



ESL Podcast 169 – Describing People’s Appearance

GLOSSARY

back home – to return to your home after being away from it; to return to the home of your parents or family when you live in another state or city

* It’s nice to be back home after such a long trip.

Let’s have a look – Let’s inspect or examine what you have

* What’s in that package we received in the mail today? Let’s have a look.

cousin – the children of your aunt or uncle are your cousins

* My aunt and my cousins have lived in Memphis for over 10 years.

to look nothing like/to look more like – Not to resemble or look like a certain person/to resemble or look a lot like a certain person

* Everyone tells him that he looks nothing like his father and more like his mother.

fair – to have light colored skin and/or blond hair

* Are you sure you two are really brothers? One of you is so dark and the other is so fair.

heart-shaped face – a face that is in the shape of a heart, that comes to a point at the chin

* When she went to get her haircut, the stylist looked at her heart-shaped face and recommended a new style.

thin lips – lips that are not very thick; small lips, the opposite of full lips

* I wear lipstick to make my thin lips look fuller.

fat cheeks – cheeks that are large or big (cheeks are the part of your face that are below your eyes and between your nose and your ears)

* That little girl had the cutest fat cheeks I had ever seen.

bushy eyebrows – eyebrows that are very large or big (eyebrows are above your eyes and below your forehead)

* Do you think he looks manly with those bushy eyebrows?



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to not give yourself enough credit – to be too humble, to not think that you are very good

* You never give yourself enough credit for the great job you do.

guy friends – male (a boy or a man) friend of a girl or a woman, but who is not a boyfriend

* Why don’t you bring some of your guy friends to my party on Saturday?

pretty – good-looking

* This dress is pretty but the other one fits me better.

wavy/curlly (hair) – hair that goes up and down like a wave; hair that grows in small circles

* He has wavy hair now, but it was very curly when he was a kid.

cute – adorable, good-looking, attractive

* Oh, that little dog is so cute!

pudgy – fat, overweight

* Eating all of this good cooking is starting to make me a little pudgy.

adorable – attractive, cute, good-looking

* This is the most adorable baby I have ever seen.

to compliment – to say something nice about someone

* Men love it when you compliment them on how smart they are.

to go straight to your head – to become arrogant, to start to think that you are better than everyone else

* I hope that all of this success doesn’t go straight to your head.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Nora looks like:
 - a) her cousin
 - b) her sister
 - c) Gilles

 2. Gilles thinks that Nora is good looking because:
 - a) she has bushy eyebrows
 - b) all of Nora’s guy friends like her
 - c) he likes pudgy and heart-shaped faces
-

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

fair

The adjective “fair” in this podcast means a person who has light-colored hair or skin. Fair is also commonly used to mean that someone is being treated according to normal standards: “When I was young, I didn’t always think that my parents were fair when they punished me for doing something wrong.” Or, “The raises we got this year weren’t generous, but they were fair.”

pretty

In this podcast, the word “pretty” means to be good-looking but not beautiful: “All of their daughters are pretty, but the oldest one is really beautiful.” “Pretty” can also be used as an adverb and is also used to mean moderately high or fairly: “I’m pretty happy with my job, although I wouldn’t mind a change.” Or, “That mountain is pretty high. I don’t think I want to try to climb it.”

compliment

“Compliment” means to say something nice about someone. Do not confuse this with a similar sounding word, “complement” (with an “e” in the middle). A complement is something that completes or matches something else. It can also be a verb meaning to match well or to go well with something: “He’s good at math, I’m good at arts and literature. Our skills complement each other very well.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Words that are used to describe people can sometimes cause problems. Some words, such as “fat,” “pudgy” (big, overweight) and “skinny” (thin) are considered by many people to have a negative meaning or are insults. You would never want to call a person “fat” if he or she were your friend, for example.

Since the United States is a country mostly of immigrants, people are often described by their race (skin color) or ethnicity (what country or group they were originally from before coming to the United States). The words we use to describe someone’s race, for example, have changed over the past 25 years. Currently, we usually describe people who used to be called “blacks” as “African-American” (although you will still hear and see the word “black” used). Thirty or forty years ago, the word “black” was more common, and sixty years ago people used the words “colored” or “Negro.” But nowadays, to say “colored” or “Negro” is considered very, very insulting to African-Americans, and should never be used.

Similarly, people whose families were originally from Asia are now called “Asian-Americans,” not the old term, “Orientals.” Ethnic groups are usually described according to the country where their families originally came from. For example, someone whose family was originally from Ireland would be called “Irish-American,” and someone from Iran would be an “Iranian-American.”

