

The Superpower of Story with Bree Aesie – Transcript

Coming up on *Easy Stories in English*...

And for me, fluency is being able to speak and be understood when I speak a language. That's all. Nothing to do with perfect grammar, nothing to do with massive vocabulary. It's communicating, and if you are obsessed with perfection, you will not be able to be a great communicator until you have proficiency level, and that's completely insane.

[intro]

Hello, my Lovely Learners, and welcome to *Easy Stories in English*, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's episode is a conversation with Bree Aesie of the *Into the Story* podcast about the superpower of story. As always, the transcript and PDF are available at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com), and you can find the link in the description.

So, yes, we're doing an interview today. Something a bit different. It's been a while since we had one of those. And actually, you might know Bree Aesie already because [I recently appeared on her podcast, Into the Story](#). A while back, I mentioned that I had started doing stand up comedy, and on this podcast, [Into the Story](#), I share the whole story, the whole shebang.

The whole shebang just means the whole thing with all the details. So if you want to hear in detail about my first time doing stand up comedy, definitely go to [intothestorypodcast.com](https://www.intothestorypodcast.com) and listen to my episode. Of course, I'll also link it in the description.

I had so much fun talking with Bree about my first time doing stand up. It's kind of a scary story, not as scary as climbing Mount Everest, which we had a while back on the podcast, but scary in more of a, an artistic, existential way. Which, you know, I think... Doing stand up comedy, climbing Mount Everest, one of these is clearly more difficult than the other.

Anyway, Bree is just a ball of sunshine and energy and the conversation we had together was so fun. You're really going to enjoy this interview on the superpower of story. It has some fantastic exercises which you can put into practice for working on your English and just becoming a more effective communicator in general.

But before that, I just want to remind you that [my Story Builders course is still open for signups](#). You may have seen the trailer in last week's episode. What did you think of it? Do I look good in a hard hat with a hammer? It's, uh It's debatable.

Someone actually did reach out and ask me a question about the course, and I thought it would be useful if I talked to everyone about it. So one of my lovely learners asked me, is my English good enough to do this course? Because I said before that it's for pre-intermediate B1 learners and above, but of course it's very hard to know your own level. Maybe you only feel like you can communicate at a beginner level, or you just don't feel so confident in a classroom environment.

What I will say to you is, ultimately, it is your decision. Only you can decide if you're ready to do this course. Now, having said that, I will work as hard as I can to make it accessible for everyone. Whoever is in the class, I will do my best to find a language level that suits everybody's needs.

And the great thing about working on a story together is that we will be able to change the level very easily and add different parts, some parts that are maybe higher level, but make sure that the overall structure of the story is easy to understand for everyone.

It also depends on your personal attitude. Some people have had negative learning experiences in school before, so they find it quite intimidating being in a classroom, whereas some people love to challenge themselves and conquer their fears. I feel like I know someone who's a bit like that. So for them, it would be maybe a good idea to push themselves a bit and just give it a go, even if they're not so confident about their level.

What I will say is, you don't have to suffer in silence. You don't have to just sit there and think, Oh, I can't decide. You can talk to me. Of course, you can email me at Ariel@EasyStoriesInEnglish.com, but also you can book a free 15 minute consultation with me to talk about this. Just go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes and [you will see a link to book this free 15 minute chat](#).

Normally, I do the consultations to talk about private teaching, one to one, but it's also a great way to ask any questions you have about the Story Builders course. If you think you want to do it but you're not quite sure, please do book a consultation and I will answer all your questions and hopefully help you make a decision.

Anyway, today is the last day to get the discounted early bird price for Story Builders. So if you do want to do Story Builders, and you're confident, book it today, the day this podcast comes out. Because once it hits midnight UK time, BAM! The price is going up. You will no longer be the early bird that catches the worm.

So, sign up for Story Builders at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Build and get your 25 percent discount before it's too late.

I don't know what that was. Some kind of evil witch. You know, if you don't sign up for Story Builders maybe an evil witch will curse you. I couldn't say. It's not like I know any witches personally.

Okay, and on that note, I think we should get right into the interview.

Interview with Bree Aesie

[Ariel Goodbody]: Bree Aesie is the co-founder of [AC English School in Barcelona](https://www.acenglishschool.com), and she uses her psychology background to help students reach fluency. Bree also hosts the podcast Into the Story, which I've been on, where listeners learn English through inspiring true stories. So, Bree, lovely to chat to you. How are you doing today?

[Bree Aesie]: I'm doing great. It's great to be here. It's always fun to chat with you, Ariel.

[Ariel Goodbody]: The point of what we actually want to talk about today is the superpower of stories. Obviously I write fiction and you work with non-fiction. What kind of led you to choose that format for your podcast of interviewing people and getting their true life stories?

