**Практичне заняття 6**

**6.10**

***1. Ознайомитися з лексикою:***

* **To question (v) –** to express doubts about the value or truth of something.
	+ *Results from a study questioned whether treatment with the drug really improved survival.*
* **To examine (v) –** to consider a thing carefully and in detail in order to discover something.
	+ *The council is to examine ways of reducing traffic in the city centre.*
* **Contradiction (n) –** the fact of something being the complete opposite of something else or very different from something else, so that one of them must be wrong.
	+ *You say that you’re good friends and yet you don’t trust him. Isn’t that a contradiction?*
* **Ignorance (n) –** lack of knowledge, understanding, or information about something.
	+ *Public ignorance about the disease is still a cause for concern.*
* **Dialectical (adj) –** discovering what is true by considering opposite theories.
	+ *Contradiction is after all what dialectical thinking is all about.*
* **Assumption (n) –** something that you accept as true without question or proof.
	+ *People tend to make assumptions about you when you have a disability.*
* **Preconception (n) –** an idea or opinion formed before enough information is available to form it correctly.
	+ *Try to go into the meeting without too many preconceptions about what the other group wants.*

***2. Прослухати подкаст, слідкуючи за транскриптом тексту. Виписати незнайомі слова і вирази, перекласти текст. Вивчити незнайому лексику***

[***https://thinkinginenglish.blog/2023/03/15/216-english-learning-and-socrates-what-can-we-learn-from-the-father-of-western-philosphy-english-vocabulary-lesson/***](https://thinkinginenglish.blog/2023/03/15/216-english-learning-and-socrates-what-can-we-learn-from-the-father-of-western-philosphy-english-vocabulary-lesson/)

**Philosophy and Language Learning**

A few weeks ago, I wrote an episode on Stoicism and English learning. Despite dating from 2000 years ago during the age of the Roman Empire, the ancient philosophy of stoicism has recently experienced a resurgence in popularity. Its focus on self-discipline, self-control, and personal motivation have found a place in the 21st century.

As someone who enjoys reading philosphy and discussing the ideas of philosophers, and more importantly has found the lessons from philosphy personally useful in my own life, I decided to make an episode applying some lessons from Stoicism to English learning.

And it was a really popular episode! I had so many lovely messages from all you guys listening, and requests for similar episodes with other schools of thought and famous philosophers. After spending a few days reading through my old notebooks where I recorded and wrote down my old readings and ideas on philosophy, I decided there would be no better place to start than with one of the “Fathers of Western Philosophy”: *Socrates.*

Today I’ll talk about the life of Socrates before discussing his main philosophical ideas and contributions. Then, I will try to use some of Socrates ideas to give

everyone listening some tips and advice for their English learning journey!

**Who Was Socrates?**

Socrates is a remarkable historical figure. He is considered to be the founding father of western philosophy, his *Socratic method* is still widely used, and he is known for being one of the first people in recorded history to use an *inductive argument –* an approach that was refined by Aristotle and later used by Francis Bacon at the beginning of western science.

The name Socrates is known around the world and he is often placed as one of the wisest people in all of history.

Yet, Socrates himself never wrote any philosphy. He left no books, essays, writings, or notes. He established no school of philosophy. He had no theories or unique ideas of his own. And he was sentenced to death in ancient Athens for corrupting the youth of the city with his ideas.

Our knowledge of Socrates comes only from mentions of him in other Greek’s writings. He became a well known and famous figure in Athens and had many followers. It is from one of these followers, the incredibly influential philosopher Plato and his dialogues *Apology, Phaedo,* and *the Symposium*, that we gained most of our understanding of Socrates.

So, who was Socrates? And what do we know about him?

It is believed that Socrates was born in Athens in the year 469BCE. He was the son of a stonemason and a midwife, and it is likely that he followed his father into stonemasonry as well as studying philosphy, before serving in the Athenian army during the Peloponnesian War.

After his father died, Socrates inherited enough money to live without needing to work. He spent the rest of his life engaging in philosophical discussions around the city. I’ll talk more about his approach to philosphy in a second, but in short it was not his philosophical ideas that were revolutionary but the questions he asked (and the way he asked them).

Socrates insistence on asking questions developed into a new way of thinking – a way of thinking that involved **questioning** and examining everything we think. This approach to thinking was labelled as dangerous to society: Socrates was accused of arguing for the sake of deception and sentenced to death for corrupting the youth of Athens with untraditional ideas.

Although he was offered the choice of being exiled away from Athens, Socrates instead pleaded guilty to corrupting the youth and was killed by hemlock poisoning in the year 399BCE.

## What was Socrates’ Philosophy?

As I’ve mentioned, Socrates major contribution to the history of philosphy was not a radical new idea or school of thought. Instead, it was his approach to gaining knowledge, learning, and questioning everything that was revolutionary.

Before Socrates, the philosophers of ancient Greece were seeking answers and explanations to some of the most troubling problems like the origin of the universe.  But this was not what concerned Socrates. Instead, he was primarily interested in **examining** people’s lives and beliefs – hence the famous quote “The life which is unexamined is not worth living.”

Socrates believed everything should be questioned. He would question the essential concepts that are known and used every day, and try to reveal their true meaning and the **contradictions** in our society.

For example, he was one of the first philosophers to question the meaning of a “good life.” People have always been searching for how to live this kind of life, and for Socrates it meant to do the right thing and achieve a peaceful mind.

