

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

# Inner Circle S1 #05

## May 2014: Mastering Cantonese with an Online Tutor vs. an In- Person Tutor

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## INTRO

Becky: Welcome to a special Inner Circle Audio Lesson! I'm Becky and I'll be hosting today's lesson with my co-host, the founder of Innovative Language... Peter Galante!

Peter: Hi everyone! Peter here.

Becky: Whether you're learning language with an online tutor or with an in-person tutor...

Peter: ...Both have amazing advantages. In this lesson, we cover my experience with both kinds of tutors.

## BODY

Peter: In the last Inner Circle, we talked about staying motivated in your language learning routines.

Becky: You were pretty motivated and confident last time we spoke, Peter.

Peter: Ah, yes, my confidence was definitely running high last time. So high that I actually ended up getting another tutor!

Becky: You mean a new Skype tutor?

Peter: Oh, no. An in-person tutor. My Skype tutor lessons were going so well that I decided to start doing in-person lessons.

Becky: Sounds like May was a good month for you then!

Peter: Actually... this month was brutal and my experience with the new in-person tutor really knocked me down a couple pegs.

Becky: Uh oh. What happened to your confidence?

Peter: Well, if you remember, this isn't the first time I got knocked down. Back in January, my first Skype lesson was awful. But I adapted

quickly.

Becky: Yeah, I remember. You actually doubled your Skype lessons to 2 hours and doubled your conversation goal to 10 minutes.

Peter: That was going so well that I thought it was time to try face-to-face lessons: an in-person tutor. And it turns out... learning with an in-person tutor was a very different experience for me than Skype.

Becky: And listeners, that's the topic of this Inner Circle Lesson.

Peter: Learning with an online tutor vs. learning with an in-person tutor.

Becky: So, Peter... What happened? How'd you get up and out this month?

Peter: Well... I'm not completely down and out, Becky. But I did get knocked down a peg or two. But first, let me go over why my Skype lessons have been going so well, what their advantages are, and then why learning with an in-person tutor is so different.

Becky: Alright!

Peter: So, everytime I have my Skype lesson, my computer is my Italian learning command center.

Becky: An Italian command center? Like...NASA?

Peter: Exactly. Picture this: I have 2 monitors and several browser windows open. Each browser has a specific tool I need to keep the conversation flowing.

Becky: What kind of tools do you usually need?

Peter: The first and most important one is the video Skype chat with my Italian tutor, and I keep the text chat open. So that's right in the center. To the left, I have a neat list of topics and related vocabulary prepared for that lesson.

Becky: Go

on...

Peter: Then, to my right, on my other monitor, I have Google translate open which will instantly give me any translation, and one more browser window, to the right of that, with 3 tabs: Wikipedia search, Google search and YouTube search.

Becky: So let's recap. Main screen: Skype with teacher in the middle.

Peter: That's right.

Becky: You have the list of prepared topics and vocabulary you want to talk about to the left.

Peter: That's right:

Becky: And on your right, you have fast and easy translations with Google Translate.

Peter: You got it.

Becky: That's a lot right at your finger tips.

Peter: And lastly, to the right of Google Translate, I have the entire Internet available... whether it's YouTube, Wikipedia, Google or Google Maps. Everything at my fingertips. And that's where the advantages comes from.

Becky: Alright, I see you have your teacher and you have all of these tools at your fingertips, but what are the advantages of this setup?

Peter: Great question, Becky. Ok, the first advantage is... Fast answers. I don't have to break the flow of conversation, too bad, if I don't know how to say something. Let's face it Becky, people type fast. Do you type fast?

Becky: I type pretty fast.

Peter: So during my lesson, I can quickly type something in and get the answer fast! And while I'm typing I can say a well rehearsed phrase like, "One second please. I'm

looking for something” so it keeps the conversation going while I’m searching.

Becky: Can you give an example?

Peter: Sure, with Google Translate, I can instantly get a translation. I then can say the phrase or sentence. So, while I’m searching, I can say “wait one second please.” Then I get a translation in 1 or 2 seconds and I say it. The conversation remains in Italian, which is great practice! A lot of times, Google translate is not so accurate, but my teacher can understand it, she corrects, and she types it into Skype.

Becky: Ah, that’s a really good idea! Definitely not something you can do in a face-to-face conversation, as it would take much longer without the keyboard.

Peter: We’ll get to that in later, but that is so true. Second advantage. Our conversations get more detailed and last longer.

Becky: What do you mean by that?

Peter: With Google Search, you have so much information at your fingertips, your conversations become much richer.

Becky: Can you give us another example?

Peter: Sure! In the last lesson, we went from talking about my doctor’s appointment to Italian doctors salaries’, and I was able to maintain a fairly difficult conversation pretty well.

Becky: You were able to talk about doctor’s salaries in Italian?

