
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Controlling the weather



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Sam.

Neil

And I'm Neil. Agh, it's raining again, Sam! I've had enough! It's been **drizzling**, that's raining lightly, all week...

Sam

I know what you mean, Neil. Living in a wet country like Britain I sometimes wish I could push a magic button and stop it raining.

Neil

And ironically, people living in hot, dry countries need rain but don't get it. If only we could control the weather...

Sam

It's funny you should say that, Neil, because you're not the first person to have that idea. In this programme, we'll be hearing about 'cloud-seeding' and 'geo-engineering', two controversial methods scientists are using to manipulate or change the weather. And as usual, we'll be learning some new vocabulary as well.

Neil

Anything that stops it drizzling sounds good to me, Sam.

Sam

I hate to disappoint you, Neil, but these ideas involve making *more*, not less, rain. We'll learn the details soon but first I have a question for you about the wettest place in the world, a village which gets nearly twelve metres of rain a year. But where is it? Is the wettest village on earth found in:

a) Ireland?

- b) New Zealand? or,
- c) India?

Neil

Well, it rains a lot in Ireland doesn't it, so I'll say that's where the wettest place on earth is.

Sam

OK, Neil. We'll find out if that's the correct answer later in the programme.

Neil

The first type of weather manipulation we'll hear about is a way of getting snow and rain out of clouds known as 'cloud seeding'. Airplanes fly through the clouds and spray chemicals to make water particles freeze and stick together as snowflakes. These then fall as snow which builds up during winter before melting in spring to help water crops.

Sam

Listen as Charmaine Cozier, presenter of BBC World Service programme, The Inquiry, speaks with Professor Katja Friedrich, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Colorado:

Charmaine Cozier

The first cloud seeding experiments took place in the 1940s. In the years since, scientists are often accused of **meddling** with nature.

Professor Katja Friedrich

People are thinking, yeah, you're putting some substances in the atmosphere that should not be there. Usually I respond and say, every time you get into your car, every time you get on an airplane you put substances in the air that don't belong, so you're also **playing God**.

Neil

Because everyone needs water, cloud seeding is becoming more and more popular, with scientists from over fifty countries using the method to extract rain from clouds. But some critics accuse these scientists of **meddling** with nature – trying to change something which it's not their responsibility to change.

Sam

In other words, they're accused of **playing God** – acting as if they have unlimited power and can do whatever they want.

Neil

Unlike cloud-seeding, the next type of weather modification has never been tested and is still just a theory. 'Solar geo-engineering' aims to reduce global warming by reflecting sunlight away from the Earth, back into space. This involves putting tiny particles called aerosols into the stratosphere - the band of sky twenty kilometres above the surface of the earth, about twice as high as airplanes fly.

Sam

Although it's never been tested, the method is controversial, as Charmaine Cozier discussed with Harvard University professor of engineering, David Keith, for BBC World Service's, The Inquiry:

Charmaine Cozier

How controversial is this area?

Professor David Keith

There's lots of controversy around solar geo-engineering - and for good reason. People are, I think, sensibly scared that this could provide an **excuse** that allows countries or companies to avoid doing the work that has to be done to cut emissions. But in fact, controversy has really **waxed and waned** over time, so in the early work on climate change in the 1960s, and 70s and early 80s, these ideas were just part of the way we talked about what might happen about climate change. And then, as climate change became more politically central, say in the 90s and 2000s, there was really a **taboo**.

Neil

David Keith believes that geo-engineering could provide an **excuse** for inaction on climate change – a reason for countries to explain why they did not take action.

Sam

He says controversy over the method has **waxed and waned** - an idiom connected with the cycle of the moon which describes something that increases then decreases over time. In the 1960s for example, geo-engineering was uncontroversial, but by the 1990s it had become **taboo** - a subject that is avoided for social or religious reasons.

Neil

While these ideas to change the weather have potential benefits, other suggestions - for example to position a giant floating mirror between the earth and sun - are highly controversial... Although personally, I think the idea of giant floating umbrella above Britain would be good!

Sam

Ha! Well, just think - there are even rainier places to live Neil, as I asked in my question: in which country is the world's rainiest village?

Neil

I guessed it was in Ireland.

Sam

Which was... the wrong answer, I'm afraid. In fact, Mawsynram, the world's wettest village, is in the Khasi hills of north-eastern India. With around twelve metres of rain a year, I guess it's not somewhere you'll be visiting, Neil! OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned starting with **drizzling** which means raining lightly.

Neil

If you're **meddling** you're trying to change something which is not your responsibility or without being asked to.

Sam

Someone who is **playing God** is acting as if they control everything and can do whatever they want.

Neil

An **excuse** is a reason you give to explain why you did something wrong.

Sam

If something **waxed and waned**, it grew stronger then weaker over time.

Neil

And finally, a **taboo** is a subject that avoided for social or religious reasons. Once again, our six minutes are up! Bye for now!

Sam

Bye bye!

VOCABULARY

drizzling

raining lightly

meddling

trying to change or influence something which is not your responsibility or without being asked

playing God

acting as if you have unlimited power and can do anything you want

excuse

reason given to explain why you did something wrong, or did not act in a helpful way

waxed and waned

first increased/grew stronger and then decreased/grew weaker over time

taboo

subject that avoided for social or religious reasons