



ESL Podcast 357 – Describing Facial Expressions

GLOSSARY

taken aback – surprised and shocked, often in a negative way

* We were all taken aback when the manager announced that the store was going to close.

to give (someone) a dirty look – to make a facial expression that shows that one is displeased or angry with another person; to scowl at another person

* Stacy gave her father a dirty look when he told her that she was too young to date.

to look down (one's) nose at (someone) – to believe that one is better, smarter, or more intelligent than another person

* Kirk is the best soccer player on the team and looks down his nose at the other players.

if looks could kill.... – a phrase used to show that someone made a very mean and/or angry facial expression, and that if facial expressions were able to kill people, then this one would have done so

* - How did your parents react when you told them that you crashed their new car?

- Let's just say that if looks could kill....

to strike out on (one's) own – to begin to do something independently, without assistance from other people

* We all offered to help Maggie find an apartment, but she decided that she would rather strike out on her own.

happy-go-lucky – laidback; relaxed; not stressed out about anything; calm

* Abu is a happy-go-lucky guy. Even when he lost a lot of money in his investments, he just shrugged his shoulders and made a joke out of it.

to misread – to misinterpret something that one has seen; to see something and think that it means one thing, although it actually means something else

* Karen never cries, and some people misread this as a sign of her strength, but it's really just that she doesn't show her emotions in front of other people.

to grin [from] ear to ear – to smile very widely; to have a very large smile and be very happy

* After Dinkar's girlfriend agreed to marry him, he was grinning ear to ear for days.



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frown – an expression of displeasure or sadness where the corners of one's lips turn down; the opposite of a smile

* The little boy had a frown on his face and refused to smile for the camera.

not sure – uncertain; not knowing

* I'm not sure what time the meeting will end, but probably no later than 4:20.

what to make of (something) – how to interpret something; how to understand something

* We didn't know what to make of Kelly's decision to change her major from biophysics to American literature.

to raise (one's) eyebrows at (someone) – to lift one's eyebrows, often to show that one is confused or surprised by something that another person has said or done, or to question something that another person has said or done

* When Keith said that he was going to sell his car and start riding his bicycle everywhere, his friends raised their eyebrows at him in surprise.

to wince – to cringe; to change one's facial expression to show negative surprise, shock, or pain, usually moving one's head and shoulders backward slightly

* Lulu winced when the doctor gave her a painful shot.

poker face – a facial expression that does not change to show one's emotions; a facial expression that is intended to hide what one is feeling

* The criminal had a poker face throughout the trial, and he didn't even react when the judge sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

purple with rage – so angry that one's face has a dark red color

* Octavio became purple with rage when he found out that he was going to lose his job.

long face – a facial expression showing great sorrow or depression

* Lenny had a long face for weeks after his dog died.

to spring (something) on (someone) – to surprise someone with something; to tell someone without preparing him or her in advance

* When Zede and Jeb decided to get married, they sprang the news on their parents over dinner.



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all at once – all at one time; simultaneously; doing something with a group of people together at the same time, rather than one at a time

* In their family, they open their Christmas presents all at once, rather than opening gifts one at a time to see what everyone else has received.

to cry over spilled milk – to regret something that has happened; to feel bad about something that has happened and wish that one could have done it differently

* When his business failed, everyone said, “It’s no use crying over spilled milk. Forget about it and open a new business!”

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Based on facial expressions, who was most upset by Pedro’s announcement?
 - a) Dan
 - b) Sanjaya
 - c) Wendy
2. How does Pedro feel now that he has made the announcement?
 - a) He feels rage.
 - b) He feels sad.
 - c) He feels like crying.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

taken aback

The phrase “to be taken aback,” in this podcast, means to be surprised and shocked, often in a negative way: “Everyone was taken aback by the way the little girl was yelling at her mother.” If something is “taken over,” it means that control over something was passed to another person: “The government was taken over by the rebels.” Or, “The project has been taken over by another division.” Something that has been “taken apart” has been disassembled into the smaller pieces from which it was made: “After Vincent had taken apart the car’s engine, he was horrified to realize that he didn’t know how to put it back together.” Finally, the phrase “to be taken in” means to be deceived, or to be made to believe something that isn’t true: “I can’t believe you were taken in by that crazy story!”



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to strike out

In this podcast, the phrase “to strike out on (one’s) own” means to begin to do something independently, without assistance from other people: “Natalie was 32 years old before she decided to strike out on her own and move out of her parents’ house.” The phrase “to strike out” is related to the game of baseball, where if a player is unable to hit the ball three times, he or she “strikes out”: “Everyone in the audience cheered when the other team’s best player struck out.” The phrase “to strike out” can also mean to be unlucky and to have failed in doing something: “Winston tried to ask Chelsea on a date, but he struck out when she said no.” Finally, “to strike out against (someone)” can mean to say something to hurt another person: “Many parents are hurt when their children begin to strike out against them as teenagers.”

