

THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

English Language & Applied Linguistics

SECOND TERM ESSAY

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MA - TEFL/TESL

2012/2013

Title of option(s) for which work is being submitted: Business English

Question: Evaluate a chapter of your choice (of approximately 6-8 pages) from a textbook for learning Business English. Evaluate the material in the following two ways:

- a) from a pedagogical perspective, taking into account such issues as needs analysis, the language skills practised and the variety of the tasks and materials;
- b) in terms of applied linguistics research into the use of English in business. For example, is the language used in the material realistic and appropriate as measured against findings from research into business interactions? Does it draw on any research (for example corpus research) or use authentic written and spoken material?

Based on your discussion, do you think this material is realistic and effective for teaching Business English? Why?/Why not?

In what ways could the material be improved?

Number of words: 4135

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare:

- a. that this submission is my own work;
- b. that this is written in my own words; and
- c. that all quotations from published or unpublished work are acknowledged with quotation marks and references to the work in question.

Date: 20.03.2013

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1.INTRODUCTION

Textbook and material selection is the main step for the Business English course as they determine what is going to be covered during the process. Today the number of textbooks and materials for teaching Business English is relatively high. However, in order to provide an effective teaching environment the main point that teachers should take into account is to choose a textbook which meets learners' needs.

The purpose of this essay is to evaluate a chapter from a textbook and I will evaluate a chapter from upper-intermediate Business Result published by Oxford University Press. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 97) define evaluation as a "matching process" and teaching materials as "available solutions" that learners' needs are matched. According to their perspectives evaluation should be carried out objectively to determine the effectiveness of material. However, subjective evaluation is also necessary to choose the right material by considering the learners' needs. Therefore I will start with objective evaluation and then I will evaluate the chapter subjectively on the grounds of my teaching context and learners' needs.

First of all a brief information about my learner group, the selected textbook and chapter will be presented. Next the selected chapter will be examined on the basis of Ellis' and Johnson's (1994) criteria. Following this I will mention about my own suggestions to make the chapter more effective.

2. WORKING CONTEXT AND THE SELECTED TEXTBOOK & CHAPTER

The context I work with is professional employees of a Turkish trading company which does business with different countries all around the world. The number of my learners is 10 and their level is upper-intermediate. All ten learners have university degrees from business departments of different universities and their ages are between 25- 30. They have a good knowledge of English but they have difficulties in communicating with their foreign colleagues as culture varies by country. To sum up the learners' basic need is to learn how to communicate with their foreign colleagues properly in workplace.

The textbook I have chosen for my learners is Business Results from Oxford University Press. It is divided into 16 units and each unit has the same sections such as starting points, working with words, business communication skills, practically speaking, language at work and case

study. I selected unit 14 “Culture” and as it is understood from its title it deals with the cultural differences in business world.

The reason why I chose this unit is as it is mentioned above my learners do trade with people from other countries and even though their level of English is high they have some problems when communicating with foreign people due to cultural differences in some certain areas such as correspondence, arranging a meeting and making telephone calls and even survival English.

3. EVALUATION OF SELECTED CHAPTER

In this part I will evaluate the chapter I selected from Business Result in terms of pedagogical considerations and research perspective. The selected chapter “Culture” is divided into four main parts and a case study. These parts and their targets are shown in the table below:

Working with words	Business communication skills	Practically speaking	Language at work	Case study
Cultural differences Hierarchical risk-taking, sensitive to etc.	Exchanging Informaiton Narrating past events Giving explanations	Talking about films, Tv and boks	Narrative tenses- past continuous, past simple, past perfect	Investigating an intercultural communication problem

(Duckworth and Turner, 2008: 2)

3.1. Pedagogical Considerations

Pedagogical considerations tackle the needs of teaching context and what the material will deal with during the process (Frendo, 2005). These considerations are summarised by Ellis

and Johnson (1994, 128-129) and according to them so as to choose a suitable material these questions should be answered:

What kind of learner is the material aimed at?
What are the main language objectives?
What are the main topics covered?
What is the main methodological approach?
What is the role of the material?
Is the material attractive?