He did not accept that ideas like “good” and “evil” were relative concepts. Instead, he believed that “there is only one good: knowledge; and only one evil: ***ignorance***.” As knowledge is the only true good, and if we want to lead a “good life”, we must be constantly learning, questioning, and examining ourselves and everything we think know.

For Socrates, the purpose of life was not getting rich or successful, but knowledge. The reason we exist is to learn and gain knowledge.

## What is Socrates’ Dialectical Method?

The **dialectical**, or Socratic, method is one of Socrates most influential contributions. At its basic level, it is a relatively simple approach to asking questions to reveal the false **assumptions** and mistakes that claims are based on. It is known as the “dialectical” method because it is based on a dialogue or discussion between two different and opposing views.

The idea is that by asking and answering questions from opposing perspectives, we can activate our critical thinking and understand the presumptions ideas are based on. The aim is not to find “truth”, but to find the problems and inconsistencies in other people’s arguments.

In a Socratic dialogue, the facilitator or person asking the questions will remain independent and critical, asking open questions to promote discussion and reveal flaws in arguments.

There is a famous story concerning Socrates dialectic method. The Priestess of Apollo was asked who is the wisest person in Athens, and she responded that no-one was wiser than Socrates. Socrates couldn’t believe this – he believed he was ignorant, so how could he be wise.

He went to all of the most knowledgeable and intelligent people in Athens to find someone who was wiser than him. During his discussions, however, he realised that even the most knowledgeable people in Athens would, under questioning, reveal that their knowledge was limited or wrong.

Socrates entered these conversations from a position of ignorance. He took the position of someone who knows nothing, and would therefore question every assumption and point. Rather than engaging and arguing, he would question because he was interested in their knowledge.

Socrates realised the Priestess of Apollo was correct – he was the wisest man in Athens. Not because he was the most knowledgeable, but because he understood the limits of his own knowledge and claimed to know nothing. He realised that being wise was understanding your own ignorance and **preconceptions**.

Here is another example of the Socratic method I found while reading. Imagine you are in Ancient Athens, and like most Athenians you believe in all knowing Greek gods.

Socrates may ask you “Do you believe the gods know everything?” And you might say, “yes! They are Gods.” Socrates may then ask, “Do the gods ever disagree with each other?” And as an Ancient Greek, you would answer “yes – the gods are constantly fighting with each other and arguing” (if you have read any Greek myths you would know this).

Socrates would then ask, “if the gods are fighting and arguing, they must be disagreeing about what is true and right?” And you would probably respond by saying “yes – I guess they do.” Socrates would then say, “This must mean the gods can be wrong sometimes? Meaning they can’t know everything?”

This was just a simple example of the dialectical method – by asking questions from a position of ignorance, you are able to reveal the false assumptions that underlie our own ideas and concepts. The purpose of Socrates’ conversations is not necessarily to find the truth, but it is in the conversation itself – to find insights in the ideas, assumptions, and contradictions held by people.

## What Advice Would Socrates Have Given to English Learners?

Now I’ve given you a very brief and simple introduction to the life and philosphy of Socrates, what lessons can English learners gain from Socrates. I think there are few…

**Practice asking questions:** Socrates believed that asking questions was one of the best ways to learn and understand. In fact, he is reported to have said that [“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.”](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/73059-i-cannot-teach-anybody-anything-i-can-only-make-them) By asking and answering questions, you are learning!

I think questioning is one of the most undervalued skills by English learners – I’ve even recorded episodes about the importance of asking questions. Ask questions, and especially question your assumptions, and you will begin to improve.

You can improve your language skills by asking questions of native speakers, your teacher, or even yourself. By asking questions, you can clarify your understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and usage.

**Learn through dialogue**: Socrates believed that learning happens best through dialogue and discussion. The Socratic method, which involves asking questions and engaging in dialogue, is a reflection of Socrates’ belief in the value of dialogue and discussion as a means of learning.

For Socrates, learning is not possible without such discussions. And the same could be true of English learners – having conversations is a great way to learn and practice! You can practice your language skills by engaging in conversation with native speakers, classmates, or language exchange partners. If you are struggling to find conversation partners, join my conversation club – we encourage our members to ask questions and examine everything!

**Embrace mistakes:** Socrates believed that making mistakes was an essential part of the learning process. It was the core of his approach – he asked questions to find the contradictions and mistakes in all knowledge. Once he found these mistakes, he believed he was better able to understand the meanings.

The same is true for learning a language. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes; instead find your mistakes. Once you can identify your inaccuracies and common problems you can use it as an opportunity to improve and practice!

**Keep an open mind:** [“I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing.”](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/socrates_125872) Socrates emphasized the importance of understanding your own ignorance, of questioning assumptions, and of keeping an open mind. While studying, you may encounter new ideas and perspectives as you engage with the language and culture. By keeping an open mind and questioning assumptions, you can deepen your understanding of English and the people who speak it.

**Never stop learning:** As I mentioned earlier, Socrates saw a good life as being intimately connected with knowledge. To lead a good life, for Socrates, you must always be learning. Once you stop questioning and looking for knowledge, you may become ignorant.

Language learning is a lifelong pursuit. There are always new words, collocations, abbreviations, and  sentence patterns – keep learning and looking for new knowledge!

## ****Final Thought****

Socrates was one of the founders of western philosphy. His approach to asking questions, and questioning the fundamentals of society, ultimately caused him to be executed. But it influenced the past 2000 years of European philosphy.

Socrates commitment to learning and questioning has many important lessons that could be used by English learners and speakers. Embrace your mistakes, never stop learning, keep an open mind, and ask questions!