



ESL Podcast 531 – Describing Fabric Patterns

GLOSSARY

to pick out – to choose; to select

* They went to the mall to pick out some new clothes for school.

upholstery – material used to cover furniture, like chairs and couches

* They chose some heavy green upholstery that matches the color of their walls.

fabric – soft, flexible material made from cotton, wool, silk, or other things

* Ingrid bought some beautiful fabric to sew a dress.

checkered – with a grid-like pattern, with vertical and horizontal lines crossing each other at regular intervals, creating many small squares of the same shape

* Besides chess, what other games are played on a checkered board?

eyesore – something that is ugly and very unpleasant or even painful to look at

* That old house is such an eyesore! I hope someone buys it and fixes it up soon.

subtle – not drawing attention to oneself; not easily noticed; easy to ignore

* Lia says there's a subtle difference between these two colors, but they both just seem blue to me.

bold – very strong, bright, and attention-grabbing because something is unexpected

* Mitch always wears bold shirts with lots of bright colors, because he wants to be different from all the other men who work at the bank.

to make a statement – to do something that is different, unique, and interesting; to communicate an idea without using words

* When the war began, Harold wore all black to make a statement about his feelings against the war.

polka dots – a design with many small circles

* They bought a white blanket with black polka dots.

pattern – a repeating design; a design that repeats itself many times, especially on fabric, wallpaper, or wrapping paper

* They bought a baby blanket with a beautiful pattern of teddy bears, boats, and flowers.



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busy – with a lot of small things to look at, so that one's eyes don't know what to focus on; with too many small details

* That blouse is too busy. I think you'd look more professional if you wore a blouse in a solid color.

stripes – a design with many vertical or horizontal lines

* This magazine says that wearing clothing with vertical stripes can make you look thinner.

crazy about (something) – very excited and interested in something; liking something very much

* Everyone's crazy about this new TV show. You have to see it!

tacky – unattractive and inappropriate; in poor taste, showing that one isn't good at knowing what is attractive or appropriate

* They always decorate their home with tacky holiday ornaments that nobody else likes.

a sight for sore eyes – something that is very pretty or attractive, especially after one has been seeing ugly things for a long time

* After months of being in the city, the ocean view is a sight for sore eyes.

solid – with only one color and no design or pattern

* Most homes are painted a solid color, with another color used around the doors and windows.

shade – hue; a particular type of a color, like light pink or dark green

* We want the kitchen walls to be yellow, but we still haven't picked a shade. Do you think a dark yellow or a light yellow would be better?

to boot – in addition; a phrase used to put emphasis on the last thing that one has said

* He's tall, handsome, kind, polite, and he has a good job to boot!

dull – boring; uninteresting

* The date was very dull. He spent the whole time talking about the new accounting laws.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these fabrics would be the busiest?
 - a) A fabric with a subtle pattern.
 - b) A fabric with red polka dots and orange stripes.
 - c) A solid purple fabric.
2. Why doesn't Ruth like the fabric that Gerry picked out?
 - a) Because it's uninteresting.
 - b) Because it's too expensive.
 - c) Because it's very tacky.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

busy

The word “busy,” in this podcast, means with a lot of things to look at, so that one’s eyes don’t know what to focus on: “This advertisement is too busy. Can you help us create a simpler, cleaner ad that will help sell our products?” The word “busy” normally means occupied, unavailable, or doing many activities: “Ms. Crenshaw is busy right now, but I’ll let her know you came by.” When talking about a telephone call, “busy” refers to the sound that one hears when the person whom one has called is already using the phone to talk to someone else: “I called Uncle Sarmi, but his phone was busy. I’ll call him again later.” Finally, a “busybody” is a person who is very interested in other people’s lives and tries to learn their secrets: “Shaina is such a busybody! I wish she’d stop asking so many personal questions.”

to boot

In this podcast, the phrase “to boot” means in addition, and is used to put emphasis on the last thing that one has said: “I’m cold, hungry, tired, and now I’ve cut my finger to boot!” Normally a “boot” is a shoe that covers one’s foot and the lower part of one’s leg: “Why do cowboys wear boots?” The phrase “to give (someone) the boot” means to fire someone, or to force someone to leave a job: “The company has decided to close the factory, giving hundreds of the workers the boot.” Finally, “boot camp” is the period of time immediately after one has joined the military, when one has to work very hard to train: “Boot camp is very difficult, because it prepares soldiers to fight for their country.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Some people like to “renew” (make something seem new) old furniture or “antiques” (very old furniture that is worth money because of its age), rather than buying new furniture. They have many “options” (choices).

