

## Life Story of a Language Learner from Ghana

Nazira Kazakbhaeva

**1. N:** Today is the 13 of March and I am going to interview Austin Oloyede. Austin is from Nigeria. He's an IUP student, majoring in nursing and psychology.

How are you?

**2. A:** Hi Nazira, I'm fine.

**3. N:** Austin, how is your feeling before interview?

**4. A:** Really, when u came to me and said, "Austin, I'm going to interview you!" I was like- What is she going to ask about? I was a little bit nervous, to be sincere with you. As a matter of fact, I know the interview is going to be an interesting interview, so I decided, I was happy to be interviewed. And I was ready for it. So, I said okay, I'm going to do it and I make up my mind to do it.

**5. N:** Don't worry Austin, it is going to be an easy interview and I'm going to ask easy questions. Can we start now?

**6. A:** Yes, Let's start.

**7. N:** Ok. Let me ask the first question. Can you tell me please about yourself in general?

**8. A:** As you said earlier, My name is Austin and my middle name is Alouida. I was born in Ghana but my parents are originally from Nigeria, my both parents are from Nigeria, both of them are Euro bales. I was born there and then I went to school in Ghana, my father was a good merchant and my mom, my mother, my mom is a trader. But... When I was age 6, I lost my dad, so we have to leave Ghana, back to Nigeria , so from there I had , I had little education in Ghana before we moved to Nigeria , so I finished all my education , both elementary and secondary education in Nigeria, I went to university in Nigeria and I had my degree there. That's a little part of my ...uummm...

**9. N:** Of your life?

**10. A:** Yes.

**11. N:** Ok. Do you remember ...uummmm... first year of your life?

**12. A:** As a matter of fact, to be sincere with you, if I tell you I remember ....

**13. N:** Yes, be sincere with me. Please. (Laughing)

**14. A:** Ok, If I tell you I remember the first year of my life... I will be telling you the lie. But, as a matter of fact, I could remember some little stuff... maybe when I was at the age of three, because my mom tells me the story of the way I used to behave when I was a little child... Really it was very interesting when my mom says some stuff about me when I was a kid... the way I used to cry for food and all other stuff and when I used to play so hard... it's an interesting story when I hear it from my mom. My mom kind of says it all and I used to laugh when she says it now.

**15. N:** I'm sure that your parents told you some funny story from your childhood, can you tell me? Please. Do you remember something?

**16. A:** Exactly, as I said earlier about my mom, she used to tell me something that I do when I was a kid ... when she was happy... maybe when a friend was around, she used to make some jokes of me , she used to say," oh!" she jus says to my friends, "Austin, when he was a baby, he doesn't play with breast milk... when he came to breast feeding, my son will never play with it.. he doesn't play with anybody when it came to breast feeding." If she doesn't give my breast milk on time, I will be crrryyyyyingggggg, crrryyyyyingggggg, "and a pain on my head will start arising off.. and everybody will start asking the question, " What's going on? Where is she? Why is he crying? She, she says," He's mood off because I didn't give breast milk. "If she doesn't give any me food and she depressed me, I'm ok. As a matter of fact, she nurtured me with breast milk for more then 2 years. I took breast milk for more than 2 years and because why, I am strong today.

**17. N:** That's interesting. What is the ethnic and cultural background of your parents?

**18. A:** Well, my both parents as I said you ... both of them are from Nigeria and they are Euro gales, so culturally we have a lot of things ... both my parents have a lot of things in common,.. though my mom is from a little town in my country, both from Aushnestine ... both my parents are from Aushnestine ... my mom is from Estanco inio and my dad is from \_\_\_\_\_ ... they both had the same local governments, so they shared the same cultural background together like marriage, we have the same type of marriage system when we come traditional marriage and religious stuff. We have everything in common. So basically both of my parents are Christians. They are catholic. So they don't believe... I am not saying they don't believe... but they don't worship all these traditional religious but they are Christians