Table 1: Pedagogical considerations by Ellis and Johnson

In the light of these questions I will evaluate the chapter and analyse its usefulness for my teaching context. (Detailed version of questions will be provided in appendix 1).

3.1.1 The Aimed Learner Context

The first step for material selection is identification of teaching context in order to decide the material's suitability for learners (Harwood, 2010). This also refers to needs analysis as it gives information about learner group and their expectations from the course.

Learners of business English can be categorised in terms of their job experience as pre-“experience” and “job-experienced” learners. Pre-experience learners are students studying at university or college. While they have theoretical knowledge of business English they are lacking of practice. Therefore they are not sure about what they exact need (Ellis & Johnson, 1994). On the other hand it is remarked by Boyd (1994) that professional business English learners are aware of their needs and regard learning process as an important part of their current jobs or further projects that might have in their future. That is to say they learn business English in order to obtain a good progress in their occupation. In addition to this they view themselves as professionals and they are more likely to learn interactively since they always need to communicate with their colleagues in workplace. When looked at my learners' communication needs what they primary need is to learn the proper language while doing

business with other countries. Therefore, cross-cultural communication tasks in which they use real life language and perform professional roles would be helpful in their real professional lives. The textbook and the chapter I chose for my teaching context is suitable for professional learners as it requires some background knowledge about business to engage with the tasks and benefit from the chapter.

3.1.2. Language Objectives

Business objectives are defined as the expected outcomes of the course and they also deliver the exact aim of the chapter/ unit. It is suggested by Frendo (2005: 32) that objectives should be “specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound”. This chapter has five language objectives. These are indicated on the content of textbook as below:

- Talk about cultural differences
- Narrate past events
- Give an explanation
- Talk about films, TV and books
- Talk about past events

(Duckworth and Turner, 2008: 2)

The main objective of this chapter is to enable learners to communicate with colleagues from different cultures with whom they encounter in their professional lives. The chapter is learner-oriented and it presents both language functions and provides tasks in which learners have chance to use these functions in specific situations. To illustrate this the section “Business communication skills” firstly demonstrates an example about Indonesian culture. Secondly it asks learners to do pair work and talk about a misunderstanding that they have experienced in their working lives. Also in order to help learners some example situations are given such as asking for directions and talking on the phone.

The next objective deals with structures presented in “Language at work” teaches the use of past tenses in a business context. Robinson (1991) states that in business textbooks listening and speaking skills are integrated as these two skills complement each other. Similar to this statement listening and speaking skills are combined for the objective of narrating past events and giving explanations in this part. In addition to these two skills vocabulary is taught by

means of listening and fill in the blanks activity. Moreover, in this section listening and vocabulary are practiced with sentence completion activity and storytelling.

“Practically speaking” includes the other objective for talking about films, TV and books. The activities for this objective is supported with listening skill and some phrases that learners are expected to use when talking about their choices are given.

The last objective for talking about past events takes place in the section “Language at work”. The use of different past tenses are taught in a reading passage and consolidated with matching and filling the blanks activities in and at the last part speaking activity for talking about a situations that learners had is provided.

3.1.3. Main Topic Areas

The main topic of this chapter is cross-cultural differences and their reflections on business life. These differences are introduced with a reading passage which contains a research about cultural values and their affects in the workplace. Before reading the passage learners have two questions in “starting point” section. These are warm up questions used at the beginning to familiarise learners to the main topic “culture”. Afterwards the “culture” is introduced in a reading passage which gives general information about cultural affects in the workplace.

According to the Hutchinson and Water’s (1987: 108- 109) model created for material analysis has four components. These are “input, content focus, language focus and task”. As an input this chapter starts with a reading passage in order to introduce the topic and gives opportunity to learners for combining their own knowledge with the information in the passage by question 3:

“Which of the key factors would you use to describe your own culture?”

