



ESL Podcast 701 – Improving Your Looks

GLOSSARY

agent – a person whose job is to represent actors, musicians, writers, or other types of artist to help them find work

* Sara is thinking of becoming a model, but she needs to find a good agent first.

potential – the possibility of being able to do something; the qualifications and ability to do something that one is not yet doing

* With her great people skills and interest in biology, she has a lot of potential to become a doctor.

to sign you – to create a legal agreement to work with and/or represent a particular person

* How old were you the first time a professional basketball team wanted to sign you?

salable – able to be sold easily, especially because something is very useful or attractive

* Troy would be more salable as a business consultant if he started wearing suits and ties instead of shorts and flip-flops.

hair extension – a piece of artificial hair that is attached to one's own hair or scalp (the skin on one's) head to make one's hair look longer and/or fuller

* The key to having natural-looking hair extensions is to make sure they're the same color as your real hair.

fuller – hair with more body and volume; hair that has a lot of shape and seems to move, rather than hanging straight down from one's head

* Lynn uses mousse and a hair dryer every morning to make her hair appear fuller.

to spruce up – to make something look nicer or neater; to improve the appearance of something

* My parents are coming to visit tomorrow, so I need to spruce up my apartment.

to cap teeth – to allow a dentist to put small pieces on each tooth, entirely covering the visible surface of each tooth, to improve their appearance

* He had uneven, yellow teeth until he asked his dentist to cap them.



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teeth whitening – a procedure that lightens the color of one's teeth, making them less yellow or gray and more white

* After years of drinking coffee and red wine, his teeth were so discolored that he paid for a professional teeth whitening.

spray tan – a procedure where all the skin on one's body is sprayed with a chemical to make it look darker, as if one had spent a lot of time in the sun

* Women who love having dark skin but don't want to risk getting skin cancer can choose to pay for a spray tan every few weeks.

constructive criticism – advice that may be very negative, but is intended to help another person improve

* When giving constructive criticism, it's important to let other people know you're trying to support them as much as possible.

to stamp out – to end or eliminate something; to get rid of something

* What can we do to stamp out poverty and hunger in our community?

individuality – uniqueness; the characteristics that make a person special, unlike anyone else

* Many students don't like wearing uniforms, because they would rather wear clothes that express their individuality.

clone – an exact copy of another person; someone who seems just like another person, copying his or her appearance and behavior

* Mariah and her sister are so much alike, they could be clones!

sch(m) – a common prefix for many Yiddish words, often attached to English words to create Yiddish-like words for humor

* Books, schmooks! Why do you spend so much time reading textbooks when you could be having fun with us?

Don't you even think about it – a phrase used to warn someone not to do something because one thinks it is a very bad idea and one will be upset if he or she does it

* You want to throw her a surprise birthday party! Don't you even think about it! She's very shy and it would really embarrass her.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the agent, what is wrong with Mai's teeth?
 - a) They aren't in straight lines.
 - b) They're too yellow.
 - c) They're too big.
2. Why doesn't Leo want Mai to follow the agent's advice?
 - a) Because he thinks she's beautiful just the way she is.
 - b) Because he thinks the procedures would be too expensive.
 - c) Because he thinks Mai shouldn't become like all other actresses.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

agent

The word "agent," in this podcast, means a person whose job is to represent actors, musicians, writers, or other types of artist to help them find work: "Ingot's agent suggested he audition for three Broadway musicals." An "agent" can also be something that creates change: "Cell phones have been an important agent of change for how people communicate with one another." An "undercover agent" or a "secret agent" is a law enforcement officer who does not wear a uniform and tries to learn information by pretending to be someone else: "A secret agent was able to develop a close relationship with several of the gang members, learning about their drug deals." Finally, a "double agent" is a spy who works for two countries at the same time: "He worked as a double agent, selling U.S. secrets to the Russian government and Russian secrets to the U.S. government."

to stamp out

In this podcast, the phrase "to stamp out" means to end or eliminate something: "Our researchers dream of finding a cure to stamp out AIDS." The verb "to stamp" usually means to put one's foot down very heavily: "The boys wore cowboy boots and stamped to the beat while dancing." The phrase "to stamp on (an insect)" means to kill an insect by stepping on it with one's foot or shoe: "Mother shrieked and then stamped on the spider." Finally, the phrase "to rubber-stamp" is used to talk about how someone, usually a government official, approves something without really thinking about it: "The president just rubber-stamps anything put on his desk. I don't think he even reads the documents first."



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CULTURE NOTE

Yiddish Words Used in American English

The “Yiddish” language is spoken by many older Jewish people, especially in Eastern Europe. Many Yiddish words are also used by American English speakers. Some of them are real Yiddish words, but others have been “made up” (created). Many of these words begin with the “prefix” (letters or syllables that begin a word) “sch(m)” or “sh(m).”

