about step by step progression. Ivan's levels were quite a good model, really. Basic conversation, just being able to talk about everyday things.

Then more advanced conversation, being able to express opinions, stories, feelings and more nuance. Then a third level, which is the ability to be spontaneous and to improvise, being able to react in real time with no preparation. Identifying these different stages and

trying to deal with them one by one, rather than trying to jump to the end.

Just deal with things one by one, break things down into achievable chunks. Number 6, accents, rhythm and sounding natural. First, learn to hear an accent.

You can't produce what you can't hear. Choose one accent that you're targeting. It could be a standard British accent, standard general American accent, whatever it is you want.

Really listen to it, really start to identify the different sounds. Map it out, create an accent map. Notice which vowels in speaking English, which vowel sounds are different to yours.

How do they stress certain words? What's the rhythm? You could find your accent twin.

That's, let's say, a speaker of English that is very similar to you. Someone of similar age, probably the same gender. Someone whose voice feels close to your natural voice, and then use them as your model.

I will let you decide who that is. It would help if you could find someone who has plenty of audio content that you could work with. Rhythm and word stress are arguably more important than perfect vowel sounds.

For example, the case of making sure that you're saying banana and not banana. That's just one example of many multi-syllable words. Don't underestimate the importance of the word stress and sentence stress.

Shadowing works. That means repeating along with a speaker or pausing and repeating after them, trying to match their timing, stress, and melody. Ivan talked about dialect coaches.

I did actually speak to a dialect coach on this podcast once upon a time. Jerome Butler is his name, and Jerome works with actors in America, working in television and films. Which episode was that?

I'm thinking it was 682, but I'm not sure. I need to check. In which episode did I talk to Jerome Butler, accent coach, dialect coach?

691. I wasn't too far off. You could listen to episode 691 and see what Jerome Butler has to say about helping actors learn certain accents.

He talked about shadowing and the importance of using shadowing as one of his training methods. It works. Try it.

Exaggeration. This is point seven. When you are trying to copy someone's accent, exaggeration is good.

It's a good way to push yourself in the right direction. Overdo it first, and then calm it down. Exaggerate the British or American accent or intonation you're trying to copy.

Really push the stress and the melody to an extreme point, and then slowly bring it back to something natural. This is not fake. This is a question of training.

Just like with acting, you push beyond your comfort zone, and then you can refine it. Or you push yourself into the right area, and then you can refine it step by step. Point eight.

Identity culture. Identity culture and letting yourself change. I've heard people talk about the fact that maybe the main reason why people don't improve their pronunciation is because there are subtle psychological factors and identity issues which actually block you and stop you from being able to speak in a more, let's say, British-sounding accent because you feel self-conscious or something like that.

There is something to be said for just letting yourself go and feeling free to borrow a new identity. It might feel weird. It might feel like you are not being yourself, but that flexibility is all part of your language learning journey.

Adapting is not the same as betraying your culture. You can still be 100% you, and also learn to play by local rules when you're speaking English. Point number nine.

Talk to yourself. Talk to yourself a lot. Self-talk is powerful.

It doesn't mean you're crazy. Walk around your flat narrating what you're doing in English, or you could rehearse future conversations, retell a story that you heard, argue with yourself about something, or at least after you've been trying to work on a particular accent, trying to copy a particular person, you can go around and try and inhabit that character. I have done it myself just for fun or just for comedy when learning to do impressions of Paul McCartney or something.

I'll just walk around as Paul McCartney, just walking around. That's a lovely little mug you got there. That's great.

I mean, that's a silly example, but it is a technique that you can try and do just for fun. Walk around talking to yourself in a different character. It's also good as a way of immersing yourself in English and a way to make yourself think in English as well.

The goal is to stop translating. It's to find your flow state in English. Like Ivan said, it's like changing gears into a car.

Once you're in English gear, you just stay in that gear and you just drive. You've got to practise shifting into that gear, which is why it can be fun just to play around with English. Walk around and pretend that you're me doing an episode of my podcast.

That can be very good for you. Point number 10 is treat English like a role you inhabit. This is where you have to think like an actor.

Step into the role of an English-speaking version of you. Use your voice, but with English rhythm and intonation. Add the body language, facial expressions that match.

That includes little filler words, little filler sounds. All of it's part of the package. Use emotion.

Try to express emotions when you practise English. So, you're not just trying to express a grammar rule or trying to express correct English. You are actually trying to express real feelings and put some emotion into your English as well, because it should come out with a certain kind of intonation.

So, don't just say words. Feel what you say, which is where you have to be like a Jedi, right? You don't just use English.

You have to feel the English. This actually really helps you to remember language and also sound more authentic. Then, number 11, point number 11 is simply inspiration and the fact that you can do this.

Various messages which are implied by Ivan's story are that you can start with school English that isn't great, like most people in the world come out of school with English which isn't amazing. I mean, it's alright, but most people come out of school with a certain sort of intermediate level of English which isn't great. You can start with that and you can build from there and end up working internationally.

You don't need a perfect method. You need consistent action, curiosity, the courage to interact, discipline, and a sense of fun as well. Being from somewhere else is not a weakness.

It can be your superpower, a different perspective, a richer identity, and something that you can share with others. It's always great fun to explore and share your own personal world view from your particular corner of the world. So, there you go.

There are just 11 points which we've taken from this episode that you could apply and think about and reflect on and use yourself in the future when you continue to improve your English. Thank you again to Ivan. Thank you to you for listening to this podcast episode all the way up until this point.

Yeah, check out the PDF transcript. That could be useful for you. And otherwise, I look forward to reading your comments.

Do you have any comments? Do you have any insights that you can share? What did you take away from this?

Anything at all? I'd love to read your comments and get the conversation started in the comments section. Other things I could say, obviously, check out Luke's English Podcast Premium if you're really serious about using my podcast to help you learn English.

Teacherluke.co.uk/premium. If you're a fan of my podcast and you want to show your appreciation, one thing you could do is to write a nice review. So, if you listen to this podcast, for example, in Apple Podcasts, then leave a review for the show and let other people know that you love the show and that it has really helped you.

Tell people sincerely what it is that you like about this podcast. It would make a huge difference to me because those reviews and ratings on different podcast platforms really helped to promote my podcast. And this is something I have to keep doing because even though I've been doing this for over 16 years, this podcast has been going for more than 16 years, I still have to make sure my podcast is still getting kind of promoted by these algorithms and things like that.

So, if you leave a nice, positive, sincere review on your podcast platform, that can definitely help. Okay, that's it for this episode. Thank you for listening.

Thank you for watching. Speak to you again soon, but for now, it's time to say good bye. bye. Bye. bye. bye.