Additionally, thanks to discussion activities in part 5, 6 and 9 learners can develop their information processing skills.

As a content, culture is presented in a passage. Other activities are seen in contents also. For example, in business communication skills section the aim is to teach use of phrases and they are taught with listening which has the dialogue about “critical incidents” in part 1 and 2. As a result, it is possible to say that the language is conveyed in a content in this chapter.

In language focus learners have different types of activities such as discussion and storytelling which enable them to turn their input to output. In this chapter each part has a section for speaking with a partner. It appears that the main objective is to improve learners' speaking and tasks are designed to serve this objective. When the chapter examined it appears that all tasks are communicative and they focus mainly on speaking in cross-cultural issues.

Another further point is credibility which refers to the real world content that learners are familiar. The chapter I examined is designed for a real world issue cross-cultural differences that people always come across in business life. Therefore it is possible to say that this chapter has high level of credibility.

3.1.4. Methodological Approach

According to the criteria suggested by Ellis and Johnson (1994) methodological approach comprises language context, presentation of grammar, vocabulary, skills and language practice. As mentioned in the previous part the examined chapter presents the language in a context through reading passages and listening activities. Language at work section presents grammar inductively through a reading passage so there is no explanation for grammar rules. The use of past simple, past continuous and past perfect tenses are practiced by a fill in the blanks activity in section 3 and complemented with the speaking activity in the 4th exercise. In general the target grammar topic is selected in terms of the chapter's content in business textbooks (Dudley-Evans and John: 1998). Nevertheless when I analyse the grammar section it appears that the content of the reading text is not about culture but a story of a billionaire living in the USA. Therefore I can state that by the aspect of grammar the chapter is incompatible with the main topic culture as the reading text presents past tenses in a different topic.

Vocabulary is seen in the first part "working with words". In this part vocabulary is taught with both reading and listening and these activities have content of culture. Firstly, the reading text "working across cultures" has matching exercises. Also part 7 has the sentence completion exercise which learners need to understand the audio so as to do the exercise. As it is postulated by Dudley-Evans and John (1998: 81) when teaching business English it is beneficial to use a specific content to demonstrate the use of vocabulary. The reason for this application is "...vocabulary is acting as a carrier content for an exercise and is not the real

content of the exercise.” That is to say learners need to comprehend the vocabulary to be able to make practice with the exercises. When looked at the way of teaching vocabulary in this chapter it is clearly seen that a useful vocabulary teaching methodology is followed.

On the other hand Robinson (1991) points out that the majority of learners tend to learn vocabulary as chunks rather than learn as single words and he suggests to demonstrate these chunks in tables in order to increase the clarity. In this chapter there are two tables which show some expressions used in certain situations at the bottom and top of business communication skills section. I consider that these tables help learners to recognise the vocabulary in their real life.

Furthermore the chapter enables learners to do both controlled and open practice of language with different speaking and listening activities. At the end of each section a pair work activity takes place and these are open practice activities in which learners have discussions about cross-cultural issues. For instance learners do storytelling in activity 4 in business communication skills and practically speaking part. According to the given situations students are asked to do pair work and tell a story about the situations. Storytelling is a relatively efficient task as it enables learners to talk about their own experiences (Frendo, 2005). Besides storytelling, small talk activity are used by offering some example business situations. These are collaborative activities in which learners work in pairs and groups to learn the language. It is pointed out that collaborative learning is an integral part of teaching as learning derives from the interaction between person current competence and his/her life experience and these are also facilitated by dialogues with practitioners in the community (Alexander et al. 2008: 112). This is a kind of “apprenticeship” model of learning which enables learners to have “legitimate peripheral participation” by participating the lesson actively.

