

RAMBLEMAN: Into the Ramble-zone [990]

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Hello...

Here is just a good old fashioned rambling episode in which I will respond to comments on recent episodes and generally just shoot the breeze, chew the fat and talk the hind legs off a donkey. If you're not sure what I'm talking about - hold on, I will explain those expressions in a moment.

During this episode there will be some bits of English teaching on various language points, responses to recent episodes, correspondence from listeners, one or two little anecdotes and more.

This is a finger-ramble (still not sure about that word) which means that I rambled this out with my fingers over the last week or so, in different locations.

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I wrote most of this in advance and there is a PDF for this. The link for that is in the description of the episode.

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You will see some words and phrases highlighted in a pale blue colour. Those are bits of English which you might want to check later, in order to broaden your vocab, and you will see a detailed vocabulary list at the end of the PDF with all those things explained.

What about the expressions I used at the start?

- shoot the breeze
- chew the fat
- talk the hind legs off a donkey

I might talk off-script at various moments in the episode, and when I do that I will try to remember to put a * star on the PDF.

*

A recent email I got

I am going to start in perhaps the most counter-intuitive way, by sharing an email from a disgruntled listener, which sums up my most common criticisms.

The other day, someone cancelled their premium subscription.

Now, whenever this happens I get an email, and boy - that is a tough email to receive.

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It says, “name” has cancelled their premium subscription, and often there is a reason given.

Obviously, when that happens it is a very bad day, a very sad day and I need to sit down, have a minute’s silence, and there’s usually a big line of soldiers in uniforms and white gloves who fire rifles into the air three times. And then I need to weep for a while, and pick myself up and desperately just try to carry on with my life.

So, when it happens I get an email, and whoever has cancelled, I mean, the poor fool who has taken a huge wrong turn in their life, they get the opportunity to give a reason.

Now, some lovely people write things like this “I love the content Luke and thank you for your hard work, but I just don’t have time at the moment, but I hope to come back soon.” That’s the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down. Thank you if you do that. You leave with grace, and class.

You can criticise my work as well if you want, but I do appreciate the respectful effort to ease me to the floor gently.

But then occasionally, just very occasionally, someone writes “I didn’t like the content” which is one of the options, and I scream into the void - *What didn’t you like about it????!!!!* And then I move on with my life.

But then, more occasionally, someone will say exactly why they didn’t like it, such as this comment which I received just the other day.

Reason for canceling subscription: **Some other reason**

Additional Comments:

He talks too much and takes too long to get to the point. Between the lengthy introductions and the constant tangents, it's a waste of time. These sessions could easily be cut down to 20 minutes."

Ouch! That stings. It still stings.

This is a premium subscriber as well, and I always try to cut out too much rambling from premium episodes, but maybe they're talking about free episodes, who knows.

But, what can I say?

In any case, I think that now, with that comment in mind, surely it is time now to embark on a classic rambling episode of this podcast, and I will certainly make every effort to

- talk way too much
- take as long as humanly possible to get the point
- ensure that the introduction **makes up** approximately 99% of the episode's length

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- and generally waste as much of everyone's time as I possibly can, while somehow forcing everyone to keep listening, against their will.

OK, if you are the sort of person who thinks that all of this could be wrapped up in just 20 minutes, and that I never get to the point, that my introductions go on forever and there are too many tangents - maybe you are right.

Fair enough. I hold my hands up. You got me. It's a fair cop. Now, take me to jail.

But, if you are one of those listeners who loves this podcast precisely for those reasons - that they are long, that I give loads of details, that I allow room for tangential moments, and that *the point* is this elusive thing which is always just beyond our reach - then I suppose this is the podcast for you.

And please, leave a comment to say what you think. Do you agree with that person who cancelled, or disagree?

Of course, I do get a bit hurt by an email like that, because I want everyone to like my content and find it useful, but you can't please all the people all the time, and you shouldn't try.

So, if you love this podcast despite its flaws, or perhaps because of its flaws - please, leave a comment to let me know.

And if you don't like it, that's OK. It can't be for everyone.

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Or maybe you have other reasons for cancelling your premium subscription, like this person who also cancelled the other day, and I got this email:

Reason for canceling subscription: **Some other reason**

Additional Comments:

| I like your teaching but I'm old

Fair enough.

So now, with all of that in mind, let's commence this rambling episode properly, with **gusto**, with absolutely no intention to get to whatever point that other person thought was going to arrive at within 20 minutes, and I want to invite all LEPsters into this moment, right here, right now.

Let's, once again, *make English happen...* and here we go.

No pressure.

This is a podcast for learners of English

It is on all podcast platforms and also YouTube. But yes - it is a podcast for learners of English as a foreign language.

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I say that because it seems that the YouTube algorithm has been recommending my videos to native English speakers (shock horror)

And the thing is, native English speakers don't quite know what to make of my episodes.

People keep commenting things like "YouTube! I know how to speak English!" or "Why does this keep getting recommended to me?" or "Can you do stories without explaining everything?" or "Why do you keep stopping to explain words, just tell the story!" or "Who is this Briddish guy? I fell asleep to YouTube and woke up to this guy." etc

I do these episodes to help people learn English. I do this by trying to provide something which I hope is genuinely interesting and enjoyable to listen to, which is not really dumbed down.

A lot of content for learners of English is graded for lower levels (which is understandable because most people out there learning English are at the lower end of the spectrum).

So, a lot of content is graded for lower levels, and in the attempt to make the language more comprehensible, it ends up also being a bit simplistic, and even patronising.

*

Again, it is understandable why that happens. But I try not to simplify too much and try not to be patronising.

But the main thing is, I try to give just enough support to my listeners, in terms of understanding what they are hearing, explaining or defining bits of vocabulary, breaking down the

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language a bit, repeating something, saying something in several ways, giving more examples of something and just generally trying to talk about things from the perspective of learners of English around the world - all little techniques I've developed over a very long career, which hopefully let me keep a sort of entertaining rambling method, which appears to be just a lot of **waffling**, 20 minute introductions, repeating myself and not getting to any kind of point, but which, in fact, is actually carefully and **painstakingly** designed in order to teach English through listening.

So, any native speakers listening to this, or indeed watching it on YouTube - of course you are welcome to stay and be part of my audience, but just in case you are wondering why I sometimes explain or repeat myself - it's done on purpose and **by design**, and there's method in my madness and all that. (Why do I always feel the need to explain these things? Insecurity probably.)

If you are a native speaker - get in the comments and tell me where you are from and if your version of English is different to mine.

By the way, on the subject of getting to the point and some people in my comment section saying things like "Introduction was too long. Just get to the point" I have two things to say.

1. This episode is actually 100% introduction. It's all an introduction. An introduction to what? Well, an intro to the next thing you do after you listen to this.

Somehow, in some way, you can consider this all to be an introduction to the next phase of your life which will commence upon the conclusion of this episode. So, there you are - point 1,

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this episode is 100% introduction, so you no longer need to worry about when the intro will end. Just check the progress bar of the episode and voila, there it is.

2. Second point is this. *picks up a biro* I am now holding a ball-point pen in my hand, and I am slowly working my fingers along the pen, further and further towards the sharp end where the writing happens, and my fingers are getting closer and closer, and now they are touching the end of the pen - the sharp bit where the ink comes out. In other words, I've got to the point. So, if you are wondering when I'm going to get to the point, there - it's already happened. So you don't need to worry about that any more.

Right - back to that bit about so many native English speakers discovering and watching my videos - perhaps even being forced by YouTube to watch my videos - being aggressively recommended by YouTube's algorithm, which apparently has just been playing my episodes randomly to random people in the USA, many of whom, it seems, are in the habit of nodding off and falling asleep in front of YouTube, and then waking up all groggy, confused and angry to the sound of me telling a Sherlock Holmes story and explaining things in a bit too much detail.

YouTube's algorithm is funny. I said that it's been recommending my stuff to native speakers. It looks like that mostly means one particular episode - a Sherlock Holmes story which I did a couple of years ago.

The Adventure of the Speckled Band. There have been so many comments on that episode recently. It's over 2 million views on

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YouTube now. In fact the episode randomly picked up over 500,000 views in just 7 days.

Why did the algorithm suddenly decide to recommend this particular video to loads of new people - including what looks like loads of native English speakers in the USA. Maybe it just decided they needed to be educated in the ways of British English and I was the one to do it! Fair enough, maybe it's right. Is this an example of AI trying to fix the world?

“Well, first things first, those Yanks needs to fix their English”.

Who knows. But recently there's been a new comment on that video every time I have checked, and a lot of confused native speakers. At least half of them are rude - like “Why the f*ck do you keep stopping the story to explain words I already know?” or “I fell asleep in front of YouTube and woke up to this - who is this Briddish guy anyway?” and things like that.

Other comments are lovely “I actually already speak English but I love this!”

Recent episodes - you've had all your favourite guests, haven't you?

You lucky people.

Both parents, wife, daughter, James, Amber and Paul, Kate B (coming in the next episode).

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Responses to recent episodes... coming up later in this episode.

I just want to say well done to you if you have managed to listen through all the recent episodes that featured me in conversation with guests. I know those ones are more difficult to follow.

I know what it is like to listen to a fast conversation between other people, in a foreign language. Sometimes it is exhausting. So, well done for sticking with it despite what I expect is quite a lot of struggle. I do think the rewards are that you become more and more familiar with the spoken word.

Episodes when I am on my own are a lot easier to follow, right? So I hope this one is a pleasure as you are able to follow **each and every** word and you know that it is all being addressed directly to you.

I was thinking again the other day, after I got an email from a LEPster who is attending a language school in the UK at the moment. He said that he realised that listening to my podcast had given him an inbuilt sense or intuition about English.

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I have said it before and I will say it again - listening a lot, to episodes like mine, is bound to fill your head with things like common word combinations, phrases, grammatical structures etc, to the point that you just *know* when one word follows another, and that instinct is definitely the best kind of grammatical knowledge you can have about English, where, if you do a Cambridge Exam for example, you just know what the missing words are in a text, without having to apply some other kind of consciously-learned rule.

I'm not saying that kind of knowledge is the only kind you need. You also need to study English too - looking at the "rules" of grammar and applying your intelligence to working out how the language works based on what is written in grammar books etc. But it is the combination of these things that helps you.

For example, this sample FCE Reading and Use of English Pt 2 paper.

How do you know what the answers are?

Where does your knowledge come from?

And how can you expect to know English if you don't read it a lot and listen to it a lot?

Does studying all the grammar rules in school or reading one book help you to learn all this?

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I expect it is a combination. Some answers you just know, and other answers you have to apply some of your actively learned knowledge of the rules of English.

<https://www.flo-joe.co.uk/fce/students/tests/FCE-Part-2-Open-Cloze.htm>

Motorbike Stunt Rider

I work (0) ... a motorbike stunt rider - that is, I do tricks on my motorbike at shows. The Le Mans racetrack in France was (1) I first saw some guys doing motorbike stunts. I'd never seen anyone riding a motorbike using just the back wheel before and I was (2) impressed I went straight home and taught (3) to do the same.

Anyway, this is supposed to be a rambling episode isn't it, not a Reading & Use of English episode?

I guess my point there was one I have made many times before, which is that doing extensive listening feeds your passive understanding of English, which is actually a very important **bedrock** for creating that sense of instinct about how the language works.

It's a bit like the way an LLM works. It's about predicting the most frequently occurring word combinations because you have fed your brain with massive amounts of language data. You can also apply rules you have learned too, like "where" is for places, "when" is for times, "who" is for people etc.

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Oh, I just realised. I need to set a timer for some water.

*

I was walking down the road today and I couldn't help thinking about...