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast Number 169, “Describing People's Looks.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast Episode 169. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles, California.

This podcast is going to be a dialogue about describing how people look. Let's get started.

<start of story>

Gilles: Hey, what are you looking at?

Nora: Oh these? They're pictures from my trip back home last month.

Gilles: Let's have a look. So, who's this?

Nora: That's my sister and that's my cousin Keira.

Gilles: Your sister looks nothing like you. You're fair and she has dark hair and dark eyes. Now, you look much more like your cousin.

Nora: Yeah, that's true. Keira and I both have heart-shaped faces, thin lips, fat cheeks, and bushy eyebrows. Gorgeous!

Gilles: You don't give yourself enough credit. Why do you think every one of your guy friends is interested in you? Hey, who's the little girl?

Nora: Oh, that's my cousin Adriano's daughter. She's seven. She's very pretty, as you can see, and has the most beautiful wavy hair. That's her baby brother who was just born in April.

Gilles: Oh, man! He's so cute. That pudgy face, curly hair, and big eyes. He's adorable!



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Nora: Yeah, I think he looks just like me.

Gilles: Hmm...I think I better stop complimenting you. It's going straight to your head.

<end of story>

We heard a dialogue between two people describing how other people look. The dialogue opens with Gilles saying, “Hey, what are you looking at?” and Nora says, “Oh these? They’re pictures from my trip back home last month.” So, she's looking at photographs or pictures of my trip, meaning pictures that she took when she was on her trip back home. Usually, when we use the expression “back home,” we add that word “back,” we mean that we traveled to a different city and that we have moved, and so we had to go or return to this city where our home is. Now, you could use this for a student, for example, who is studying at a different university in a different city, may go back home for the holidays, for a family wedding, or some other event. We also use it when children move away from their parents. They grow up and they get old, like me, and they move to a different city. Many people still call their home where their parents are. So, for me, if I take a trip back home, that means I'm going back to where I was born, where my parents and family live, back in Minnesota.

Well, in the dialogue here, Gilles says to Nora, “Let's have a look.” It means, let me see the pictures, let's have a look, show it to me, is what that means. And Gilles says now, “Who's this?” - who is this person. Nora says, “That's my sister and that's my cousin Keira.” Of course, a “cousin” is the word we use for someone who is your aunt's or uncle's son or daughter. There's just one word for both a boy and a girl and that's “cousin.” So, cousin could be a man or a woman. Well, here, it's a woman, “my cousin, Keira.” Gilles says, “Your sister looks nothing like you,” means your sister does not look like you, does not have the same face or the same appearance as you. You do not, we would say, “look alike”; you do not look the same. She says, he says, rather, “Your sister looks nothing like you.” It's the same as your sister does not look like you.

Gilles says that “you are fair and she has dark hair.” To be “fair” usually means that your skin is very light, not dark, and often, that your hair is light, perhaps, a blonde or very light brown hair. We would say that person is fair. I, for example, am fair-skinned. “Fair-skinned” means I have very fair skin; I have very, very white, very light skin. So, if I go out into the sun, I will get sunburned. My skin will turn red because I have very fair skin. When we say a person is fair in talking



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about how they look, we mean they usually have light skin and light hair, not dark, the opposite of dark. Well, dark hair, of course, would be someone with black or brown hair. When I had hair, it was brown, but not very dark. Well, the expression “dark” could also be used for your eyes. You have dark eyes means you have brown eyes or maybe even close to black eyes. Those would be the colors of your eyes. We would say they were dark. The opposite of that...you could say someone has light-colored eyes. But, I think we would probably just say they have blue eyes or green eyes if the color was not as dark.

Well, Gilles says that his friend, Nora, looks much more like her cousin. You look “more like” means, of course, that you have a similar appearance to someone else. “You look much more like your father than your mother” means that you are closer in appearance to your father than you are to your mother. Nora says, “That’s true” that Keira, her cousin, and I both have heart-shaped faces.” A “heart-shaped” means that the face comes down to a point at the bottom. You can also have a round face or an oval-shaped face, which is like a circle, but a little longer than a round circle. You can also have a square face, so that, of course, your face looks like a square. Well, these are all ways of describing the shapes of the face.

