

REC004: Language Mining with Carsten Peters (part 1)

EPISODE SUMMARY

In this episode of Real English Conversations, Lori talks to Carsten Peters of the Language Mining Company, a company providing specialized language training for businesses and individuals who want to learn or improve their foreign language skills quickly and efficiently. This is the very first time Lori and Carsten ever spoke to each other, so it's an authentic example of two people getting to know each other.

A native speaker of German, Carsten is a podcaster, published author, language coach, entrepreneur, and is keenly interested in the science and practice of language learning and acquisition. He's a great example of a successful learner of English as a foreign language.

This episode presents the first part of the conversation in which you hear them getting to know each other, and then moving on to exchange their ideas about how adults and children learn languages, and the role of motivation and structure for adult language learners.

The vocabulary notes for this episode focus on phrasal verbs, as well as informal words and phrases that might be difficult to understand.

BEFORE YOU LISTEN

Take a moment to think about the following:

Does fear or anxiety prevent you from using English when you have the opportunity to practice? What are you actually afraid of?

Do you think children and adults learn language the same way? What similarities and differences might there be?

What are your goals as an English learner? How will you know when you reach them?

Do you have a regular routine for your English learning? If not, what is the simplest, easiest thing you could change to make English a regular part of your life?

Introduction

Hello and welcome to another episode of Real English Conversations from BetterAtEnglish.com. I'm posting this episode at the end of August, 2014, after a rainy and gray summer here in the Netherlands. If you had a vacation this summer, I hope that you had better weather than we did here!

Apart from doing a lot of reading, photography and playing with my dog, I've spent most of my vacation arranging and recording new conversations for you. I'll tell you a secret: it's scary for me to contact people I don't know and ask them to record conversations. But knowing how much you like listening to conversations gives me the courage to do it. So thanks for helping me push myself to get out of my comfort zone and do something scary.

In today's conversation, you'll meet Carsten Peters, an all-round interesting guy: He is a polyglot, a language coach, a guitarist, as well as a published author, a podcaster and an entrepreneur. His first language is German, and he's is a great example of a successful learner of English. Carsten is also one of the founders of The Language Mining Company, and excels at helping people reach their language learning goals efficiently, sustainably, and at their own pace. You can find out more about Carsten and Language Mining at LanguageMiningCompany.com.

OK, let's get started with the conversation!

CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPT

Carsten: Here we go, hello Lori.

Lori: Hello Carsten.

Carsten: How are you?

Lori: I'm doing great, how are you?

Carsten: Yeah, fine, fine.

Lori: Oh good, I'm so glad you agreed to talk to me.

Carsten: Yeah, I'm, like, **puzzled** that you wanted to talk to me so it's on both sides.

Lori: Oh, why would you think that?

Carsten: Because it's just like, I was amazed that you contacted me and I'm very grateful for it and I'm happy to be on your show.

Lori: Oh, well it's a real pleasure.

Carsten: Where are you now, you are in the Netherlands, right?

Lori: That's right, I live in the Netherlands.

Carsten: But I read something about Sweden, is that where you were **based** before?

Lori: Actually, **to make a very long story short**, I was born in the US and lived there till my mid-twenties and then I moved to Sweden, lived there for about twenty years, and then I moved to the Netherlands where I live now.

Carsten: Okay, yeah.

Lori: Yeah, one of the reasons that I thought it would be so cool to talk to you is that I think it's inspiring for people learning English to hear people who are not native speakers but who have managed to learn really well. You know, people who are basically **badass at learning** languages. And I thought, you know, as soon as I found your site, I thought, "Oh, Carsten, he looks like a really cool guy to talk to."

Carsten: Yeah, thank you.

Lori: One of the things that I wanted to ask you about is – you see, I'm not actually involved actively anymore working with real-life learners...

Carsten: Okay.

Lori: I stopped teaching English back in around 2007. And now, recently, I have decided, you know, I started my podcast back in 2006 and it would be fun **to pick that up** again.

Carsten: Yeah.

