

EVP Classification: An Introduction

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Tuesday, 20 January 2009
Last Updated Wednesday, 24 June 2009

People often look to classifying EVPs to establish their sound quality, as though they were grades of maple syrup. However, the truth of the matter is that an EVP classification ultimately marks the degree of risk anyone is taking in believing the evidence to be of paranormal origin.

It occurred to me that, as we begin the arduous task of evidence review for our latest cases, many of our newest members to PPI as well as our guests hoping to capture their own EVP evidence, might profit from a discussion about EVP classifications. I say this because EVP evidence is probably the most prolific evidence captured in paranormal investigations. There are good things about this, and there are bad things. The bad news is that, working under the assumption that evidence of the paranormal is a rarity, with so much EVP evidence extant, the likelihood that any of it is paranormal is highly questionable. The good news is that, with as much EVP evidence as we capture, we have the luxury of parsing it of only the best and strongest evidence, which leads to a data set that, once again, is rare enough to be considered potentially paranormal. And this is where EVP classification goes to the heart of the issue.

People often look to classifying EVPs to establish their sound quality, as though they were grades of maple syrup. However, the truth of the matter is that an EVP classification ultimately marks the degree of risk anyone is taking in believing the evidence to be of paranormal origin. To put it in plainer terms: we are more certain about a Class A EVP being paranormal than we are about a Class B EVP, and we are even less certain that a Class C EVP is paranormal. So, rather than assume that all EVP are the voices of the dead blathering through the ether, treat all EVP as if they are perfectly explainable, and use the classification system to categorize evidence that is less easily explained.

Audio evidence falls into two main categories: Audible Voice Phenomenon (AVP, for short) and Electronic Voice Phenomenon (EVP). Both names are misnomers, since "voice" is not the only anomalous sound captured and classified.

AVP, sometimes called "ghost voices," are actually detected in the environment by one's own ears. They range from the classic ghostly moan to the equally classic rapping on the cupboard door. Their most distinguishing feature is that they are heard in real time and later corroborated by recorded evidence. Their authenticity must be determined by the testimony of those who hear them and any honest attempts to reproduce them. Miniature portable amplifying devices now make this phenomenon less scarce. Since these devices extend the range of human hearing, sounds that formerly had been recorded in the audio evidence and treated like EVP may now in fact be captured AVP. The matter is still up for debate.

EVP, on the other hand, are not heard at the time of their occurrence, but rather are "captured" on recorded media. Just as "Voice" is a misnomer, so too is "Electronic," for the phenomenon has long existed in analog recordings well before electronic audio devices became popular. EVP are evaluated and sorted by their clarity and volume, but, as stated earlier, the classifications ultimately determine the risk being taken in calling them "paranormal." The following are the most commonly used conventions for classification:

Class A:

heard clearly without the use of headphones and listeners will generally form a consensus about what is being said (even if that consensus is that they cannot agree on what is being said);

Class B:

audible yet difficult to hear without the aid of headphones; frequently there will be some disagreement about its message, or disagreement over the assumption that there is a message;

Class C:

will scarcely be heard without the aid of headphones and filtering (such as equalization); the wording will likely be indiscernible and very speculative.

Class R:

in this controversial classification, EVPs are recognized by reversing the audio clip, making the transcription of such an EVP very unreliable because there is such a strong potential to matrix the words. In fact, because the obscured sound quality of most EVP places them in Class C and B, any transcription should be regarded as suggestions only, and not verbatim quotations; everyone therefore is advised to keep a skeptical view of their interpretation and to be aware of the potential for auditory matrixing.

Mark and Debbie Constantino, self-credentialed parapsychologists and EVP specialists, have also attempted to divide these classifications into further categories. While not all of these are universally recognized by the paranormal community, they at least exemplify how even casual paranormal enthusiasts can easily classify and organize their own EVP captures:

- Growling Voice EVP (self-explanatory)
 - Fast-Talker EVP: said to operate at a higher frequency, and therefore communicated very quickly; one can pick out words, but only in piecemeal fashion
 - Singsong EVP: an EVP that comes through as if a spirit were singing it
 - Whisper EVP: the most common variety, this EVP is thought to be quieter because smaller amounts of energy are being used for the communication
 - Altered EVP: thought by some to be voice manipulation; very rare; will take a person's spoken words and transform or rearrange them into a spoken message
 - Mimic EVP: the "spirit" says one or more of the same words immediately after someone in the room has spoken them
 - Multiple Spirit EVP: one spirit begins the EVP, and one or more complete the thought or sentence (presumably in a different voice)
 - Layered EVP: one EVP is spoken over another; or, an EVP is found underneath the voice of a real person speaking
- Again, some cautiously critical thinking and skeptical inquiry are called for in any of these categories, but at least it gets you thinking about what might possibly cause an anomalous audio capture to occur. For a more thought-provoking discussion of the three recognized classes of EVP, as well as AVP, visit one or more of the other articles available in the "Articles" menu of this site.