[Bree Aesie]: Yeah, Well, I think that for me, stories have always been very cathartic. So when I say cathartic, I mean listening to a story or watching a movie for me is like my happy place. If I'm feeling bad, it makes me feel good. So when I moved to Barcelona, I started teaching English and any teacher will know that sometimes teaching can be a bit lonely. You do a lot of preparation and especially when you're a new teacher, you put in like two hours of preparation for one hour of class.

So I can remember being in my flat and preparing classes and then I started listening to podcasts. And a specific podcast that I started listening to was called, is called The Moth.

And The Moth is true stories told live. And when I listened to these stories, not only did it make me feel closer to my culture, kind of less homesick, I'm from Canada and The Moth is from the States. So North America, it's all very similar culturally. And it just made me feel very connected and less lonely.

And I also just found it endlessly entertaining. Like, it didn't matter what the story was about, it didn't matter the background that the person had, whether we were very similar or extremely different, all of their stories just felt, I loved them. I could, I could listen to the podcast all day. And then many years later, I decided that I wanted to start doing more of what I liked and less of what I didn't like when it came to teaching.

And around the same time, some research came, came out. Um, having a background in psychology, I'm always really interested in evidence-based methods. And there was this research study that came out where they put people into an MRI to look at their brain. Okay. And they were listening to this podcast, to The Moth that I had been listening to for years.

And they discovered that when we listened to a story, our entire brain is lighting up, our entire brain is active. And this has many different meanings. This could mean several different things, but one of them is that stories just activate our brain and help us remember things better. So I decided to start recording true stories and turn it into a podcast.

[Ariel Goodbody]: It's so interesting teaching English and having students from all over the world, and very often they want to share their stories. Traditional course books tend to be very, formulaic and they're focused a lot on like practical role plays but actually in my experience a lot of students want to really share their stories and talk about important things to them.

That can be challenging sometimes because I've taught like refugees where you know it can be really traumatic for them and actually it requires you to create like a really safe space in the classroom.

We want our classrooms to be like a welcoming space where students can bring their whole selves and personal stories like open that up. Do you feel the same?

[Bree Aesie]: Absolutely. So in order to learn anything, we need to feel safe. We need to feel safe, and we need to feel entertained. So if we feel insecure and bored, if we feel like we're being judged in a classroom or in any space that we're trying to learn and we're not engaged with the content, we're not interested in the content, it's nearly impossible to learn anything.

And I understand how course books were created. I understand very well how there's certain frameworks for each different level and it's very linear. When you're in this level, you cover these grammar points, this vocabulary, these functions. But what happens is that you lose the connection, you lose the real English, and then learning can't take place.

So, absolutely, that, you know, we have to create safe spaces where people feel good and they feel like entertained and connected.

[Ariel Goodbody]: How many people have you interviewed now?

[Bree Aesie]: So now, we just finished season 5, so we've released 60 stories, and recording now the next season, so each season is ten stories. I've recorded probably now 65 stories, so a lot of different people, a lot of different experiences.

[Ariel Goodbody]: And personally, what do you feel you've learned from that? Or what are some, like, surprises or takeaways you had from those interviews?

[Bree Aesie]: So many. If you think about all the different people you've spoken to in your life, right? You think how many different things you can learn. So normally these interviews that I have with people, it's quite an intimate process because we meet, we choose a story, they tell me about their lives, and then we really go into this specific story.

And all of the stories that people tell are moments of transformation in their life where something changed. That could be a big transformation or a small one. So one thing that I've started seeing is certain themes. One theme that I've seen, because I do, I have interviewed some people who have achieved quite high levels of success, let's say.

The first Canadian to summit Everest is an example I like to give because it's like very quintessential, like becoming the first Canadian to go to the top of a mountain. And you see very specific things.

People who reach high levels of success are very disciplined, okay? They have habits, they work towards them. In general, they're also very positive. Everyone can have bad days and be negative sometimes, it happens to all of us, but in general, they have their goal, they're persistent, and they tend to think positively about themselves and their ability to reach that goal.

And also the best communicators that I've, that I've interviewed are the ones who try to say the least. What makes someone a good communicator isn't knowing what to say, it's knowing all of the things not to say. So it's knowing all of the information that's not relevant to what we're talking about, to leave it out.

And I've also noticed this in books that I've read, and articles that I've read, and movies that I've watched, that the main point is just there and it's very clear. And it's repeated kind of over and over but in different ways.

And I think I've also tried to take this into my own style. Don't try to say everything. If I'm in a class, don't try to teach everything.

[Ariel Goodbody]: I did an acting course recently and one of the things that the teacher said is, he pointed to a whiteboard, but I'm just going to use, um. What's it called? What are these called? Sticky notes. Sticky notes.