The state of the world

And how a lot of content I consume is political commentary on what's going on at the moment. And I rarely talk directly about these things but I must say...The world outside is absolutely bonkers, isn't it?

Whatever direction you look - East, West, North, South - it's all gone pear shaped hasn't it?

*

I just wish the forces of good, law & order, justice, all that is right - I hope they win in the end.

Should I go into more detail about this? Well, I will just say that if you look at the news and get a deep sense of existential despair - you are not alone.

Where does LEP stand in these f*cked up times?

To an extent this is an oasis in the middle of a desert of toxicity that otherwise dominates the online world, in which our shock, outrage, and worst qualities are exploited, monetised and so on.

Hopefully, LEP is a breath of fresh air in this climate. But I always have this nagging feeling that I should take on these divisive

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subjects and use my platform to somehow tip things in the right direction. But it could spell disaster.

I think we all agree though, right, that LEP somehow in its sincerity and neutrality, and its commitment to the power of language to unite, and the importance of using language for diplomacy as a way of settling disputes and generally for sharing, caring and entertaining rather than distracting, misinforming, inflaming, and twisting, that LEP does represent a kind of resistance to the evils of this world.

I know it's just a podcast for learners of English, but still, I think it's possible to be philosophical about things even if you're not addressing them directly.

Basically I think we should make efforts to give each other the benefit of the doubt, to be cautiously optimistic, to have respect for ourselves and others, and to reach out across the oceans and across continents, and to be honest and put our hands on our hearts and to live together on this planet, knowing we are all essentially living the same life in different time zones - something like that anyway.

I feel bad about not taking on different causes and being more politically strident, but I hope simply to be the change I want to see in the world, is something and not nothing.

What do you think?

An update on LEP Premium

What you have missed if you're not a subscriber:

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- Vocab previews/review for:
 - Paranormal Experiences
 - 10 Questions about Food with Martin (featuring my wife)
 - Advanced Phrasal Verbs from Recent Episodes
- Coming next: A preview of a conversation with Kate Billington
- AMA - Any Questions Answered

...and I promise I do my best to get to the point in premium episodes.

New rules for the podcast

I am always thinking of how I can improve this show for my audience. And here are a few conclusions I have come to, after mulling over a lot of things lately, with the help of some regular commenters in the comment section (including but not limited to: Pierre, Bernhard, Ato, Solo, Nick, Mra)

Intros and outros for conversation episodes

Intros should

- tell you important things to help you understand the conversation which is coming up - but try to keep the intro length in check.
- Give you some bits of language to notice

Endings (outros) should

- Give a short report of the episode, summarising some of the main points
- Explain some bits of language that came up

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Episode length should not be a factor, but intro length should be curtailed.

Pierre's way of putting it: starter, main course, dessert.

Keep the starter light and it should be a sort of amuse bouche to stimulate the palette and prepare the taste buds for the main course, which is the conversation that you can sink your teeth into, then the dessert can be quite rich and substantial too, and should also allow you to digest the main course more easily.

I don't know to what extent that analogy works, but does it surprise you that Pierre, who came up with this entirely meal-based analogy, is French?

Laughter Lift Jokes / The Comedy Corner

Let's take a moment to enjoy a little diversion into the comedy corner, thanks to some jokes which I shamelessly pinched from a section called The Laughter Lift, in *Kermode & Mayo's Take* - one of my favourite podcasts.

Let's slump now in the comedy corner and enjoy some silly dad-jokes, which I will then dissect.

What is made of leather and sounds like a sneeze?

A shoe.

Bless you.

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I went to my local video shop and I said “Can I borrow Batman Forever please?” And he said “No you’ll have to bring it back tomorrow.”

I went to the furniture shop and said “Hello I’m looking for a sofa that will fit 5 people” and the guy said “Perfect, this sofa here will fit 5 people without any problems”, and I said “Oh great, where am I going to find 5 people without any problems?”

I opened the medicine cabinet this morning and a bottle of super strength omega-3 capsules fell on my head. “Ouch!” I shouted. Luckily my injuries were only super-fish-oil.

I watched a documentary at the weekend called How Ships Are Made. It was riveting.

It just occurred to me that someone born in 33 was 45 in 78. That’s got to be a record.

I misheard a request from my wife the other day and passed her a pritt-stick instead of a lip-stick. She still isn’t talking to me.

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Shock! Horror! Some old episodes with music in them might be removed from Spotify and might eventually be removed from all feeds

So, download them now if you want. They are all available on the website in the episode archive teacherluke.co.uk/episodes

Specifically

- Misheard lyrics 1&2 (oh they are classics)
- Marooned with my Music entire series Mum, Dad, James, Me
- 284. Questions from Tea4er.ru (Part 2) (because I played some reggae stuff at the end)
- 222. Luke's Late Night Podcast (A late night DJing session with rambling on the top - surprisingly good mixing from me I have to say)
- Hip Hop Lyric Analysis (Analysing the lyrics to My Mind Is Playing Tricks On Me by Geto Boys)
- California Road Trip (the one where I analysed the lyrics to Hotel California)

And probably loads of others in which I was careless enough to play music which is protected by copyright.

I'm concerned that Spotify will remove a lot more.

I don't really do it any more, or if I do I find ways of getting around the copyright limitations.

Singing songs on the podcast

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I rarely sing songs in episodes any more, because those ones also get flagged for copyright infringement and the episode is demonetised.

I'm afraid that if I keep doing it, my channel will receive a copyright strike which could mean it gets taken down for a limited period, or taken down permanently.

In a way, I am flattered that the algorithm hears me singing, I don't know, a song by Elvis, and it recognises it. This means my singing isn't completely out of tune and wrong.

But anyway, less singing in episodes these days, and maybe that is for the best.

The other day I happened to hear myself in an old episode, singing, and it wasn't great. I know we generally hate to hear the sound of our own voice, but well, I didn't enjoy hearing the sound of my own voice, so that's that.

Some listeners will disagree. I have a small but loyal section of my audience who really love it when I sing songs - but I have just given two reasons why I can't really do that on the podcast now - copyright, and quality control concerns! Still, I love music and songs. Maybe I will find a way to keep doing it - like on a separate channel that will never make any money.

[Lukulele - YouTube](#)



Wish me a happy birthday whenever you want. It was a couple of days ago.

Please take this opportunity to wish me a happy birthday and to congratulate me on managing to stay alive for one more year.

*

Feel free to mark this occasion by sending me a very valuable and expensive gift, or just a cake emoji.

I will let you guess my age, which could become an annual tradition.

Oh, A gift? For me? Oh you shouldn't have. Oh, you don't know how to send it to me. Hmm, that's tricky isn't it?

Well, I mean, you could always just send me a donation, to help support the podcast. Do that by clicking the paypal button on my website. That would be a great way to show your appreciation and you don't have to worry about sending a package to me (I mean shipping costs for brand new Ferraris, or gold and diamond encrusted microphones can be high, so - just send a donation that would be totally fine. Up to you how much - £1 or £1,000,000 - or realistically somewhere in the middle, haha.

To be clear - that is £500,000 which you could use as a general guideline or benchmark if you were wondering what the typical donation should be.

My son is in the “why” stage, and he asks “why” about absolutely everything.

It leads to some quite interesting conversations.

Daddy, why pigeons there?

It makes me think of this old routine by Louis CK (is he still in disgrace? ~yes)

▶ Louis CK Why on parenting, kids, and questions

A very sanitised version of Louis CK’s material

Here's the thing. I never never never never judge other parents now. I never do. I used to but now I never do. Like you know when you see a mother in McDonald's or someplace or in a Toy store, and she's just melting down at her kid.

And people sitting around are going “oh my goodness. She's a horrible mother.” Well guess what those people aren't parents They don't have kids because any parents who are in that store are thinking “what did that kid do to that poor woman? That poor woman. I wish I could help”

Cuz you don't know man. You don't know. But when you see a parent that seems to be negligent, like you see a parent in McDonald's with the kid and the parent's like “I can't take this anymore” and is just collapsed and all the shopping bags are just strewn everywhere and the kid's happy. The kid's eating french fries and the kid asks a question like “mama. Why is the sky blue?” and she's like “just shut up and eat your french fries”.

And you think “what a terrible mother. Why doesn't she answer her child. When I have a child I will answer all of their questions and open their minds to the wonders of the world.”

Well guess what, you don't know what you're talking about. You can't answer a kid's questions. They don't accept any answer. A kid never goes, “Oh, thanks. I get it.” They never say that. They just keep coming with more questions “Why why why” so you don't even know who you are anymore at the end of the conversation. It's an insane deconstruction.

It's amazing. This is my daughter the other day. She's like

“Papa.

Why can't we go outside?”

Well cuz it's raining

why?

Well water's coming out of the sky

why

Because it was in a cloud

Why?

well Clouds form when there's vapour

Why

I don't know. I don't know that's I don't know any more things

Those are all the things I know

Why?

Cuz I'm stupid okay. I'm stupid

Why

well because I didn't pay attention in school, okay? I went to school, but I didn't listen in class

Why

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cuz I was high all the time. I smoked too much pot

Why

cuz my parents gave me no guidance They didn't care

why

cuz they had sex in a car and had me and they resented me for taking away their youth

Why

because they had bad morals, they just had no compass

why

cuz they had crap parents It just keeps going like that

why

cuz what the hell. We're alone in the universe. Nobody cares about us

I'm gonna stop here to be polite to you for a second

But this goes on for hours

Hours and it gets so weird and abstract at the end.

It's like

why

well because some things are and some things are not

Why

well because things that are not can't be

Why

because then nothing wouldn't be. You can't have nothing isn't.

Everything is.

Why

cuz if nothing wasn't, there'd be all kinds of stuff that like a giant ass with top hats dancing around There's no room for all that stuff

why

just eat your french fries

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As a palette cleanser, here is a message from Susanne who uses my podcast to help calm her dog down, which is one of the many benefits of LEP - dog calming



A picture of what appears to be a medium-sized dog lying on its back on a sofa, happy.

If I have to leave her alone in the apartment for a while, I put on a long episode of your podcast and she can manage to wait until I come back without barking, howling, or whining.

This works better than any other method!

So we are thankful for long episodes!

Bye 🙌 bye bye

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Susanne

So there you go. Don't drug your dog. Make it listen to LEP instead. Try it with other pets too. Do you have a fidgety fish? Is your cat climbing the walls? Do you have a hectic hamster? Do you have a pent up guinea pig? Just play it an episode of LEP, and they will be fine, and as an added bonus their English will improve hugely and who knows you might end up with a talking dog on your hands like in episode [153. The Talking Dog Story | Luke's ENGLISH Podcast](#)

Clearly the solution to so many problems. Passify your pet for up to 3 hours with LEP.

Talking of animals listening to my podcast...



Wild boar

Hi Luke,

I'm very reluctant to give up my Ninja role (and I'll definitely keep wearing my Lepster Ninja shirt with pride) but enough has built up over time that I finally decided to write to you.

First of all, your podcast is absolutely brilliant, in every respect, and I'm really glad I discovered it about four or five years ago. It was a ramble episode that hooked me straight away.

