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## ESL Podcast 12 – Small Talk About the Weather

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### GLOSSARY

**small talk** – casual conversation; discussions about ordinary events that are not very important

\* While Nguyet waited for the play to begin, she made small talk with the people seated next to her.

**to shoot the breeze** – to speak with someone casually; to talk informally with someone to pass the time

\* Dexter enjoyed shooting the breeze with his friends after a week of hard work.

**to cast about** – to search for something, usually in a worried manner

\* When Margaret's brother told her about his big problems at work, she desperately cast about for something she could tell him to improve the situation.

**taboo** – something that is forbidden; a topic that is not allowed or not wise to talk about

\* Sydney did not like to talk about his family and mentioning the topic around him was taboo.

**to chat** – to talk in a casual and social way; to have a casual and friendly conversation with someone

\* Joanne did not have any specific news to tell her mother, but it had been a few weeks since they talked, so Joanne called her to just chat.

**weather** – the condition of the air, temperature, and moisture outdoors

\* The weather today is cool and rainy.

**temperature** – a measurement of how hot or cold something is

\* The outside temperature is supposed to get colder as winter approaches.

**humidity** – moisture in the air; the amount of small water drops in the air

\* The humidity was very low yesterday, so the air felt very dry.

**muggy** – humid; a condition in which the air feels very moist

\* The air outside was so muggy that Brian could feel the moisture sticking to his skin.

**weather report** – a report of current and future weather conditions, usually shown or presented on the television or radio news

\* The weather reporter on TV mentioned that a storm is coming soon.



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**meteorologist** – a professional trained to predict what the weather will be like in the near future

\* The meteorologist predicted that there will be snow next Tuesday.

**high-tech radar** – an advanced computer program used to detect or discover rain, snow, and other weather conditions

\* No signs of incoming storms appeared on the high-tech radar.

**forecast** – a prediction of future weather conditions; a guess based on scientific information about what the weather will be like

\* The forecast shows that the next three days will be sunny.

**to rise** – to go up; to increase

\* If we had known how much this stock would rise, we would have bought shares six months ago!

**to fall** – to go down; to decrease

\* Last night, the temperature fell to 15 degrees Fahrenheit.

**to move in** – to come in slowly; to arrive little by little

\* Storm clouds began moving in blocking the sun.

**wind chill** – a measurement of how much colder the air outside feels due to the amount of wind

\* Even though the temperature was above freezing, the wind chill made it feel like it was below freezing.



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### The Environment and “Greenwashing”

The importance of protecting and not harming the environment is an issue that more and more Americans are paying attention to, especially after Vice President Al Gore’s influential 2006 “documentary” (movie based on true events) *An Inconvenient Truth*.

American companies are trying to “appeal to” (make themselves more attractive to) consumers by claiming that their products are “earth-friendly” or “eco-safe,” when it is not clear whether they are or not. (“Eco” is short for “ecology,” which is the study of how people and other living things interact with their environment.)

This “practice” (way of doing things) is called “greenwashing,” since the color green is associated with nature and the environment. This new word comes from the old term “whitewashing,” which means to cover up or hide a mistake, problem, or “flaw” (imperfection; weakness) by putting something appealing or correct in front of it so people can’t easily see those problems. “Greenwashing,” then, means that a company is trying to hide the real way it does business by saying or claiming that the way their products are made does not harm the environment.

The U.S. government “regulates” (controls; supervises) how some words are used in advertising. For example, companies must meet “minimum” (lowest acceptable) requirements before they can call their products “organic” (grown or developed naturally, without chemicals) or “recycled” (turning waste or garbage into new products). However, as of 2012, there are no regulations about who can use terms like “eco-friendly” and “environmentally-safe.” So, buyers looking for “green” products have to “beware” (be careful). Consumers have to ask themselves: “Is this a product that will not harm the environment or is the company simply “greenwashing?”



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 12 – Small Talk.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 12. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development, in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Today's topic is going to be "small talk" – talking about things that aren't very important. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I admit that I'm not very good at small talk. When I'm with friends, I can just shoot the breeze all day long. But when I talk to a stranger or someone I don't know very well, I'm always casting about, searching for something to talk about. Politics and religion are definitely taboo subjects, at least here in the United States. But you have to chat about something, otherwise there are these uncomfortable silences.

So we end up talking about - what else? - the weather. This usually begins with something like, "So, nice weather we've been having!" or "It sure is a warm one out there today." Of course, we have to comment on the temperature. My favorite is, "It's not the heat that's so bad, it's the humidity!" Actually, I think that's true - I hate it most when it's muggy outside.

Back in my home state of Minnesota, everyone is obsessed with the weather report! Every TV station has its own meteorologist with a high-tech radar giving you the 5 day forecast. They tell you when the temperature is rising or falling, what kind of clouds are moving in, and how cold the wind chill is.

My favorite quote about the weather comes from Mark Twain, who once said, that everybody talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it!

[end of story]

I begin our story by saying that "I admit that I'm not very good at small talk." "Small talk" is an expression we use to describe things we say to someone just to fill time. "Small talk" is always about something that isn't really very important. It could be the weather. It could be a movie that you've seen recently – anything that isn't controversial, that's not going to get you into a fight with that person. We use small talk often with strangers – people we don't know. I said that, "When I'm



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with friends, I can just shoot the breeze all day long.” The expression “to shoot the breeze” (breeze) is an informal one, which means to talk about lots of different things but nothing, again, very important. It’s a little different than small talk. Small talk is almost always with someone who perhaps isn’t very close to you, someone you don’t know very well. “To shoot the breeze” just means to talk a lot about something usually with a close friend. I say, “I can shoot the breeze all day long,” meaning for a very long time. “When I talk to a stranger or someone I don’t know very well,” I continue, “I’m always casting about searching for something to talk about.” “To cast (cast) about” means to look for something. It could be a physical object. I’m casting about for new pen, or it could be, as in the case of the story here, a topic that I want to talk about. I say, “I’m always casting about searching for something to talk about.” I continue by saying that “Politics and religion are definitely taboo subjects, at least here in the United States.” A “taboo” (taboo) is a subject that is considered inappropriate to talk about, not something you should talk about, something that is even forbidden. You’re not supposed to talk about it. To talk about politics and religion – two things that people often disagree about – is considered taboo in the United States. Those are taboo subjects. We don’t usually talk about those with strangers. We often don’t talk about them with family either, if your family doesn’t agree with your politics or your religion.

