



ESL Podcast 433 – Describing People’s Voices

GLOSSARY

deejay – DJ; disc jockey; a person who plays music and/or speaks on the radio, hosting a radio program

* A good deejay is familiar with all of the most popular music.

to take (someone or something) – to use someone or something as an example; for example

* Life is getting so expensive! Take the price of gas, which has increased about 100% in the past year.

deep – with a low sound, usually used to describe a man’s voice

* That singer has a deep voice that lets him sing even the lowest notes.

husky – with a low, attractive, quiet, and deep sound, usually used to describe a man’s voice

* All of the women in our office love that actor’s husky voice.

sexy – sexually attractive or exciting

* Shimo bought a very sexy dress to surprise her husband.

monotone – always on the same note (never higher or lower) and at the same volume (never quieter or louder), so that the voice never changes and is very boring to listen to

* Students are more likely to fall asleep in classes where the professor speaks in a monotone.

to lull – to make someone feel calm, relaxed, and tired, possibly even making someone fall asleep

* Sebastian uses quiet music to lull himself to sleep at night.

sidekick – someone who works with another person and helps him or her, but isn’t as important as that person is

* Joachim sometimes jokingly refers to his secretary as his sidekick.

music to (one’s) ears – something that is very pleasant to listen to; something that one enjoys listening to

* His baby’s laughter is music to his ears.



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lilt – the way that a voice goes up and down, higher and lower, while one is speaking, making the voice sound pleasant

* People in the southern United States speak with a nice lilt.

high-pitched – a sound that is very high, so much so that it hurts one’s ears and is unpleasant

* The little girl let out a high-pitched scream when she got scared while watching the movie.

squeaky – making many quiet, high noises like those of a mouse

* The baby wakes up every time we open or close the squeaky old door.

grating – irritating; annoying; aggravating; unpleasant

* It’s grating to call an office and have to listen to a recorded message for 20 minutes before you can speak with a real person.

gravelly – with a low, rough, unpolished, deep sound

* Eberhard tried to speak with a gravelly voice, but it sounded like he was sick and had a sore throat.

fantasy – something that one imagines happening and would like to have happen, often about a sexual relationship

* His fantasy became real when he was hired as a travel writer and got paid to go to many different countries.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these might be grating?
 - a) A husky voice.
 - b) A monotone.
 - c) A squeaky voice.

 2. Which of these might be music to your ears?
 - a) A sexy voice.
 - b) A monotone.
 - c) A squeaky voice.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

deep

The word “deep,” in this podcast, is used to talk about a low sound, especially when describing a man’s voice: “Boys’ voices usually get deeper when they are 12 or 13 years old.” The phrase “to be deep in (something)” means to be concentrating on something so much that one doesn’t notice anything else: “The young couple was deep in conversation and didn’t hear anything that was being said around them.” The phrase “to be in deep water” means to be in a very difficult situation, or to be in a lot of trouble: “After using all of their money to buy a new house, they were in deep water when Jacob lost his job.” Finally, the phrase “to go off the deep end” means to become very angry or to go crazy: “Pete went off the deep end when his son got a tattoo.”

lull

In this podcast, the verb “to lull” means to make someone feel calm, relaxed, and tired, possibly even making someone fall asleep: “Most babies are lulled to sleep by the movement of a car.” The phrase “to lull (someone) into doing (something)” means to make someone relax so that he or she is very surprised when something bad happens: “The investor lulled us into thinking that our money was safe, but then we lost it all.” As a noun, a “lull” is a brief pause in an activity or a moment of silence or stillness: “They talked for hours, without a lull in their conversation.” Finally, the phrase “the lull before the storm” is used to talk about the period of time when everything was calm right before a lot of trouble began: “The company seemed to be doing well, but that was just the lull before the storm.”



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CULTURE NOTE

A “voice actor” is a person who provides a voice on a TV show, radio program, or “automated recording” (a computer that speaks, often over the phone). A voice actor must have a pleasant voice that is easy for people to understand. A voice actor must also “enunciate” (pronounce words very clearly) very well and speak slowly.