**19. N:** Do you have some specific things in your culture?

**20. A:** Like?

**21. N:** Mmmm like....

**22: A:** Like marriage?

**23. N:** Yes, like marriage.

**24. A:** My culture, you know during the olden days, in the olden days my parents believe in choosing marriage for their children. Mmmmmm in olden days if I am girl my dad have to choose for me a man .....my parents have to choose for me a man for marriage or if am a man my parents have to look for me a wife for marry I can not choose by myself the person that I am going to marry, in the olden days. But now-a-days the things are changed, it's not longer it was then... so children can do whatever they like now-a-days, they can marry outside the culture....in the olden days you can not marry outside of culture. You have to marry according the culture. The reason why I think the do it because they so much believe in culture and parents like and enjoy and respect ...and they believe that their children who are married from another culture, they believe that

they will not enjoy the culture and respects... from the ...from the whoever the wife or the the the the husband will be from the other culture they will not enjoy and respect ... they prefer their children to marry from the culture ... and if any child marry out of their culture , the parent does not allow, does not support... it means their children will be called as outcaste and they will not give that child the respect and the family would not even allow... they would no even let him see any member of family. So that was in the olden days but in the normal day everything changed due to civilization, education these things changed, now any child can marry out of their culture and from another country as they like...even from your country... another culture as you like... it matters that you are happy .

**25. N:** I see, before the interview I read an interesting article about Nigerian culture and I read one article that men in your culture they can marry...they can have more than four or five wives. It is true?

**26. A:** Yeahh, yeah... really that's true man. I like that myself.. I didn't say that when I was doing my introduction ... well, I'm from a polygamous family... my dad had like four wives and my mom is the.. my mom used to be last wife of my father. So, the reason why I think our parents did this stuff in the olden days ... according to the excuse they give, why they married many wife ... because my daddy was a good merchant and he has a lot of business and they don't believe in employing for their business, so they believe that if they marry many wives, they will have as many children as possible and it would be helping them in their businesses and their wife would be supporting them and they put their trust in their wife and .... For their business to be progressing so the major reason, the major excuse they give because of their business they begun to marry as many wives as possible or their business would... so their business would progress.

**27. N:** It means if you can support your wife you can marry several times.

**28. A:** Yeah, once you have the money and the ability to support your wives you can marry as many wife as you like. But no ideas according to religion has make everything to change now because people don't marry as many as before because of religious or because of education, civilization or... make many thing to stop now so people marry they believe in man and wife...women ... so they don't marry as many wives as before

**29. N:** Hhhmmmmhmmmm...ummmmm... did you make friends easily?

**30. A:** Well... I do I do make friends so easy. I don't find it's... I don't fine it is so difficult to make friends because I enjoy talking with people and I get along with people so easily ... But one little thing is that I make friends with ladies more than way I make with men ... with boys .. the guys ...I don't know the reason but I think when I am in the midst of ladies, I feel so ... I feel so comfortable talking to ladies ... than maybe interacting with guys. So, I make... it used to be easy to make friends with ladies than to make friends with guys. Basically I can make friends with both sexes the male and the female.

**31. N:** Oh if you make friends easy with girls it means you have a lot of girlfriends?

**32. A:** Ohhhh no, no, no. No that way. Making friends with ladies doesn't mean that I might have girlfriends but I just enjoy talking with them. Maybe the reason, why I like that because my family ... In my own family ...when I mean my family, I'm talking about my mom, children... because we are a polygamy family we are six in number and 5 of us are male ... 5 of us are male ... we only have one ... we only have one sister ... girl ... so, I lived most of life with men ...so, now when I'm talking to men don't enjoy talking to men as I talking to ladies ... not that I have them as my girlfriend .. but when I'm talking to ladies, I find it so much interesting talking to ladies than talking to men.... not that I have them as my girlfriend .. but I find it easy talking to ladies, than talking to men. I don't know why I say that.

**33. N:** Do you remember your first date?

**34. A:** Well, well, weeel... I had a lots of dates back in Nigeria...

**35. N:** No, I am asking about your first date.

**36. A:** Ok, my first date, my first date, my first date was back home in Nigeria. That was when I was in secondary school. I met the lady in my class and I like her. .. I fell in love with her. I really had a ... I had a crush on her ... I did not fall in love ... I had a crush on her and I just invite her for outing and only we just ... we keep playing ... not something serious, we just went out for a drink, not for a strong drink and just for soft drink ... and just exchange some talk ... I can't remember ....