What is more learners also have chance to make controlled practice through the combination of listening and speaking. Activity 2 and 3 in practically speaking offers a controlled language practice by giving some phrases used to narrate a film or a book and then check their answers from the audio. As Tomlinson (1998) remarked that learners should be involved in the teaching process actively through different tasks so as to obtain permanent learning and in this chapter learners have opportunity to engage with a number of activities which assist them to learn how to deal with cross-cultural differences in professional life.

By the aspect of skills development speaking is the main skill in this chapter. The other skills are listening and reading but they keep in background when compared with speaking. It is obviously seen that each part has necessarily at least one activity for speaking and sometimes combination of skills appears in some sections such as case study. The case study combines reading with speaking by asking learners to discuss the problems mentioned in the text. Therefore it is possible to say that this chapter has a functional/ task-based syllabus in which learners involve in the lesson actively by means of different tasks and learn to use functional language in certain situations (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). On the other hand this chapter has no writing part so learners do not practice writing throughout the chapter. Lastly as it is understood from the task types I can conclude that this chapter addresses to interactive learners who are more likely to learn by sharing or discussing their ideas with each other. Also business is an area which requires to interact with people. Therefore it is quite usual to find communicative activities in this chapter and business textbooks.

3.1.5. Role of The Material

In order to provide effective teaching learners need to be exposed to meaningful input and exercises to practice the language in different ways (Krashen, 1985, cited in Tomlinson 2003). Furthermore, it is significant to provide a material which includes sufficient and proper exercises to practice language skills since experimental learning helps learners. Another crucial point is to present the language in content as decontextualized items make difficult to understand the language. (Tomlinson, 2003).

The chapter I analysed teaches learners to practice the language in contexts related to culture rather than presenting. To illustrate this, after the reading passage “working across cultures” learners practice the input by means of vocabulary and speaking tasks. Similar to this grammar rules are not presented deductively but they are seen in the reading passage and learners practice the rules with examples. By taking into account these points it is possible to say that this chapter focuses on language practice. On the other hand it serves a resource for learners by the aspect of teaching “key points” and “tip” tables in which useful expressions take place. Learners can do self-study and develop their knowledge of vocabulary and speaking skills. Also this chapter based largely on language practice rather than presentation.

3.1.6. Clarity of the Material

It is important for a material to have clear layout and enough space for students to use while studying. Also a material should use attractive visuals, tables or diagrams in order to present the topic clearly. The chapter I evaluated has all these facilities suggested by Ellis and Johnson (1994). For example to illustrate the behaviours peculiar to Indonesian culture are demonstrated with pictures to increase the students' awareness. In addition to these as I mentioned previously the objectives of this chapter are presented in a context through reading texts or audios and tasks are also designed in terms of these contexts. Overall this chapter has enough attractiveness to be used for teaching business English.

3.2. Research Perspective

Research perspective deals with the question of to what extent does the material include realistic items such as authentic text, cultural differences and real life situations. These are the significant factors that increase the usefulness of material. In this part I will evaluate the chapter "Culture" in terms of these elements.

3.2.1. Authenticity

Authentic materials can be newspapers, magazines, brochures or any type of material which is not produced for teaching but used by teachers as a material in classroom (Frendo, 2005). Authenticity is the fundamental concept for business English materials since it shows the use real life language to the learners. Use of authentic materials is quite beneficial as they provide learners opportunity to work with realistic data (Brown, 1994).

The material I analysed begins with an authentic reading text taken from a research study about cultural differences in the world. The language level and the activities are suitable for upper intermediate learners and the topic is relevant to the main objective of working with different cultures. Ellis and Johnson (1994) highlight that authentic materials can be efficient to increase the ability of a certain skill such as reading or writing. Also they can be used as an extra activity to enhance the learners interest in business English classes. When the authentic text is examined it is seen that it is used in order to introduce the topic to learners rather than developing their reading skills. The only task for the text is discussion about cultures and doing vocabulary exercise.

