

Gaining acceptance

Zu Beginn ihrer Lehrtätigkeit musste sie manchmal gegen das Vorurteil ankämpfen, englische Muttersprachler könnten Englisch besser unterrichten. Und auch manch anderes Hindernis galt es zu überwinden. KEN TAYLOR sprach mit der Sprachdozentin.

MEDIUM AUDIO



KRISTIN DUNN

was born in Hamburg and studied translation, finishing her MA in English linguistics and literature in Heidelberg. Before her studies, she went to Australia for a year and developed a passion for English. She then taught English as a foreign language in Colombia, before returning to Germany and teaching English classes alongside her studies. She now lives in Heidelberg and works as a freelance language teacher in Heidelberg and Mannheim. Her clients include private students and big companies.



KEN TAYLOR

is a communication consultant, personal coach and author of *50 Ways to Improve Your Business English* (Lulu Publishing). Contact: KTaylor868@aol.com

freelance

['fri:lɑ:ns]
• freiberuflich

Ken Taylor: What do you teach?

Kristin Dunn: I teach both business English and German as a second language.

Taylor: Who are your students?

Dunn: Adults who work in companies or organizations in and around Mannheim and Heidelberg. One of the issues I've had to face is getting acceptance from my students — for a few reasons.

Taylor: For example?

Dunn: There seems to be a prejudice that native speakers always make the best teachers. This affects my students' initial attitude towards me, as I'm not a native speaker. I'm a German teacher of English.

Taylor: How have you overcome this initial prejudice?

Dunn: By showing that I fully understand the problems German speakers face when learning English — the difficulties we have with sentence structure, auxiliary verbs, false friends, etc. I can empathize with my students because I have shared their struggles.

Taylor: That's very true. I've been lucky to work in partnership with teachers like you on courses. Having both a native speaker of the language being learned and someone who has the target language as their mother tongue was a great combination. It allowed us to concentrate on

those areas of language that cause people the most problems.

Dunn: I know where my students' main problems lie — the false friends they use most frequently, for example.

Taylor: False friends can be fun! My students often have funny stories to tell about their misuse of false friends.

Dunn: One very common mistake I hear is the use of “beamer” instead of “projector” when talking about presentations. I'm married to an Englishman, and for him, a “beamer” is a BMW car!

Taylor: Most of my students use their English to communicate with other second-language speakers. They are more focused on communicating clearly than being perfect.

Dunn: That's what my students tell me as well. They say that they feel native

affect sb. [ə'fekt]

• jmdn. beeinflussen

auxiliary verb

[ɔ:g,zɪliəri 'vɜ:b]

• Hilfsverb

empathize with sb.

['empəθaɪz wɪð]

• sich in jmdn. hineinversetzen

face sth. [feɪs]

• etw. gegenüberreten

issue ['ɪʃu:]

• Problem, Thema

make sb./sth. [meɪk]

• hier: jmd./etw. sein, jmdn./etw. abgeben

mother tongue

[ˌmʌðə 'tʌŋ]

• Muttersprache

prejudice ['predʒudɪs]

• Vorurteil

struggle ['strʌɡl]

• hier: Mühe

target language

['tɑ:ɡɪt ,læŋɡwɪdʒ]

• Zielsprache

speakers are more critical of their language. They feel more comfortable with other second-language speakers, who understand what it is like to be a second-language speaker.

Taylor: I train groups in Scandinavia, and they all prefer communicating in English with partners in Germany to communicating with native speakers of English. They feel they're on the same wavelength, and they feel that their German partners will be more tolerant of any mistakes they may make when using English.

Dunn: Besides being a German teacher of English, I'm also a younger woman who is not very tall and has a rather high-pitched voice. I often teach classes of male technicians who are over 50 years old. I sometimes have the feeling that they are questioning my professional credibility.

Taylor: I imagine that's an unpleasant feeling. How do you deal with it?

Dunn: At first, I spent time deciding on which clothes would make me look professional and on how I should do my make-up. But although appearance is important, I soon realized that my credibility depends on my expertise. I needed to demonstrate that I knew what I was doing.