**37. N:** ... friends' conversation

**38. A:** Yehhh.

**39. N:** Do you remember your first kiss?

**40. A:** Mmmmmmm ... I don't think I can remember this, but I think first lady I had kiss... may be I kiss her somehow but I don't remember. I can remember I kissed a lot.

**41. N:** You said that your first girlfriend was from elementary school...

**42. A:** No, no, noooo I had my first girlfriend when I was in high school. We call it secondary school in Nigeria. So, I think I was in when I had my first girlfriend. It was my first date.

**43. N:** Ok, what do you remember from your elementary school?

**44. A:** Well, well, well, well.

**45. N:** What do you remember most from your elementary school?

**46. A:** I think my elementary school was somehow interesting back in Ghana. I had my first elementary school in Ghana. You know, one interesting thing about going to school as a young child is that you know one funny thing is that they ask you to put your hand on your ear like this(he is showing this action)..

**47. N:** What for?

**48. A:** They don't count the age as anything than, what is they do they ask you to put your hand on your ear... your hand on your ear... touch your ear... so if you can touch your ear it means that you are matured enough to go to the elementary school. So... once you can do it that you will be happy to join to your mate in school. There are lot of children that are somehow short or maybe they don't grow up very well, so they find it difficult to gain admission to school...start school. So, One time I remember when I came to ... when I went for the interview or I don't know what is called it as ... when I went for it and I was able to touch to my ear, I was so much happy that oh! I am starting school.' And when my parents buy books for me, I used to value it a lot and they bought me a lot of stuff for me. When I went to school, they put food in my flask. They put a lot of things for me kindly to eat ...oh; I used to like this stuff ... when...

**49. N:** How old were you?

**50. A:** Oh, I started school when I, I started elementary school when I was age 5 ...

**51. N:** Age 5?

**52. A:** When I was 5 years old... then, I think I really like all those ... I like ... I like... I like my childhood and I like my elementary school ... I really enjoyed ... each time I remember when was in elementary school I used be very happy because I really enjoyed my family taking care of me and they gave me what I need.

**53. N:** Did you have favorite teacher or subject?

**54. A:** Well, as I already said most of the students and at the same I am a double major student ... double major students... I majored in nursing and psychology. Well, I like what I'm doing as nursing students. I really like taking care of people. so anything they have to be care I like it because I like to interact with people so if you ask me may be I have more particular thing which I like more... I don't think that I have more particular subject I like more but I think I do better... and I do my best... I can do all subject well..... I

have to do... I don't have any particular subject what I like to do more but... basically what I like more I enjoy what I am doing as nursing student. I enjoy of taking care of people. and I... I like being around people. So that is why I choose this profession. The philology make me to be able to reason very well and to know how the people think and the way they think and it make me able to understand people better that is why I decided to be in physiology major as well as nursing.

**55. N:** Ok Austin next question I am going to ask you about your language. Can you tell me how many languages you speak?

**56. A:** Well I speak at list three languages of which the English language is my primary language or I call it my official language. so all of these three languages... Urban language is happened to be my travel language that is the language we speak for my tradition... back in my country Nigeria. So, and the other language which is Ghana language it has to be Twine because we call it Twine language. I was born in Ghana as I said early. I went to the elementary school in Ghana so I learn... I learn the language because I was born there and I can speak the language fluently and I went school there so I can even write it. So when I came to... when I went to Nigeria... that is place my parents came from. So I learnt the language, the Yoruba language, so I can speak language as well. I learnt it in school than I can write it. So the English language in both countries that I...I visited in Africa the Ghana and Nigeria their official language is English language. so I have no problem in speaking English because that is the language we speak from L1 back home in Africa, in Nigerian and Ghana.

**57. N:** How often do you use the English language in your country?

**58. A:** As I said earlier on. The English language is an official language that is easy language we speak in school. We don't speak... we were not allowed in school to speak any other languages beside English language. so we use it when ever we got into school, when we

get home we speak whatever we spoke at home. As soon as we get into school, In college, in high school we use English language.