3.2.2. Culture

Cultural similarities and differences are one of the key points that should be considered in teaching settings. The reason why is culture has a high importance since it determines the conduct of the course and relationship between learners and teacher (Robinson, 1991). The selected chapter also deals with the culture and it seems that each culture is treated equally. English is introduced as an international language learnt as second or foreign language in business world. Therefore, this chapter could be utilised in different countries as it is not designed according to a particular country and culture. Additionally English is used as lingua franca in international workplaces and people need to be aware of cultural differences and know how to deal with these differences properly. This chapter could be used in my teaching context or other contexts as it is not written for a specific nationality. It treats all nations equally.

3.3.3. Real-life Language

Real-life language is needed to be reflected in teaching materials since it enables learners to cope with the situations that they have in their professional lives. This chapter presents speaking tasks in which learners can use real-life language. In addition to speaking tasks in the case study part learners use real language so as to discuss the problem and find solutions. According to Frendo (2005) case studies teaches learners to consider business issues from different aspects and use the different language skills. In this case study learners asked to read, discuss and report the situation in the text orally. Thanks to this part learners practice a real-life situation and develop their communicative skills by using real-life language.

4. DEVELOPING THE CHAPTER

The main objective of selected material is teaching to deal with cross-cultural differences in business life by using proper language. It is generally seen that all tasks are designed within the frame of culture so the tasks and the topic are consistently organised. Also the material is supported by authentic texts, visuals and tables. Even though it presents a clear and satisfying display, it is needed to be developed by the aspect of some points.

Firstly, the majority of the tasks are weighted more on speaking with pair work as the major aim is developing communication with different cultures. Needless to say this is an efficient way of developing speaking skills. However, these should be varied with different activities. For example, learners can be watched short videos for business meetings with international participants before the tasks in order to gain them general idea about the cultural differences. Moreover, role-play and simulations are the activities which contribute the teaching process especially if learners are professionals (Robinson, 1991). I consider that simulations can be useful for my learner group as they are professionals and good level of English.

Another significant skill for business learners is writing which is widely used in business world. Written communication has a great importance as it enables people to store information and saves time and space. Nonetheless the material has no part for writing. From my perspective a writing activity could be placed in the case study by asking them to compose a written report instead of verbal.

Furthermore it is pointed out by Frenco (2005) that using corpora is a useful tool to teach business English as it has data from real language both spoken and written. Learners could be taught specific lexis or grammar by means of concordance lines. Also learners can be asked to create their own concordance lines to practice the lexis or grammar they have learnt. In this material grammar topic is past tenses and I consider that corpora can be used to demonstrate the uses of past tenses. In addition to grammar the phrases used in past tenses in task 2 can be exemplified through corpora. On the other hand corpora can be ensured by the teacher. Teacher can bring concordance lines to illustrate the use of lexis.

Also the material densifies largely on language practice rather than testing. The textbook has language testing parts but they do not take place not in each unit but in another part which tests the knowledge of four units together. In my opinion it is more beneficial to have a testing in each unit in order to determine the points that learners are successful and unsuccessful.

5. CONCLUSION

The material I evaluated is upper-intermediate level Business Results Student's Book. I chose to analyse unit 14 "Culture" and I evaluated it in terms of considerations outlined by Ellis and Johnson (1994). When I analysed the material elaborately I concluded that the material is suitable for my teaching context to large extent. As I stated earlier my class is a homogenous

group. By the aspect of their ages, language levels, needs from the course are common and these are the factors that help me to select the material. The reason why is it is easier to plan a lesson for homogeneous groups as they share the same or similar backgrounds, interests and expectations. Thus, they are more likely to be motivated with the activities as long as the material meets their needs directly (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998). Also the material could be motivating for my learners as it presents interactive activities that they discuss and work with their partners during the lesson. It is also useful for their skills development since they have chance to use their knowledge communicatively in realistic contents.