Many voice actors are used for “animated” (drawn) TV shows and movies, where each animated “character” (one person or animal) in a “cartoon” (a show made of only drawings, with no real people) has a different voice. Radio “soap operas” (dramatic shows that have the same characters and story line each week) also use voice actors, although these shows are not as popular as they used to be.

Most commercials have “voice-overs,” or “segments” (parts) where a voice speaks while images are being shown, perhaps telling listeners about the reasons to buy a product or service.

Voice actors are also hired to record the messages heard on “telephone answering services,” or the messages that people hear when calling many large companies. Sometimes these messages are “interactive,” meaning that the computer will use the voice actor’s words to ask the caller to provide information.

People who always work as voice actors are usually not well known. However, sometimes famous actors or singers begin to do voice-over work, and they can become very popular. For example, when the animated movie Shrek was made, it used many “celebrity” (famous, especially related to actors or singers) voices, such as those of Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz, and Eddie Murphy.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 433: Describing People’s Voices.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 433. I’m your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful City of Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. You can download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions, culture notes, comprehension questions, and a complete transcript of everything we say on this episode.

This episode is called “Describing People’s Voices.” It’s a dialogue between Adriana and Ralph talking about the qualities of people’s voices, common adjectives we use to describe different voices. Let’s get started.

[start of dialogue]

Adriana: Shhh, I’m trying to listen to the radio.

Ralph: How can you listen to that radio station? All of their deejays have such funny voices.

Adriana: That’s precisely why I like it. Take this guy, Kevin. He has a deep, husky voice that I find really sexy.

Ralph: This guy? His voice is so monotone that it lulls me to sleep every time I hear it.

Adriana: Well, if you don’t like his voice, how about his sidekick, Lisa May? Her voice is music to my ears.

Ralph: She has a nice lilt in her voice, but it’s so high-pitched and squeaky. It can really be grating to listen to her for more than a few minutes.

Adriana: Okay, if you don’t like their voices, what kind of voices do you like?

Ralph: I like a gravelly voice, speaking softly and saying...



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Adriana: I’m not talking about your fantasies. I don’t want to know anything about those!

[end of dialogue]

Adriana begins the dialogue by saying to Ralph, “Shhh.” The expression “shhh,” or the sound “shhh,” is what we use to get someone to be quiet. Technically, when you do that is called “shushing” someone. Well, Adriana shushes Ralph; Ralph said, “How can you listen to that radio station? All of their deejays have such funny (or unusual) voices.” Sometimes the word “funny” means unusual, strange, not comic. A “deejay” (deejay), sometimes abbreviated with the letters “D” and “J” because it actually comes from the abbreviation for disk jockey. A “disk jockey” or “deejay” is a person who plays music and, usually, is on the radio. They play music; they talk about the songs – the person that you hear on the radio, at least the music radio.

Adriana says, “That’s precisely why I like it.” She likes the deejays because they have these interesting or unusual voices. She says, “Take this guy, Kevin.” The verb here, to “take” something or someone, means to use someone as an example; it’s another way of saying for example. You might say, “I like traveling in the western part of the United States, where there are beautiful parks. Take California, we have some beautiful parks here in California.” I could also say “For example, California, we have some beautiful parks here in California.”

Well, Adriana says, “Take this guy, Kevin. He has a deep, husky voice that I find really sexy.” “Deep,” when we are talking about a voice, is someone who has a voice that is very low, like this: [speaking in a low tone] “Hello there baby.” That would be a deep voice – and a voice that could get you in a lot of trouble with your wife! “Deep” has several different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. “Husky” (husky), when we are talking about a voice, is a low sound voice – a deep voice, but it’s sort of attractive. It’s often used to describe some men’s voices. Interestingly enough, “husky,” when used to describe someone’s body usually means someone who is very big, perhaps a little overweight. But when we talk about a voice being husky, it’s usually a positive description.