**59. N:** what language do u speak with your relatives?

60. A: yeah, that is good question. When I come to my relative, when I am talking to my parents or with my brother when we are home, we speak our traditional Tribal languages like Yoruba language. We speak it to ourselves. My parents... my mom...she will speak the language to me and my dad will speak the same language too.... when we have to say the same thing, same language, so I don't have to ... only they want to me to speak English because at times they force us and encourage us when we are home to be speaking English in order to develop our spoken English at home, so our parents normally speak English language to us. They had to speak English language with us, so that we would develop the spoken of English very well. But most of the time they speak ...the language we speak with our family, with friends, at home is the family language which is the Yoruba language.

**61. N:** Austin, did you have any difficulties with the English language when you came to the United State?

**62. A:** Actually, I don't have many difficulties with English language. As I said, English language used to be my official language back in home ... so I have no difficulty with spoken English, but the only problem I had when I came to United States, many people used to say that I had very strong accent... that is, when I say something , sometimes , they find it difficult to understand what my pronunciation , so I have a very strong accent.. but when it came to writing of English language, I don't have any problem ... the only problem is that when I have ... people doesn't hear me clearly , some people say I talk too fast , so that is only problem I have with. I never had any problem with

English language .... I'm being in United States and I did very well in my English classes.

**63. N:** how long are you in United States?

**64. A:** well, it's going to be 7 years that I've been in the united states now ... and yet, I still have problem with my accents, people still complain about my accent, the I have strong accent ... but I have spent 7 years in the United states but I think I'm having a little improvement from the first time I came , so I think my spoken of English understanding of it from other people has changed who doesn't complain as before as they complained when I first came.

**65. N:** Austin, out of 3 languages you speak, which one do you ... do you find more interesting?

**66. A:** well, that is a little bit difficult question ... but really to be honest with you ... I find my traditional language very much interesting because I can digress.... I can... we can mix so many proverbs ... my language has a lot of proverb... we can make a lot of jokes with it .... Though, I can still speak. I find English language interesting too. I see people, when they comes to speak with us ... when they come to my primary language, that is the language I speak with my family ... my traditional language is Yoruba language , I can make a lot of jokes with it .. so I find it so much interesting when I see people from my country or from my tribe, I can speak in the language with ... so, I used to enjoy so much, I find it so much easy for me to speak the language and I find it so much interesting ..., so anytime I see people that can speak the language I used to be happy and I like to be speaking the language ... as I just found a new food that I have not been eaten for a long time.

**67. N:** Do u see the English language as an advantage language for you when you came to United States?

**68. A:** yes, as a matter of fact I find English language as a plus for me when I came to the united states because I discovered that a lot of people who came from different country , they have to start learning English language like a primary .. like a elementary school students... but I came to united states , I was so much happy because there is no much difference in written of English from where I came from. So, I don't have to start all over again, I just start at the college level English. So I see this as an added advantage for me. I speak English language from day one in my country... so the spoken of English right from back home is a plus for me when I came here even though when I started going to school , when I started taking classes I don't have to take the TOFEL or any other English ..preliminary English language in college, so I started with English 101 which is English comprehension , then I did a English research and humanity literature ... plus I did English ...3 English classes that I took when I came to united states ... those people who that just came from ... maybe, they speak French from where they came from.. so they have to start learning English all new ... they have to start learning English so that they understand it and will be able to speak it and understand all those alphabets and those words and how to use the word ... but as for me I have no problem with all those... so I find it as an added advantage and interesting language for me. It's a plus, even though when I came to Indiana here, the English is the same thing, doesn't change ... English is the only language they speak in the United States ...it think it is the #1 language they speak in the United States .... That is one thing that makes united states a unique nation, so unlike where I came from, we have numerous of languages that we speak from my country. but English language is the only language where they speak in the united states, so, anywhere I go in any part of

united states that I go, I don't have any problem...but the only problem I used to have at times is that when they speak ... maybe ...some... the call it American lingual that I don't understand when they use some, some word like ....

