

Catch Word #40 - To put your foot in your mouth

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp...

Maura: And Maura...

Harp: And we're bringing you the Catch Word podcast...

Maura: At Culips! Our website is Culips.com.

Harp: That's C-u-l-i-p-s.com.

Maura: And at the website, you can go to our Lipservice and get the transcript, Detailed Explanation, and quiz for this episode and every episode.

Harp: Exactly! So today we're doing the Catch Word podcast which is where we take an expression and we break it down. We give you examples of how to use it, we give you synonyms.

Maura: Yeah, we have fun with it.

Harp: Yeah!

Maura: So, today's expression is one of my favourites.

Harp: Really? What's today's expression?

Maura: Today's expression is **to put your foot in your mouth**. It's a long one.

Harp: Yeah, I like this one as well. So, this is **to put your foot in your mouth**.

Maura: Right. So the meaning of this expression is to embarrass yourself by something you say.

Harp: And this can also make others uncomfortable or embarrassed too.

Maura: Right! So you say something stupid or strange and it creates an uncomfortable situation.

Harp: Yeah. If you imagine trying to actually **put your foot in your mouth**, it would be embarrassing, and make you look stupid.

- Maura: Yeah, I think for most people it would be a very difficult thing to do, **to put your foot in your mouth**.
- Harp: Exactly!
- Maura: So, the result is really the same. In both cases, whether you say something stupid or you try **to put your foot in your mouth**, you are embarrassed and you look stupid.
- Harp: Exactly! Now, very honest people can be more **likely to put their foot in their mouth**.
- Maura: Right, because they say what they're thinking and sometimes that's not a good thing to do because you say something and you **regret** it.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: If you **put your foot in your mouth** you might **regret** what you say, something you shouldn't have said.
- Harp: Exactly. I have a friend who is very honest and he often **puts his foot in his mouth**. The funniest story he told me was when he was at a party and he saw this girl, and he hadn't seen her in a long time, and he thought she was pregnant so he went to her and said, "**Congratulations, how many months are you?**" She had just gotten fat.
- Maura: So she wasn't really pregnant?
- Harp: No, she was just fat.
- Maura: Right. So, that's a really good example because he said something stupid without thinking, he embarrassed himself, and the girl was probably embarrassed too. It was an uncomfortable situation.
- Harp: Yeah, it was very uncomfortable. Thankfully, no one else heard, just him, but he was very embarrassed.
- Maura: OK, let's give another example when someone **puts their foot in their mouth**. So, what kind of qualities do you look for in a boyfriend, Harp?
- Harp: Well, I like tall guys, they have to be tall. I can't imagine dating a short guy. No, I couldn't do it.

- Maura: Harp, my boyfriend is short.
- Harp: Oh, I'm sorry.
- Maura: Right! So that's another example. In that case, Harp, you **put your foot in your mouth**.
- Harp: Yeah, I felt embarrassed because it's not nice to say that.
- Maura: Right! So sometimes when people **put their foot in their mouth**, they **offend** someone. They say something that is a little bit rude.
- Harp: Yeah, sometimes people do this when they tell offensive jokes at a party or just at a work situation.
- Maura: Right! And you often **put your foot in your mouth** with people you don't know very well.
- Harp: Exactly!
- Maura: Because you say something and you don't know their situation. For example, if you say to someone "Oh, how is your husband?" and then you found out that her husband died.
- Harp: Yeah, that would be bad. But if it's one of your close friends, you would know that their husband died, so you wouldn't say that. So it's someone you don't know very well.
- Maura: Exactly. So the origin of this expression goes back to the eighteenth century.
- Harp: Yeah, it was an Irish politician and he would often say things that would embarrass himself, so someone said about him, "Every time he opens his mouth, he puts his foot in it."
- Maura: Exactly! It must have been a creative person.
- Harp: Yeah, it's a good expression.
- Maura: So, this is not a fixed expression. There are different variations to this expression. The classic, or most popular, is **to put your foot in your mouth**, but there are other ways that people use this expression too.
- Harp: ***To put your foot in it.***