Adriana finds the deep, husky voice of Kevin to be sexy, to be sexually exciting or attractive. Ralph says, “This guy?” He can’t believe what Adriana is saying. Ralph says Kevin’s “voice is so monotone that it lulls me to sleep every time I hear it.” The word “monotone” means always the same note, always the same tone; perhaps even the same volume, never quiet or loud. “Mono” means one,



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so it’s one kind of tone or one kind of note. A monotone voice would be something like this: [speaking in a monotone] “I am speaking in a monotone voice. Please wake up now if you have fallen asleep.” Kind of like a computer voice, I guess. When we say something “lulls” (lulls) someone, we mean that it makes someone feel calm, relaxed, often tired, maybe even making someone fall asleep.

Well, Ralph thinks Kevin’s voice is monotone, and it makes him sleep. Adriana says, “Well, if you don’t like his voice, how about his sidekick, Lisa May?” “How about” means what do you think of his sidekick. A “sidekick” (sidekick – one word) is someone who works with another person and helps them, but isn’t as important as the other person. For example, in the comics there is Batman and Robin. Well, Batman is the most important person; Robin is his sidekick. On many popular radio shows, at least in the United States, there are two people that are on the radio: the main person and then someone else who is the sidekick that they talk to or make jokes with.

Adriana says the voice of the Lisa May, Kevin’s sidekick on the radio, is music to her ears. The expression “to be music to one’s ears” means that something is very pleasant to listen to, something that you enjoy listening to. We hope that ESL Podcast is music to your ears! It doesn’t mean you necessarily are listening to music, however. “Music to your ears” can also be used to mean that you are giving someone good news or you are hearing good news.

Ralph responds by saying that Lisa May “has a nice lilt (lilt) in her voice.” A “lilt” is the way that a voice goes up and down, up and down, higher and lower. It’s supposed to make your voice sound more pleasant. It’s, in some ways, the opposite of monotone. However, Ralph thinks that Lisa May’s voice is very high-pitched and squeaky. Something that is “high-pitched” is something that has a sound at a very high note, so high that it could hurt your ears or be unpleasant. If I were to speak in a high-pitched voice I might sound, for example, like a woman: [speaking in a high pitch] “Hello. How are you?” Pretty annoying, isn’t it? A “squeaky” voice is a voice that sounds a little like a mouse; it’s [squeaking sounds] “ee, ee, ee,” that would be a squeaky voice. I don’t have a squeaky voice, so it’s hard for me to imitate that. Ralph says, “It can really be grating to listen to her.” When we say something is “grating” (grating) we mean it is annoying, it is unpleasant, it is irritating.

Adriana says, well, “if you don’t like their voices, what kind of voices do you like?” Ralph says, “I like a gravelly voice.” “Gravelly” (gravelly) is a very low, rough, almost a deep kind of sound, but it’s something that you could use to describe a



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woman’s voice as well. Ralph says, “I like a gravelly voice, speaking softly and saying...” – well, what Ralph is referring to here is that sometimes women who are trying to be or make themselves sexually attractive may speak in this lower voice. At least, some men find that voice attractive – find it “sexy.”

Adriana says, “I’m not talking about your fantasies.” Your “fantasy” is something that you imagine might happen, something you would like to happen. But, of course, Adriana isn’t interested in Ralph’s fantasies about women, she says, “I don’t want to know anything about those!” And neither do we!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Adriana: Shhh, I’m trying to listen to the radio.

Ralph: How can you listen to that radio station? All of their deejays have such funny voices.

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Ralph: This guy? His voice is so monotone that it lulls me to sleep every time I hear it.

Adriana: Well, if you don’t like his voice, how about his sidekick, Lisa May? Her voice is music to my ears.

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Adriana: Okay, if you don’t like their voices, what kind of voices do you like?

Ralph: I like a gravelly voice, speaking softly and saying...

Adriana: I’m not talking about your fantasies. I don’t want to know anything about those!

[end of dialogue]



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The script for this dialogue was written by someone whose voice is music to my ears, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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