Yeah, I guess you call it Post-its and we call it sticky notes. Um, so I have a block of sticky notes.

So he was like, imagine that this whole square is the potential emotional range you could hit in a scene, right? So let's say you have a scene where you're angry.

When you rehearse, you can go all the way here or here, where you're like screaming and sweating and going rah! But at a certain point, it stops being effective, and to be here is just as effective as like being here, right? And really when we do the final performance, we're going to be performing within a much smaller box, but you take that experience from further out, and you bring it into the centre. Right?

And it's like that with a good story where, of course, all of your lived experience, all of the small details are going to bring in a richness, but you're not going to say all of it. You know, a lot of it is going to be held internally. And I think that's a really, it's a difficult life skill, I guess.

But it's also like a good point for, for non-native speakers that, people worry so much about expressing themselves completely perfectly with every single word, and it's like, actually you don't have to say everything exactly. People will still get the message.

[Bree Aesie]: Excellent point, and I've had this in my own experience also. I speak Spanish and some Catalan as well. And what I realised is that I will never know every word in the language. And I will always make mistakes with the subjunctive tense in Spanish, but that's okay. The most important thing is this point that we're talking about is being clear on what you're saying.

And this is important when I speak in English and also in Spanish. Be clear in what you're saying. And don't try to say more than is necessary. And a second point I always say

to myself, anyway, is, an effective non-native speaker, the most valuable skill they can have, in my opinion, when they're speaking, is something that's called oral agility.

And this is the ability to move around something that you don't know. So you're in a sentence, you're going, going, going. And you get there, and you say, Ooh, okay, that's a third conditional. Hmm, I don't know how to say that. So all you do is go around. You're agile, and you go around, and you say it in a different way.

Because of course, if you stop there, and you say, I don't know how to say it, then you've stopped the conversation. And the person listening to you, unless they're a teacher, they have no idea what's going on. They will understand you if you speak in a different tense, but explain it.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Yeah, I, I always encourage students to practise paraphrasing, like, take something you know, like a bottle and be like, Oh, it's that long thing that you put water in or whatever.

Um, because it's not a skill that we're taught to practise even in our native languages, but realistically there will always be a moment where you don't know the word and you have to find some way to, to work around it, as you say. Based on your experience, how do you think stories are helpful for students? Aside from the emotional benefits, what are the linguistic benefits?

[Bree Aesie]: Yeah, that's a really good question because I think I often think about the art of creating stories and I think about my own experience, my own emotional connection to it, um, and the entertainment value and all of these things are great. You and I both know and love stories, but what is the real value that someone can use in their own life?

So there are a few different things. The first that I absolutely love and I think is very practical is something that we call the story method. Maybe you've heard of mnemonics. These are memory devices. These are ways and kind of tricks that we use and have been using. I think like the first record of them was from the Ancient Greeks and the, the most common perhaps that you've heard is called the memory palace.

It's when you create, you imagine like your house, for example, and when you have, say, a list of vocabulary or something you need to memorise, you put each of the list in a different location in your house, and then all you need to do is walk through your house in your mind, and you'll see these different items.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Yeah, it's like you connect a vocabulary item to like the bookcase, the TV, the desk. Yeah.

[Bree Aesie]: So the, the reason that these are effective is because remembering essential vocabulary and grammar can happen more effectively when we link it to an image or an emotional trigger, something that's emotional to us. This can enhance our memory.

So I was looking at, uh, an old booklet that I had of my, my days doing Spanish classes. And it was really interesting if you've ever looked at some of your old handwriting. I think that you say you journal, you're a journaler. So when you look at your handwriting from say like 10, 15 years ago, it just has this, this, it's interesting to see the things that you've written.

And I opened it and all of the lists, all of the vocabulary, all of the grammar, I had no memory of writing. There were so many things. And then I flipped to this page where my teacher, we had been learning the past tense.

So, instead of just having me memorise the different tenses, she had me write a story where all of the tenses were, were there. So when I moved to Barcelona, I was living with some flatmates and one day we went to a dinner. Okay, this was, this, this was the story. And I remember writing that like it was yesterday.

And I have repeated that story in my mind maybe a hundred times. I don't use it anymore, but when I was needing to learn, when I was needing to use the past, the correct past tense, I would use that little story and then I would have it. I would say, okay, that's that tense, so I need to say the imperfect, right?

And you can do this, and I recommend that you do do this, with lists of vocabulary, with grammar tenses, you can do it for phrasal verbs, right? That's something that students often ask, for example, phrasal verbs, give me a list of all the phrasal verbs. You're like, okay, wait, wait, wait a second, back up.