Furniture that is covered with fabric can be “reupholstered,” where the existing fabric is taken off and replaced with new fabric. The reupholsterer might also replace the “padding” (thick, soft material that isn’t seen, but is comfortable to sit or rest on) underneath the fabric.

If wooden furniture has been painted, the paint must first be “scraped off” (removed by rubbing a sharp edge against the surface). Any “varnish” (a shiny, clear liquid put on furniture) or “stain” (a liquid put on wooden furniture to change the color of the wood) must be “stripped” (taken off, usually with a chemical and lots of rubbing). Then the surface is “sanded down,” where a piece of “sandpaper” (very rough paper) is rubbed against the wood to make it smooth. Finally, the wood is re-stained and “polished” (rubbed with wax or another substance to make it shiny).

Many small businesses specialize in reupholstering and “refinishing” (improving the wooden or metal surfaces) antiques. However, people must be careful when refinishing antiques, because sometimes the process destroys their “value” (the amount of money they can be sold for). A good, professional furniture “restorer” (a person who improves old furniture) knows which types of refinishing will increase its value, and which types will decrease its value.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 531: Describing Fabric Patterns.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 531. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there and download a Learning Guide for this episode. You can support ESL Podcast by becoming a Learning Guide member or by making a small donation on our website.

This episode is called "Describing Fabric Patterns." "Fabric" is what you use to make clothing or to put on a couch. "Pattern," here, refers to the design, so we're going to be talking about common designs that you would see on fabric for something such as a chair or a couch. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Ruth: Now that we've picked out a new couch, we need to pick out an upholstery fabric. What do you think of this checkered one?

Gerry: That's an eyesore. I prefer something a little more subtle.

Ruth: Subtle? What's fun about subtle? I want something bold and that'll make a statement. How about this one with the polka dots?

Gerry: You've got to be kidding! That pattern is so busy, if I had to look at that every day, I'd go crazy.

Ruth: All right, what do you think of this one with the stripes?

Gerry: I'm not crazy about it, but it's not as tacky as the others ones.

Ruth: Okay then, you pick one out.

Gerry: Fine. Let me see...Now this is a sight for sore eyes!

Ruth: But that has no pattern at all! It's a solid blue color, and a boring shade of blue to boot.



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Gerry: That's right. That's what I call a classic.

Ruth: And that's what I call dull!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue between Ruth and Gerry begins with Ruth saying, "Now that we've picked out a new couch, we need to pick out an upholstery fabric." "To pick out" is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to select, to choose. "I need to go pick out a new shirt at the store," I need to find a shirt, select one to buy. Ruth and Gerry have picked out a new couch (a new sofa). Now, they need to pick out an upholstery fabric. "Fabric" is soft material, usually made from cotton, wool, silk, other things, that is used to cover something; it can be used to make clothing as well. In this case, they're buying fabric for upholstery. "Upholstery" (upholstery) is specifically the material that is used to cover furniture, such as chairs and sofas, couches – that sort of thing.

Ruth says, "What do you think of this checkered one?" She's showing him a sample of this upholstery fabric. Something that is "checkered" is basically a grid-like pattern, where you have vertical and horizontal lines crossing each other at regular intervals (at regular distances), so that you end up with these little squares. We talk about the game of checkers; that's a checkered pattern on the actual board itself, where you have horizontal and vertical lines crossing. There could also be different colors inside of the squares, as is the case on a checkerboard.

Well, Gerry doesn't like the pattern; he says, "That's an eyesore (eyesore – one word)." An "eyesore" means something is very ugly, something that is painful to look at, something that is very unpleasant. It's a very insulting, negative way of describing something. Gerry says, "I prefer something a little more subtle." "To be subtle" (subtle) means that it's not as easily noticed; "subtle" can also mean not drawing to attention to yourself, meaning you're not trying to get other people to look at you. "Subtle" can be used in many different ways. Here it's used as a description of a pattern, a pattern that is visually subtle, meaning you can see the differences in the pattern but they aren't as bold – they aren't as strong as, for example, in a checkered pattern, where the pattern is very obvious.

Ruth says, "Subtle? What's fun about subtle? I want something bold that makes a statement." "Bold," as I mentioned, is strong, bright, something that attracts your attention, something you notice easily. She wants a fabric pattern that makes a statement. The expression "to make a statement" means that you are doing something that is different, that is interesting, that is unique, but you are



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doing it in such a way that you want other people to notice. Maybe you're trying to communicate some idea, but rather than saying it you do something to make a statement. That's what she's trying to do with her fabric. I'm not sure to whom she's making the statement, but she wants to make a statement, Ruth does! Ruth says, "How about this one with the polka dots (polka dots – two words)?" A "polka dot" is a design with many small circles. It's usually, in most cases, considered a very bold, a very dramatic kind of pattern. Most people kind of make fun of polka dot patterns nowadays; it seems very old-fashioned to us. You might wear a polka dot pattern as a joke, for example, but you don't see it very often.