**69. N:** like what?

**70. A:** like for instance, maybe, if you go to Philadelphia now and if a Philadelphian is talking, if a Philadelphian is talking, the way they say some thing is different from someone that came from Alabama. Where they pronounce different but they just call it ... when it comes to the general spoken of English ... they speak the same thing... they speak it on the same level ... when they are talking with their friends, at times when African-American are talking with themselves they will be using the English language ... when they ... they way they will be using it, at times I may not understand what they are saying when I first came ... but now I'm able to understand whatever they say, whether they are speaking in the American lingual or whatever they speak. So, I think I have upper hand when it comes to the spoken of English, when compared with some other that came from a country that doesn't speak English because they have to learn all the way.

**71. N:** can you understand all American idioms or jokes very well?

**72. A:** Mmmm ... really I can understand some American jokes, when I see something that funny...when I first came, somebody ..... when they say something like [uatz up], I don't know what they mean by [uatz up] aaaaa... like...

**73. N:** [uatz up] ?

**74. A:** [uatz up], [uatz up] that is may be... [uatz up] that's means "what are you up to?". All stuff, the way they use... somebody say such thing to me I would say "what are you talking about?" And where I came from we have some... we call it, we call it Pigeon English in my country, that is we speak the language like [wetin you dey do there?]

That is – what are you doing there? So [wetin you dey do there?] means “what are you doing there?” If I speak such language to may be to someone in America [wetin you dey do there?] he or she will looking at me “what exactly do you mean? What are you talking about?” So...that is... we call it Pigeon English in Nigeria. But here in America when we use our own the way of speaking they are not getting what we are saying. But know I can understand most of American lingual... or whatever they call it.

**75. N:** Do you use the Pigeon language around friends from back your...

**78. A:** Yehhhhh

**79: N:** friends?

**80: A:** Most of the time when I see people from my country or from Africa where I came as well from Nigeria. When...May be, we are... we are...we are making jokes we are just talk about... we use to speaking Pigeon English to suggest ...to remind ourselves about home and we use to find it soooo much interesting when we are speaking those languages. Using those words make us feel happy and make us feel at home.

**81. N:** Austin, do you have any funny language experience when you came to Unite Sates?

**82. A:** Well, well, well. Interesting enough (laughing). When I came to Unite States I was... went to Philadelphia than so when I one day I was going on the street, that was may... that was my second...that was my third weekend in America so I was going on the street I just saw some black guys, they just were talking each other among themselves. I don't know what was going on between them but I just heard them using certain language... I just heard guys said “Hey mother fucker we get a fucking out of my face” so I found the way they used the word sound somehow funny to me and I don't know the meaning. I don't know what the mean... what he means by “Mother f...” so, but the way he use it... I said that may be American Language. So, I mem... I memorized the words, the way they used it... so, one day my brother was coming to visit us... he was

living in America for a long time. So as soon as I see... I saw him I was so much to see him, so, I said "its ok, let me use the American for this guy too" So as soon as he came I said "hey mother f... hey how long". The man was sooo mad the way I use the language, I said "did I do something wrong?" (Laughing) than he explain me everything. He understand that I don't know what I was saying, I don't know what I mean by " Mother f..." than he explain . I said "ok I am so sorry, because I just heard people using it and I thought somehow funny to me". That is why I just (laughing) the man almost be ready bit me that day. So, but apologized to him.

**83. N:** Did he explain the meaning of this word?

**84. A:** yes, he told me he explain of "mother fucker we get a fucking out of my face " and it is not something you should saying in public whatever public...public discussion because it is bad language. So I was so much sorry for using such a language, dirty language.

**85. N:** Austin, you said that you have been in Us more than seven years, can you speak your other two languages as fluently as before

**86. A:** Yes, I think I am still fluently with my two, two other languages for that fact that the English language the language you use everyday in the school, with my friends and every where I go I speak English. I think I can speak two languages...each any time I see anybody from may be from Africa from my tribe that speak the same languages that I speak...when I am talking with them there are don't see any different what I am saying before I came here... what I say now and I can still write the same way because both languages as a language I used for... I am... I am used to fro a long time. I don't think I forget them. I think I can forget them though my accent...the way I am speaking both of the languages now mmmmmmm has a little bit different from the way I speaked it when I... before I came to United States because I met be...when I speak...I may be putting a little bit English into the...between the words I am using...I will be

using. So, that is only the different when I speaking your traditional language you will be putting English language in between. Its sound the same thing but someone who doesn't speak in English...who doesn't speak English they may not understand what I said when I put English language between what I am saying but I believe when I am speaking my language, two language the Dania languages which is Twine and Urban language from Nigeria. I can... I am still very much greats. I can write it very well as well.