Nora also says that she has “thin” lips. So, you can either have thin lips or thick lips. “Thin lips,” of course, would be very small and “thick lips” would be much bigger, like Jennifer Lopez, the singer, has thick lips. Well, Nora says she has thin lips. She also says she has fat cheeks. Your “cheeks” are what are next to your nose, below your eyes, you have two cheeks: a right cheek and a left cheek. They’re next to your mouth, below your eyes, and next to your nose. Well, normally, we say someone has fat cheeks, means that their face is fat, they have big cheeks. You can also have, I guess, thin cheeks or skinny cheeks for someone who has the opposite.

Nora describes her eyebrows as being bushy. I have bushy eyebrows. Well, first, an “eyebrow” (all one word) is that hair that is above your eye, in between your eye and your forehead, the top of your head. To say that you have bushy eyebrows mean that you have lots of hair. A “bush” is a president of the United States, but we’re not talking about that bush. A “bush,” as a noun, is a small plant or a small tree. So, when someone says the eyebrows are bushy (with a “y” at the end, “bushy”), they mean that they are big, that there’s lots of hair coming out them, that they look like a little bush. Well, the opposite of the bushy eyebrows will, I guess, be thin eyebrows? Someone who doesn’t have a lot of



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hair in their eyebrows. Nora ends her description of herself by saying, “Gorgeous!” Gorgeous means very beautiful, but she's making a joke. She's saying that she isn't very beautiful because her lips are thin and her cheeks are fat, and so forth.

And Gilles says “You don't give yourself enough credit,” means that you have too low of an opinion of yourself. You are not being honest or realistic about who you are. To give someone credit means, in this case, to say that they are good and he is saying that you don't give yourself enough credit. It means you are describing yourself as being worse than what you really are. Gilles says, “Why do you think every one of your guy friends is interested in you?” Well, a “guy,” of course, can mean a man or just another person. Here, it means a man. A guy friend is not the same as a boyfriend. A “boyfriend” (all one word) is someone you are romantically interested in or romantically connected to, you're in love with, perhaps. A guy friend is just one of my friends who is a guy (and “guy friends” is two words).

Now, if you are a man and you have friends who are women, but they are not your girlfriend, we would say that they are your female friends, “my female friends.” We would not say, “they are my girlfriends.” That would mean that you are romantically connected to them. We would not say they are my lady friends because that is a different meaning. A “lady friend” again has a romantic connection. We would just say they are my female friends. So, guy friends, female friends. A girl can say, “my girlfriend.” That does not mean that they are romantically connected. A man can say my guy friends, but for a man talking about a woman who is a friend, they would just say a female friend.

Well, Gilles says, “Who's the little girl in the picture?” Nora says, “Oh, that's my cousin Adriano's daughter. She's very pretty (very beautiful) as you can see, and has the most beautiful wavy hair.” Hair, of course, is what's on top of your head—well, some people, not me. “Wavy” is hair that is like a wave in the ocean, it goes up and down. Wavy hair is hair that is the opposite of “straight.” Straight hair is hair that sits flat on your hand; wavy hair is hair that goes up and down. So, Nora describes her cousin's daughter as having beautiful, wavy hair.

Gilles says, “Oh, man! He's so cute.” “Cute” is a word we often use with children, when we say they are pretty or cute. Gilles describes this boy as having a “pudgy” face. To be pudgy is a word that we would use especially for a baby or for a young child. “Pudgy” means sort of the same as fat, but it's considered



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cute; a very round face that has big cheeks or fat cheeks. We might describe that as a pudgy face. “Curly hair” is similar to wavy hair. “Curly” is hair that has lots of curls. A “curl” is when the hair goes around, as in a circle. That would be curly hair. When I was growing up, I had curly hair.

Gilles says that this boy has big eyes, eyes that seem big for his face. “He’s adorable,” Gilles says. “Adorable” is again a word that we would use to describe a child or a baby to say that they are very cute, that they are very beautiful. Nora says, “Yeah, I think he looks just like me,” making a joke, of course. And Gilles says, “I think I better stop complimenting you.” To “compliment” is to say something nice about someone else. A husband should always compliment his wife on how beautiful she is. Gilles says that he wants to stop complimenting Nora because it’s going straight to her head. For something “to go straight to your head” means that you are beginning to think that you are better than other people, that you are more beautiful or more intelligent or smarter, whatever it is, than someone else. So, it’s an expression we use when we compliment someone and that person says, “Oh, yes, I am very beautiful. I am very smart.” That would be going to his head. He thinks himself more important than he is, better than other people.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue at a native rate of speech.

<start of story>

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Nora: Oh these? They’re pictures from my trip back home last month.

Gilles: Let’s have a look. So, who’s this?

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<end of story>

The script for our podcast was written by our own Dr. Lucy Tse.

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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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