



Дорогие коллеги, представляем вам нашего англоязычного гостя - Люка Томпсона, самобытного автора подкастов по английскому языку, который побеждал в проекте издательства Макмиллан как лучший блог.

Люк любезно согласился дать интервью нашему журналу и рассказал о своей преподавательской деятельности.

Более того, совместно с Luke's English Podcast журнал Tea4er.ru объявляет о конкурсном проекте "Ask Luke Thompson". Читатели нашего журнала в специальном разделе форума могут задавать вопросы Люку, после завершения дедлайна Люк выбирает лучшие вопросы и отвечает на них. После получения рейтинга от Люка Томпсона, журнал награждает победителей и лауреатов дипломами.

Визитная карточка проекта:

Luke's English Podcast started in 2009 and is still going strong. With over 250 episodes, transcripts, videos and a special series on phrasal verbs, there is so much for you to use, and it's all free. The podcast has been downloaded over 2.5 million times in the last 12 months and this website won the Macmillan Dictionary Award for Best Blog in 2011, 2012 & 2013. ☐ <http://teacherluke.co.uk/>

Luke Thompson – Luke's English Podcast

Ветка конкурса: <http://tea4er.ru/forum/342---/64382>

Interview for Tea4er.ru

Dear Readers,

These days there is an emerging new kind of English teaching professional – the online teacher. They create their own content, break new ground with the use of social networking, and give learners an option outside of the traditional school structure. They're on YouTube, blogs and podcasts, they gain a very significant following, and I suppose that I am now one of them.

Over five years ago I had settled into my career as a teacher of English as a foreign language. I had passed my DELTA course, had a permanent job teaching English and had just bought my very first property in London. I bought a new laptop and it gave me the option to record, produce and publish my own podcast in iTunes. I had always wanted to be a radio DJ. As a child I had produced numerous fake radio shows with my brother on our cassette recorder, and I had always loved listening to radio, podcasts and comedy CDs. It was my dream to make the same kind of content, and have an audience of people like me, who would lie on the sofa, listening to someone else's words, being transported to different worlds of imagination.

For a while I tried my hand at making comedy videos on YouTube but they didn't get many views. Why would anyone look at my comedy videos and short films anyway? I didn't have an audience.

As an English teacher I'd been working for about 8 years. I'd met hundreds and hundreds of learners of English from all around the world, and had learned some key things. I knew that almost everybody wanted to learn English – the vast majority of the people in the world really. I'd learned how to engage the attention of a class full of people. I knew what subjects interested them, what language difficulties they had, and how to stand out as an English teacher. Also, as a recently diploma qualified professional I had some proper know-how when it came to helping other people learn my language.

What I realised was that there was a potentially huge audience in the world, I had something to offer to them, and I had the means to do it, so what could possibly stop me from launching my own podcast for learners of English? The idea sounded perfect really. I could do it all on my laptop. I could plan my episodes around engaging topics, I could make sure I included some fairly rigorous sequences about language and language learning and I could find ways of making the content funny too. I even had my own flat where I could record episodes of the podcast without being disturbed. Conditions were perfect.

I come from what I consider to be a BBC family. My Dad was a BBC man for about 30 years. We grew up in a BBC household. We never watched ITV, the commercial television station which was the BBC's main rival. The BBC logo was everywhere in our house on pens, folders, notepads, and mugs. I would often hear my Dad talk about producing the news, what he thought of different presenters and how to deliver information as a broadcaster. It felt quite natural to do it myself on the podcast.

Also, I'd always loved stand-up comedy. When I lived in Japan at the start of my career as a teacher, I had no television so I used to listen to comedy CDs over and over again. My Mum used to send me recordings of Eddie Izzard, Bill Bailey, Monty Python, Peter Cook, Bill Hicks and Steve Martin and I used to devour them, listening over and over again.

I came back to London after a couple of years in Japan, just as the podcasting boom took off for the first time. I continued what had now become a tradition of lying on my bed listening to someone talking through through my speakers, usually a stand-up comedian.