The material also is suitable for teachers who prefer to behave as a facilitator and a guide rather than director. When the tasks are examined it appears that they are based on student interaction and it has no specific part that requires teacher's presentation. This kind of role is parallel to my intentions as a teacher. I believe that teacher should organise the lesson and assist learners during the process. By using this material I can behave as their colleagues and create a more comfortable teaching environment. Overall I can sum up by saying that learning cross-cultural communication is the basic need of my context and this material fits my learners' needs by means of communicative tasks. However it might be developed at some points that mentioned in the previous part but in general it is a useful resource to teach how to interact with people from different cultures in workplace.

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APPENDIX 1:

. Pedagogical Considerations (from Ellis and Johnson 1994, pp.128-129)

1) What kind of learner is the material aimed at?

- work area
- work experience
- language level
- cultural background
- educational background
- age
- learning style

2) What are the main language objectives?

- skills
- functions
- structures
- vocabulary

3) What are the main topic areas covered?

- Does the material introduce the subject?
- Does it use the topic area as a contextual background?
- Is the coverage of the topic content high in credibility?

4) What is the main methodological approach?

- demonstration of language in context through text, tape or video
- explanations of grammatical rules
- presentation of vocabulary
- controlled practice of language
- open practice of language
- skills development

- a combination of these?

5) What is the role of the material?

- to present language?
- to practice language?
- to provide a resource for the learner
- to check or test knowledge

6) Is the material attractive?

- clear layout
- good use of space
- useful, clear pictures and diagrams
- interesting context and tasks



14 Culture

Learning objectives in this unit

- Talking about cultural differences
- Narrating past events
- Giving explanations
- Talking about films, TV and books
- Talking about past events using past continuous, past simple and past perfect

Case study

- Investigating an intercultural communication problem

Starting point

- 1 A common piece of advice to people travelling to another country is 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'. What does this expression mean?
- 2 How much do you change your behaviour if you visit another country for work? Or as a tourist? Why?

Working with words | Cultural differences

- 1 If you do business with a different culture, what is it useful to know about that culture? Read the text and compare your ideas.

Working across cultures



Professor Geert Hofstede of the Netherlands conducted a study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. His research, based on a large database of employees' values collected by IBM, covers 74 countries and regions.

Working, entertaining, negotiating and corresponding with colleagues from different cultures can be quite difficult. One misunderstanding could have a negative effect on months of work. Understanding intercultural differences can help communication with colleagues from other cultures. According to Hofstede, if we compare the key factors in our own culture with those in another culture, we can predict possible difficulties.

Hierarchical or egalitarian?

Some cultures, like Malaysia and Indonesia, are **hierarchical** with a caste or class system; and there is often a big difference in wealth between individuals. At work, employees respect authority, don't usually take responsibility and have a **formal** relationship with their manager. Other cultures, like Australia and Denmark, are more **liberal** and **egalitarian**. Managers give their employees

responsibility and often socialize with them.

Individualistic or collectivist?

Individualistic cultures, such as the US and the Netherlands, think that individual rights and freedom of speech are important. Personal goals, choices and achievements are encouraged. In more **collectivist** cultures, such as Korea and Colombia, this self-centred approach is discouraged. The group, such as the family, has a big influence on people's lives and is often seen as more important than business. Companies have a strong work group mentality and praise is given to teams rather than individuals.

Masculine or feminine?

In 'masculine' societies, like Brazil and Mexico, the male dominates the power structure. Competitiveness and assertiveness are encouraged, and the accumulation of wealth

is important. Many employees 'live to work' and take short holidays. In 'feminine' societies, such as Sweden and Finland, family, personal relationships, and quality of life are more important. Conflicts are resolved through negotiation, and people 'work to live', enjoying longer holidays and flexible working hours.

Cautious or risk-taking?

Some cultures, especially those with a long history such as Greece and Portugal, are quite **cautious**. They often have religious backgrounds and resist new ideas. At work, people prefer to follow **strict** rules and do things as they always have been done. Other cultures, like Jamaica and Singapore, often have a younger history and are willing to take risks. They are more **open** to new ideas, are less **accepting** of rules and regulations, and are more likely to welcome change.



