

No Pressure English

Episode 3 transcript - How old are you in English?

Hello, how are we today? I hope you're really well. Welcome to this week's episode of the podcast. Before we start, I just want to remind you that the transcript for this lesson is in the description of this video.

The transcript has all of the text with the most difficult words **highlighted**, plus a comprehensive **glossary** or list with definitions of each word underneath the text. So today, I would like to speak about a very interesting question, which is: what age are you in English? Okay, it's a silly question, right? I think so. Yeah, it's definitely a silly question.

But the reason I want to talk about it is... because I'm going to explore three things today. The first is your age in a language. The second is your brain and the power of that beautiful machine. And the third is the effects of language on the brain, or at least one of them. So I'm going to start by sharing a personal story, which is my relationship with Italian. So, let me take you back to **circa** April 2020.

I was living in Milan when COVID broke out, when it started to spread, and nobody knew what it was. I had been living there for almost a year and a half. In that time, I had tried my best to learn Italian and to acquire some of the language. However, all of my days were spent in English because I was teaching English. So, long story short, I didn't feel like I was making progress in the language. I was spending a lot of time doing all the basics, but I couldn't understand a goddamn word.

There were many **humbling** moments and situations in which I felt I understood, but then the conversation progressed, and I realised that I didn't understand or I couldn't respond. Of course, in all communication, we want to be able to (a) understand our **interlocutor**, the person in front of us, and (b) respond in a **timely manner**. But going back to that April 2020 and the COVID lockdown - I think it was a Friday evening. As was routine on Friday evenings during COVID, I was drinking a few glasses of wine, possibly a bottle.

And somewhere in the middle of the second glass of wine, I wanted to know my level in Italian. You know, I wanted to know my number. How good am I in Italian? You know that feeling, as if an internet language test will put a label on your head: A2, B1, or B2, etc. There's such a variety in **vague** numbers, and really, there's not enough distinction within those numbers to know how good you are in general or in different disciplines—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In any case, I was scrolling **mindlessly**, **aimlessly**, doing grammar tests and some vocabulary tests. Then I saw the title of one particular test: What age are you in Italian? I thought to myself - interesting!

So I did the test. Now I've got to tell you, I think my result was 10. So, in 2020, I was a 10-year-old in Italian, which is very interesting when you think about it. I only had the intellectual capacity to express myself as a 10-year-old in that language, which could be exceptionally depressing if you look at it in a certain way. But God knows anyway, God knows what level I have now in Italian. At least 12, guys, I think, at least 12. Anyway, I want to talk about a change in **mindset**.

So I don't really want to talk about my level in Italian because it's not great. It could be better, but it's the mindset that has changed, and that's what I want to focus on today. So I came back to Ireland from Milan in, I think, the summer of 2020. I just stopped. I kind of broke up with Italian. I stopped listening to Italian, stopped reading in Italian, and just took a big break. I didn't look at or listen to anything in Italian for four months, probably from September 2020 to December 2020.

Then, in the new year of 2021, I made a New Year's resolution. I listened to a 10-minute podcast in Italian. It became my ambition to do that every day for a week. Then it became my ambition to do that every day for the next month, and so on. Now I don't go one day without listening to at least 10 minutes of Italian. Usually it's closer to 30 or 40 minutes. But the point is, my brain knows that Italian is extremely important to me. It's of the **utmost importance** to me and my brain that I do it every day. So I can't go to bed unless I've done my 10 minutes of Italian.

And you don't do something every day if it's not important to you. You just don't. Fact. Do you know what I mean? So if my objective was to improve my comprehension, I can **tick that off the list**. I've definitely improved my comprehension, and listening definitely helps your speaking, too. Of course, it helps, but that is another skill that needs practice, and you need to set goals in that area too. You use it or you lose it, you know.

In essence, I'm just talking about convincing your brain that something is important to you. All you really need to do is do that one thing every day. Even if it's only three minutes in the worst-case scenario, like your worst day, the toughest day that you have of the week, or if it's 30 minutes in the subway listening to a podcast, whatever it is - make sure your brain knows that it's important to you. That machine is just good, man. It's really good, and it wants you to do well.

Like if you like shopping online and you do it every day, your brain knows that shopping online is important to you. And you're going to do it again and again and again. And if you tell your brain that FIFA, the video game, is important to you, you'll play it again and again, too. Okay? So that's life. Sometimes, especially when we have goals, we need to just fit in the positive things—the three minutes, the five minutes or more of that beneficial skill-building practice.