Let's say the phrasal verbs for public and private transport. So this is the get on, get off, get in, get out. These are very similar. Like it's very difficult to learn them, but if you created a story using them and you memorised it, it doesn't have to be long, it would be much easier to remember.

So in the morning, I wake up, I get on my bike, okay, so get on a bike, I ride down to the train station, I get off my bike, and then I get on the train.

So you could really make any story and, and try to imagine the story. That's the key is really saying it to yourself and imagine it. And of course, make it personal to you. The more personal it is, the more effective it will be.

I know that you're, you speak a lot of different languages. Have you ever used this type of technique?

[Ariel Goodbody]: Not so much of deliberately writing down a story, but I do find with reading that, um, I always encourage my students to read extensively, uh, as in don't focus on understanding every single word when you're reading a book, just really focus on broader comprehension.

And I find for myself, and I've heard a few people also say this, that you'll be reading a book and there'll be certain words and phrases that come up that at first they don't really stick but then like later you go to bed and suddenly that word is bouncing around your head and sometimes it's a word that like I remember it but I don't remember the meaning.

But as soon as I look it up, it's like, Oh, that's what it is. Of course. And then I know that word, right? In a way that before it was, had no meaning. And it's so tied to the story.

And I, you know, I've used creating stories in classes with my students. And I've actually had moments where I'll say a word that we didn't see for like a few weeks, but a student says, Oh yeah, that's like in the story when the boy did this. And they remember the exact moment in the story where that word first came up.

So I absolutely agree. Generally I try to not give, not focus too much on this, like, explicit memorization because I think it adds a lot of stress often, but realistically, there are going to be many instances where you have to prepare for an exam, or a job interview, or whatever.

And that's a really lovely method of doing it without making it feel, um, stressful. Yeah.

[Bree Aesie]: So if you're trying to memorise vocabulary, you're trying to remember a word, create a small story around it. This is a great technique.

This is something I did. It's not an important word at all, but it's a word I could not remember. So I ride my bike, I take my kids to school on my bike, and it's an old bike, and like three days a week, the chain comes off.

Okay? The chain comes off of the spokes. A spoke is the place that the chain goes on, right? This is not an important word, but I couldn't remember in Spanish that it's called piñón. Okay? And piñón is the same word as pine nut. Okay? A pine nut is like this little tiny nut. So this isn't exactly a story, but I just, every time I need to remember that word, I just close my eyes.

I picture my bike with a pine nut on the spoke, right? And I'll never forget that piñón. So this little bit of like, this mental exercise that you can do as you're reading, as you're watching a movie, as you're in a conversation, just to create a small little story in your mind with images. This is so effective.

It's much more effective than, you know, getting a list of a hundred phrasal verbs, it's much more effective than trying to memorise anything that has no context. Because that is the thing that makes learning most difficult, is when we try to memorise outside of context.

[Ariel Goodbody]: And I think a common thread through all of that is spatial learning. When we teach in a classroom, we have like, posters in different parts of the room because that kind of helps us link the language to spatial use. And I think stories, even though it's in our imagination, the different locations in the story kind of link into that spatial memory.

I think probably it's a good idea when you're studying to try studying in different places as well. Because if you're always sitting at the same place, your, your brain is like, well, this is where I speak English and then everywhere else, it's just forgotten. I don't know.

[Bree Aesie]: Absolutely. Having different locations, having really, it's that we think in images. Right? Like, when I think of the word house or home, I do not see the word H O M E. I see my house. And this is the way our brains work, most of our brains work in general. We're thinking in pictures. So when we take the time to create imagery in our minds and connect it to vocabulary, this is the most effective thing we can do.

When we listen to a story, it is eliciting, it is giving us so much visual information. So most good stories, good movies, they'll start with a place and an action.

Right? So if I tell you, I was standing in my kitchen and I was, we were having a really serious conversation and I started to cry. I've given you two phrases here, but with that information, you see so much. You're not seeing my kitchen, but you're seeing your kitchen or maybe your kitchen when you were a child and you know what it's like to have a conversation and to start crying. You know those feelings.

So what stories are doing is that they're giving us so much visual richness and then the added benefit of emotion, and we can speak about why emotion is so, so effective when we want to learn something. It's just the best, in my opinion, I hope I can say that, the best way to learn languages and also to really use that format to remember languages, which of course is what we all need to do to be able to communicate and to be fluent.

[Ariel Goodbody]: No I, I, I completely completely agree. Obviously, I'm quite biased. The way I think about it, and explain it to people is 90 percent of what we're doing when we use language in our everyday lives is telling stories, right? Like you see your friends and you tell them what you've been up to, something funny you heard, it's all stories.