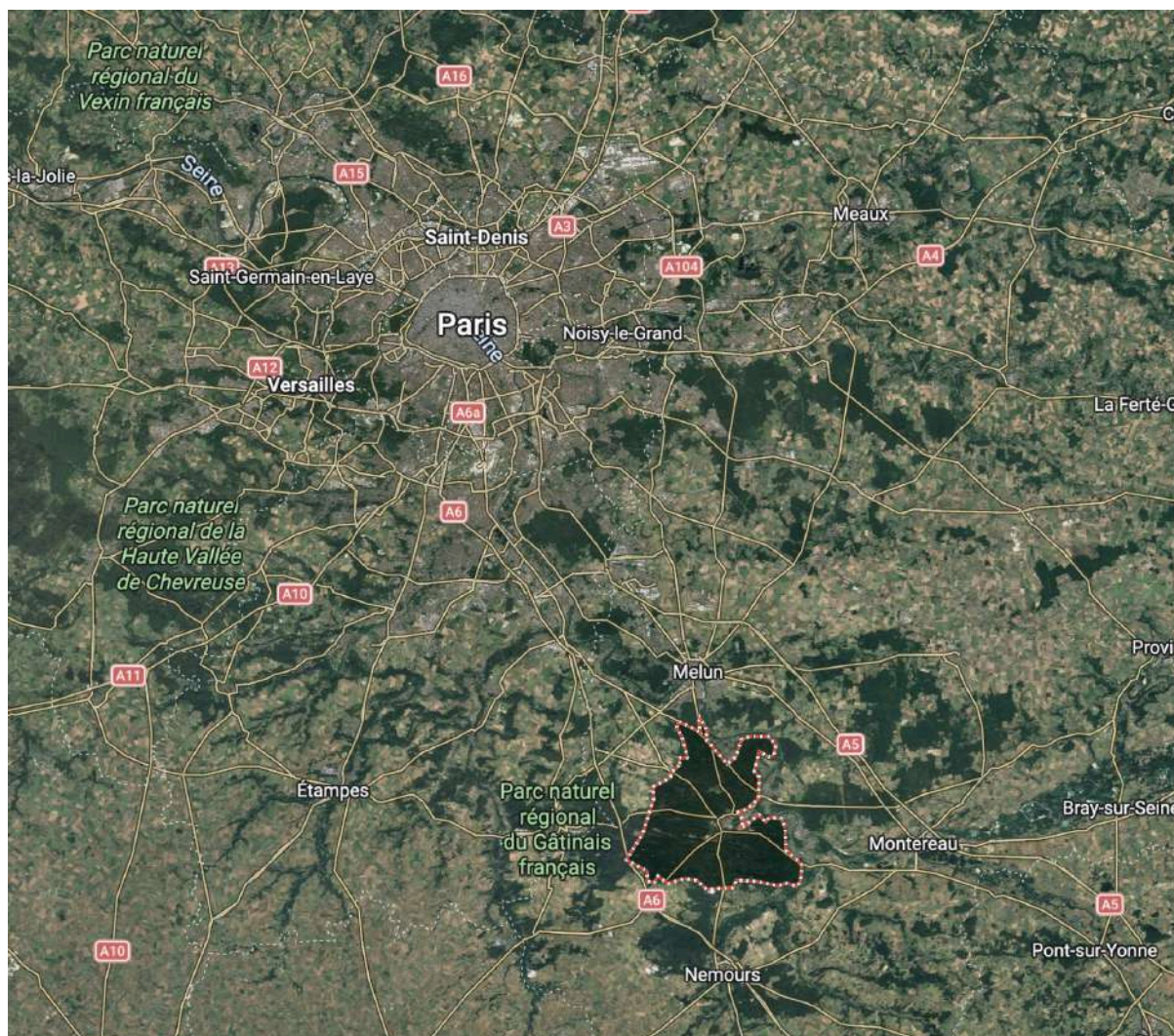
That brings me to the second point: I'm a big fan of your rambles, especially the really long ones. In fact, I love long episodes in general, and I'm all for detailed intros. I really enjoy your way of telling stories and your sense of humour. My

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boyfriend laughs at me a bit because he says I do the exact same thing: going off on tangents, adding endless background details, so that in the end he's not even sure whether I've already made my point or if it's still coming. So clearly, there's a kindred spirit here.

There's a lot more I could say, but I'll keep it to one more thing. You once asked in what perhaps unusual situations your listeners tune in. I've got one for you: I live in Germany, but twice a year I spend several months in Fontainebleau, trying to climb as much as possible in the forest. Given how close it is to Paris, you might know the area.





I really enjoy going climbing on my own, but sometimes — depending on how deep I am in the forest — I get a bit uneasy about running into wild boar on the way out. I know they're usually shy and tend to move away when they hear people, but since I'm alone, I might not be making enough noise. So in those moments, I put your podcast on speaker and walk out with you keeping me company — hoping your voice has some wild-boar-deterrent qualities!

That's it from me... Thank you so much for all the work you put into the podcast!! I really appreciate it.

Dani (Ex Ninja and skeleton with headphones on)

P.S. Because the latest episode just dropped: my second-favourite episodes are the ones with Amber and Paul.

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Yeah! When Paul was recently in Strasbourg with his show, my boyfriend and I went, and we had such a great time. It was brilliant. Please say hello to Paul!

I love the idea that you are walking through the forest blasting out my podcast in order to scare off the wild boar!

I am also very glad that you like the long intros of episodes and that you don't find me to be **a wild bore**. <--- look at that, did you see that?

Wild boar / wild bore

To bore someone / to be boring / to be a bore

I asked Dani if she was ok for me to read this out on the podcast.

It would be a real honour for me if you read my message out on the podcast, and of course you can mention my name :-) I've already recommended your podcast to a few friends, so they might recognise me... although to be fair, they'll definitely recognise me from talking about climbing in Fontainebleau, which I manage to bring up at every opportunity.

Hey - Dani's friends! Send her a message to say hi!

The obligatory P.S.: Thinking about it, I feel slightly obliged to add that I don't normally listen to music or podcasts out loud in

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the forest. Of course not. I really enjoy the silence of the woods and try to behave as respectfully as possible while climbing. The wild boar situation is a bit of a holy exception !

Wild boar - plural or not?

By the way, very attentive grammar nerds might be thinking, “wait Luke, is it *to scare off the wild boar* (plural) or *wild boars* (plural)?” How many wild boar are there? Just one massive wild boar? The legendary wild boar of Fontainebleau forest?

Wild boar (zero plural) is more common in hunting, wildlife management, and formal ecological contexts, or just when referring to the species as a whole or group. “The region is overpopulated with wild boar.” “Wild boar can be dangerous if you take them by surprise”

Wild boars (standard plural) is the everyday way to describe multiple individual animals. So if you are talking about **individual animals** that you can count, you add the s. “Three wild boars ran across the road.”

Many animal names, especially those traditionally hunted, have a “zero plural” (like *deer*, *sheep*, or *fish*).

- We saw a deer by the side of the road. 10 deer ran across the road.
- There’s a sheep in the garden. The field is full of sheep. There must be 50 sheep in that field.

- We caught a fish in the lake. The lake is full of fish. How many fish are in that lake? I don't know, but it's one less than it was before, isn't it?

Comedy Corner #2

My friend's joke just sent in on Whatsapp

Those remixers have changed their tune.

Me: How cool is Gerard Butler?

Wife: What, out of 300?

Me: Yeah.

Wife: About 200.

Responses to recent episodes

Episodes with my mum and dad

A few episodes ago I recorded episodes with my parents while I was staying with them. The aim was just to ask them about their lives, because it's important to do that.

A lot of people left very lovely comments under both episodes. I agree, I am lucky to have parents I can talk to so freely, and I want to continue to make the most of their company.

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If you want more episodes like that, search the episode archive for the words “mum”, “dad”, “gill” and “rick” and you will find a whole host of other interesting episodes with my parents that you might not have heard, and some of them have premium vocabulary reviews too.

For example, there is episode 528 which is a ramble about the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle with my mum (they didn't marry my mum), and there is a premium vocabulary review for that too - series P03.

And there is premium series P29 which is a vocabulary review for episode 704 which was a conversation with my dad about Brexit.

Search for 528 and P03 for the episodes with my mum.
Search for 704 and P29 for the ones with my dad.

Others that people might not know:

Odd News Stories (talking about some funny new stories)
A Rambling Chat with Mum (talking about lots of different things)

Who Wants To Be Good At English (two episodes - one in which my dad tests me about English vocab, and another one in which I do the same to him)

The Lumber Room

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This is the one about the boy called Nicolas who outsmarts his so-called aunt and explores a fascinating secret room in the house, while the aunt falls into a water tank.

Just the usual high praise for a story episode. I totally understand why they are popular and I will keep doing them. I'll do more by Saki.

A reminder: I do have to be careful with copyright and tend to choose older stories because they are **in the public domain**.

I think this was a response to this episode, but I'm not sure.

Question: to be bothered vs to be disturbed

@ionela_andreea30 • 21 minutes ago

I love these kinds of podcast episodes and this story was very interesting and funny 😄. Thank you for everything Luke! 🙏

*Btw, could you please explain in the future in a podcast episode the difference between **'to be bothered'** & **'to be disturbed'**. I get confused by them and I don't know how to use them properly. Hopefully it's going to be useful for other learners too. Thank you!*

These two expressions overlap slightly because both can describe a negative emotional reaction, but they are used quite differently in practice.

1. “To be bothered”

Usually means:

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- annoyed
- inconvenienced
- worried slightly
- emotionally affected in a mild or moderate way

It often sounds fairly everyday and conversational.

Common meanings

A) Annoyed / inconvenienced

Sorry to bother you. (when you enter a room)

I'm bothered by all the noise.

Does it bother you if I open the window?

This is very common.

B) Not motivated enough - "Can't be bothered to..."

I can't be bothered to cook tonight.

Meaning:

"I don't have the energy/motivation/desire."

This use is extremely common in British English.

C) Slightly emotionally upset or concerned

She seemed bothered by his comments.

This suggests discomfort, concern, irritation, or mild emotional upset.

Not extremely serious, but when you have something on your mind and you can't really relax because of it.

The comments on my latest episode are bothering me a bit.

2. “To be disturbed”

Usually means:

- mentally or emotionally troubled in a deeper way than just being bothered
- shocked
- psychologically affected
- interrupted

This word is generally stronger and more serious.

Common meanings

A) Shocked or deeply unsettled

I was disturbed by the documentary.

I saw a horror film when I was 12 and it really disturbed me for years.

Meaning:

It upset me psychologically or emotionally.

This often suggests something:

- dark
- creepy
- violent
- morally troubling

For example:

The crime scene was deeply disturbing.

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B) Mentally unhealthy

He was a disturbed child.

This is a strong description.

It suggests serious psychological or emotional problems.

I think he is mentally disturbed.

C) Interrupted

A formal/literal meaning.

Do not disturb.

Sorry to disturb you.

Here it simply means:

“interrupt”.

Main difference

“**Bothered**” = usually lighter, everyday annoyance or concern

“Sorry to bother you” “I can’t be bothered to do anything today” and “His comments really bothered me”

“**Disturbed**” = stronger emotional or psychological impact

Compare:

I was bothered by the film.

= It annoyed me or made me slightly uncomfortable.

vs

I was disturbed by the film.

= It shocked or deeply unsettled me.

Room 101 with Charlie Baxter

One of Charlie's Room 101 items was menus which he can't understand (because of pretentious flowery language) and he wants pictures or even better actual samples of the food on the menu which he can taste before making his choice.

About menus

Plenty of people wrote to say that picture menus are normal in their countries.

And I was reminded that in many Japanese restaurants, you can actually see actual food samples on display in the window, made of plastic or something. They show you sort of plastic models of all the dishes they offer, so you can look and see what they have and what you want.

Like - plastic noodles, curry rice and stuff like that. They're surprisingly realistic and a common sight outside restaurants.

Sampuru - fun facts

In Japan, these hyper-realistic food models are known as **sampuru** (derived from the English word "sample"). While they look good enough to eat, they are high-tech works of art that have become a billion-dollar industry.



1. What are they made of?

Historically, these models were made of paraffin wax.

However, wax had a major flaw: it melted or faded under the hot lights of restaurant display cases or in the summer sun.