So I'm going to just **segue** and lean into the benefits of this: learning English or any language. So I've just listened to a video, which I'll link—I will link in the description. It's a video from the BBC World Service on the benefits of **bilingualism**. It **staves off** dementia for an extra four years. So if you're putting in your, whatever it is, your 10 minutes a day, you're staving off, you're preventing or delaying dementia for an extra four years.

Okay, obviously life is different for everyone, so, you know, that's just [a] **ballpark figure**. But that's pretty cool, isn't it? It's a bit of a trade-off. You're gaining time by investing time. You know, that's a trade-off. That's pretty damn cool.

So this brings me to the point about age. How old are you in your target language? I think it's not the most productive way to look at things, especially if you're a really serious person. You might feel **disheartened**. You might feel **disillusioned**, and you might feel a little bit sad about it, bummed out, depressed. In reality, it seems to me that you're constructing a house.

Your first house, when you start learning the language, is kind of a shitty **bedsit** apartment. You know, it's a student apartment with terrible heating. There might be stains on the walls and all these things, but it's yours. It's not perfect, but it's yours. That's kind of the initial phase with a new language, isn't it? It's yours.

You're going to improve it. It's a fixer-upper. It's something you need to fix or repair, to renovate, to **refurbish**, but it's yours.

Slowly, slowly, it gets a little bit bigger. Maybe it's a very nice **bungalow** with one floor, or maybe it's a two-story house, or maybe it's a mansion. I don't know, but bit by bit, the quality increases. So, you can set your own goals inside that framework and watch yourself **flourish** in different areas. So let's go back to the initial idea of age again.

In hindsight, or looking back, that's kind of groovy, isn't it? When you really think about it, if you're studying a language and you're like 20 or 25 or 30, let's say at my age, I'm coming up on 40. So let's say I'm 12 in Italian or 15 or something. I'm kind of forever young in one language. I have none of the **baggage** that I have in my native language, really, in Italian. I have lots of shame about not knowing a word or losing the **thread** of conversation, but you get over that.

You do. Once you get to a certain age, you get over it. Just like you do in your native language, when you overcome some insecurity. You get over the awkwardness in life at some point. You're forever young in a language. If you decide to acquire another language, you're even younger. You're a baby again. You could be three different ages simultaneously in three different languages. Maybe that's how those smart **polyglots** are doing it.

Maybe they're staying forever young with their curiosity, and they're staving off any mental fatigue, in one sense, by staying **clued in**, by staying attentive to what's going on. You just gotta keep growing and learning. Okay, that's my rant over. That's my monologue, my **soliloquy** over. Yeah, that's all I have to say today, but I hope you have a beautiful week and take care of yourself.

Take care. Ciao.

Comprehensive Glossary

highlighted (adj) - made to stand out; marked in a bright colour to draw attention

glossary (noun) - an alphabetical list of terms with definitions; a vocabulary list

circa (preposition) - approximately; around (used with dates)

humbling (adj) - making you feel less important or proud; causing you to realise your limitations

interlocutor (noun) - a person who takes part in a conversation or dialogue

timely manner (phrase) - at the appropriate time; promptly; without delay

vague (adj) - unclear; not specific or precise

mindlessly (adv) - without thinking; without paying attention; automatically

aimlessly (adv) - without purpose or direction; randomly

mindset (noun) - a person's way of thinking; mental attitude or approach

utmost importance (phrase) - the greatest or highest level of importance; extremely important

tick that off the list (idiom) - to mark something as completed; to accomplish a goal

segue (verb) - to move smoothly from one topic to another; transition (pronounced "SEG-way")

bilingualism (noun) - the ability to speak two languages fluently

staves off (phrasal verb) - prevents or delays something unpleasant; keeps at bay

ballpark figure (idiom) - an approximate number or estimate; a rough calculation

disheartened (adj) - having lost hope or enthusiasm; discouraged

disillusioned (adj) - disappointed after discovering something is not as good as believed

bedsit (noun) - a small apartment consisting of one main room (British English); studio apartment

refurbish (verb) - to renovate; to restore to good condition; to redecorate

bungalow (noun) - a single-story house

flourish (verb) - to grow or develop successfully; to thrive

baggage (noun) - emotional problems or experiences from the past that affect current behaviour; (literally: luggage)

thread (noun) - the main theme or line of thought in a conversation or argument

polyglots (noun) - people who know and are able to use several languages

clued in (phrasal verb/adj) - well-informed; aware of what's happening;
knowledgeable

soliloquy (noun) - a speech in which someone talks to themselves; a monologue
(often used in theatre)