Taylor: That's right. And you also have to be authentic — to be yourself. You shouldn't try to act a role as a teacher. People will soon see that is not the real you. It destroys their trust in you.

Dunn: Yes. I also try to make my classes as relevant as possible to my students' situation and to create an open, secure atmosphere.

Taylor: When you are learning a language, you have to take risks and make mistakes. That's an important part of the learning process. So, a secure environment is vital.

Dunn: I believe that a teacher needs to be a good listener and to look for every opportunity to give positive feedback. In fact, I sometimes feel a bit like a therapist!

Taylor: I know the feeling. What you are looking for is self-correction.

Dunn: When your student starts a sentence and then stops and says, "No, what I meant was..." , it's very satisfying as a teacher.

Taylor: Do you have any colleagues you can discuss things with? It can help to talk to other teachers and even to sit in on each other's classes and discuss what happened afterwards.

Dunn: Unfortunately, I do not. But I can imagine it would be very useful to get feedback from another professional — not just from your students.

Taylor: You said earlier there were a few issues you faced as a teacher. Is there anything else

you'd like to take up?

Dunn: Another challenge is dealing with conscious or unconscious sexist behaviour from course participants. It's usually not overt but rather in the form of slightly sexist remarks.

Taylor: That's not an easy situation to deal with. How do you approach the issue?

Dunn: I find a good way is to take up these issues in a general class discussion. Then it is easier to be calm and rational.

Taylor: And by bringing in others in the class, you can agree on acceptable and unacceptable class behaviour.

Dunn: And sometimes, you need to choose your battles!

Taylor: Right. But you should never accept open harassment, of course. If I have a student who is, in some way, disruptive in a group, I take them aside after a class for a one-to-one talk. Usually, that works as a last resort.

"I try to make my classes as relevant as possible to my students' situations and to create an open, secure atmosphere"

Dunn: It requires confidence to do that. At the moment, I feel more confident getting my opinion across in open class discussions.

Taylor: Fair enough. I suppose that's why teaching never gets dull — we meet a mixture of people with all sorts of different opinions.

Dunn: Opinions we encourage them to share — and from which we, the teachers, can learn, too.



What's your challenge?

Would you like to have a conversation with Ken Taylor about your current work challenges? If so, send an email with your name, company and the subject you would like to discuss to business.trainer@spotlight-verlag.de

In each issue, we will choose one reader who will talk to Ken, and the dialogue will be published in *Business Spotlight*.

AUDIO

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across: get sth. [-'ə'krɒs]
 ➤ etw. rüberbringen, vermitteln

approach sth.
 [ə'prəʊtʃ]
 ➤ an etw. herangehen

choose one's battles
 [tʃu:z wʌnz 'bætəlz]
 ➤ etw.a: sich auf das Wesentliche konzentrieren

credibility
 [ˌkredə'bɪləti]
 ➤ Glaubwürdigkeit

disruptive [dɪs'rʌptɪv]
 ➤ störend

environment
 [ɪn'vaɪrənmənt]
 ➤ hier: Umgebung, Umfeld

expertise
 [ˌeksɜ:p'ti:z]
 ➤ Sachkompetenz

fair enough
 [ˌfeə ə'nʌf] ifml.
 ➤ verständlich

harassment
 ['hærəsmənt]
 ➤ Belästigung

high-pitched
 [ˌhaɪ 'pɪtʃt]
 ➤ hoch

last resort
 [ˌlɑ:st rɪ'zɔ:t]
 ➤ letztes Mittel

one-to-one
 [ˌwʌn tə 'wʌn]
 ➤ persönlich, unter vier Augen

overt [əʊ'vɜ:t]
 ➤ offen, ostentativ

sit in on sth. [ˌsɪt 'ɪn ɒn]
 ➤ bei etw. hospitieren, an etw. als Gasthörer(in) teilnehmen

take sth. up [ˌteɪk 'ʌp]
 ➤ etw. aufgreifen; hier: etw. ansprechen

technician
 [tek'nɪʃn]
 ➤ Techniker(in)

vital ['vaɪtəl]
 ➤ unerlässlich

wavelength
 ['weɪvlɛŋθ]
 ➤ Wellenlänge