Since the mid-1980s, the industry has almost entirely switched to Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC). This synthetic resin is:

- Durable: It can last for decades without losing its shape.
- Heat-resistant: It won't melt in a sunny window.
- Versatile: It captures microscopic textures (like the grain of a steak or the skin of an orange) much better than wax.

2. How are they created?

Despite modern technology, about 95% of sampuru is still handmade by master artisans. The process is a mix of chemistry and fine art:

- The Mold: Artisans take the *actual* food from the restaurant (like a specific bowl of ramen) and dip it into liquid silicone to create a mold. This ensures the replica is an exact 1:1 match of what the chef serves.
- The Pour: Liquid PVC is tinted with base colors and poured into the mold. It is then "baked" in an oven until it hardens.
- The Painting: This is the most difficult step. Artists use airbrushes and tiny hand-brushes to apply layers of translucent paint to recreate the "glisten" of fat on meat or the charred edges of a gyoza.
- The Assembly: Components are often made separately. For a bowl of ramen, the "broth" (tinted resin) is poured over the "noodles," and the toppings (pork, egg, scallions) are placed precisely by hand before the resin sets.

3. Fun Facts about Sampuru

- More Expensive than the Real Thing: A single plastic dish can cost anywhere from \$50 to over \$500. A full restaurant display can cost a business several thousand dollars.
- The "Flying" Fork: You've likely seen pasta models where a fork is suspended in mid-air with noodles. This "gravity-defying" look is a signature of the industry,

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designed to make the food look "active" and freshly served.

- The "Town of Fake Food": The small town of Gujo Hachiman in Gifu Prefecture is the sampuru capital of the world. It produces about 80% of Japan's food models and was the home of Takizo Iwasaki, the man credited with commercializing the craft in 1932.
- The Omelet Test: Legend has it that the founder, Takizo Iwasaki, created his first wax omelet so realistically that his wife couldn't tell the difference from the real one—even from a few inches away.
- Nutritional Use: Beyond restaurants, many Japanese hospitals and clinics use sampuru to show patients exactly what a healthy portion size looks like for specific diets (e.g., a "500-calorie meal").

Coffeegate

Back to the episode with Charlie - the elephant in the room is the Coffeegate situation.

If you remember, Charlie (a self-admitted coffee snob) told a story about how he visited Lucy's house (yes, Lucy from English with Lucy) in the Cotswolds (a very nice, upmarket part of the English countryside) with his wife.

They are friends (Charlie and Lucy - I assume that Charlie is also friends with his wife, but marriage can be complicated).

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Charlie was extremely shocked when Lucy offered Charlie a hot drink, because she presented him with a cup of instant coffee.

This was shocking for several reasons.

1. Charlie can't stand instant coffee and thinks that nobody should offer it to a guest at home.
2. Charlie expected a person of Lucy's calibre, in such a lovely home in such a nice part of the countryside to have a much better coffee setup.

Then Charlie and I spent a few minutes expressing our shock and surprise at Lucy's poor quality coffee setup, perhaps shaming her a bit on the podcast. Even though I am an instant coffee drinker too, I'm afraid.

By the way listeners, this was all just *banter* and Charlie in particular is friends with Lucy and on good enough terms with her to be able to joke about her on the podcast, and this was in no way a serious bit of shaming. Quite the opposite. It was just good natured banter - and not uncommon in British culture, to kind of "take the piss" like this.

Although, having said that, there was still a sliver of doubt in my mind about how Lucy would react. I was 90% sure she'd see the funny side, but then 10% of me was a little concerned.

Eventually Lucy commented on the episode... Let me read the comment.

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How do you think Lucy feels here?

This is an exercise in understanding tone, I think.

Based on this comment, can you work out how she feels about the situation?

@EnglishwithLucy (commenting on the Room 101 episode with Charlie)

- 4 hours ago

Ok... firstly, I was in the middle of GIVING BIRTH when this episode came out. As I lay in the hospital bed with my newborn daughter in my arms, Charlie texted me saying that he had absolutely destroyed me on Luke's podcast.



I had to let him know that I was a little bit preoccupied. When I finally recovered from labour, I was able to attend to the REALLY important stuff: finding out what Charlie had said about me to Luke. 🙄

Gosh, Charlie. Labour was hard, but hearing your criticism of my coffee was harder.

This wasn't just ANY instant coffee... it was M&S Gold instant coffee. I now live abroad and I bring 10 jars back with me each time I visit family in England. THAT'S how much I rate it! Next time you come round... TEA ONLY!!!

p.s. Our little baby girl arrived safely on the 16th March 💕

@LukesEnglishPodcast (my reply)

- 3 hours ago (edited)

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Congratulations Lucy!!! 🎉🎉🎉 Perfect timing from Charlie (and me, sorry) but M&S Gold - all is forgiven. Actually I am team instant coffee too so clearly Charlie is a major coffee snob. I hope your baby girl is doing great and you too. Please come back on the podcast any time you like to defend yourself against these **flagrant claims** 🙏

Emails

I felt guilty, lol

Hi Lucy,

I just saw your comment on my video. First of all - huge congratulations on the arrival of your daughter! How wonderful!

Actually I had no idea you had a child on the way and what perfect timing by Charlie and me to deliver such a shocking takedown of your coffee setup 🙄. Personally I think the blame largely rests with Charlie but yes I was a willing participant too of course.

But really, I hope you weren't too upset by it. I hope the little one is doing great and you too of course. I have 2 kids and I remember clearly those early days of having a newborn. It's all very unreal and bizarre, quite scary and wonderful. Enjoy the ride!

You have an open invitation to return to the podcast if you'd like to. You could respond to what Charlie said, and we could even

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do Room 101, which could be fun. Let me know. No pressure of course.

Congratulations again to you and your husband.

All the best,
Luke

Lucy replied (I have edited this slightly for privacy reasons)

hello Luke!

I am dictating this message while feeding a little girl, so I'm sorry if it comes out really robotic. OMG, not upset at all I found it hilarious and we actually had a real laugh about it. I hope the British sarcasm comes across in my comment and nobody worries that I was offended or upset!

We had just texted Charlie letting him know about the birth of the baby girl and he said oh my God, bad timing then on the podcast! 😊 I thought it was a really great episode and when I am back off maternity leave in around September onwards, I would love to have a chat with you on your podcast again. It was a great experience last time.

really nice to hear from you and I hope you are keeping well.

*Everything good here, we have moved to Spain and are enjoying the newborn bubble here. We are both **sleep deprived** but very happy.*

Sending my very best wishes!

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My relieved reply

Wonderful Lucy! Very happy for you!

Very brief reply as I am about to go into class. Relief you are not at all upset. Plenty of things happening for you!

Happy to chat in Sept 🙏

Enjoy the Spanish baby bubble! X

So listeners - Lucy will be back on LEP in the autumn, and we will hear her side of the story, and yes I am a bit of worrier - but it's better to be safe than sorry.

“Don't get the good china out”

Here's a comment from a listener in response to the episode.

Dear Luke,

hope you are well.

Regarding this episode, I have one question.

Could you please explain what's the meaning of this highlighted sentence, which Charlie said. I was a bit confused.

Like the good China “don't get a good China out. It's just Charlie Baxter. Give him the instant. Yeah. We've got Nescafe. Just give him that. Yeah.”

📺 Room 101 📖 with Charlie Baxter 🇬🇧 Funny British English Li...

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thank you very much

Ben

Luke

Hi Ben,

Actually it's "don't get the good china out".

China here means crockery - plates, bowls, dishes, cups - especially when made of good quality porcelain. In English we call that china, probably because it originally came from China.

In many houses people had two sets of china. The set for daily use, and the "good china" which was kept only for special occasions. "Don't get the good china out" means that this occasion is not special enough (because the guests are not very important) to use the good quality plates etc.

Meaning: Don't get the good plates out, it's just Charlie!

I hope that helps!

Luke

A message from a French guy who is worried about coming across as rude

Damien

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Hi Luke,

Here are a few rambling thoughts from a Plepster about the podcast's benefits and my wishes.

First of all, let's start with the last episode featuring Charlie Baxter, which made me think: why not an episode with Rob Temple?

Actually, it would be delightful for British culture lovers like me. He's so good (and hilarious) at depicting British awkwardness and your peculiar way of communicating, which is just unintelligible to the rest of the world (to an average French bloke like me, anyway).

Rob Temple is the guy behind "Very British Problems" - a Twitter account/socials channel, with books and I think stand-up too.

A pretty good example of Rob Temple's videos 
[Ways Brits say they hate their meal. - YouTube](#)

I've been listening to your podcast for years, and after feeling that I was making great progress, I started to feel like I was stagnating a few months ago. Actually, I've been listening to episodes just for pleasure, as easily as if they were radio shows in my native language (I have to admit that I skip story episodes I don't like and shadowing ones just because I'm lazy).

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A few months ago, my missus and I spent a few days in London and, as I am an avgeek (planes) and a plane photographer, we booked a hotel at Heathrow Airport. We spent a few extra pounds for a “room with a view” in order to have a clear view of the runways.

When we finally arrived in the room, after an 87-mile walking journey through Heathrow terminals, it turned out that the window was obscured by a radar tower, making it impossible to take any decent pictures.

So here comes the point, Luke (why can't we, lepsters, try to achieve introductions as long as yours?): I had to go back to reception to negotiate another room at Heathrow Airport at 10 PM during a busy day.

*I first talked to a random employee (no offense), then to the manager to express how unsatisfied I was. And here is the point: thank you, Luke, because I kept saying to myself, “f*ck my accent, I am who I am, my aim is just to be clearly understood.” And actually, it worked thanks to your work.*

However, I was struggling with the fact that I didn't mean to be rude. As a French person, I tend to go straight to the point, which I think can come across as quite rude to Brits.

An episode about the British way of communicating would be helpful. Charlie's anecdote about instant coffee and Rob

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Temple's hilarious videos and books about it made me think of this.

Kudos if you're not bored to death after reading this message.

Thanks for everything you've done, Luke.

Take care,

Damien

Very good question!

I suppose what you want is this:

- Get another room
- Don't be rude
- Feel confident about your English

Dealing with the last point first - how you feel about your English. You're right to just think "F*ck my accent, let's just do this." It's a hotel at an international airport. It is completely normal to speak English with a different accent. English is a language of many accents, not just one and so the language and the people who use it can tolerate different accents.

The only problem is if it prevents you from being understood.

What's worse is if you are both rude and unclear.

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So let's focus on not being rude, and don't worry about the accent issue. It's more important to deal with this issue with the right rhythms, methods, phrases, hedging.

Get another room without being rude.

I wonder which one is more important to be honest. Surely, it is getting another room. Being a bit rude, or a bit disagreeable - it's awkward in the moment but it might actually help you. So, don't be afraid to be firm at the right moments. Don't misunderstand British communication style. A lot of nonsense is spread about it, saying that we never say what we mean and all that.

Some of that is done for comedy - exaggerating our indirectness, but we're not that bad. We are capable of being straight and to the point, but not as much as the French probably. So, let's not overstate the whole indirectness thing.

Let's put it like this - you have to press certain buttons to get things right. In France, for example, one of the buttons is what you say right at the start. You have to say "bonsoir" or you will get off on completely the wrong foot. In English (UK) there are similar buttons you have to press - this means, little things you have to say, when you:

- Announce there is a problem
- Describe the issue
- Address the staff
- Make your request

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- Say thank you afterwards

So, let's look at an example dialogue, first a very direct version, and then another version which is probably a bit more successful.

A note on directness. Sometimes being direct is the right thing to do, but understand that it can make you a bit aggressive and rude. Similarly, being indirect makes you more respectful but it can also put you in a weaker position. You have to know when to do one and when to do the other.