And sometimes we can get trapped by this idea that learning a language should be serious and academic and even boring. And I think some students definitely think, well, if it's, if it's fun, then I can't be learning, but it's, it's the opposite, right? When we're having fun, we're, our brains are open to receiving information.

[Bree Aesie]: There's, um, a quote from Alan Watts that is to be sincere, but not serious.

[Alan Watts]: *If somebody were to say to me, 'I love you,' and I turned to them and said, 'Are you serious?' she might say, 'No. I'm sincere.'*

[Bree Aesie]: So in general, when you approach anything in life, even, even your work, um, but especially learning, seriousness is not a good place to come from when you want to be curious. Whereas sincerity is about making time, right?

You have to make time to learn a language. You have to make time to work. You have to make time to do anything in life that's worthwhile. When you say, okay, I'm here, you approach it sincerely, that's a much better place to do it from.

But what I think is really interesting about learning and about stories is this concept of curiosity, like never stopping being curious. If I could think of one thing that is the best place to start learning from or doing anything from, even a conversation, it's just being curious.

It's like if you are genuinely curious about what the other person is saying, you're going to listen more. You are going to be more interesting. You are going to be more interested in that person and they will be more interested in you. It just has so much importance. We often associate that with more childish, um, emotion, you know, but it's not, it's like necessary and specifically the role of emotion.

And this is something that I've spoken about on another podcast. We talked all about just emotion and why that is so important for learning.

We get emotions basically from this part of our brain that we can call the primitive brain. So it's a part of our brain that evolved a long time ago. And when we are connected to a situation and it makes us feel something, right? That could be negative or positive. Whatever that means to you, we are affecting these three things.

So, emotion affects, I call it MAM, M A M, motivation, attention, and memory. Okay, so if you are feeling emotion about a story, okay, that you're listening to a story on your podcast. And the listener is feeling something. They are going to be more motivated to keep listening. They are going to be giving their attention to that story. And they are going to remember things more from that story. Like you were saying before, a student recalling a word that was in a story from an earlier class.

So if you are disconnected from emotions, if you are not curious and really trying to feel what's happening, you are disconnecting yourself from these really, really necessary things for learning: motivation, attention, and memory. And, you know, this is just not something that I was taught, or maybe you were taught when we started teaching, but that are so necessary and we should always have it in mind, not only when we're learning languages, but when we're, we're teaching and trying to create spaces and content for people to learn.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Are you familiar with self-determination theory?

[Bree Aesie]: No. Tell me.

[Ariel Goodbody]: So it's a theory of motivation in psychology, and I think it's really relevant to language learning. So the acronym for self determination theory is CAR, so you've got competence, autonomy, and relatedness. So these are the three things that students need to feel motivated.

So competence is the feeling that I'm good at this, like I can do this. Autonomy is having some control over the situation. And relatedness is having relations to your social network. So a sense of community, right? So we create this in the classroom by giving students challenges we know that they can succeed at. We're setting them up to succeed rather than to fail.

We give them autonomy. Like maybe they can decide some of the topics or we're co-creating something. And relatedness is, you know, more broadly trying to create a sense of community in the classroom, but stories are fantastic for all of these because you can, you know, choose the level related to the students, you can allow them to have a lot of input, especially if it's something to do with their story and then, um, stories create, you know, a dialogue and a sense of community.

And yeah, I think. Often we neglect these really fundamental things of, like, how do you get people interested and, like, motivated.

[Bree Aesie]: And I think this is, you can see it in so many disciplines, you know, in medicine, in politics, I don't know, anything, where it's looking at one thing very, very specifically and forgetting like holistically about everything else.

So it's looking at like, okay, I'm writing a course book, I want the person studying it to learn present simple. And it's forgetting that the person learning it is a human being who needs to feel curiosity, who needs to feel motivated, who needs to give their attention to this thing, who needs to be able to remember it, and what's exciting, I think, is that there are now a lot more options to learn languages, and there's a lot of amazing ways to do it.

A lot of ways that are free, right? Now, some people need to pay to be motivated, to be, to feel accountable. And that's not what I'm talking about, but there's just a lot more options that are accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world.

[Ariel Goodbody]: The people I've met who are the most successful and intuitive language learners... An example is I was at a language teaching conference and there was a teacher from Turkey and her son was about 15, lived in Turkey his entire life, no native English speakers in his family, but he spoke perfect American English.

Like I would have thought he was an American teenager. So I was like, okay, how did you learn English? And he's like, I'm really into Minecraft and I watch Minecraft videos for hours every day. And that's it. He just watched videos from American YouTubers playing Minecraft and he's really invested in it and he loves it.

So, and that's how he learned. Or people who are really into TV or cinema and just watch loads, right? And it's purely coming from a place of just passion and enjoyment.