I'd always harboured a desire to try stand-up myself, but it wasn't until my girlfriend at the time suggested I do a stand-up comedy course (yes they exist in London) that I first picked up a mic, stood on stage and tried to make a room full of people laugh. The relationship with the girlfriend didn't last, but the stand-up comedy did. I'm still doing stand-up now (in fact I have a gig in about one hour) and I'm glad to say that feeds into my podcast a lot as I attempt to use comedy, from time to time, to make my audience laugh, and to reduce the so-called "affective filter" which can really get in the way of language learning.

So that is what I brought to my new project, called Luke's English Podcast, years of experience, qualifications, enthusiasm, a BBC background, and some skills as a stand-up comedian. I finally

have my own radio programme.

Over the last five years I have managed to keep producing regular episodes of my show, and it brings in lots of listeners particularly in Russia, which is my number one country for downloads and website visits.

You may be wondering at this point what the website address is for Luke's English Podcast, and I am very glad to tell you! It's teacherluke.co.uk. There you'll find loads of content, including some very popular YouTube videos, but mainly it is a place to present episodes of my podcast, which is also available on iTunes.

The vast majority of my content is in audio form, and I upload podcast episodes about once a week. Each episode is one hour long on average, and the English level of my audience ranges from intermediate to proficiency.

Yes, that's right, my episodes are usually about one hour long. Sometimes people are surprised at that length as the usual model for learning English podcasts is for them to be short, like the BBC's "6 Minute English" podcast. The conventional wisdom here is that short episodes are easier to digest, they don't overwhelm learners with too much content, they are convenient for listening at lunch time or during a quick break from work or studies, and they can be adapted by teachers for classroom use.

I decided quite quickly that I would take the conventional wisdom and chuck it out of the window. My episodes would be longer, like the podcasts that I loved to listen to. By 2009 I'd been listening to podcasts regularly, particularly one called "Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo's Film Review". That is one of the most popular podcasts in the UK, and is produced by the BBC. In a nutshell it features two guys reviewing films, but it's not really a film review show, it's a lot more than that. Reviewing films gives their podcast a structure and a theme but the show is, sometimes quite profoundly, about life in general. It's an intensely rewarding listening experience, especially if you're a long-term listener. Listening to Mark and Simon wittering on about films is life-affirming, entertaining, touching, educational and more. It makes you feel like you're part of a close community of people who share a certain outlook on life, and who all are aware of the little in-jokes and references from that show. I wanted Luke's English Podcast to be like that.

Having longer episodes gave me much more freedom. I could go much deeper into subjects I wanted to talk about. I could achieve more in each episode. I have never really understood why learning-English podcast episodes should be short. There doesn't seem to be any good reason for it. Mp3 players and iPhone apps are programmed to remember where you stopped listening. So, if your journey to work is only 30 minutes – no problem. Listen to 30 minutes of an episode, and then press 'stop'. When you come home from work your mp3 player will remember where you were in the episode, even if you listen to some music in the meantime. Also, longer episodes mean more content, and what is wrong with that? So, despite the fact that every now and then I read comments that say my episodes are a bit long, I maintain that they're exactly the right length for what I want to achieve with my podcast.

The other thing I decided from the beginning was that my episodes would not be scripted. A lot of other podcast episodes for learners of English are scripted, and I know why. Writing the script beforehand means that you can easily add target language into a conversation, you can properly prepare grammar or vocabulary explanations and it means that a full transcript is available for listeners when the episodes are published. But, when I listen to these scripted episodes (such as the BBC's 6 Minute English) they just sound fake, awkward and unengaging. Why should English learning materials be dull or patronising? Why make podcast episode contrived, full of bad acting and unnatural speech patterns? Again, I can't think of any really good reasons. Surely, it is better to present English in the most authentic way possible: by recording without a script.

Admittedly, some of my episodes are scripted, but for the most part I've kept them spontaneous, and I think that has really benefited the podcast. They sound more engaging natural and they present language more authentically. I think it gives the programme a lot of personality. There are times when I have made mistakes, stumbled over my words or forgotten what I was talking about, and I left them all in the published episodes, for the sake of authenticity. In fact, this sort of thing is precisely what my listeners love about my podcast. They love the fact that it's real and spontaneous. The fact that I have total creative control, and that I make sure that podcasting is fun for me, have made LEP (Luke's English Podcast) unique and valuable.