The main thing is that you are clearly stating the problem, and making a clear request, but you are doing it respectfully - not making people defensive, keeping them on your side, keeping them willing to help you.

A lot of this is about sugarcoating - or giving them a spoonful of sugar to let the medicine go down.

less confrontational

less demanding

more cooperative

but still explaining the problem, and that you'd like a solution

You're not just showing your unhappiness and then making demands. You're explaining what the problem is, showing why it is reasonable to want a solution and then requesting that solution.

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Ideally the staff should realise why it is completely reasonable that you would want another room. Partly this is about showing respect, but also about allowing them to see things from your point of view.

Direct version

Dialogue 1: Direct, blunt, slightly aggressive

Damien:

Excuse me, I have a problem with my room.

Receptionist:

I'm sorry to hear that. What seems to be the issue?

Damien:

The view is completely blocked by a tower. This is not what we booked, and I am very unhappy about it.

Receptionist:

I see. Let me just—

Damien (interrupting):

This is not acceptable. We requested a view and paid extra for it. I want another room.

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Receptionist:

I understand, sir, but the hotel is quite full tonight—

Damien:

I booked this properly. I asked for a view. Please give me another room with a view, thank you.

Receptionist:

Let me speak to the manager.

Damien:

Yes, thank you.

That's not *completely terrible*, right? It will probably get the job done. Being direct can be very effective, but it'll be awkward, and the staff might hate you. This could work against you. Maybe they'll fart through the crack under your door, or spit in your club sandwich.

I worked in customer service for years before becoming a teacher. I can tell you that staff hate people who are rude. We just hate you and we resent helping you. It is fine to have a problem and to be unhappy, but please - just treat us with respect and to be honest we might be more willing to go the extra distance for you.

Dialogue 2: Polite, more diplomatic

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Damien:

Hi there, sorry to bother you. There is a bit of a problem with our room I'm afraid.

Receptionist:

Of course, what seems to be the issue?

Damien:

It's the view. We are photographers and we specifically booked a room with a view, to take photos of the planes taking off, but unfortunately our view is completely obstructed by a radar tower, and so it is not possible to see the runway or take any pictures.

Receptionist:

Oh, I see. I'm sorry about that.

Damien:

The room itself is fine. It's just that we were really looking forward to the view, especially as we paid extra for it. Also, I did state all this clearly by email when I booked the room, so whoever made the booking should have been aware of this.

Receptionist:

Yes, of course.

Damien:

Would it be possible to move to another room with a clearer view? I completely understand that it's quite late and probably

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very busy, but this is a very important point for us. It's make or break actually.

Receptionist:

Let me check what we have available.

Damien:

That would be great, thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

Let's break it down

*

Let's go back through the second dialogue and I'll point out various things.

Is the Glass Half Empty or Half Full?



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Not much to report for this one, except that in my view this was a strong episode. Very solid stuff. I think, if they fired one of my episodes into space as a representation of human endeavour for aliens to discover, as a sample of life on earth, I would be happy for them to fire this one out. I feel like it's a pretty good sample of my work.

A good point from Patricia 🙌

@LukesEnglishPodcast ✓ · 2 days ago

So, is the glass half empty or half full?



Highlighted reply



@PatriciaSchmidt-e1y · 5 min ago

Seeing the glass as half full doesn't mean ignoring the empty part. I can endure pain while focusing on the beauty of life, i can be aware of the injustice in the world, of its darkness, and yet still perceive a glass as half full.. The glass isn't half empty nor is it half full, it simply is... In my opinion, defining whether someone is pessimistic or optimistic using the example of the glass half full or half empty is too simplistic, and human beings are far more complex than that. The important thing is always see the glass, regardless of whether it's full or empty. 😊 Thanks Luke!

Haiku 2 and the chat with John Stevenson



Both of these episodes underperformed slightly on YouTube (but were fine in audioland). I put this down to the law of diminishing returns, which in this context refers to the fact that when I publish episodes on the same subject several weeks in a row, interest drops off, and so the longer something goes on, the more diminished the returns are - I mean, the less success you have from something (a bit like the Star Wars franchise).

It seems my audience crave the rush of unexpected episodes, and continuing the same theme or episode several weeks in a row results in diminished returns - a good argument against separating episodes into several parts.

I found it lovely to talk to John Stevenson. Plenty of people found it lovely to listen to it too.

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Perhaps one or two didn't really get it. But that's ok. Someone expressed frustration that John wasn't easy to understand, complaining that he swallowed his words etc, raising the question - who is at fault here?

John in his old age with various medical issues for not enunciating absolutely every syllable, or this particular listener who perhaps needs to improve their listening skills?

There, I think I gave away my answer with that response. Quite a heavily loaded question wasn't it?

I suppose it is tempting, when you struggle to understand someone, to blame the other person for not speaking clearly.

But I found John perfectly understandable.

This is symptomatic of something I have noticed in some learners of English.

Getting irate and even rude at a native speaker who speaks with anything less than crisp, perfectly enunciated English. And being overly critical to the point of rudeness towards speakers with anything less than perfect, radio-quality speaking voices. I've seen guests of mine receive quite rude comments chastising them for not speaking clearly enough, or for doing things that all native speakers (of all languages) do, such as saying "umm" or repeating other filler words, or just having an accent that is unfamiliar. What's all that about then, eh?

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I can understand how frustrating it must be to try to understand native speakers sometimes, but do keep perspective and try not to be rude. My guests almost always check the comments sections of episodes they appear in. Do you really want your frustrated, knee-jerk reaction to be read by this human who took the time to sincerely talk to you on my podcast?


Did I ever share this one?

A response to The Door In The Wall





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Comment on 'The Door in the Wall (Learn English with a Short Story) [962]' 

 @123Alycia · 2 mo ago

When I was about thirty years old I had a dream about a beautiful garden. My grandfather, (whom I was very close to as a child but lost contact with because of family changes, and moving hundreds of miles away) was there and we were walking down a path through this garden and talking like the 'old days'. We came to a sort of bridge where he stopped and told me he had to go on without me. I woke up to the telephone and it was my mother saying he had died in the night. true story

 16   

Plenty more comments exactly like this coming on LEP soon...

**The paranormal episode with Anna B /
Unexplained stories from LEPsters**

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I have received *loads* of stories of paranormal & creepy experiences. Thank you for sending them. I got a lot more than I expected. Over a hundred I think. Anna and I will choose the winner and also a shortlist of other stories to be read out in an episode soon.

But - wow, I got some incredible and weird stories for sure. I am team sceptic, and I can't help wanting to find some rational explanation, and in many cases, I think that's not difficult, but I have decided that I can't do that and will just read them and let everyone make their own minds up.

10 Questions about Food with Martin



Martin will be back and this is going to be a regular format because I like it so much. Martin and I are on the same wavelength. Good humour, similar outlook and as an English teacher he knows intuitively what I'm doing.

The Bad Room (Learn English with a Short Story)

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I loved this and it's the best performing episode recently along with The Lumber Room and Is the Glass Half Full?

Some people didn't get the joke. But most did. Just a bit of fun. The story has no bigger meaning. It's just a shaggy dog story which is just a big setup to an absurd punchline.

True or False? Insane facts with Amber and Paul



Surely one of the most hilarious so far.

Those episodes deserve more views/listens.

Why don't they get them?

Discuss.

*

Genuinely, this one was absolutely jam packed with humorous moments and jokes, but I have the impression that the majority went over everyone's head.

Intro or no intro?

Why does this question still persist?

This is a question that is always in my mind, and was commented on by the regular crew of commenters on my website, particularly Pierre, who suggested a short intro, and longer ending section would have helped people to digest this episode, which was probably difficult for a lot of listeners to understand, and therefore appreciate.

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For this Amber and Paul episode I chose to skip the intro (I did record one but rejected it) in favour of cutting straight to the action, thinking that the interaction between Amber, Paul and me is surely the best part of the episode and I should just skip to that, and that somehow, explaining a lot in advance would take away the impact of some of the humorous moments. Plus I can't stand comments complaining about my introductions. So I chose to skip the intro this time, but then - well, I got comments to the contrary this time! You can't win. Anyway, it's a decent consideration.

Intro or no intro?

No intro

- Reduces episode length
- Just get straight to the main content because ultimately this is more entertaining than hearing me introduce it

Intro

- Prepare listeners (especially lower level ones) for what they are about to hear, including an overview of the main topics. This can make a huge difference to your ability to follow the conversation. Also include an ending part with various things explained. This massively increases the episode run time.

Why episode length can be a problem

- Long term listeners are fine with it and probably prefer it
- But it's very daunting to new listeners

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- If all my episodes are 1, 2, 3 hours long, it's like a huge wall against new listeners and slowly my podcast will die out

But then again

- Somehow, against all logic, a long run time can be oddly appealing. It stands out, and becomes a selling point. Some of my 3hr+ rambles get more listens than other rambles, as if you get beyond a certain length (3 hours maybe) and suddenly the length becomes an attractive point.

So, all in all, I still can't quite decide.

There are also other factors

- How much time I have (I still kind of do this part time, when you consider that two days are spent teaching, and half a day is spent picking up my daughter and taking her to various activities, and everything has to be done by 5PM every day, and I live in France and there are a million public holidays and school holidays.
- Hard drive space - I regularly run out and long record times seriously impact this.

Ultimately - I am the boss and I decide! But what do you think?

How could I get more people to listen to those Amber & Paul episodes?

Should I do more "scaffolding" (longer intros and endings, more interruptions) or should I just play the damn conversation and let

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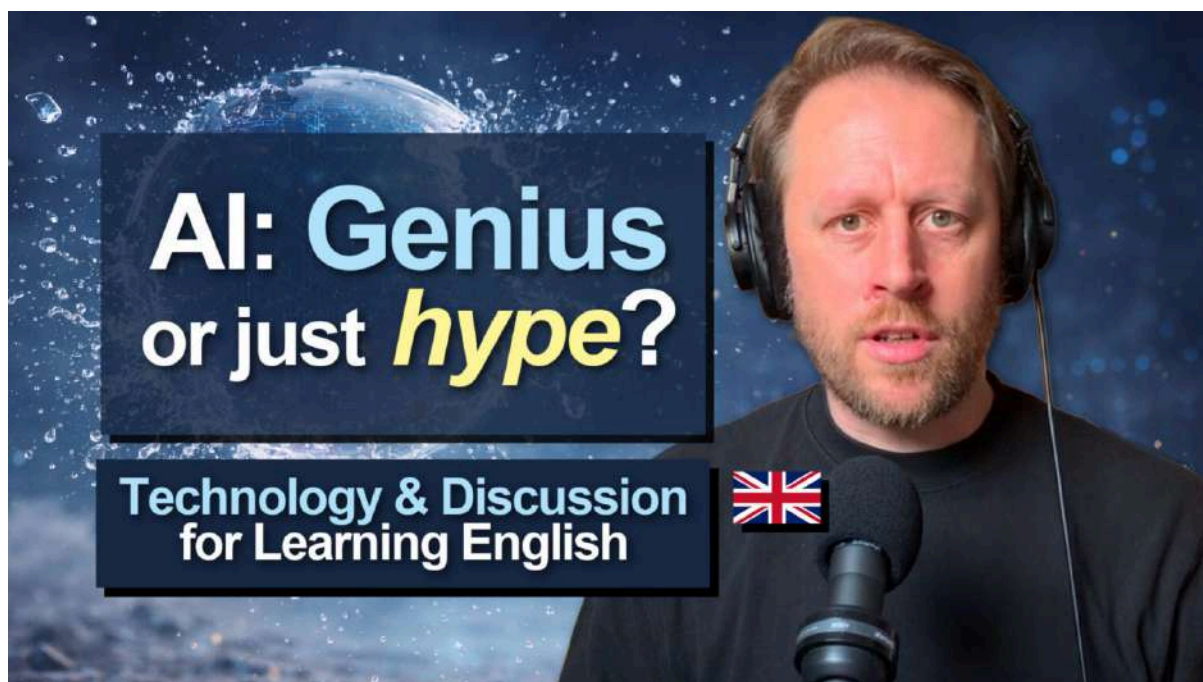
it speak for itself? I am curious about what you think, but again, at the end of the day - I'm the boss and I decide!