Lori: And I'm finding that as I'm **getting back into it** and, you know, and **reading up on** learning theory and language learning and trying to **get caught up again**, a lot has changed in 2006 – or since 2006. When it comes to the resources and things that are available for people to learn online.

Carsten: Yes, yes, definitely. There are so many things that actually the big challenge is not, is not the content itself it's for the learner to select which content to use.

Lori: Right, exactly, it's almost like you can get overwhelmed by so much information out there and so many different sites and people with different theories about what the best way is. I think for a learner it can be overwhelming to just know...where do I start?

Carsten: Yeah, but what you are doing at BetterAtEnglish.com is actually very interesting because **as far as I have seen** you are recording real life conversations, is that true?

Lori: Yeah.

Carsten: And then you are transcribing them, working on the vocabulary that has been used in that conversation, right?

Lori: Yeah, that's basically what I'm able to do with the resources that I have. I would like – to me it doesn't feel so pedagogically **sound** to just be putting conversations out there and then highlighting vocabulary and basically leaving the rest up to the learners to **do with it what they will**. But with the time I have available that's really all I can do. Apparently people do think it's helpful so I keep doing it. But I'm thinking, if you want to go beyond that, I mean, I hear a lot of language learning podcasters saying things like, "All you need to do is just listen a lot, listen a lot and you will learn and get better." And I think of it – when I **think back** from my own perspective – I think you would have to already be at least an intermediate level to get a lot out of just listening. You need a little more structure and focus especially at the lower levels. But it could be that that's an old fashioned way of looking at things.

Carsten: It's actually true. I mean, if you think about children, what they do is they just listen. They listen and listen and listen and listen, and over time they have a fairly good language level, like when they are six years, seven years old...

Lori: Right.

Carsten: ...they are fluent and they can say everything they want to say. Probably a rather limited vocabulary – amount of words that they know – but still they are fluent. So **the thing is** that what is different between kids and adults, just to put it very simple [sic], is they have time.

Lori: Right.

Carsten: And they are motivated and they are enjoying life and all these kind of things. And we adults, we tend to struggle with things and we want to have it, we don't have patience, we want to have it fast and it just does not work. I mean, it works and we would need such a long time to just learn the language by listening.

Lori: Yeah, of course we can learn that way as adults but I think we also have a lot of pressure. We **put pressure on** ourselves, we like, as you just said, we don't have the patience and we are worried about looking bad...

Carsten: Yeah, exactly.

Lori: There's... so I think a little bit, yeah, and here this is just my opinion, I'm not basing this on science, but it just seems logical to me that adults need to have a little more focus than just listening. That is, yeah, one of the things I struggle with when I'm creating my podcast is, is this really enough for people? Like, just to listen to this?

Carsten: Yeah, it's, I mean, listening is important of course. But then if you add structure to it, it gets a lot faster. There's really an advantage that have adults over children if we continue to compare these two.

Lori: Right.

Carsten: Is that we adults we know how to think logically and in an abstract way and all these kind of things. So if you add that structure to the content that you are providing then they will just learn really, really fast.

Lori: Yeah, yeah, that's what I think as well. It's great to tell people, yeah, listen as much as you can and try to get as much exposure to English as you can but **at some point** I think adults need to do a little more than just, like, absorbing things and taking things in. In order to learn, you know, more efficiently and faster. I think you can learn just from listening and trying to notice things and especially if you have access to the context. Because that's another thing that little kids have, that adults don't, is everything that is happening to them it is in the context, you know?

Carsten: Yeah.

Lori: They see mother holding a banana and saying "banana" and they are hungry and they want that banana and pretty soon, you know, they make that connection. It's not just language sort of flowing over them with no context like you would get as an adult just, say, turning on the TV and trying to watch a TV show in English that you have no idea what's **going on**.

Carsten: Exactly, exactly. The thing is that the kids, they are exposed to the language all the time and they just cannot **run away from it** and what we adults do all the time, we are... we are... we have other priorities. We have things to do, we have **to-do lists**, and these lists have nothing to do with language learning. So what we do all the time is we do something and then we get away from it, then we do something else. So what I do really when somebody asks me about language learning, what's the first thing to do, the first thing I always tell them is get structured, and compare language learning with sports. Most people have some experience with sports, like they have tried it or they are doing it actually, like running. So you have to do it **on a regular basis**. That's the first thing that I do with them. What are you going to do in order to make sure that there is a continuance in there?