2 Read the text again. According to Hofstede, which culture(s)

- 1 think family life is important?
- 2 like to be very polite to their manager and / or follow rules and regulations?
- 3 adapt easily to change?

3 Which of the key factors would you use to describe your own culture?

4 Work with a partner. Match the adjectives in bold in the text to these definitions.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 very polite: _____ | 6 allowing freedom: _____ |
| 2 organized in levels: _____ | 7 shared by all the group: _____ |
| 3 classless: _____ | 8 must be obeyed: _____ |
| 4 careful: _____ | 9 do something without complaint: _____ |
| 5 receptive of new ideas: _____ | 10 focusing on one person: _____ |

5 Discuss how each adjective in 4 could be seen as both positive and negative.

6 55▶ Listen to two people talking on the subject of culture.

- 1 Summarize the main points of the first speaker's story.
- 2 What type of course is the second speaker talking about? What do people learn about on the course?

7 Use these words from audio 55▶ to complete the sentences.

*aware sensitive familiar respectful
tolerant informed adjust used*

- 1 People from the Czech Republic don't like to offend other people, so they're always very _____ to their guests' feelings.
- 2 I found it quite hard to _____ to the hierarchical culture in Thailand – my culture is much more egalitarian.
- 3 I wasn't very _____ with the way business is done in Romania so I was surprised by the amount of bureaucracy.
- 4 I wasn't _____ of the custom of greeting the oldest person first in China so I'm afraid I offended my host.
- 5 Mexico is a hierarchical culture so it's important to be _____ of people of a higher rank.
- 6 My boss sent me on a cross-cultural training course so I was _____ about business etiquette in Brazil before I was seconded there.
- 7 I'm _____ to people being direct in my own country so the indirect communication of Singaporeans seemed strange to me.
- 8 My colleague is always very punctual so he wasn't very _____ of the Greek custom of arriving late for dinner!

8 Use five of the words in 7 to make questions to ask a partner.

» For more exercises, go to **Practice file 14** on page 128.

9 Work with a partner. Prepare some information for someone from a different culture who is coming to work in your company. Think about the things below and explain how aspects of your culture influence expected behaviour.

- how people behave in meetings
- relationships between different members of staff, e.g. formality
- individual efforts and teamwork
- responsibility
- company policy
- social events

Business communication skills

Context

'Critical incidents' are communication situations which the participants find problematic or confusing. They often consist of a misunderstanding, a linguistic mistake, or some kind of cultural faux pas. They are events that can highlight different cultural beliefs and values. They are about ways of behaving that might be interpreted in different ways by different people, particularly when people from different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other.

Exchanging information | Narrating past events | Giving explanations



1 56▶ Listen to two conversations describing critical incidents. Which two of these situations is mentioned in each conversation?

- 1 importance of punctuality
- 2 questioning an authority figure
- 3 importance of seniority and titles
- 4 small talk before meetings
- 5 saying 'yes' to avoid loss of face

2 56▶ Listen again. Complete the sentences with these phrases.

*in the end that's but then it came about because of as time went by
so that was it wasn't until due to so what that was when*

Critical incident 1

- 1 ... for years. As _____, I noticed that things weren't being done that I'd requested ...
- 2 ... it wasn't done. _____ I was aware we had a problem.
- 3 Well _____ understandable.
- 4 And _____ I talked to a Korean friend that I realized what was wrong.
- 5 My team didn't want to refuse my request _____ respect for my seniority.

Critical incident 2

- 6 Yes ... _____ I realized they hadn't actually told him this.
- 7 ... authority figure. _____ the first problem solved.
- 8 _____ did you do?
- 9 Well, _____ I asked Anna, a Polish colleague.
- 10 Yes. _____ the lack of information about why we were questioning them.

3 Which of the phrases in 2 do the speakers use to

- a help tell the story of the incident and indicate the sequence of events? _____
- b explain the reason for the incident? _____
- c show they are listening / encourage more information? _____

» For more exercises, go to **Practice file 14** on page 128.

