



ESL Podcast 669 – Making Controversial Comments

GLOSSARY

news commentator – a person whose job is to talk about current events or politics, usually on a TV or radio program

* If you have such strong opinions about what's happening, maybe you should become a news commentator so you can tell other people what you think.

to be fired – to lose one's job; to be told one no longer needs to work in a particular organization or position

* Can employees be fired for using drugs during their personal time?

inflammatory – something that makes other people very angry; something that causes strong, negative reactions

* The website was blocked because it contained too much inflammatory material.

to make a mountain out of a molehill – to exaggerate; to treat a small problem as if it were much more important than it actually is

* I know you're angry about what Jake said, but don't make a mountain out of a molehill! I'm sure he didn't mean to upset you.

albeit – although; a word used to modify what one has just said, making it less forceful

* It was a beautiful wedding ceremony, albeit a very wet one since it started raining heavily as they said their vows.

controversial – something that many people have strong opinions about and cannot agree on

* The town's decision to ban smoking in bars and restaurants was very controversial.

offensive – something that causes other people to become very angry and upset or to feel insulted

* The way you assume that all women enjoy cooking and cleaning is very offensive.

to mark (one's) words – to listen to what someone is saying; to pay attention to what someone is saying

* Mark my words, this is going to be the worst storm this region has ever experienced.



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up in arms – active and agitated; with a lot of excitement and/or anger directed at someone or something, making people want to take action or fight

* When the police decided to begin using video cameras to issue speeding tickets, many drivers were up in arms.

head on a platter – an informal phrase used to talk about someone who needs to be punished for something, often by losing his or her job

* If you ruin these negotiations, I'll have your head on a platter.

to blow over – to lose importance over time; for an argument or situation to no longer be important, often because people have forgotten about it

* I know your wife is angry right now, but if you wait a few days, I'm sure everything will blow over.

tempest in a teapot – a situation where many people become angry or upset over something that is not really very important

* The bride started screaming that the roses were the wrong shade of yellow, but it was really a tempest in a teapot. Nobody else could even see the difference in color.

to get away with (something) – to not be punished for one's bad actions; to not be punished for breaking a law or rule; to not experience the negative consequences of one's actions

* Sarah's little sister always gets away with things that Sarah would have been punished for.

bet – an arrangement where Person A agrees to pay or do something if Person B is correct, and Person B agrees to pay or do something if Person A is correct

* Let's make a bet: If I'm right, you'll wash the dishes all week, but if you're right, I'll take care of the kids on Saturday.

to eat (one's) words – to admit that one was wrong; to say that one's earlier prediction was incorrect

* Conchita said her nephew would never graduate from college, but he made her eat her words when he went on to earn his Ph.D.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Vivian think should happen to the news commentator?
 - a) He should be burned alive.
 - b) He should lose his job.
 - c) He should pay a fine.
2. What does Vivian mean when she says, “Mark my words”?
 - a) She wants William to listen to what she is saying.
 - b) She wants William to take notes while she is speaking.
 - c) She wants William to record their conversation.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

offensive

The word “offensive,” in this podcast, refers to something that causes other people to become very angry and upset or to feel insulted: “Do you think magazines with photos of naked women are offensive?” When talking about sports, the word “offensive” is related to attacking and earning points, not defending oneself against the other team: “The coach taught us some great new offensive techniques that helped us destroy the other team’s defenses.” In the military, an “offensive” is an effort to attack the enemy: “This was the site of a major offensive in World War II.” Finally, the phrase “to take the offensive” means to attack and criticize another person before he or she can do the same thing: “If you don’t take the offensive and start saying bad things about your opponent, he’s going to do it to you first.”

to blow over

In this podcast, the phrase “to blow over” means to lose importance over time, or for an argument or situation to no longer be important, often because people have forgotten about it: “Everyone thought their argument would blow over, but now it’s two years later and they still aren’t talking to each other.” The phrase “to blow up” means to be destroyed by an explosion: “Can using a cell phone near a gas pump really cause a gas station to blow up?” The phrase “to blow up at (someone)” means to become very angry and start shouting at someone unexpectedly: “I’m sorry I blew up at you, but I was really angry” Finally, the phrase “to blow up in (one’s) face” means for one’s plans to suddenly not work out: “Olga thought she had done a good job planning the conference, but then everything blew up in her face.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Most Americans watch TV news programs on weekday mornings or evenings, but some prefer to watch Sunday morning news shows. Here are three of the most popular Sunday morning news shows.