[Bree Aesie]: Exactly, and I, my experience is the exact same as yours. I've seen students from all different walks of life, from all different backgrounds, all different ages, and the top 3 percent of learners always fall into the category you just said.

There is some element of passive learning. When I say passive, I mean watching, listening, reading. Okay. Receiving information, receiving language that they were interested in. They watched Netflix, they watched movies. You know, maybe their parents started having them watch movies when they were little and insisted, but they have that.

And then the second is that they're not obsessed with grammar, they're not obsessed with perfection. That is the enemy, okay? That is the absolute enemy of becoming fluent. And for me, fluency is being able to speak and be understood when I speak a language. That's all. Nothing to do with perfect grammar, nothing to do with massive vocabulary. It's communicating, and if you are obsessed with perfection, you will not be able to be a great communicator until you have proficiency level, and that's completely insane.

[Ariel Goodbody]: And I mean, also with grammar, I remember I was watching a TV show in Spanish and it was a reality TV show and someone said, um, Oh, como bueno te se ve. And then someone else said, are you stupid? It's se te ve. Like you can't speak Spanish. And this is a native speaker, right? Making like a fundamental grammatical error. And I was like, I wouldn't even make that mistake, I don't think.

When we're learning another language, we always hold ourselves to a really high standard, but actually native speakers are much freer with their language use, and people make mistakes all the time and don't even think about it because it's not an environment where they need to be performing at that level.

[Bree Aesie]: One fundamental thing that I have learned the hard way, really learned the hard way, is that you need to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

Like, it is simply, for most of us, uncomfortable speaking a language that is not your first language. It, it is. It just has this feeling of, hey, I could do this better if I was just doing it in my own language. But once you say, you know what? Okay, this feels a bit uncomfortable, right?

And we have evolved in a way, right? Going back to this part of our brain, this primitive brain that controls our emotions. We have evolved to run away from things that make us feel

scared and feel uncomfortable. Because, you know, we don't want to get eaten by a tiger, right? And also, it feels scary for us to be speaking in a language, not knowing if we're making mistakes because we want to be accepted by our group, by our social circle.

Way, way long ago, 40,000 years ago, if you were saying something, communicating to a group, and you were misunderstood, that could be deadly. That is fear inducing, but our brain is telling us something like, run away, this is terrible. But that part of our brain, you need to kind of quiet because you have to say, it's okay. They're not going to kill me. You know, most of us don't live in that world anymore, right?

So get comfortable being uncomfortable with the discomfort of speaking and not knowing exactly if it's correct. You just have to push past it and practise it. Do it a lot.

[Ariel Goodbody]: And I think there's also a gift that you always bring as a non-native speaker of seeing the language with fresh eyes and like, I know sometimes a student will comment to me like, Oh, is this word related to that word? And I'm like, Oh yeah, I guess it is. And I just never thought about it.

With, uh, language teaching traditionally, there's this idea that you're like, an ambassador for this other culture or your own culture and you're teaching students all about the culture and it's this really kind of like, oh, you're teaching French in school, so you're going to be talking about going to the patisserie and like, you know, French cinema and that's, that's, it can be a really lovely way of teaching, but I realised for myself, I see myself as more of like a, a cultural mediator where I'm really interested at just like looking at the differences between cultures and like, forging good communication, right?

And I think that's a skill that we want to pass on to all our students.

[Bree Aesie]: That's like a massive issue that I see, and it's something that you commented on at the beginning, that most of the content that people listening to this will have started learning in school come from like British English and American English, like the nuclear family. It's like so limited. It's so hierarchical. It's so patriotic. Like it's, it's all the things, right? Whereas we know that the amount of non-native English speakers compared to native English speakers, you know, there's way more non-native English speakers. Okay.

It's simply, in my opinion, not important to try to speak at a native level. It's important to speak global English and the best communicators I've seen, they speak in global English.

They speak in a simple way that anyone can understand. They're not trying to make themselves look intelligent and use their massive vocabulary. They're speaking in a way that the person sitting in the room who is a B1 speaker from Germany is going to understand the same as the American who is a native speaker.

Do you know the, the author, I forget his name, but the author of *Sapiens*?

[Ariel Goodbody]: Yuval Noah Harari, I believe.

[Bree Aesie]: So he is someone that obviously - incredible - for me, okay? Writer. Non-fiction - I mean, that's maybe debateable, for certain people. Okay? But he's a non-fiction writer. *Sapiens*, the book, super clear, goes to the point.

Then he wrote another follow up book that's for children. And he said, it's much more difficult. And I'm not saying that non-native speakers are like children, but it's writing in a simple, even simpler way. Now he is a non-native speaker, right? But I consider his communication style to be incredible. Much better than a lot of the native speakers that I've read their writing or, or heard them speak.