Lori: Yeah.

Carsten: That you have the structure, like every day from 6:30 to 7 or whatever time they select, so that they actually schedule it, and by repetition that they **advance**, that they advance with their language learning. And then it's really, it's not that important any more if the content is good or bad. I mean, better content would lead to more efficiency but if they just do it, that's fine. If you walk from Paris to Berlin, it's a long way but it would be effective, you would reach your goal. So if you take ten steps each day you will eventually **end up in** Berlin.

Lori: Right, exactly. And I think that is one of the most, absolutely most important things to try to figure out and the thing that I would love to be able to help people with is getting that motivation to be able **to stick with it** and keep some kind of regular schedule for your learning. And that's really hard. Because it's easy when you feel motivated. If you feel motivated it's, like, super easy. The problem is when things get difficult or you get discouraged or – for whatever reason – suddenly you are not feeling motivated any more. And that I think is the real challenge for

anyone doing something – not even language learning, anything that takes a long time, like a skill that you are trying to develop that takes, you know, many years of practice. I think that is why so many people give up...is that they lose their motivation or run into an obstacle and just can't keep going. Have you found that when you've been working with people?

Carsten: Yes and I've found a way of how to **tackle** that problem. That's why like years ago I was thinking about why do I, like me, myself, I have mastered several languages, like I speak several languages fluently. But then there are other languages that I have put so much effort and so much time into it and I don't speak them. Still, just a little bit is left...of course, I can ask for directions in like Russian and Chinese or something, but I haven't advanced to a level where I can say that I am fluent.

So I was thinking about what do I need in order to reach that level and really to continue, and everything is about psychology. Because there is a reason why we don't want to learn a language, why we are struggling with it, why our focus is on something else and not on the things that we are doing. So the whole psychology behind language learning has nothing to do with language learning itself but with the way we are, we treat, we tackle certain problems. We try to do something like in sports, why are we going out and running every day and have a good **shape** and lose weight and all these types of things and other people don't do it. What's the difference between those, those two?

Lori: Well I can tell you from myself, I work out and lift weights and **watch** my food because I want to look better naked. Sorry, that's why I do it!

Carsten: Okay, yeah, yeah, so it's probably like you see yourself in situations where you want to look in a certain way. And that's your motivation. So if you want to be there, you want to be exposed with that kind of body that you would like to have, then doing sports is easy. That's why, near the coast of certain countries, warmer countries, people lose weight more easily than in countries where the weather is not so nice just because they expose their body to the public...

Lori: Yeah.

Carsten: ...at the beach.

Lori: I grew up in Southern California, so I totally know what you are talking about.

Carsten: Okay, so if you grow up in say in Finland or, I don't know, you've been living in Sweden...

Lori: Yeah.

Carsten: I mean, people don't go out and show their bodies. Probably they have a sauna, sort of, different things. Anyway it's like when you are not used to that then the motivation is not that high. You can get along with it, you can hide some things and put some clothes over, so that's fine. Same thing with English learning, or with whatever language you want to learn. So when the motivation is high, when you don't want to stand there as an idiot at the international trade fair and you have to talk to customers. That happens once a year, that's fine, you can **get along with**

it. But if it happens like every week and you have to pick up the phone and – I have, I have really, I have clients who they say, “When I see that 0044 on the telephone display, I am scared.”

Lori: Yes, I had the same thing working with people in Sweden.

Carsten: Okay.

Lori: They would say that when they could see it was a foreign number calling and they knew they had to speak English they would just totally panic.

Carsten: Yeah. So, and that’s psychology. So once you overcome that psychological problem – let’s call it a problem – then you are **way** more open to language learning. And then if you add this – this discipline or regular, like, scheduled lessons or whatever – then everything is fine. So what I always do with people is like, I have them make a plan of how much they want to reach in what amount of time.