CULTURE NOTE

English has many other phrases related to facial expressions beyond those in this script. For example, someone might say, “You look as if you’ve seen a ghost!” This means that you look frightened, or as if you had just seen a “ghost” (the visible spirit of a dead person). A similar expression, “you’re as pale as a ghost,” means that the skin on your face is very “pale” (lighter than normal), probably because you are scared.

Children sometimes “make faces at” other people, which means that they do strange things with their faces to make other people feel uncomfortable, such as sticking out their tongue, or pulling at the corners of their eyes. These behaviors are known as “making faces,” but if they are directed at a specific person, then the child is “making faces at (someone).”

If you are angry, you might “give someone the evil eye,” which means to “glare” (stare at someone angrily). This is similar to “giving someone a dirty look,” which was discussed in the script. We say that people who give the evil eye are “shooting daggers at (someone),” where a “dagger” is a small, sharp knife.

If you don’t believe what someone has said or done, or if you think it was silly or incorrect, you might “roll your eyes,” which means that, without moving your head, you roll your eyes in a circle. Some teenagers roll their eyes disrespectfully at their parents or teachers.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 357: Describing Facial Expressions.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 357. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

You can visit our website at eslpod.com and download a Learning Guide for this episode. In our Learning Guide today, we talk about additional expressions related to facial expressions. You'll also learn about different meanings for some of the expressions we talk about today. The Learning Guide is the fastest way to improve your English; it allows you to see all of the vocabulary and definitions, read new sample sentences to see if you really understand the words that you hear on the podcast. You can also follow along and listen to every word that we say during the audio episode by taking a look at the transcript. Finally, you can check your comprehension with comprehension questions. Every episode of ESL Podcast has a Learning Guide, just go to our website to find out more.

This episode is called "Describing Facial Expressions." We're going to listen to a conversation between Marjorie and Pedro about the way that people use their face to express their feelings. There are different terms that we use for the kinds of expressions that you will see on someone's face. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Marjorie: I wish I could have been there when you told the managers that you were leaving the company and starting your own business!

Pedro: Everyone was taken aback. Dan gave me a dirty look, of course. He's always looked down his nose at me. As for Sanjaya, if looks could kill...

Marjorie: Sanjaya? I thought if anyone would understand why you wanted to strike out on your own, he would. I honestly don't know him that well, but I thought he was a happy-go-lucky kind of guy.

Pedro: Maybe I misread him, but he certainly wasn't grinning ear to ear. He just had a frown on his face the entire time.

Marjorie: What about Wendy? How did she react?



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Pedro: I'm not sure what to make of her reaction. She just raised her eyebrows at me. She sort of winced when I broke the news, and then she had a poker face. I really hope she's not angry with me.

Marjorie: I think you'd know it if she were angry with you. The last time she was mad at me, she was purple with rage. So, aren't you happy about your big announcement? I don't get it. Why the long face?

Pedro: I just wonder if I did the right thing by making an announcement, rather than telling each manager individually. I thought it would feel good to spring it on them all at once, but now I'm doubting whether I did the right thing.

Marjorie: It's no use crying over spilled milk. Forget about the announcement and focus on your new business. You're going to be big success!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Marjorie saying, "I wish I could have been there when you told the managers that you were leaving the company and starting your own business!" "I wish I could have been there" means I wanted to be there, I wish that had happened. It didn't happen, I wasn't there, is the idea.

Pedro says, "Everyone was taken aback." "To be taken aback" means to be surprised and shocked, often in a very negative way. "When I told him that his son was not going to be able to go to the university, he was taken aback" – his father was taken aback. We have several common ways of using the word "taken" plus some other preposition, for example: "taken over." Take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations of these expressions with "taken."

Pedro says, "Everyone was taken aback. Dan gave me a dirty look, of course." "To give someone a dirty look" means to make an expression with your face that shows that you are angry with them or you are unhappy with them. It's a very negative way of describing what someone does. "She gave me a dirty look" – she looked at me like she was angry or mad.

Pedro says that Dan is always looking "down his nose at me." "To look down your nose at someone" means to believe that you are better, smarter, or more intelligent than another person. "He looked down his nose at me" – he thought I was not as good as he was. "As for Sanjaya," Pedro says, "if looks could kill." The expression "if looks could kill" is used to mean that someone made a very angry facial expression. If facial expressions were able to kill people, this one



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would have done so – that’s the idea. So, the expression “if looks could kill” means something similar to giving someone a dirty look; they gave you a very angry expression.