Meet the Press was created by NBC in 1947. It is the “longest-running” (shown on TV for the greatest number of years) American TV show. The current “host” (leader of a show) is David Gregory. Meet the Press “comprises” (is made up of) interviews with national leaders on important issues in economics, “foreign policy” (how countries interact with one another), and politics. Sometimes there is also a “roundtable discussion” (a discussion among three or more people with different opinions) on the same topic, where people comment on the interview. Beginning with J.F. Kennedy, every U.S. president has “appeared” (been seen) on the show.

Face the Nation was first shown by CBS in 1954. In the half-hour show, a “moderator” (a person who leads a discussion without expressing an opinion or bias) interviews important “figures” (leaders; individuals) in the news and then provides some commentary afterward. The show is filmed in Washington, D.C. and is dedicated almost “exclusively” (entirely; without anything else) to politics.

This Week is the Sunday morning news show on ABC. It “premiered” (began; was first shown) in 1981. It has roundtable discussions like the other shows, but it also has special features. For example, in the “In Memoriam” feature, the host mentions recent deaths of important “newsmakers” (people involved in current events and business). In the “Sunday Funnies” feature, the show shares some of the best jokes from “late night television” (shows airing late in the evening) during the past week.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 669: Making Controversial Comments.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 669. 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. You can download a Learning Guide for this episode, and all of our current episodes by going there and becoming an ESL Podcast member to help support this podcast.

This episode is called "Making Controversial Comments." It is a dialogue between Vivian and William using a lot of vocabulary that would describe comments or remarks – things that you say – that would make other people angry. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Vivian: That news commentator should be fired for making such inflammatory comments. At least I won't watch this show again until she is.

William: As usual, you're making a mountain out of a molehill. She was just expressing her opinion, albeit a controversial one.

Vivian: Her opinion is offensive. Mark my words: Before the end of the week, a lot of people will be up in arms calling for her head on a platter.

William: I doubt it. It'll all blow over. It's just a tempest in a teapot.

Vivian: No way. She'll never get away with it.

William: Oh, yeah?

Vivian: Yeah.

William: Do you want to make a bet?

Vivian: Sure, I'll take that bet. What does the winner get?

William: Just the pleasure of seeing the other person eat her words.



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[end of dialogue]

Every country, every culture, has things – topics that you can talk about, and other topics that it would not be good to talk about with people you don't know very well. In the United States, in most businesses you don't have a lot of people talking about religion or politics; those are two areas that can be very controversial, topics that people have strong opinions about. Well, in this dialogue Vivian and William are describing someone on the television, a news commentator who has controversial opinions, who makes controversial statements or comments.

Vivian begins by saying, "That news commentator should be fired for making such inflammatory comments." A "news commentator" is a person who gives their opinion about the news on a television or radio or, I guess, podcast program as well. Vivian thinks the news commentator should be fired, meaning they should lose their job, they should be told they can no longer work at that company. Why? Because they made inflammatory comments. "Inflammatory" is something that makes other people very angry, something that would cause a very negative reaction. Vivian says, "At least I won't watch this show (this television program) until she is." So, the news commentator was a woman.

William says, "As usual, you're making a mountain out of a molehill." This is an old expression: "to make a mountain (a very large thing) out of a molehill" (molehill – one word). A molehill is very small, so if you're making a mountain out of a molehill, you're making something that isn't very important, something that isn't very significant, and acting as if it were a huge, big problem. The verb we would use here is "to exaggerate" – to exaggerate the problem, to say this is a horrible thing, it's the worst thing in the world. That's to make a mountain out of a molehill. A "mole" (mole) is a small animal that digs into the ground, and so when it comes up out of the ground it digs dirt and the dirt comes up and you can see a little hill where the mole goes in and out. That's the origin of that particular term.

William says, "As usual, you're making a mountain out of a molehill." "As usual," if William is the husband, is not a very good thing to say. You see, when you're having an argument with your wife or your husband you don't want to say things like "as usual" because then you get the person even more angry. You get them angrier because now you're talking about things they do all the time rather than just what happened today. A little marriage advice from me to you, or relationship advice – girlfriend, boyfriend, that sort of thing. Don't say "as usual" unless it's a positive thing.



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William says the news commentator “was just expressing her opinion, albeit a controversial one.” “Albeit” (albeit) is a less common way of saying “although.” It’s a word used to modify what you had just said, making it a little less strong. It’s not that common in spoken English, it’s not even that common in written English, but you will hear it sometimes. It basically means “although.” So, the woman was just expressing her opinion, although a controversial one. It was an opinion, but it was something that would make other people perhaps angry; it was a very strong opinion.

Vivian says, “Her opinion is offensive.” Something that is “offensive” is something that is inflammatory; it’s something that makes you very angry, it might even make you feel insulted. If someone says, “All blonde haired people are stupid,” well, that’s an offensive statement. You are insulting people who have blonde hair, and of course I used to have blonde hair, so – when I had hair – so that’s offensive to me. Although if you said all bald men are very handsome, are good looking, now that is not offensive. That is just stating the facts, the truth. Right?