Peter: Alright Becky...bare with me. We weren’t exactly the economic council but the conversation was able to be maintained pretty well. I’m going to tell you how. Because all sorts of information is available online, what I did was, I googled in English “Italian doctors’ salaries”. I found a report on this, and shared the link with my teacher. She found an Italian webpage about this, with the same information, and shared it with me. So we had the English and the Italian web pages

open.

Becky: Ah, so you were able to talk about it,

Peter: Again, our conversation wasn't to the academic level, but we could talk about the amount of the salary, the numbers, work associated with, how long they studied for. Again, it was a great lesson for me because even though the content was way above my level, I could use my vocabulary to talk on the topic. Such as "thousands of euros a month." "how long they had to study," "four years of university," "four years of medical school" and things like that.

Becky: And you can keep on going. That's a great way to maintain conversations!

Peter: Remember, Just because the source material is not in the target language, in my case, Italian doesn't mean you can't speak in Italian about it.

Becky: That is so true. Okay, what's next?

Peter: The third advantage: again, we're talking about online learning, our conversation topics never run out. Again, because we have the whole Internet available. You can get your hands on anything so fast, it kind of leaves you with endless amounts of topics. For example, one topic we were also talking about a new movie, Frozen, that I saw with my kids.

Becky: Ah, the one with the snowman and the 2 princesses? Let it go?

Peter: Yeah, but my teacher actually didn't know what I meant at first – so I thought maybe the Italian title is different – so I quickly found the Frozen wikipedia page, changed language to Italian on the left, and then sent her the link.

Becky: And did she recognize the movie?

Peter: She did, but it turns out she hasn't seen it yet. But the point is... there's always something to talk about, and you can use the Internet to help keep the conversation

going.

Becky: I see now. You can always send a video, an article, or any kind of multimedia to your tutor over Skype Chat....

Peter: ... and without breaking the flow of conversation. That's what's so great about it. You can share your favorite songs, movies, or articles...

Becky: ...and use them as talking points.

Peter: And Becky, my tutor usually has some interesting videos for me to watch in every lesson. She does this as part of her preparation. But since we were talking about Frozen, and it was a topic that I knew better than her, I sent her the Italian version of the song from Frozen "Let it go."

Becky: Wow, interesting. Did she like it?

Peter: Haha. No, not so much.

Becky: Why not!?

Peter: She is kind of anti-Disney?

Becky: Here's a question though: what if she uses Italian you don't understand?

Peter: And goes back to the first advantage - Fast answers. I can quickly ask her in Italian "write it down please and she'll write it into the chatbox. I'll translate it, hear her say it again, and most of the time, I'll get it. Again, this takes 2 seconds, while we carry on with the conversation.

Becky: Ah, so this way, you really do maximize conversation time... even if you are cheating with Google Translate. Alright, so it sounds like your Italian Skype lessons almost flow naturally. Then what was the problem with your in-person tutor sessions?

Peter: Well, I foolishly thought that it'd be the same thing, since I'm talking to an actual

person!

Becky: Yeah, that's what I would think!

Peter: And remember my goal is to maximize my Italian speaking with my tutor, right?

Becky: Right. But I feel like you'd speak more in a real-life situation because you're right next to them!

Peter: It seems that way but the problem was that, when I was studying with my online tutor, I was relying heavily on my Italian language learning command center: Online Tools like Google Translate, Google Search, YouTube, etc.....

Becky: Ahh, but you don't have those in real life.

Peter: No you don't. You only have what's in your brain. : )

Becky: I can see why your first lesson went badly now.

Peter: It was pretty bad, Becky. Wait, Did you just insult my brain power, Becky?

Becky: Well, I'm just referencing that you have no easy and fast answers, huh?

Peter: Alright, I'll buy that. That was the first problem - there are no fast answers for real-life conversations. So, if you're not prepared, it's going to be tricky and challenging.

Becky: I'm guessing your conversations kept getting stuck.

Peter: You're right! It was hard to maximize conversation time. For example, We tried one topic, basketball, and I started running out of words, so I tried to use a dictionary.

Becky: And that's 5 or 10 seconds, while she sits there waiting for you...

Peter: ...Exactly, And it breaks the flow of conversation! There is a major difference between 1-2 seconds online with a keyboard and 5-10 seconds with a smart phone or physical dictionary. So, if you're doing that throughout your lesson, it really cuts into



the speaking time and really ruins the flow of the lesson.

Becky: What if you didn't understand something?

Peter: Again, I tried to use my online tactic. I'd have her stop and ask her to write it down. BUT, this took around 10-20 seconds each time as she was writing by hand, not typing as when we were online.

Becky: And you're both sitting there not saying anything!

Peter: Again, so, because there were no fast answers, this ruined the conversation flow and decreased my conversation time.

Becky: Wow, I didn't even think of that the first time. So, if you're stopping frequently for long gaps that means....