Marjorie says, “Sanjaya? I thought if anyone would understand why you wanted to strike out on your own, he would.” Marjorie is saying that Sanjaya should have understood why Pedro wanted to strike out on his own. “To strike out on your own” means to begin to do something independently, without the help of other people. Often, we use this expression when someone is starting a new business for example, or is going to move away from home and live in their own apartment – they’re going to strike out on their own. The expression “to strike out” has several meanings in English; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations of that.

Marjorie continues, “I honestly don’t know (Sanjaya) that well, but I thought he was a happy-go-lucky kind of guy.” The expression “happy-go-lucky” means relaxed, very calm. We might say “laid back,” not excited about anything. Someone who is happy-go-lucky never gets angry, never gets sad, is always very relaxed. I am not happy-go-lucky, in case you were wondering!

Pedro says, “Maybe I misread him.” “To misread” someone or something means to misinterpret, to see something that you think is one thing but is actually something else – when you misunderstand a situation. You can misread a person, you can also misread a situation. It’s more common probably to say “I misread that person.” Pedro says, “I misread (Sanjaya)” meaning my opinion about him was wrong, I was wrong. “He certainly wasn’t grinning ear to ear.” “To grin” (grin) means to smile. “To grin from ear to ear” means to have a very big smile, to smile very widely. Pedro is saying that Sanjaya was not smiling, “He just had a frown on his face the entire time.” A “frown” (frown) is the opposite of a smile. When you are showing someone that you are not happy, you have a frown on your face.

Marjorie then asks about Wendy. Pedro says, “I’m not sure (I don’t know) what to make of her reaction.” “What to make of” means how to understand or how to interpret something. “I don’t know what to make of the news that there are now more people the United States who drink coffee for breakfast than Coca-Cola for breakfast.” Believe it or not, there are a million people in the U.S. that drink Coca-Cola for breakfast, at least that’s the last statistic that I heard. “I don’t know what to make of it” – I don’t know how to interpret it, I don’t know what it means.

Pedro says, “She just raised her eyebrows at me.” “To raise your eyebrows at someone” means to lift that part of your face that is about your eye, what we call



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your “eyebrow.” You have hair above your eye that you can move up and down. “To lift your eyebrows at someone” means that you are confused or surprised by something that that person has said. “She sort of winced when I broke the news.” “To wince” (wince) is to change your facial expression to show a very negative emotion: surprise, pain, shock. Often, you move your head and shoulders back a little when you wince. It shows that you are sort of in pain or you are very surprised in a bad way about something.

Pedro says Wendy “winced when I broke the news (when I told her the news that I was leaving).” Then he says Wendy “had a poker face.” To have a “poker (poker) face” means that you do not show your emotions; no one can tell what you are really thinking or feeling. “Poker,” you may know, is a popular game with playing cards. If you go to Las Vegas, you can play poker. The expression “poker face” means that you don’t show any expression, because when you play poker, you don’t want to let the other players know what cards you have. I’m a terrible poker player because I do not have a poker face; you know exactly what I’m thinking by looking at my face. That’s why I can never lie to my wife; she’ll always know the truth. That’s a good thing, I think!

Marjorie says that the last time Wendy was mad at her, “she was purple with rage.” The expression “to be purple with rage” (rage) means to be very angry, so angry that your face turns red. “Purple” is a color – a dark color. “Rage” is when you are very angry. So, “purple with rage” means your face turns red – turns something like the color purple because you are so angry.

Marjorie then asks Pedro “aren’t you happy about your big announcement? I don’t get it (I don’t understand). Why the long face?” A “long face” is when you are disappointed or sad about something. “Why the long face” – why are you disappointed or why are you unhappy.

Pedro says, “I just wonder if I did the right thing by making an announcement, rather than telling each manager individually.” He got everyone together as a group and told them he was leaving the company. Now he thinks he should have talked to each manager separately. Pedro says, “I thought it would feel good to spring it on them all at once, but now I’m doubting whether I did the right thing.” “To spring something on someone” means to surprise someone with something, to tell her or him surprising news without giving them any warning, without them expecting it. Someone may say, “I hate to spring this on you, but can you give me your car this afternoon to use?” You’re surprising them by asking them for this.



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Pedro says, “I thought it would feel good to spring it on them all at once,” meaning altogether, all at one time. Marjorie says, “It’s no use crying over spilled milk.” “To cry over spilled milk” is to worry about something that has already happened and that you can’t change. Don’t cry over milk that you have spilled – that you have let fall on the floor or on the table by accident, it’s no use, it doesn’t help you. You also hear this expression “don’t cry over spilt milk”; the past of spill can either be either “spilled” (spilled) or “spilt” (spilt). In either case, you don’t want to worry about things you can’t change.

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

[start of dialogue]

Marjorie: I wish I could have been there when you told the managers that you were leaving the company and starting your own business!

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Marjorie: It’s no use crying over spilled milk. Forget about the announcement and focus on your new business. You’re going to be big success!



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[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse, who never has a frown on her face!

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

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