I have found that the episodes my listeners love the most are the ones in which I take risks and am spontaneous. I can do things on LEP that I definitely wouldn't do in schools where I work as an employee. If I want to devote a whole episode to Star Wars, or zombies, I can. If I want to talk about all the rudest words in the English language, I can. If I want to just talk and talk about nothing in particular, with no plan, I can! And it seems the more I do that, the more my listeners appreciate it.

The atmosphere of total freedom is really healthy for my podcast, I believe. For example, a couple of years ago I just decided to improvise a story on the podcast, based on an old joke I used to tell as a child. The joke normally takes about 2 minutes to tell, but I decided to try and stretch the story to about 30-40 minutes of podcasting time. I recorded the episode with the microphone in my hand, walking around the kitchen, improvising jokes, dialogues and scenarios. The story became an epic adventure, with me being chased around the world by a huge pink gorilla, using various modes of transport. I wasn't sure if I should publish it, because I thought people would think I was crazy, and that they wouldn't see the learning value in it. That episode (125. The Pink Gorilla Story) is one of the most popular ones I've ever done. My listeners love it, and now I try to do improvised stories as much as possible. It's so fun, full of risks (I have no idea what I'm going to say next sometimes) but I think it's truly rewarding for my listeners because it creates a listening experience which totally captures people's attention. If they know it is being created there and then, in the moment, there's so much more drama involved, and that makes people pay attention. Sometimes people tell me they are addicted to my episodes, and that when they listen, time just flies by. Apparently, the length of my episodes proves not to be such an issue.

All of my feelings about this are backed up by academic research. I am sure you are familiar with the work of Stephen Krashen. His idea is that language is effectively required by learners when they engage with language in a meaningful way, and that the more comprehensible input a learner is exposed to, the better. That pretty much sums up the thinking behind my approach to the podcast, however I realise that it's not just as simple as that, and I try my best to vary my teaching method in my episodes. Sometimes I focus on grammar, providing colourful examples and sample sentences which I encourage my listeners to repeat to themselves. Sometimes I teach vocabulary in a fairly traditional way. Sometimes I devote episodes of the podcast to giving general advice on learning English, with a view to improving my listeners' metacognitive strategies. The whole package, which includes over 250 episodes to date, covers a really wide range of content, language input, comprehensible input, interviews with native speakers, comedy, music and more. I'm really proud of it, and this year I have decided that I finally deserve to make some money from my endeavours, but this is the tricky part. So far I have focused mainly on producing good content, hoping that it would speak for itself. It has done that to an extent. I have a healthy following and a large audience, but I must find ways of monetising my online project. So, taking LEP to the next level is my new challenge, while also producing regular episodes of the podcast as normal.

As English teachers yourselves, I suggest that my podcast could be a great resource that you can recommend to your students for use outside the classroom. It could be just another option, other than the BBC's podcasts. If your students like it, hopefully they will get hooked and then they'll find themselves with a healthy new habit in their lives. If they don't like the podcast, no problem. I've always known that you can't please all the people all the time, but you can do your best!

There's so much more for me to tell you about, like the transcript writing project I have set up, which has listeners collaborating on transcriptions of my episodes using Google documents, and the award my podcast has won three times, but I have already written nearly 2,500 words here, and as I said, I have to go out and perform some stand-up comedy soon.

Just to bring this writing to a close, I should say that since starting my podcast in 2009 it has steadily grown in popularity. In the last year LEP was downloaded over 3,000,000 times in total, which is much higher than I expected when I first started. I would really like to continue and build my work into something larger. I believe I have a lot to offer as an online teacher, and podcasting may just be the beginning. Online teaching has given me freedom, creative control, an audience, my own radio show and an outlet for my comedy. I also know from all the messages I receive every day, especially from listeners in Russia, that my podcast has made a difference to the English of people all around the world. I hope that in the future I will be able to make a living teaching like this, and I believe I can.

Thanks a lot for reading.

Luke