Peter: ....Our conversations can't go far. And that was the second problem.

Becky: That's the problem every beginner suffers through. Limited vocabulary.

Peter: "Suffers" is the right word! We'd just touch upon the basics and then, boom, I'd run out of words...

Becky: And you'd just have to jump into new topics, right?

Peter: And that was very awkward. We ended up running out of topics. And That was the third problem.

Becky: Ouch. I can see why the first lesson didn't go so well.

Peter: Still makin fun of me, huh, Becky. Well, here's the good news, Becky. That first lesson was a big wakeup call and our second lesson went much more smoothly because I adapted.

Becky: I hope so - you're paying money for this! How'd you fix those

problems?

Peter: Well the 3 problems were 1) no fast answers, 2) limited conversations and 3) running out of topics to talk about.

Becky: Hmm. So it sounds like you need to do extra preparation for real-life lessons.

Peter: Exactly. What I did was double my preparation time for these lessons. I'd prepare a list of the topics, review words, and grammar that I'd need for them. Also, I translated the sentences that I wanted to use ahead of time. And this was very important.

Becky: It's interesting to see how much homework you need to do for real-life conversations.

Peter: Right... I mean, I could pull out my iPhone and search for a word during the lesson, but as we'd talked about earlier, that takes a few seconds...

Becky: And it'd break the flow of conversation.

Peter: Which is not something you want in real-life conversations. So remember when we talked about my command center,

Becky: Yeah?

Peter: What I did was. That list that I usually have next to the Skype Window, I printed it out and I brought it with me.

Becky: Smart. I think that would work well.

Peter: it did. I always try and get the most out the techniques that work for me. That was one that I used online, that I was able to take with me offline.

Becky: What else did you do to improve your conversations and topics?

Peter: Two things really helped. 1) Bringing extra materials to the lesson. Anything

visual works really well! For example, I brought a travel guide for the Italian city where she was from. That allowed us to get more in-depth about her town and what was famous about it. She liked talking about it too!

Becky: Can you also cheat and use videos from YouTube?

Peter: You definitely can! Now, If it doesn't stop the flow of conversation, it's a great tool! A tablet computer is pretty powerful. I actually keep 3 videos as back up now, I pick the topics ahead of time, put the topics on the tablet computer and bring it with me.

Becky: What was the second thing that helped improve conversation topics?

Peter: This is interesting because this is something that's harder to do online. So this is a powerful offline, or a powerful in-person tutor tactic. The location of our lessons. For example, our first lesson was at a Starbucks, and they're weren't so many talking points about the location. Except for the fact that there are no Starbucks in Italy.

Becky: None? I thought that the inspiration for Starbucks came from Italy?

Peter: That's right. The founder of Starbucks got the idea after a trip to Milan, Italy, but no surprisingly, no Starbucks in Italy at the time of this recording. But...we're a bit off topic. For the second lesson, I chose, as a location for the lesson, an Italian restaurant.

Becky: I hope you paid for her dinner, Peter. Did you use things like the menu as a conversation aide, something like that?

Peter: I did for her dinner and exactly, you're right - everything in that place becomes a topic of conversation. From the kind of food we liked or didn't like, to which food Italians eat the most.

Becky: So you really adapted after that first lesson, I think!

Peter: It really did knock me down a peg, but that's because I was so used to the online tools! I made the mistake of assuming that I could seamlessly use my technology solutions

in-person.

Becky: It would be nice if you could keep using those I suppose. But that's the challenge of in-person tutors. They'll put your language to the test.

Peter: Becky, that's the biggest advantage of having an in-person tutor. Real-life interaction is the best practice you can get because you're challenged to use what you know to keep the interaction natural.

Becky: Either you're prepared... or you're not. Listeners, real-life conversations are often unplanned, improvised, and there are no fast answers available.

Peter: So mastering real-life conversation is what most language learners want..

Becky: ...So instead of delaying the inevitable...

Peter: ...You've got to start talking to native speakers. Now, this is where my new in-person tutor came in.

Becky: By the way, did you reach your 18-minute conversation goal?

Peter: That's the good news, Becky. Combining the two tutors did help me reach my goal! But I have much more work to do for my in-person tutor.

Becky: That's great! So Peter, what will your June goal be?

Peter: Well, for now, I want to get used to the new in-person tutor, so, I'll keep my monthly goal realistic and aim for... 20 minutes.

Becky: That sounds good! Listeners, do you combine online and in-person tutors?

Peter: Or have you encountered similar problems when it comes to speaking in real life?

Becky: Let us know in the comments or shoot us an email at [inner.circle@innovativelanguage.com](mailto:inner.circle@innovativelanguage.com)

## OUTRO

Becky: Okay, well that's going to do it for this special Inner Circle lesson!

Peter: Bye everyone!

Becky: Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.