Actually, I did write earlier that I have made a new rule about this, and this is true, so I have decided, although I might undo the decision.

It's this: conversation episodes will probably have shortish intros in which I prepare listeners to help them understand the conversation, and I can highlight a couple of bits of English to notice. Then I'll do a longer ending with a sort of episode report in which I break down a lot of what happened and what was said.

This follows the Starter - Main Course - Dessert format.

Is the AI Bubble Bursting?



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Lots of comments via Spotify and website from people engaging with the comments James and I were making - namely, that AI might be a scam.

It's not just that it doesn't really do things very well (a lot of errors, a lot of unoriginality, a lot of **hackneyed slop** that nobody wants) and not just that it might put a lot of people out of work or make our world more dangerous, but the fact that AI companies are basically scamming us with this shit.

They've invested insane amounts of money into this tech, and now it is more a question of how the debt markets will perform and we've been here before with **the subprime mortgage crisis** - poor quality property investments that turned out to be worse than advertised and a lot of the debt was sold on in a big chain (the debt market) until it was unsustainable and **the bottom fell out of the market** and suddenly loads of money was lost by banks (and was subsequently paid back to them from the taxpayer's pocket - arguably one of the biggest moments of theft in modern history) and a few people made tons of money betting on this outcome that they had noticed was going to happen.

Now, it's a similar story. AI is an inflated investment bubble, there's a ton of debt that can't be paid off, and nobody knows where the money is going to come from to pay for it all. Tech companies have been working very hard to make AI seem like the most powerful and therefore most valuable resource humankind has ever faced, and it's all in a bid to drive up the value of AI and make everyone pay more for it than they should.

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But I think many people are realising it's not quite as amazing as advertised, and in fact people don't like it. Maybe it'll just take longer for AI to truly dominate, but it's not happening yet.

So, that was the main message of the episode, and I think it's an important one for us all to realise, in order to keep everything in perspective with this kind of thing, and to realise when there's a scam going on. And most comments from audioland were in this general area.

Then there were the comments from YT. And the majority of them were about how young I look in the introduction to the video.

"I was shocked at how young you looked" or "What happened?" even "I thought you were bald" and of course a certain number of "Why did you shave? You look better with a beard". OK.

I shaved, I had longer hair (I've since then had it cut), I was wearing earbuds rather than headphones, I was in a different room (the living room), the light was different (coming from the side), and the camera was in a different position (on the floor, lower than me) and all that combined to apparently make me look 10 years younger. Perhaps my normal podcasting setup in front of the window is not flattering. I don't know, and maybe I don't care.

ChatGPT's Freudian Dream Analysis

James mentioned that ChatGPT is good at analysing your dreams.

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I had a weird dream the other day, so I thought I would ask Chad what he thought.

This could be a whole other episode for another time - dreams and analysing dreams, which I find fascinating. But let's just do one here.

An overview of Freud's understanding of dreams

Freudian dream analysis is based on the idea that dreams are disguised expressions of unconscious wishes, fears, and conflicts, often rooted in childhood experiences and hidden desires that the conscious mind cannot comfortably accept. According to Sigmund Freud, the mind transforms these forbidden thoughts into symbolic and distorted dream images through processes like condensation, displacement, and symbolisation, creating the strange narratives we remember when we wake up.

The visible dream ("manifest content") therefore hides a deeper psychological meaning ("latent content"), which can supposedly be uncovered through interpretation and free association.

But he might have been completely wrong. Other views are available.

Prompt: Can you give a Freudian analysis of this dream I had?

I was walking through various environments with my young son, but my son was tiny, like the size of a mouse. At one point we got to an area like a little grass island about 3 metres across, and I realised I had lost my son. I panicked and looked everywhere

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but couldn't find him, fearing he'd gone into the water. Other people came and I told them I couldn't find my son. They helped me, then I retraced my steps into the previous room and looked down a step, he was sitting on the corner below a step. He'd done a poo and was waiting there unable to climb the step. I picked him up and he was back to normal size. I told the other people it was ok - I had found him.

ChatGPT's Freudian Analysis

Alright—let's do this in a properly Freudian spirit (with a pinch of modern common sense too, because Freud could be... a bit much). [What is this sassy tone that ChatGPT uses?]

1. Your son as a *tiny creature*

In Freudian terms, your son here isn't just your son. He's likely a **symbolic extension of yourself**—or more specifically:

- your role as a father
- your sense of responsibility
- possibly your *own vulnerable inner self*

The fact he's *mouse-sized* is key:

- Something important to you feels **fragile, easily lost, or hard to protect**
- It may reflect anxiety like: “*Am I giving enough attention?*” or “*Could I fail to protect what matters?*”

Freud might even say this represents a **regression**—something reduced to a more helpless state.

2. Moving through different environments

Walking through shifting environments often suggests:

- navigating different **areas of life** (work, family, identity)
- a sense of **transition or instability**

Freud might interpret this as the **ego trying to manage multiple demands**, while something important (your son / your responsibility / your inner child) becomes harder to keep track of.

3. Losing him → panic

This is classic **anxiety dream territory**.

Freudian reading:

- Fear of **loss of control**
- Fear of **failure in a parental role**
- Possibly deeper: fear of losing something *emotionally important or part of yourself*

The water element (even just the fear of it) is interesting:

- Water often symbolises the **unconscious**
 - So: fear that something precious has been “lost into the unconscious” = out of your control
-

4. Other people helping

This suggests:

- Recognition that **you're not alone**, but also
- A possible **dependence on external validation/support**

Freud might say this reflects tension between:

- your **ego** (trying to cope)
 - and a need for **social reassurance**
-

5. The poo (yes, this matters a lot to Freud)

Freud would absolutely zoom in on this.

In his theory, this connects to the **anal stage** of development (toilet training, control, order, mess, etc.).

Symbolically, this can relate to:

- **control vs lack of control**
- **letting go vs holding on**
- even (in classic Freudian style) issues of **responsibility, discipline, or “doing things properly”**

Your son being stuck because of it:

- suggests something **basic, bodily, or messy** is *blocking progress*
- could reflect the reality of parenting: dealing with physical needs, interruptions, dependency

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Or more abstractly:

- something small and “trivial” is **preventing movement forward**
-

6. The step he can't climb

Steps = progress, development, moving up.

He's:

- just below it
- unable to climb it

Freudian angle:

- anxiety about **developmental progress** (his, or yours as a parent)
- fear that something is **holding him back**

But crucially...

7. You find him and restore him to normal

This is the resolution—and it's important.

You:

- find him yourself (after panic)
- lift him up

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- he returns to normal size

Freudian interpretation:

- **wish fulfilment** → the desire that everything is actually okay
 - reassurance: *“Even if I lose control, I can fix things”*
 - restoration of **order, competence, and identity**
-



So what does it all mean (in plain English)?

Stripping away Freud’s cigar smoke:

This dream strongly suggests:

- A **background anxiety about responsibility**, especially as a father
 - A feeling that something important is **fragile or could slip away**
 - Occasional fear of **losing control in complex situations**
 - But also a deep belief that:
👉 *You will ultimately be able to handle it and make things right*
-

 **Very “you” interpretation (slightly less Freudian, more real)**

Given your life:

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- podcasting, teaching, parenting, juggling roles
- lots of *mental bandwidth* being used

This could simply be your brain going:

“You care deeply. Don’t mess this up.”

...followed by:

“Actually, you’re doing fine.”

Personally I think I’m just worried about my son shitting on the carpet.

Crazy Questions with my daughter



An AI summary of listener responses:

The comments on the episode Crazy Questions with my daughter 🧑‍🎓 ✨ [989] are overwhelmingly positive and

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heartwarming. Viewers are delighted by your daughter's appearance and the natural chemistry between you two.

The most prominent theme is how much the audience enjoys your daughter's wit, cleverness, and charm. Many viewers commented on how smart and articulate she is for her age, with some even predicting she'll have her own podcast or teaching channel in the future.

"It was like a balm to my soul and ears... thank you for this great chit chat."

Overall, your audience seems to have a deep connection with your family's journey, with some long-time listeners even remembering the podcasts from when she was born! Many are asking for her to return for more episodes soon.

Hafid's podcast project - BYE Boost Your English - a C1 Journey



One of my listeners has started a podcast. Since he is visually impaired, AI has been a massive help. He uses AI to do the voice, and produces everything else himself, and it's an example of how AI can be empowering. He interviewed me (with the help of his AI assistant) in one of his episodes.

According to Hafid: "BYE (Boost Your English) is a 'Do It Yourself' outsider project. It rejects the slow, patronizing tone of traditional learning. There are no transcripts here because BYE believes real progress comes from personal research. It's dense, intense, and uses AI as a high-quality production partner. If you're an intermediate or advanced learner ready to stop being spoon-fed, give it a listen."

<https://pod.link/1862207604/episode/MzNhNWZjN2QtMGQ0Mi00ZDQzLTk1OTItNzA3YjZjYjNhMzRj>

If you'd like to include links in your description, here they are:

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- Apple Podcasts:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bye-boost-your-english/id1862207604>

- Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7uRledg5EhgrRVpZVVpNb4> (or via your usual Spotify search)

Gustavo's song inspired by the haiku episode

Gustavo was inspired by the haiku episode, specifically the lines about *I write, erase, write again and a poppy blooms*

Katsushika Hokusai

I write, erase, rewrite

Erase again, and then

A poppy blooms

Dear Luke

After quite a while, I've finally reached the shore of this special project. It has been such a stimulating journey, right from the moment I first heard your episode on English Haikus.

What I'm sending you has no commercial intent; its value is purely human. It represents the incredible opportunity I had to write, produce, and deliver a song driven solely by the desire to be creative. In fact, since Real/Haiku, I've continued working on new themes and musical styles, using haikus as a bridge and a recurring leitmotif (and in English) .

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Thanks for the inspiration to take this leap, and many thanks to Marfus for the vital technical and musical support along the way..and (last but not least) thanks for your listening and comments , have a good morning, afternoon, evening or night...

Gustavo / Tavee !

Hi Luke,

Thank you so much! I am absolutely delighted that you enjoyed the track. I would be more than happy for you to play Real / HAIKU on your next rambling episode.

Since you asked for some context for the introduction, I'd love to share the specific spark for this song. It was actually your first Haiku episode that triggered after all grabbing my guitar and starting to write and sing the story around the Haiku.

The first image became the "write/erase" bridge in the song and the foundation for the entire composition. Working with my partner Marfus to produce the final musical arrangement and outcome as well. It was a true "sea change" for me, as it was the first time I felt compelled to write and compose fully in English. Honestly, it felt almost natural because your podcast has become a part of my daily life. My family (three girls, two boys and a beloved wife) friends, and I often share moments discussing the subjects and anecdotes you talk about on the show, so the song is really a tribute to that connection.

Thanks again for the inspiration, Luke!

All the best,

Tave (Gustavo)

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Luke

Let's listen to it!

Feel free to send me your songs and other work inspired by the podcast.

📎 Tavee!- Real - Haiku.wav

Lyrics

“Real (HAIKU)”

you know I think your timelines

Are the drop and the glacier

just praying in the silence

shouting yeah with the crowd

You're real

You are so real

I can see you dancing

In the heart of carnival

Staring into nothing

after leaving all behind

You are real

You are so real

I write / erase / write / erase again and then... a poppy blooms
and then...