For example, to “schlep” means to “drag” (pull an object while it is still partially resting on the ground) a very heavy object, or to carry something on a long, difficult journey: “I have my own books to carry! Why would I want to schlep your book bag, too?”

A “schmo” or a “schmuck” is a rude word used to refer to a person who is very stupid, foolish, or easily tricked. “Can you believe that schmuck bought that old car for \$5,000?” Or, “Some schmo hit my car in the parking lot and then drove away without even leaving a note!”

The verb “to schmooze” means to chat or speak informally with someone, possibly to speak with someone who has more power and influence, trying to make a good impression on that person: “Nobody likes going to holiday parties at work, where everyone is expected to schmooze with each other and try to impress the management team.”

A “schnoz” or “schnozzle” is used to talk about a nose, especially a very large nose: “I hope your baby doesn’t grow up to have a schnoz like yours!”

Finally, a “schtick” is used to talk about a funny characteristic or something one does for humor, to make other people laugh: “That comic always uses the same schtick, slipping on a banana peel to try to make his audience laugh.”

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 701: Improving Your Looks.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 701. 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. Don't miss the Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English much more quickly than if you don't have our Learning Guide.

This episode is called "Improving Your Looks." It's going to talk about "physical features," things that may make you look more handsome or more beautiful. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Leo: Where have you been?

Mai: I've been meeting with an agent. You know I've wanted to pursue a career in acting for a long time, but today I actually met with a real agent. She thinks I have potential.

Leo: Is she going to sign you?

Mai: She might. She suggested a few improvements that are going to make me more salable as an actress.

Leo: What did she suggest?

Mai: Well, she thought I should get some hair extensions to make my hair look longer and fuller.

Leo: There's nothing wrong with your hair.

Mai: Well, she thought it could use some sprucing up. She also recommended getting my teeth capped. At the very least, she said I should have teeth whitening done.

Leo: Your teeth look nice and natural. There's nothing wrong with them.



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Mai: She also suggested getting a spray tan, so I'd look healthier.

Leo: You already look healthy. Is she crazy?

Mai: No, I think she's giving me good constructive criticism. I want to make myself as salable as possible.

Leo: It sounds like she wants to stamp out all of your individuality and turn you into a clone of every other actress out there.

Mai: I was thinking of taking her advice. I want to be salable.

Leo: You're a person, not a piece of meat. Salable, schmalable! Don't you even think about it!

[end of dialogue]

Leo begins our dialogue by saying to Mai, "Where have you been?" Mai says, "I've been meeting with an agent." An "agent," in this case, is a person who represents actors, musicians, writers, or other artists to try to find work for them. Most actors here in Los Angeles – in Hollywood – have an agent, someone who tries to find jobs for them – and not jobs working as a waiter or waitress! "Agent" has some other meanings in English as well; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. She says, "You know I've wanted to pursue a career in acting for a long time," she wants to become an actor, Mai does, "but today I actually met with a real agent. She thinks I have potential." "Potential" means the possibility of being able to do something; you're not doing it right now but you have the ability to do it, perhaps, in the future.

Leo says, "Is she going to sign you?" "To sign you" is to create a "contract," a legal agreement to work for this particular person. We normally talk about athletes – professional athletes, singers, artists, they sign with a certain company, or in the case of athletes a certain team, and therefore have to work for them. That's what Mai is referring to – or rather Leo, he's asking the question I guess.

Mai says, "She might," she might sign me, it's not clear, we're not sure. She says her agent "suggested a few improvements that are going to make me more salable as an actress." "Salable" (salable) comes from the word "sale," which is related to the verb "to sell." "Salable" is the ability to be sold easily. In the case of a person, it would be the ability to get a job or to get work because of your



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qualities or characteristics. Mai says that her agent wants to make her more salable as an actress. Notice that she uses both the word “actor” and “actress.” Traditionally, a woman was called an “actress,” a man was called an “actor,” but more recently the word “actor” has been used to describe both a man and a woman, but women can still call themselves “actresses.” The word “actors” could refer to a man or to a woman.

Mai says that her agent has suggested that she get some hair extensions to make her hair look longer and fuller. “Hair extensions” are basically artificial hair, not your own hair, that you attach or put on your hair to make your hair look longer. It’s something that has become popular for women to do, although I’m thinking of getting some hair extensions myself. First I have to get some hair, then I’ll get the hair extensions! The hair extensions will make Mai’s look longer and fuller. “Fuller hair” would be hair with more volume, hair that has a lot of shape. It doesn’t just hang down from your head; it seems to move around more, perhaps. That’s fuller hair.