[Ariel Goodbody]: But I think actually this is, um, a point where I'm going to speak for British people because I think obviously it's different cultural background, but I think for British people, we often don't give ourselves enough credit that we're very used to mediating between different accents, different dialects, and different, you know, levels of native and

non-native speakers. British people do have a tendency to use a lot of idioms and not really think of that.

But if I compare that to, for example, I have friends who've moved to the Netherlands or Germany, and they're trying to learn the local language and assimilate, but nobody wants to speak Dutch to them, nobody wants to speak German with them.

And I think in a lot of countries, there's this idea of like, we have our language, which we speak amongst ourselves, and then we use English with everyone else, right? I've even heard like, if you go to like Iceland as a foreigner and you try to speak Icelandic, people are really like, but that's, that's for us. That's not for you kind of thing.

I think it's really valuable that at least in certain parts of Anglophone culture that we recognize are like, no, there's, yeah, there's that distinction. And, you know, English is important for me, for my cultural heritage and like literature, but I think it's also really valuable to have that, like you say, that global English, which is like an invitation to people.

[Bree Aesie]: That's really interesting that you say that. And also there's a similar experience here in Catalonia. So Catalonia has their language, Catalan, which is different than Spanish. It's not a dialect, it's a language. And I don't want to fault people here for not wanting to speak Catalan with me because I'm a foreigner, but it's kind of just this concept, like, this is how our brains work.

We want to put people in categories. Like, tell me you are a female from North America and you speak Spanish. Like, I need to know that to feel comfortable. And if you start speaking to me in Catalan, it's like, wait, you're not that category. So I can't, I don't know. It's like, it's, it's something very interesting.

But I also think you're right. It's important that we have our, we, we are allowed to have our cultural heritage of our language. And I love speaking to my friends at home in English in a way that's, you know, using all the idioms and everything.

But I think it should, we should, most people who've never moved out of the UK perhaps, or Canada is also very multicultural, are just not aware entirely of what it means to speak global English.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Well, Bree, it's been so lovely talking to you, and I'm sure people have found this conversation really helpful. Do you have any final tips for listeners on how they can use story in their own learning?

[Bree Aesie]: Yes. So we spoke about this idea of the story method to remember vocabulary, but there's one very interesting practice that I do and I would recommend. You said earlier that we speak in story, right? If you pay attention to people in the street, to anything, you'll, you'll just see stories everywhere.

So it's worth thinking of your own stories and you, I call this doing like a personal inventory of your life and who you are. So when you are communicating with people, it's nice to have things that you can tell that are interesting and relatable, right? I am not talking about showing your status and showing the things you have. That's not what I'm talking about.

It's, for example, if I'm speaking with someone, what I think could be relatable is that I'm a parent. Maybe it's relatable, maybe it's not, but it's something that for me is very fundamental to who I am. So earlier I was telling you about the spokes on the bike, the piñóns, and I said to you, instead of explaining completely out of context, I said, I'm a, I ride my bike to school. I take my kids to school on the bike.

So this is a way for me to share something about myself with you. Right? Something that you didn't know about me. You know now that I'm a parent, you know that I like to get out in the fresh air in the mornings. Now this is instead of telling you nothing about me

personally, I'm finding ways to integrate these personal details about myself into our conversation.

And I would encourage anyone to do this. And if you can do it, do it in English. You can do it in your mind, you can do it in a notebook if you like to handwrite, um, but just have a few things about yourself that you're comfortable and you want to share. And you can also do a journal of a story worthy moment each day.

So at the end of each day, think what happened today that was funny, that was interesting, or that just changed me. Okay? It could be anything. And what you want to do is start that moment, like I said, with the Star Wars. You start with a location and you start with an action.

Yesterday I was trying to buy some plants. Had to buy a few different things. And I have a friend who's a decorator and she's able to buy at a wholesale garden centre. So I went in, totally out of place. The lady was like, no, you have to leave. So then I tried to come back.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Wow.

[Bree Aesie]: I tried to go back and I was trying to be discreet and I came in with my cart and then I knocked over a bunch of stuff off of a shelf.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Oh no, were they plants?

[Bree Aesie]: No, they were like these little tiny bottles of like plant fertiliser and I'm on my knees and I'm putting them back in the box. And it's in these moments, like, of course, I could feel humiliated, but instead of seeing it as like humiliation, I just look at the lady and she's looking at me thinking like, what, what a silly person and I just had to laugh at myself.

And I thought if I constructed this story in a certain way, it would be a story-worthy moment. And not only is it a way to start having stories to tell people, if you are interested in telling stories at parties or using them in work, you know, presentations. It's also a way to frame your life that makes it feel less serious.

