EPISODE 126

Why Your English Stops Improving

Full transcript · point of view · vocabulary review

Hi, everybody! I am Georgiana, your English teacher and founder of SpeakEnglishPodcast.com. My mission is to help you speak English fluently.

In today's episode, I will talk about an issue that is of great concern to **language** students. It is the much-feared **plateau**.

What is a plateau? A plateau **happens** when you stop your **progress** despite continuing to do "**all the right things.**"

An interesting expression for this **situation** is: to hit a plateau.

For example:

"It seems I hit a plateau because I can't see any progress with my English, and I'm still studying really hard!"

More literally, a plateau is a large flat area of land. This definition makes total sense because if you are walking on a plateau, you are not going up or down. You stay at the same height.

Plateaus are very common not only in learning a new language but in other areas—for example, a very common one is **losing weight**.

Imagine that you've been on a diet and have lost some weight. But then, after two months, you stop losing weight. You're still on a diet, but you're not losing weight anymore.

The main problem here is not the diet. It's just that the body needs some time before it starts losing weight again. It has to adapt to the new situation.

This type of situation is very tough because when we experience it for a while, we can easily lose motivation, and may end up giving up. It is essential to understand better why this happens so that we do not lose motivation and will to continue.

I'm sure many of you have experienced this.

When you started learning English, you were very motivated. You have spent a lot of time listening and answering questions, but now apparently, you are not experiencing any improvement.

Usually, when we start listening or reading in the language we are studying, we notice a constant improvement in our level.

Every day we learn new words, expressions, and structures. We are happy and pleased and want to keep learning more and more. This is a wonderful stage.

After some time, we no longer notice a considerable improvement, although we still see small improvements. So we don't worry too much and move on. But a bit later, our progress stagnates, and well, it's when we start worrying.

This situation makes us lose our motivation, and possibly, we are tempted to give up or at least postpone it, promising ourselves that we will continue to study with enthusiasm and motivation, but this seldom happens.

The main reason this happens to us is simple. Our brain needs time to consolidate, structure, order, polish, and finally automate all this new knowledge.

Learning a new language is not only about learning new words but also thinking differently. That's why I always insist that you have to learn in context. This way, you can observe how words are used in a sentence, and that takes time.

Think of it this way: when we learn math, we are using the conscious part of our brain to do calculations. To do this, we need to concentrate very hard. However, when we speak in our mother tongue, we can do this almost without attention and without effort. We can even do other kinds of activities while having a conversation.

This happens because we actually acquire the language. It is not a conscious learning process where we have to consider the rules as in mathematics. This kind of acquisition happens mainly on a subconscious level. Over time, basic speech patterns are created that allow us to express ourselves naturally. We do not have to think about word order, verb tense, necessary connectors, etc. It just happens.

This process takes time, which is why we sometimes go through periods where we don't seem to be making any progress. What really happens is that the brain is merely organizing all this new knowledge to automate it when we need it.

That's why I always insist on repetition. If you really want to learn a language, you have to use materials that are a bit easier than usual and spend many hours listening to them.

Therefore, the only thing I can recommend is patience if you see that your progress has stopped. You will see that in a short time, you will experience a significant breakthrough. This happened to me when I learned other languages. I improved very quickly at first, but then suddenly my progress stopped. I insisted and insisted until one day while talking to a friend; I realized how much I had improved.

Well, I hope this helps you.

Let's continue with a point of view story.

Now, let's practice.

Point of View

Grammar in Context

First version

New Point of View

Are you ready?

On her first day of learning, Grace learned to say, "Good morning, how are you?"

Grace was happy because she was already starting to talk from day one.

She continued to study hard and with determination.

In the second week, she realized that she could only say, "Good morning, how are you?" as she had on the first day. I mean, she hadn't made any progress.

So she worried and decided to double her study time.

After a month, and despite all the time invested, she could only say, "Good morning, how are you?"

Grace began to worry, so she tripled and quadrupled her dedication to English.

After six months, she found a friend from the States.

They started talking in English about all kinds of subjects: politics, philosophy, botany, astrophysics, and even stamp collecting.

Grace was amazed, and her friend told her that this was the biggest case on the language plateau she had ever seen.

Now, Grace gives conferences in English on all kinds of complex topics. The funny thing is that she can't do the same in her mother tongue.

Second version

Your Point of View

On your first day of learning, you learned to say, "Good morning, how are you?"

You were happy because you were already starting to talk from day one.

You continued to study hard and with determination.

In the second week, you realized that you could only say, "Good morning, how are you?" like on the first day. I mean, you hadn't made any progress.

So you worried and decided to double your study time.

After a month, and despite all the time invested, you could only say, "Good morning, how are you?"

You started to worry, so you tripled and quadrupled your dedication to English.

After six months, you found a friend from the States. You began to speak English about all sorts of subjects: politics, philosophy, botany, astrophysics, and even stamp collecting.

You were surprised, and your friend told you that this was the biggest case of language plateau learning that she had seen.

Now, you give conferences in English on all sorts of complex subjects. The funny thing is that you can't do the same in your mother tongue.

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.

Review

Vocabulary from This Episode

Review the most useful words and expressions before listening again.

01 Plateau
A period when your progress stops even though you continue doing the right things.

02 Hit a plateau
To reach a stage where you no longer notice progress.

03 Stagnate
To stop developing or improving for a period of time.

04 Give up
To stop trying because something feels too difficult or discouraging.

05 Postpone
To delay something and plan to do it later.

06 Consolidate
To strengthen and organize new knowledge so it becomes more stable.

07 Acquire a language
To develop a language naturally rather than consciously thinking about rules.

08 Subconscious
The part of the mind involved in processes that happen without deliberate attention.

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