- Maura: Or, **He has his foot in his mouth.**
- Harp: **Stick her foot in her mouth.**
- Maura: And I've also heard **Open mouth, insert foot.**
- Harp: With **Open mouth, insert foot**, it would be the person who embarrassed himself who used this expression. As soon as I realized I said something embarrassing I could say, "**Open mouth, insert foot.**"
- Maura: One thing that always stays the same is *foot*, it's never plural, it's never *feet*. It's always one foot in one mouth.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: So are there any similar expressions?
- Harp: Yeah, a good similar expression is **to make a fool of yourself.**
- Maura: Yeah, **to make a fool of yourself.**
- Harp: Now the one difference with this expression is that you can **make a fool of yourself** by words or your actions. When you say **to put your foot in your mouth**, it's only for speaking.
- Maura: Right! So it's not an embarrassing action. When you **put your foot in your mouth**, you embarrass yourself by something you say. OK, so let's give an example with **to make a fool of yourself**. Last week, I was at an art gallery and someone asked me if I liked the painting I was looking at, and I didn't really like it so I said, "No, I don't like it, it doesn't look like the artist has any skills." But then later I found out it was the artist who asked me that.
- Harp: Oh, no! You insulted the artist!
- Maura: Right! I basically told the artist that she didn't have skills.
- Harp: You really **made a fool of yourself.**
- Maura: **I made a fool of myself.**
- Harp: You **put your foot in your mouth.**
- Maura: I definitely **put my foot right in my mouth.**

- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: Let's give one more example. So, how is your first day at the new office going?
- Harp: It's going well. I hear the managers around here are really tough and don't let the employees have fun.
- Maura: Oh, really? Well, I'm your new manager.
- Harp: Oh, I'm sorry.
- Maura: Right! So that's another example of someone **making a fool of himself**.
- Harp: Exactly. I **made a fool of myself**.
- Maura: So in this case Harp was saying that the managers are not nice, but I was a manager, so it's a strange situation now.
- Harp: Yeah, so basically I insulted my manager.
- Maura: On your first day!
- Harp: I need to look for a new job.
- Maura: OK, great. So the expression was *to put your foot in your mouth* and a similar expression, *to make a fool of yourself*.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: And we'll have even more synonyms for you in Lipservice, so don't forget to go to our website and check it out.
- Harp: OK, that's about it for today. Bye everyone.
- Maura: Bye.

Detailed Explanation

To put your foot in your mouth

To put your foot in your mouth is to embarrass yourself by saying something inappropriate. When using this expression the person you embarrass can only be *yourself* and you can only be embarrassed by something you *say*.

When someone puts their foot in their mouth it also can make other people feel uncomfortable. In most of our examples in this episode, the person who said something stupid felt embarrassed but it was also a weird situation for the other person too. Listen again if you didn't hear that the first time.

And as we also mentioned in this episode, when you put your foot in your mouth, it often happens with people you don't know very well. This is because you don't know very much about the other person, and so there is a bigger possibility that will you say something inappropriate that offends them.

As well as *to put your foot in your mouth*, we can also say *to put his foot in his mouth* or *to put my foot in my mouth*, or *to put their foot in their mouth*. Notice in the last example that *their* is plural but *mouth* and *foot* still stay singular.

Here are some other variations on this expression.

- To put your foot in it
- To have your foot in your mouth
- To stick your foot in your mouth
- Open mouth, insert foot

This expression originated in the 18th century about Irish Parliamentarian Sir Boyle Roche because he often said things that made him look stupid. And then someone said about him, "Every time he opens his mouth, he puts his foot in it."

Likely

People who are very honest are more likely to put their foot in their mouth than other people. *Likely* has a similar meaning to *probably*. For example, *it will likely rain* or *it will probably rain*. We could also say that it is more probable that someone who is honest will put their foot in his or her mouth.

Here are some other examples with *likely*.

Justin: I am going to propose to her. Do you think she will say yes?
Kelly: I think it is very likely she will say yes.

Dean: What did the research show?
Patricia: The researched showed that people who speak more than one language are likely to have successful careers.

Regret

When you put your foot in your mouth you usually regret it. *To regret* something is to wish that you had not done it or, in this case, wish that you had not *said* it.

Here are some examples with regret and put your foot in your mouth.

Clay: Oh man! I really put my foot in my mouth.
Eric: What happened?
Clay: I just asked the boss how his wife was. I didn't know that his wife recently left him.
Eric: I bet you regret that.

Dan: I am sorry I just offended you. I really put my foot in my mouth with that comment.
Matt: Yeah. But, it's OK. Don't worry about it.
Dan: No, I am sorry. I really regret it.
Matt: Let's just forget it.