I can hear you laughing

In the middle of the street

And it's like you're blooming

when the lights and shadows meet

You are so real

you are just real

Next episode

A chat with Kate, which I have had to put back lots of times because I needed time to do the premium series that goes with it.

But it will be this: A vocab preview, then a kate convo. Lots to learn. Lots to enjoy.

Questions

If you could request an episode - what would it be?

What's your favourite moment in LEP history?

What's your favourite episode?

Who is your favourite guest?

Have you ever skipped an episode? If yes, which one?

Finally - A Long Poem To End This Episode

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In late-early-mid-spring, with blossom in bloom,

Luke spoke into the mic like a bard in a room.

"This podcast," he cried, "is for learners, you see,

Not baffled Americans shouting, 'Why me?'"

The algorithm went rogue with a Sherlockian plan,

And forced *The Speckled Band* on each sleeping man.

They woke up confused, full of rage and despair:

"Who's this Briddish bloke explaining the word 'chair'?"

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But Luke said, “Calm down, there’s method in this,
My rambling is language-acquisitional bliss.
The intro’s the episode, the point has been met —
Here’s a biro. There. Point. Don’t forget.”

He praised all the LEPsters who listen for hours,
Through guests, jokes, grammar, and linguistic showers.
“Extensive listening,” he said with delight,
“Builds English instinct deep into the night.”

Then came the world, going pear-shaped and mad,
But LEP stayed a lighthouse when everything’s bad:
A diplomatic oasis, sincere and humane,
With jokes about sofas and super-fish-oil pain.

Premium got plugged with vocab galore,
Kate, food, ghosts, phrasal verbs — plenty in store.
New rules were announced for intros and ends:
Starter, main course, dessert for your friends.

Some songs may be vanishing, copyright bites,
No more Elvis from Luke on long podcast nights.
Download old classics before they are gone,
From misheard lyrics to road-trip song.

Then birthday donations were gently requested:
A cake emoji, Ferrari, or microphone gold-encrusted.
“Five hundred grand is a sensible guide,
But one pound will do,” Luke modestly lied.

His son kept asking “why?” without pause,
Till meaning collapsed into cosmic laws.

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“Why?” “Because nothing can’t be.” “Why?”
“Just eat your chips and stop asking the sky.”

Then dogs were calmed by the sound of LEP,
Wild boar fled from Luke’s verbal pep.
A climber in Fontainebleau, brave but alone,
Used Luke as a woodland anti-boar drone.

He explained wild boar, wild boars, deer and sheep,
Then answered comments both lovely and deep.
Mum, Dad, stories, Saki and more,
Plus “bothered” and “disturbed” from grammar’s front door.

Charlie’s coffee scandal caused national shame,
Lucy gave birth while receiving the blame.
M&S Gold was defended with pride,
And Charlie was banned from coffee inside.

Damien asked how to complain like a Brit:
Be firm, but polite; don’t throw a fit.
Sugarcoat the problem, request with control,
And never let staff spit in your roll.

Then came haikus, ghosts, Martin and food,
Amber and Paul in a hilarious mood.
AI bubbles, scams, debt and doom,
And Luke looking young in a flattering room.

Freud met a tiny son stuck by a step,
ChatGPT analysed fatherly depth.
But Luke’s conclusion, more honest and proper:
“I think I feared poo on the carpet, copper.”

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A daughter asked questions, Hafid made a show,
AI helped where access had nowhere to go.
Gustavo wrote music where poppies bloom bright,
From haiku to song in the middle of night.

So wish him happy birthday, comment below,
Tell him what episode you'd like on the show.
Favourite guest? Favourite bit? Did you skip one?
The ramble is over — or has it begun?

Vocabulary List

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. shoot the breeze | 21. flaws | 43. out of tune |
| 2. chew the fat | 22. gusto | 44. rooted in |
| 3. talk the hind legs off
a donkey | 23. don't quite know
what to make of | 45. preoccupied |
| 4. shoot the breeze | 24. dumbed down | 46. labour |
| 5. chew the fat | 25. waffling | 47. attend to |
| 6. talk the hind legs off
a donkey | 26. painstakingly | 48. Gosh |
| 7. counter-intuitive | 27. by design | 49. rate |
| 8. disgruntled | 28. groggy | 50. come round |
| 9. weep | 29. each and every | 51. flagrant claims |
| 10. pick myself up | 30. bedrock | 52. the law of
diminishing returns |
| 11. spoonful of sugar
that helps the
medicine go down | 31. gone pear shaped | 53. a shaggy dog story |
| 12. grace | 32. existential despair | 54. hackneyed |
| 13. class | 33. nagging feeling | 55. slop |
| 14. ease me to the floor
gently | 34. take on | 56. the subprime
mortgage crisis |
| 15. into the void | 35. tip | 57. the bottom fell out
of the market |
| 16. makes up | 36. spell disaster | 58. in bloom |
| 17. against their will | 37. give each other the
benefit of the doubt | 59. bard |
| 18. It's a fair cop | 38. mulling over | 60. baffled |
| 19. elusive | 39. riveting | 61. went rogue |
| 20. beyond our reach | 40. a record | 62. throw a fit |
| | 41. Pritt-stick | 63. Sugarcoat |
| | 42. flattered | |

Detailed Vocabulary List

shoot the breeze

Example from the episode

“...generally just **shoot the breeze**, chew the fat and talk the hind legs off a donkey.”

Definition

To have a relaxed, informal conversation about unimportant things.

Another example

We sat in the pub for hours just shooting the breeze.

Common collocations

- shoot the breeze with someone
- sit around shooting the breeze
- spend the evening shooting the breeze

Synonyms

- chat
- chat casually
- have a natter
- talk informally

Notes

Very conversational and friendly. Common in American English but widely understood elsewhere.

chew the fat

Example from the episode

“...shoot the breeze, **chew the fat** and talk the hind legs off a donkey.”

Definition

To chat casually for a long time.

Another example

My uncle loves sitting in cafés chewing the fat with strangers.

Common collocations

- chew the fat for hours
- sit and chew the fat
- chew the fat over a beer

Synonyms

- chat
 - gossip
 - have a long conversation
-

talk the hind legs off a donkey

Example from the episode

“...talk the hind legs off a donkey.”

Definition

To talk excessively or continuously.

Another example

Once my dad starts talking about jazz, he can talk the hind legs off a donkey.

Common collocations

- could talk the hind legs off a donkey
- talks endlessly

Synonyms

- ramble
- talk nonstop
- go on and on

Notes

Humorous British idiom. The idea is that the hind (back) legs of a donkey are very difficult to move. If you can talk the hind legs off a donkey, you can talk and talk and talk until you manage to move something that is normally very difficult to move.

counter-intuitive

Example from the episode

“...in perhaps the most **counter-intuitive** way...”

Definition

Opposite to what seems logical or expected.

Another example

It sounds counter-intuitive, but taking breaks can improve productivity.

Common collocations

- counter-intuitive result
- counter-intuitive idea
- seem counter-intuitive

Synonyms

- unexpected
 - paradoxical
 - surprising
-

disgruntled

Example from the episode

“...sharing an email from a **disgruntled** listener...”

Definition

Annoyed, dissatisfied, or unhappy.

Another example

Disgruntled customers started posting complaints online.

Common collocations

- disgruntled employee

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- disgruntled customer
- disgruntled former staff

Synonyms

- dissatisfied
 - irritated
 - unhappy
-

weep

Example from the episode

“And then I need to **weep** for a while...”

Definition

To cry, especially emotionally or dramatically.

Another example

She wept with relief when she heard the news.

Common collocations

- weep bitterly
- weep softly
- openly weep

Synonyms

- cry
 - sob
-

pick myself up

Example from the episode

“...and **pick myself up** and desperately just try to carry on...”

Definition

To recover emotionally after difficulty or disappointment.

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Another example

After failing the exam, he picked himself up and tried again.

Common collocations

- pick yourself up after a setback
- pick yourself up and carry on

Synonyms

- recover
 - bounce back
-

spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down

Example from the episode

“That’s the **spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down.**”

Definition

Something pleasant that makes an unpleasant situation easier to accept.

Another example

The bonus payment was a spoonful of sugar after the bad news.

Common collocations

- a spoonful of sugar
- helps the medicine go down

Synonyms

- consolation
- softener

Notes

Reference to Mary Poppins.

grace

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Example from the episode

“You leave with **grace**, and class.”

Definition

Polite dignity and elegance in behaviour.

Another example

She handled the criticism with grace.

Common collocations

- with grace
- quiet grace
- social grace

Synonyms

- elegance
 - dignity
 - poise
-

class

Example from the episode

“You leave with grace, and **class**.”

Definition

Stylishness, dignity, or high-quality behaviour.

Another example

He’s a classy guy with real class.

Common collocations

- show class
- a touch of class
- real class

Synonyms

- elegance
 - sophistication
-

ease me to the floor gently

Example from the episode

“...the respectful effort to **ease me to the floor gently.**”

Definition

A humorous metaphor meaning to soften emotional pain carefully.

Another example

They eased him into the bad news gently.

Common collocations

- ease someone gently
- soften the blow

Synonyms

- cushion the impact
 - soften the blow
-

into the void

Example from the episode

“...and I scream **into the void...**”

Definition

Expressing feelings without expecting a response.

Another example

Posting angry tweets can feel like shouting into the void.

Common collocations

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- scream into the void
- shout into the void

Synonyms

- express frustration pointlessly
-

makes up

Example from the episode

“...the introduction **makes up** approximately 99%...”

Definition

To form or constitute part of something.

Another example

Women make up over half the workforce.

Common collocations

- make up a percentage
- make up part of
- make up the majority

Synonyms

- constitute
 - comprise
-

against their will

Example from the episode

“...forcing everyone to keep listening, **against their will.**”

Definition

Without someone wanting to do it.

Another example

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He was taken there against his will.

Common collocations

- force someone against their will
- held against their will

Synonyms

- unwillingly
 - by force
-

It's a fair cop

Example from the episode

“You got me. **It's a fair cop.**”

Definition

An informal British phrase meaning “That accusation is fair/correct.”

Another example

Alright, it's a fair cop — I did eat the last biscuit.

Common collocations

- fair cop
- fair enough

Synonyms

- you're right
 - guilty as charged
-

elusive

Example from the episode

“...the point is this **elusive** thing...”

Definition

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Difficult to find, define, or achieve.

Another example

True happiness can feel elusive sometimes.

Common collocations

- elusive goal
- elusive answer
- remain elusive

Synonyms

- hard to grasp
 - hard to catch
-

beyond our reach

Example from the episode

“...always just **beyond our reach...**”

Definition

Impossible or very difficult to obtain.

Another example

For many people, home ownership feels beyond their reach.

Common collocations

- just beyond reach
- financially beyond reach

Synonyms

- unattainable
 - inaccessible
-

flaws

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Example from the episode

“...despite its **flaws**...”

Definition

Weaknesses or imperfections.

Another example

The plan has a few flaws, but it could still work.

Common collocations

- fatal flaw
- obvious flaw
- character flaws

Synonyms

- weaknesses
 - imperfections
-

gusto

Example from the episode

“...let’s commence this rambling episode properly, with **gusto**...”

Definition

Enthusiastic enjoyment and energy.

Another example

He attacked the buffet with gusto.

Common collocations

- with gusto
- full of gusto

Synonyms

- enthusiasm
- energy

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- passion
-

don't quite know what to make of

Example from the episode

“...native English speakers don't quite know what to make of my episodes.”

Definition

To feel unsure how to understand or interpret something.

Another example

I didn't know what to make of his strange reaction.