CONCLUSION

I loved having the chance to talk to Carsten, and this was only the beginning of our conversation. There will be more in future episodes. You can find out more about Carsten and the Language Mining Company at LanguageMiningCompany.com . By the way, if you are an entrepreneur who has learned another language, you'd be the perfect guest for Carsten's podcast about language learning success stories. And if you speak German, make sure to check out his Language Mining podcast, which is all about tips and tricks for learning languages efficiently.

Don't forget: you can find the transcript and vocabulary notes for this episode at betteratenglish.com/004 . I'd like to close by reminding you that getting out of your comfort zone is the key to making progress. If fear or anxiety about making mistakes or not being perfect is causing you to miss opportunities to practice your English – or any opportunities at all – you're not alone. And this is the main thing that you need to overcome. If you want to learn and grow, the best thing you can do is step out of your comfort zone. I was super nervous about reaching out to Carsten for a chat, because he didn't know me at all. But I forced myself to do it, and now I'm so glad I did. So what are you going to do today to take just one tiny little step outside your own comfort zone? Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time. Bye for now!

Vocabulary notes on next page

Vocabulary notes

In the text	Basic form	Notes
puzzled	<i>to be puzzled</i>	to feel confused because you do not understand something
based	<i>to be based somewhere</i>	In this context, a <i>base</i> is the location where you live and work
to make a long story very short	<i>to make a long story short</i>	If a speaker wants to summarize something that would take a long time to explain, they often start by saying "to make a long story short". This informs the listener that what follows is a summary of just the most important details.
badass at learning	<i>to be badass at something</i>	if you are badass at something, it means you are extremely good at it. Usage note: badass is very informal, and some people might consider it vulgar, so be careful!
to pick that up again	<i>to pick something up (again)</i>	to start doing something again that you haven't done for a period of time.
getting back into it	<i>to get (back) into something</i>	If you get into something, you start to become interested in it and enthusiastic about it.
reading up on	<i>to read up on</i>	to learn about something by reading a lot about it
get caught up again	<i>to get caught up, to catch up</i>	to improve or learn in order to reach the same standard or level as someone else or something else
as far as I have seen	<i>as far as I see</i>	used when you say something you think is true, but you realize there may be facts you do not know or remember.
do with it what they will.	<i>to do what (someone) will</i>	used to say that people are free to do or choose whatever they want
think back	<i>to think back to/on something</i>	to think about something that happened in the past

the thing is	<i>the thing is</i>	used to introduce an answer, comment or explanation related to something that was just mentioned
put pressure on	<i>to put pressure on something/someone</i>	If you put pressure on someone, you try to persuade, threaten, or force them to do something. If you put pressure on yourself to do something difficult, it can make you feel worried or anxious.
at some point	<i>at some point</i>	at some moment in time that is not made specific, usually because the exact moment is not known or not important
going on	<i>to go on, to be going on</i>	to happen
run away from it	<i>to run away from something</i>	to ignore or avoid something unpleasant or that you don't like
to-do list	<i>to-do list</i>	Literally, a list of things that you need to do, written down to help you remember to do them. Here Carsten means that adults have many responsibilities and priorities that children don't have.
on a regular basis	<i>to do something on a regular basis</i>	to do something frequently or after equal amounts of time have passed, for example, every day or every weekend.
advance	<i>to advance (with / in) something</i>	to improve or make progress in a skill/ability or in your knowledge of something
end up	<i>to end up</i>	to arrive
to stick with it	<i>to stick with something</i>	to persist, to continue to do something. Usually said about activities that are difficult or challenging, or require a lot of time to master.
tackle	<i>to tackle something</i>	to make an organized, determined attempt to deal with a problem or challenge
shape	<i>to be in good shape</i>	if you are in good shape, you are fit and healthy, usually at an attractive body weight.

watch	<i>to watch something</i>	In this context, if you watch something, you are paying extra attention to it and making sure you do it correctly.
get along with	<i>to get along with</i>	In this context: to manage or continue to do something or make progress in a situation
way		A very informal synonym for <i>much, far, or considerably</i>

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