Vivian says that this woman’s opinion was offensive. “Mark my words,” she says. This expression, “Mark my words,” means listen very carefully to what I am saying. It is often used when you are going to make a prediction about something, to guess what will happen in the future, and that’s what Vivian does. She says, “Mark my words: Before the end of the week a lot of people will be up in arms calling for her head on a platter.” A couple of common expressions there: “Before the end of the week,” say Friday or Saturday. The week in the United States begins on our calendars on Sunday. In other countries, the week begins on Monday. So, you have to be careful when you’re looking at a calendar in English, an American calendar at least, because the week begins on Sunday and ends on Saturday. Vivian says, “Before the end of the week a lot of people will be up in arms.” The word “arms” can mean the things on your body that come out of your shoulders, but “arms” also mean “weapons,” things used to hurt other people. “To be up in arms” means, in this case, to be very excited, often angry at something. It’s an expression that is used to show that people are ready to fight because they’re so mad, they’re so angry. It’s as if they were getting guns in order attack you. “Up in arms.” People will be up in arms calling for the news commentator’s head on a platter (platter). A “platter” is a large plate that you put food on to bring to someone else. This expression actually comes from the Christian Bible, from the New Testament, when John the Baptist, who was Jesus’ cousin, was arrested and...I won’t tell you the whole story, but basically when he was killed his head was chopped off, it was removed from his body and put on a platter and brought to the, at that time, queen of Judea. Well, this



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expression, like a lot of expressions from the Bible, has become part of common speech – the way we talk, and in this case it means that she is going to be punished for something. In this case, as in most cases, it would mean to lose your job or to be punished very strongly or severely.

William says, “I doubt it (he doesn’t think she’s going to be fired). It’ll all blow over.” “To blow over” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to become less important over time. This is especially used for arguments, because in time people sort of forget about what they were fighting about. That is the meaning of “to blow over.” There are some other meanings with those words that can be found in the Learning Guide.

So, William says he thinks this controversy is a tempest in a teapot. A “teapot” (teapot – one word) is something that you put tea into – hot water and tea, you combine them in a teapot. A “tempest” (tempest) is a large storm, something that would happen in a large lake or an ocean. There was a play by Shakespeare called The Tempest – wonderful play! It’s about what happens after a large storm has ended. A “storm” is when you have lots of rain and wind, that sort of thing. So, “to have tempest in a teapot” is very similar to “to make a mountain out of a molehill.” That is, it’s not possible to have a tempest – a huge storm – in a little, small area, and that’s another way of saying that you are becoming more angry than this really deserves; you’re making it more important than it is.

Vivian says, “No way (she does not agree at all). She’ll never get away with it.” The expression “to get away with (something)” means that you do something wrong but you are not punished; you don’t have any what we might call negative consequences for your actions or of your actions. “To get away with (something)” means that you do something wrong but no one catches you and you’re never punished.

William says, “Oh, yeah?” and Vivian says, “Yeah.” Notice in informal speech we use “yeah” to mean “yes.” But the expression “Oh, yeah?” means do you really think so, meaning you don’t agree with that person, and Vivian says, “Yeah.” William says, “Do you want to make a bet?” That is, do you want to each say that we will give the other person money if the other person wins the argument. “Do you want to make a bet?” Vivian says, “Sure, I’ll take that bet,” meaning yes, I accept your offer of a bet, “What does the winner get?” William says, “Just the pleasure of seeing the other person eat her words.” “To eat your words” means to admit that you are wrong. It’s like the words that come out of your mouth, you have to take them and put them back into your mouth. In fact, we even use the phrasal verb “to take back what you said,” meaning to withdraw it, to say “I was wrong.” So, “to eat your words” is to admit, to confess that you were wrong



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about something that you said. This is something I do all the time in my marriage! So, Vivian asks what the winner will get, and William says, “Just the pleasure of seeing the other person eat her words.” That is, there’s no money involved in the bet, it’s just the satisfaction of knowing that you were correct.

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

[start of dialogue]

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William: As usual, you’re making a mountain out of a molehill. She was just expressing her opinion, albeit a controversial one.

Vivian: Her opinion is offensive. Mark my words: Before the end of the week, a lot of people will be up in arms calling for her head on a platter.

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Vivian: Yeah.

William: Do you want to make a bet?

Vivian: Sure, I’ll take that bet. What does the winner get?

William: Just the pleasure of seeing the other person eat her words.

[end of dialogue]

We hope our scripts never contain anything that is inflammatory or offensive, and I think we succeed because we have a good 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 on ESL Podcast.



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