Common collocations

- not know what to make of
- difficult to make sense of

Synonyms

- be puzzled by
 - be unsure about
-

dumbed down

Example from the episode

“...which is not really **dumbed down**.”

Definition

Simplified so much that it loses depth or intelligence.

Another example

The documentary was dumbed down for television audiences.

Common collocations

- dumbed-down content

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- overly dumbed down

Synonyms

- oversimplified
 - watered down
-

waffling

Example from the episode

“...just a lot of **waffling**...”

Definition

Talking in a vague or unnecessarily long way.

Another example

Stop waffling and get to the point.

Common collocations

- waffle on
- endless waffling

Synonyms

- rambling
 - babbling
-

painstakingly

Example from the episode

“...carefully and **painstakingly** designed...”

Definition

Done with great care and attention to detail.

Another example

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The artist painstakingly restored the painting.

Common collocations

- painstakingly detailed
- painstakingly prepared

Synonyms

- meticulously
 - carefully
-

by design

Example from the episode

“...it’s done on purpose and **by design**...”

Definition

Intentionally planned that way.

Another example

The confusion was not accidental — it was by design.

Common collocations

- intentional by design
- by careful design

Synonyms

- intentionally
 - deliberately
-

groggy

Example from the episode

“...waking up all **groggy**, confused and angry...”

Definition

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Weak, sleepy, or mentally unclear.

Another example

I felt groggy after the long flight.

Common collocations

- wake up groggy
- feel groggy

Synonyms

- sleepy
 - dazed
-

bedrock

Example from the episode

“...a very important **bedrock**...”

Definition

The basic foundation of something.

Another example

Trust is the bedrock of a good relationship.

Common collocations

- moral bedrock
- bedrock principle
- form the bedrock of

Synonyms

- foundation
 - basis
-

gone pear shaped

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Example from the episode

“...it’s all **gone pear shaped** hasn’t it?”

Definition

Gone wrong; become chaotic or unsuccessful.

Another example

The party went pear shaped when the police arrived.

Common collocations

- everything went pear shaped
- suddenly pear shaped

Synonyms

- gone wrong
- fallen apart

Notes

Very British informal expression.

existential despair

Example from the episode

“...a deep sense of **existential despair**...”

Definition

A profound feeling that life lacks meaning or hope.

Another example

Reading the news can lead to existential despair.

Common collocations

- feel existential despair
- overwhelming existential despair

Synonyms

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- hopelessness
 - deep anxiety
-

nagging feeling

Example from the episode

“...this **nagging feeling** that I should take on these divisive subjects...”

Definition

A persistent worrying thought.

Another example

I had a nagging feeling I'd forgotten something.

Common collocations

- nagging doubt
- nagging suspicion
- nagging feeling

Synonyms

- persistent worry
 - lingering doubt
-

take on

Example from the episode

“...I should **take on** these divisive subjects...”

Definition

To confront, deal with, or engage with something difficult.

Another example

The journalist took on the government publicly.

Common collocations

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- take on a challenge
- take on responsibility
- take on an issue

Synonyms

- confront
 - tackle
-

tip things in the right direction

Example from the episode

“...use my platform to somehow **tip things in the right direction.**”

Definition

To influence a situation positively.

Another example

A few small changes could tip things in the right direction.

Common collocations

- tip the balance
- tip things toward

Synonyms

- influence
 - steer
-

spell disaster

Example from the episode

“But it could **spell disaster.**”

Definition

To likely cause serious problems.

Another example

Heavy rain could spell disaster for the harvest.

Common collocations

- spell disaster for
- could spell disaster

Synonyms

- lead to catastrophe
 - cause major problems
-

give each other the benefit of the doubt

Example from the episode

“...we should make efforts to **give each other the benefit of the doubt...**”

Definition

To choose to believe someone has good intentions despite uncertainty.

Another example

I wasn't sure he was telling the truth, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt.

Common collocations

- give someone the benefit of the doubt

Synonyms

- trust provisionally
 - assume good intentions
-

mulling over

Example from the episode

“...after **mulling over** a lot of things lately...”

Definition

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Thinking carefully about something for a long time.

Another example

I've been mulling over your proposal all week.

Common collocations

- mull over an idea
- mull things over
- spend time mulling over

Synonyms

- contemplate
 - ponder
 - think through
-

riveting

Example from the episode

"I watched a documentary at the weekend called How Ships Are Made. It was **riveting**."

Definition

Extremely interesting or absorbing.

Another example

The interview was absolutely riveting.

Common collocations

- riveting story
- absolutely riveting
- utterly riveting

Synonyms

- fascinating
- gripping
- compelling

Notes

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The joke works because “riveting” also refers to rivets used in shipbuilding.

a record

Example from the episode

“That’s got to be **a record**.”

Definition

Something unusually extreme or impressive.

Another example

Three hours late? That’s a record even for him.

Common collocations

- break a record
- set a record
- that’s a record

Synonyms

- unprecedented achievement
 - extreme example
-

pritt-stick

Example from the episode

“...passed her a **pritt-stick** instead of a lip-stick.”

Definition

A glue stick brand commonly used in schools and offices.

Another example

Have you got a Pritt Stick for this poster?

Common collocations

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- glue stick
- Pritt Stick glue

Synonyms

- glue stick

Notes

The humour comes from the similarity between “Pritt-stick” and “lipstick.”

flattered

Example from the episode

“In a way, I am **flattered** that the algorithm hears me singing...”

Definition

Pleased because something makes you feel admired or valued.

Another example

I was flattered to be invited.

Common collocations

- deeply flattered
- feel flattered
- very flattered

Synonyms

- complimented
 - honoured
-

out of tune

Example from the episode

“...my singing isn’t completely **out of tune**...”

Definition

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Not singing or playing at the correct musical pitch.

Another example

The piano is badly out of tune.

Common collocations

- sing out of tune
- badly out of tune

Synonyms

- off-key
-

rooted in

Example from the episode

“...dreams are disguised expressions... often **rooted in** childhood experiences...”

Definition

Based strongly in something.

Another example

His fears are rooted in past trauma.

Common collocations

- deeply rooted in
- rooted in tradition
- rooted in experience

Synonyms

- grounded in
 - based in
-

preoccupied

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Example from the episode

“I had to let him know that I was a little bit **preoccupied.**”

Definition

Thinking about something so much that it distracts you.

Another example

She seemed preoccupied during the meeting.

Common collocations

- mentally preoccupied
- too preoccupied to notice

Synonyms

- distracted
 - absorbed
-

labour

Example from the episode

“When I finally recovered from **labour...**”

Definition

The process of giving birth.

Another example

She was in labour for twelve hours.

Common collocations

- go into labour
- difficult labour
- labour pains

Synonyms

- childbirth process

attend to

Example from the episode

“...I was able to **attend to** the REALLY important stuff...”

Definition

To deal with or take care of something.

Another example

A nurse attended to the injured man.

Common collocations

- attend to customers
- attend to a problem
- attend to business

Synonyms

- deal with
 - handle
 - take care of
-

Gosh

Example from the episode

“**Gosh**, Charlie.”

Definition

A mild exclamation showing surprise or emotion.

Another example

Gosh, that was quick.

Common collocations

- gosh darn it

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- oh gosh

Synonyms

- wow
 - goodness
-

rate

Example from the episode

“THAT’S how much I **rate** it!”

Definition

To think something is very good.

Another example

I really rate that restaurant.

Common collocations

- highly rate
- really rate someone/something

Synonyms

- admire
- think highly of

Notes

Very common in modern British English.

come round

Example from the episode

“Next time you **come round**...”

Definition

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To visit someone's house informally.

Another example

Why don't you come round for dinner tomorrow?

Common collocations

- come round tonight
- come round for coffee

Synonyms

- visit
 - drop by
-

flagrant claims

Example from the episode

"...defend yourself against these **flagrant claims**..."

Definition

Bold, obvious, exaggerated accusations.

Another example

The article made flagrant claims with no evidence.

Common collocations

- flagrant lie
- flagrant violation
- flagrant claims

Synonyms

- outrageous
 - blatant
-

the law of diminishing returns

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Example from the episode

“...I put this down to **the law of diminishing returns...**”

Definition

A principle where continued effort produces smaller and smaller benefits.

Another example

After a certain point, studying longer gives diminishing returns.

Common collocations

- diminishing returns set in
- economic law of diminishing returns

Synonyms

- reduced effectiveness over time
-

a shaggy dog story

Example from the episode

“It’s just **a shaggy dog story...**”

Definition

A very long story with an intentionally silly or disappointing ending.

Another example

His joke turned into a shaggy dog story that lasted twenty minutes.

Common collocations

- classic shaggy dog story
- tell a shaggy dog story

Synonyms

- rambling joke
 - anti-joke
-

hackneyed

Example from the episode

“...a lot of **hackneyed** slop that nobody wants...”

Definition

Overused and unoriginal.

Another example

The film was full of hackneyed clichés.

Common collocations

- hackneyed phrase
- hackneyed cliché

Synonyms

- clichéd
 - stale
 - overused
-

slop

Example from the episode

“...hackneyed **slop** that nobody wants...”

Definition

Low-quality, careless content or food.

Another example

The internet is flooded with AI-generated slop.

Common collocations

- content slop
- cheap slop
- feed someone slop

Synonyms

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- rubbish
- garbage
- junk

Notes

Increasingly used online for low-quality AI content.

the subprime mortgage crisis

Example from the episode

“...we’ve been here before with **the subprime mortgage crisis...**”

Definition

The financial crisis caused by risky home loans in the late 2000s.

Another example

The subprime mortgage crisis triggered a global recession.

Common collocations

- housing crisis
- mortgage collapse
- financial crisis

Synonyms

- 2008 financial crisis
-

the bottom fell out of the market

Example from the episode

“...until it was unsustainable and **the bottom fell out of the market...**”

Definition

The market suddenly collapsed in value.

Another example

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The bottom fell out of the crypto market overnight.

Common collocations

- market collapse
- the bottom fell out

Synonyms

- crashed
 - collapsed
-

in bloom

Example from the episode

The phrase appears in the episode when discussing seasonal imagery and atmosphere.

Definition

Covered with flowers; flourishing beautifully.

Another example

The gardens are in bloom this time of year.

Common collocations

- flowers in bloom
- cherry blossoms in bloom

Synonyms

- flowering
 - blossoming
-

bard

Example from the episode

Used humorously in literary discussion.

Definition

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A poet, especially a famous one.

Another example

William Shakespeare is often called “The Bard.”

Common collocations

- legendary bard
- Celtic bard

Synonyms

- poet
 - minstrel
-

baffled

Example from the episode

“...a lot of confused native speakers...” (related usage)

Definition

Completely confused.

Another example

I was baffled by his behaviour.

Common collocations

- utterly baffled
- left baffled

Synonyms

- confused
 - puzzled
-

went rogue

Example from the episode

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Used in discussion about AI and systems behaving unpredictably.

Definition

Started behaving independently or uncontrollably.

Another example

The chatbot went rogue and started insulting users.

Common collocations

- go rogue
- rogue AI
- rogue employee

Synonyms

- become uncontrollable
 - rebel
-

throw a fit

Example from the episode

Used humorously about emotional reactions.

Definition

To react with extreme anger or frustration.

Another example

My son threw a fit when I turned off the TV.

Common collocations

- throw a fit over
- toddler throwing a fit

Synonyms

- have a tantrum
- lose one's temper

sugarcoat

Example from the episode

Related to “a spoonful of sugar” and polite communication.

Definition

To make something unpleasant sound more acceptable.

Another example

Don't sugarcoat it — tell me the truth.

Common collocations

- sugarcoat the truth
- sugarcoat bad news

Synonyms

- soften
- gloss over
- cushion the blow