Congratulations and How many months are you?

Harp tells the story of a friend who put his foot in his mouth. He put his foot in his mouth because he thought that an old friend was pregnant but she wasn't.

When you know that someone is pregnant you can say, *Congratulations* or you can ask, *How many months (along) are you?* So because Harp's friend did this, and the girl he spoke to wasn't pregnant, he looked stupid and felt embarrassed. It was also embarrassing for the girl he spoke to.

When you ask, *How many months (along) are you?* it is like asking, *How many months have you been pregnant?*

Here is an example.

Bernie: How many months are you?
Elise: 4 months.
(So Elise has been pregnant for 4 months.)

To offend someone

To offend another person means that you say or do something that the other person does not like. It can also be much deeper than that. When you offend someone, you can hurt them or affect them in a deeper way.

Someone might offend another person if they say things that strongly disagree with their political views or religious views. If you say something negative about someone's appearance or personality that usually offends someone.

Offensive jokes can offend many people. Jokes about race and religion are usually always offensive and so offend people easily.

When something is offensive you usually have insulted the other person in some way. Offensive and insulting behaviour is almost always considered rude.

To make a fool of yourself

The expression *to make a fool of yourself* is just like *to put your foot in your mouth*, except for one thing. *To make a fool of yourself* can be used for when you embarrass yourself by words or actions. *To put your foot in your mouth* can only be used for embarrassing yourself with things you say.

Here are some examples using *to make a fool of yourself* by your actions.

Kevin: I made a fool of myself by falling down the stairs my first day at work.

Julie: I always make a fool of myself when I go to lunch with new people by dropping food on my shirt.

To find out

To find out something is to discover something. But *to find out* is not used in exactly the same way as *to discover*. It is much more common and natural to say *to find out* than to say *to discover* in everyday conversation. When you find out something, you have new information about something, or you have the information to solve the problem.

Here are a few examples using *to find out*.

Barb: I just found out that I am pregnant.

Fiona: Wow, congratulations!

Robert: Do you know what the problem with your computer is?

Barry: I finally found out that it wasn't plugged in properly.

Pauline: Did you find out about the job yet?
Kara: Yeah, I just found out. I got it.

Also similar to *to find out* is *to figure out*. *To figure out* is used when it was a long process or there were problems in discovering something. Like, *I finally figured out the answer to the problem*.

Other synonyms for *to put your foot in your mouth*

There are a few other words that we can use that are similar to the expression *to put your foot in your mouth*. These words are not expressions, but vocabulary with a similar meaning. Here is a little list with an example of each.

To be indiscreet

I made such an indiscreet comment when talking to the president. I am so embarrassed.

To be tactless

She can be so tactless when talking to new people. I can't believe some of the crazy things she says.

To speak out of turn

I spoke out of turn. I am sorry if I offended you.

Quiz (see the answers at the end of this Lipservice)**1. What does it mean *to put your foot in your mouth*?**

- a) To embarrass yourself by something you do
- b) To embarrass yourself by something you say
- c) To be proud of yourself
- d) To attempt a difficult physical feat

- 2. Lynn:** I really _____ what I said last night.
Joshua: I have to admit, you really put your foot in your mouth this time.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) Like
- b) Resent
- c) Regret
- d) Found what

3. Which is not a variation of the expression *To put your foot in your mouth*?

- a) To set your foot in your mouth
- b) To stick your foot in your mouth
- c) Open mouth, insert foot
- d) To have your foot in your mouth

- 4. Isiah:** Congratulations on your pregnancy. _____?
Karen: I am 3 months along.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) How many months are you?
- b) How many months is your pregnancy?
- c) How many months old are you?
- d) How many months do you have?

5. When someone puts their foot in their mouth, they also often _____ someone.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) Offend
 - b) Hug
 - c) Defend
 - d) Hit
6. Which expression means to embarrass yourself by something you say or do?
- a) To regret something
 - b) To put your foot in your mouth
 - c) To make a fool of yourself
 - d) To find something out
7. *To find out* is similar to which two verbs?
- a) To discover and to regret
 - b) To discover and to figure out
 - c) To offend and to figure out
 - d) To offend and to regret

Answers: 1.b 2.c 3.a 4.a 5.a 6.c 7. b