I continued by saying that, “You have to chat about something. Otherwise, there are these uncomfortable silences.” The verb “to chat” (chat) just means to talk to someone in an informal environment, an informal situation. The verb “to chat” is usually used when things being discussed are not very important. You’re not talking about anything very important. You’re just chatting. You’re just talking. It could also be used to mean the same as shooting the breeze. I say that, “If you don’t chat about something, there will be uncomfortable silences.” You know what happens, when you’re talking to someone and neither of you can think of something to say and then there’s just silence. No one is talking. If that goes on for too long, it could be uncomfortable. It could make you feel a little strange, like something is wrong. I continue in the story by saying that “We end up talking about – what else? The weather.” “We end up” means after a certain time, this is what happens. We talk about the weather. I continue, “This usually begins with something like, ‘So, nice weather we’ve been having,’ or ‘It sure is a warm one out there today.’” These are expressions that you might use as small talk. However, because they’re so common now, because everyone uses them, some people use it almost as a joke. To say that means that you can’t think of anything better to say. A little less common and perhaps, a better choice in this situation is an expression such as, “It sure is a warm one out there today,” or you could say, “It sure is a cold one out there today.” You’re saying it’s very cold out. You’re talking about the weather to allow the other person to give his or her comments.



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Again, it's something that people aren't going to argue about. They're not going to have a fight about whether it's cold or warm out. Most people will agree one or the other.

"Of course," I say, "I had to comment on the temperature" – how cold or hot it was. I say that, "My favorite," that is, my favorite expression, is, "It's not the heat that's so bad, it's the humidity." This is an old expression, maybe in many countries but certainly in the United States. When people complain during the summertime about the weather being hot, they'll often say, "Well, it's not the high temperature that's the problem. It's the humidity." It's the amount of water in the air that makes you feel uncomfortable. "It's not the heat. It's the humidity," we say. I then say in the story that that's true. I hate it most when it's muggy outside. "To be muggy," (muggy) means to be very humid. If you are in Florida, in southern Florida, for example, it will be very muggy in July and August. The temperature will be very high and there will be high humidity, a lot of water in the air.

I'm originally from Minnesota in the north central part of the United States and there, I say, "Everyone is obsessed with the weather report." "To be obsessed" (obsessed) means to be concerned about one thing, typically one thing only. That's all you talk about. That's all you think about. I say that "Minnesotans are obsessed with the weather report." The "weather report" is when you listen to the news or read the newspaper and you find out what the weather is going to be today or tomorrow or this week. So, report here, really means news report, report about what the weather is going to be like. I say that, "Every TV station has its own meteorologist." A "meteorologist" is someone who goes to school to study meteorology, that is the weather – the science of the weather. You could call it. I say that, "Every TV station has its own meteorologist, with a high-tech radar giving you the five-day forecast." "High tech" means very high technology, very sophisticated, very expensive. When we talk about the TV station giving you the five day forecast, I mean they're telling you what the weather will be in the next five days. A "forecast" (forecast) is a prediction about what will happen, obviously what will happen in the future. I say that, "They tell you" – "they," meaning the meteorologists – "when the temperature is rising" – is going up – "or falling" – is going down. They tell you what kinds of clouds are moving in. "To move in," here means to arrive. What kind of clouds are arriving from a different part of the country. The phrasal verb "to move-in" can also mean to go and live with someone, but we're not talking about that. We're talking about the weather.

Meteorologists in Minnesota will also tell you, at least, during the wintertime, how cold the wind chill is. "Wind chill" (chill) is used to tell you how cold it feels on your skin, not always how cold the temperature is. So, if it's 10 degrees below



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zero – 10 degrees below zero Fahrenheit – it's very cold. But if there's also a wind, a strong wind, the wind may make it seem even colder. It will feel colder. And so, there is a way of estimating a figuring out what's called a "wind chill" – how cold it feels typically on your skin – when you are out in a cold temperature with the wind blowing. I end by saying that, "My favorite quote about the weather is from Mark Twain." Mark Twain is a famous American author, what we would call a humorist. He was a novelist but he was also a very funny man. He says, or once said, that "Everybody talks about the weather but no one does anything about it." People talk about the weather but of course, they don't change the weather. That's normally something we can't do.

Now let's listen to this story this time, at a normal speed.

[start of story]

I admit that I'm not very good at small talk. When I'm with friends, I can just shoot the breeze all day long. But when I talk to a stranger or someone I don't know very well, I'm always casting about, searching for something to talk about. Politics and religion are definitely taboo subjects, at least here in the United States. But you have to chat about something, otherwise there are these uncomfortable silences.

So we end up talking about - what else? - the weather. This usually begins with something like, "So, nice weather we've been having!" or "It sure is a warm one out there today." Of course, we have to comment on the temperature. My favorite is, "It's not the heat that's so bad, it's the humidity!" Actually, I think that's true - I hate it most when it's muggy outside.

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[end of story]

We want to thank Dr. Lucy Tse for today's script and for all of her wonderful scripts.



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

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