**86. N:** That is a language for you in particular?

**87. A:** Well, that is another good question. As far as I am concern, language to me...means a lot of good thing to me because language is my life...it part of my life and it is apart what make a man...what make aaaa...what make a human being what we are today. Without language a lot of thing we never accomplish for instance there are three main language why the language looks so much important in our life. Number one for communicational reason and Number two for interaction and number three for knowledge. When come to...mmm important of language is my life, especially, without language, I believe I cannot communicate to the people, I cannot communicate to the outside of the world and I can not even gain anything from anybody. Without language the world can not even what it is today and without language I can not get even education. Without language I cannot even talk, I cannot have friends, I cannot do everything. So, I see language as a key factor, as an important factor for our oooour for life. And the thing for...for the purpose of interaction we use language daily everyday for to interact each other. Every time we go out we use language...we speak language for...it depend on the type of the language they speak. If I speak French I use speak Spanish, Spanish we will have problem in communication because we don't understand each other. When the situation was by we speak to same language...we speak the same

type of language for instance we speak English as a general language so this make interaction (coughing) possible...make me to understand what you are saying and make me to understand what I am saying. So, the points of the...the point of interaction about the language is an important factor for it make everything easy for...mmmm...for popper understanding. And again through language we quire a lot of knowledge. For instance now the language... English language have me and able... make... me...for the understanding my study because I can speak the English language I haven't problem to study something like that...the subject like science and some other subject that have to do...that have to do with English. So, I really, really appreciate the knowledge I require from the spoken the English and some other languages, for instance (coughing) in my school...my department now be require me to take foreign language as a part of my elective for my department for that I have an advantage in the spoken of media speak three different languages, they told me "Ok Austin, you speak three different languages you don't have to take any foreign languages. So they gave me another subject instead of taking other foreign languages" So, I am just happy that the knowledge I required from having the different type of speaking...different type of languages help me to do and still help certainly, I just mentioned. So, I speaking the different language and it is an important part in my life.

**88.** N: thank you. How you can relate your life with languages?

**89.** A: Well, well, well, well. That is another goooood...that is another good question. As I had been saying...as I have been saying earlier on we come to relate my live with language. It has a lot ... o lot ...it has a lot benefits about came from this. You know without the language...I am able to speak English now and I am decided to come to the United State of America. I had no problem English language gave me an upper hand a both any other person that coming here and don't having speaking English. As I said in the

earlier interview earlier I can see now that English language...the opportunity of English language help me to have a proper grades in my school and everything I do. so theeeee theeee the (pause) the important of the English language to related to my life now it has a long now.....has a language goal...some other language...for instance I can easily go to Ghana without any... have any communication problem even I can no speaking English when I go to Ghana to do I can speak Twine which is a part of their language. And it is one of the general language, but the Twine going be...they have different type of .....So when I go to Ghana I can easily speak Twine Anytime I see the Amerr... Ghanaian person in America here I can easily communicate with them. So, I see the language very much is an important part of my life and this thing is really, really helping me and give an opportunity to do many other things, give me an to spoke with other people opportunity to interact to people and each time...I can speak at least three languages. And its help me a lot in my study. As I told you before language gave a lot of opportunity in education ans mmmmmm in general in everything.

**90. N:** Thank you very much for your interview, Austin. Thank you.

**91. A:** You are welcome. I am happy to be part of this discussion...of this interview. And I really appreciate that...and...mmmmm I am still looking for any other time may be you have any other interview? You are welcome, call me...

**92. N:** (friendly laughing)

**93. A:** I am available. I will make myself available to you and I am ready to do anything to you. And come to any questions on interview. Thank you so much.'

**94. N:** thank you for sharing of your life story...

**95. A:** you are welcome, you are welcome

**96. N:** Bye.

**99. A:** Bye-bye.