Leo says, “There’s nothing wrong with your hair,” meaning your hair is just fine the way it is right now. Mai says, “Well, (her agent) thought it could use some sprucing up.” “To spruce (spruce) up (something)” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to make something look a little nicer, to improve the way it looks. Normally we use this to talk about, for example, your house. We clean it up; we make it look nicer. Here, it’s being used to talk about Mai’s hair. So, Mai says that the agent also recommended getting her teeth capped. “To cap (cap) your teeth” means to go to the dentist and allow the dentist put little pieces over each of your teeth, basically covering your teeth with something that looks like teeth but is whiter and has a better appearance. Mai says, “At the very least, she said I should have teeth whitening done.” “At the very least” means the minimum that she should do would be to get some teeth whitening. “To whiten your teeth” means to make them whiter. “Teeth whitening” is when you put something on your teeth to make them whiter, especially if your teeth perhaps are yellow or gray it makes your teeth look a little better.

Leo says, “Your teeth look nice and natural. There’s nothing wrong with them.” Mai says the agent also suggested getting a spray tan, so she’d look healthier. A “spray tan” is where you go to a place and they basically paint your body; they spray this chemical to make your skin look darker. So you don’t have to go out into the sun and sit in the sun; you can just have someone spray paint on you – a kind of chemical, it’s not paint. It makes you look as though you had gone sun tanning. This has become very popular here in Los Angeles with celebrities – with actors and actresses. I do not have a spray tan, so I guess I’m not a celebrity!



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The agent thought it – the spray tan – would make Mai look healthier. Leo says, “You already look healthy. Is she (this agent) crazy?” Mai says, “No, I think she’s giving me good constructive criticism.” “Criticism” is when you tell someone what they are doing wrong. “Constructive criticism” is telling someone what they are doing wrong, but you are telling them so that they can improve it, to make it better. You’re telling them yes, you’re doing that wrong, but if you do this you can do it better or you can improve the way you are doing it. So if someone says, “You’re ugly,” well, that’s criticism. But if they say, “You’re ugly, but if you had more hair on your head, then you would be less ugly.” That’s what people tell me all the time!

So, Mai is getting what she thinks is constructive criticism from her agent. She says, “I want to make myself as salable as possible.” Leo says, “It sounds like (this agent) wants to stamp out all of your individuality and turn you into a clone of every other actress out there.” Leo says, “It sounds like (meaning it appears to me or it seems to me) that (your agent) wants to stamp out all of your individuality.” “To stamp out” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to end or eliminate something, to get rid of something. What the agent wants to get rid of – to eliminate – is Mai’s individuality. “Individuality” means the things that make you special, unlike anyone else, the things that make you unique. Instead, this agent wants to turn Mai into – to change her into – a clone of every other actress out there. A “clone” (clone) in this case means an exact copy of another person. You will look just like the other person, dress like them, talk like them, and so forth. The agent wants Mai to look like all of the other beautiful Hollywood actresses; she will be a clone of all the other actresses out there. “Out there” just means working right now; in existence.

Mai says, “I was thinking of taking her advice. I want to be salable.” Leo says, “You’re a person, not a piece of meat.” He means that she’s not an object; she isn’t selling herself. She shouldn’t be trying to just sell herself; she should realize that she’s a unique individual, a human being. Leo says, “Salable, schmalable! Don’t you even think about it!” The word “schmalable” isn’t a real word. What Leo is doing is using the sound “schm” (schm), which is very common in Yiddish words, and attaching it to English to create a word to be funny, to make a word sound like as if it were Yiddish. Yiddish, as you may know, is a language that is spoken; it is a form of German, but was popular and still is in some areas among those who are of the Jewish religion. At least that’s its association. The word “Yiddish” actually means Jewish. Several early American comedians in the 20th century were associated with Yiddish culture, the Yiddish language and used it. One of those was a man by the name of Leo Rosten, who wrote a couple of very



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funny books that I remember reading when I was in high school. The Joy of Yiddish I think one of them was called.

Anyway, our Leo is using a little Yiddish joke here. He's saying, "Salable, schmalable." What it means is that you are saying that's not important or that's not something we should worry about. For example you could say, "I have to read a bunch of books," and your friend says, "Ah, books, schmooks! Stop it, we need to go have fun." The "schmooks" means that the books aren't important. It's one of those strange changes that native speakers will sometimes make to their own language to make it funny. I think most languages have similar strategies in making funny expressions, and this is just another one of those.

Anyway, Leo says, "Don't even think about it." That expression is used to warn someone that this is a very bad idea. Leo thinks it's a bad idea for Mai to try to change her physical appearance just so she can be more salable – kind of like that old Billy Joel song, [Jeff sings] "Don't go changing to try and please me." Remember that one? No? Okay.

Well, now we'll listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

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[end of dialogue]

If you want to stamp out all of your problems in English just keep listening to the wonderful scripts by our own scriptwriter, the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse.

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

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