Gerry says, "You've got to be kidding (meaning you must be joking – you're joking)! That pattern is so busy, if I had to look at that every day, I'd go crazy." The "pattern," we've already explained, is the design, usually a repeating design on something. "Busy," when we're talking about a visual pattern (the way something looks), means that there are a lot of small things to look at, so that your eyes don't quite know what to focus on. Something that would be "busy" would be something that would have too many small details. "Busy," however, has a couple of different meanings in English; you can find those in our Learning Guide.

Gerry thinks that the polka dot pattern is too busy. He says if he had to look at it every day, he'd go crazy (he'd go mad). Ruth says, "All right, what do you think of this one with the stripes?" A "stripe" is a thick line; it's a design that has many horizontal lines or vertical lines, but not both. If it had both, that would be a checkered pattern. You often will see businesspeople dressed in very nice suits, and sometimes they are what are called "pinstripe." There's a thin line pattern on the fabric.

Gerry says, "I'm not crazy about that pattern." "To be crazy about (something)," in this case, means to be very excited and interested in something, something that you like a lot. He says he's not crazy about it, "but it's not as tacky as the others ones." The adjective "tacky" (tacky) means unattractive, inappropriate, showing very poor taste, showing that you're not very good at knowing what is attractive and appropriate for a place. So, he's saying this one is not as tacky as the other ones, meaning the other ones are very tacky. "Tacky" is a very negative way of describing something.

Ruth says, "Okay then, you pick one out (you select one)." Gerry says, "Fine. Let me see...Now this is a sight for sore eyes!" He picks up one of the patterns and says it's a sight for sore (sore) eyes. "A sight for sore eyes" is something that is very pretty, very attractive, especially after you've been looking at ugly



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things for a long time. “Sore” would be hurt, used too often. If you have sore eyes, you’ve been looking at too many things; in this case, too many ugly things. However, this expression is often used sarcastically. If someone comes in and they’re all dirty, they may be described as “a sight for sore eyes” meaning that as a joke. Meaning they’re, in fact, not a good sight for sore eyes because they’re also ugly. But here, he means it in the original sense of something that is pretty and attractive.

Ruth says, “But that has no pattern at all! It’s a solid blue color, with a boring shade of blue to boot.” Something that is “solid,” when it comes to design, is only one color; it has no design or pattern. You would say, “It’s a solid green,” that implies (that means) there is no pattern to it; it’s just the color green. Ruth says that not only is it a solid blue color, it also has a boring shade of blue to boot. A “shade” of a color is a type of a color. You can have red, or dark red, or light red; those are different shades, or “hues” (hue) is another word we use. “To boot,” in this case, means in addition to. It’s a phrase we use to emphasize the last thing that you said. I once had a girlfriend who said, “Jeff, you’re ugly, you’re poor, and you’re stupid to boot!” Oh, no, wait a minute. That wasn’t me, that was Brad Pitt I think they said that about! “Boot” has several meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Ruth doesn’t like this solid blue color. Gerry says it may be a boring shade of blue but it’s a “classic,” meaning it’s something that everyone recognizes as high quality. Ruth says, “And that’s what I call dull!” Something that is “dull” (dull) is uninteresting, not very exciting – sort of like my life, kind of dull!

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

[start of dialogue]

Ruth: Now that we’ve picked out a new couch, we need to pick out an upholstery fabric. What do you think of this checkered one?

Gerry: That’s an eyesore. I prefer something a little more subtle.

Ruth: Subtle? What’s fun about subtle? I want something bold and that’ll make a statement. How about this one with the polka dots?

Gerry: You’ve got to be kidding! That pattern is so busy, if I had to look at that every day, I’d go crazy.

Ruth: All right, what do you think of this one with the stripes?



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Gerry: I'm not crazy about it, but it's not as tacky as the others ones.

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Ruth: But that has no pattern at all! It's a solid blue color, and a boring shade of blue to boot.

Gerry: That's right. That's what I call a classic.

Ruth: And that's what I call dull!

[end of dialogue]

If you're crazy about today's script, you can thank our own Dr. Lucy Tse for writing it. Thank you Lucy!

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

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