It can make it feel funny. It can make it feel relatable. You can imagine it as a movie when you're going through hard things. Imagine this moment as a movie where you're at your low, but then, you know, things will get better. In any case, thinking about your personal stories is something very worthwhile to do.

And if you do it in English, it's a way to practise vocabulary and grammar.

[Ariel Goodbody]: I love that. And I do the same. If anything kind of weird and unpleasant ever happens to me, I'm always like, well, this is horrible, but it will make a great story.

[Bree Aesie]: Exactly. At the end of my podcast, I always say, I hope you have a good time, or at least a good story to tell. And that's just to say that in life, either we're successful, things go well, it's great. But as Bill Gates said, success is a lousy teacher. Success is not a good teacher. And when bad things happen, it hurts.

It could be huge failures or small ones, but we always have a good story to tell.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Awesome. Well, thank you so much, Bree. I really enjoyed this conversation. If you haven't already checked out my episode on Bree's podcast, I will link to it in the transcript.

Awesome. Thank you so much. Have a great day.

[Bree Aesie]: Thanks, Ariel! Bye.

[Ariel Goodbody]: Bye.

Ah, wasn't that just a fabulous conversation? I really loved Brie's idea of making little stories to help with language learning, and I realised I kind of do a similar thing when I'm learning a language. If a specific grammatical phrase comes up in an emotional context

that's very memorable, I kind of hold on to that phrase in my head, and then I use it in future to remind myself of the correct grammar.

The big thing that I notice a lot of learners struggling with is the present perfect tense. So this is the tense we use when we want to talk about something that we are doing and we have been doing for a while.

For example, I have been teaching English for six years. I have been podcasting for almost six years. I have been writing for 17 years. I have been recording this episode for about 13 minutes. I have been living in London for about nine months, I think. You get the idea. So it's a process that's still going on.

So I was thinking about a story I could use to help remember this phrase. Obviously English is my native language, but this is to give you an idea of how you can use this technique. So I was thinking like, what's something that I'm often doing? What's like a story or a situation where I would use the present perfect tense?

And I came up with a story. Now I'm going to do it in present tense. Normally, when we tell stories, we use the past tense, but this tense you'll mainly be using in the present, so I'll say it in the present tense.

I've been editing this podcast for days and it's still not done! I'm so stressed! But finally, after days of work, I finish the podcast and release it, and then I get to go have a drink.

So, I don't know, maybe you can think up of some examples of ways to remember the present perfect tense in your life. Obviously, the easiest, most obvious common one is probably telling people how long you've been learning English, how long you've been doing a job, and so on. But get creative! I'd love to hear your ideas, and if you write a comment, I would love to see your story in the comments.

I also want to go on a little aside about bicycle terminology. To go on an aside is to kind of move away from a discussion a bit to talk about something else. So bicycle terminology is all the words related to bicycles. So you might remember that Bree talked about this story she used as a way to remember the Spanish word *piñón* for that specific part of a bicycle.

Now, in English, Bree talked about the bike chain coming off the spokes, but I was thinking, are those actually spokes? So I did a bit of research.

So it turns out, the spokes are actually the long, thin wires, that go out from the centre of the wheel. So you have a bike wheel, and you have all these thin wires going into the centre, and these are the spokes. The part that the chain goes around has a few names. So apparently, in America, it's called the crankset, and in the UK, it's called the chainset.

More generally, that kind of system, that kind of gear, is called a sprocket, okay? So a sprocket is a gear that has a chain that moves around it. I did not know any of these things before. I am learning so much about mechanics.

But when I asked my friend who cycles what he would call that, he said he would call it the gears. Because in a bike, I guess, normally the gears are inside the sprocket. So, you know, there's no clear consensus, there's no clear agreement between the things I looked up and the people I talked to as to what they would actually call that part of the bike.

Now, it's not like I'm trying to call out Bree and be like, she made a mistake, but I want to use this as an example of how, even as native speakers, we often don't have consensus on certain words. And in certain situations, we really just use context.

Contextually, when Bree said the chain came off the spokes, I immediately understood what she meant, even though I probably couldn't draw the part without looking up a picture.

But technically it wasn't the right word to use, right? So, I really want to highlight this point about communication. You don't have to use all the perfect words. You don't have to

use perfect grammar. The important thing is transmitting that meaning. And in this case, we understood each other, even if the word we used was technically incorrect.

And now I've learned lots about bicycles, so my life is so much richer. So thank you, Bree, for making that mistake.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Easy Stories in English*. A reminder that today is the last chance to get the early bird price for my Story Builders online course, so go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Build and get it now, or you won't be an early bird, you'll be a sad, late armadillo? Or maybe a seal?

The possibilities are endless. Bye!