4 Work with a partner. Read the culture tip about Indonesia on page 87. Look at the pictures and work together to tell the story of the critical incident.

Tip | It seems (that) ...

Use *it seems (that) ...* to depersonalize a situation or avoid blaming.

It seems that none of them wanted to question an authority figure.



Doing business in Indonesia

It's important to offer refreshment to guests. This is seen as respectful and polite. Guests should wait before drinking – their host will indicate when drinking can commence. Often there is a pause between receiving the drink and being asked to drink. The sign to drink may indicate that business is over. Make sure you wait and follow your host's example.



1 Last year – Indonesia with colleague – meeting to negotiate new contract



2 Near end of meeting – refreshments offered



3 Picked up my cup – colleague said 'wait'



4 Negotiation completed – host invited us to take refreshments

5 Work with a partner. Think of a situation where there was a misunderstanding between you and someone from a different culture. It could be when on business or on holiday. Tell your partner about the incident. Use these ideas if necessary.

- in a restaurant – ordering food and drink
- asking for directions
- on the telephone
- talking about own country and background
- deadlines and dates
- being unaware of traditions and cultural differences

Interactive Workbook Email

Key expressions

Giving an explanation

- ... due to ...
- It seems that ...
- The reason being that ...
- It came about because of ...

Linking the narrative

- It wasn't until ... that ...
- Luckily ...
- And / But then ...
- What's more, ...
- Despite ...

Time expressions

- While / When ...
- At first ...
- After that ...
- As time went by, ...
- In the end ...

Encouraging more information

- So what did you do?
- What had you done?
- And what did (she) say?
- What happened (next / then / after that)?
- That's (understandable).
- Go on. / Oh?
- What was (her) view?
- So how did you ...?

Summarizing the narrative

- That was when ...
- So that was the first problem ...
- All in all ...
- It really surprised me, (but it worked).
- I was extremely disappointed.

Interactive Workbook Phrasebank

Practically speaking | Talking about films, TV and books

1 57▷ Listen to work colleagues chatting in a break. What are they talking about in each of the three extracts?

2 Which of these phrases can you use to talk about

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 a film? | 3 a book? |
| 2 a TV programme? | 4 all three? |

*I don't get / have much time to ... There's a ... twist at the end. (It's) a blockbuster.
 I'm completely hooked on it. It's a real page-turner. I can't miss an episode.
 I'd definitely recommend it. (It's) a box office hit. I couldn't put it down.
 I tend to channel-hop. It's set in ... / It's about ... I've just finished ...
 What I really can't stand is ... It's very well written. ... a star-studded cast ...
 I just like to unwind in front of ... (You'll be) on the edge of your seat.*

3 57▷ Listen again and check your answers.

4 Work with a partner. Choose a film, TV programme or book and tell your partner about it. Find out what your partner likes. Refer to the Useful phrases on page 135.

Language at work | Narrative tenses – past continuous, past simple and past perfect

1 Read this supposedly true story about a billionaire entrepreneur. Number the events a–i in the order they happened.

One evening in December, an American billionaire was driving down the motorway in New Jersey. It was raining hard, but the road was busy as thousands of people were leaving for their Christmas holidays.

Suddenly, the car had a flat tyre, and the chauffeur pulled over to the side. When he opened the boot, he realized that he had left the tool kit behind. While he was standing there in the rain, wondering what to do, another motorist saw him and stopped.

Together, they changed the wheel, and as the man was leaving, the billionaire wound down the window. He asked if there was anything he could do to thank him, and the man said his wife might like a small bunch of flowers.

Two weeks later, a bunch of flowers arrived at the man's house. With it there was a small note from the billionaire, thanking the man for his help and telling him that the whole of his mortgage had been paid off.

- ___ a The chauffeur and the motorist changed the wheel.
- ___ b The car had a flat tyre.
- ___ c The billionaire set off down the motorway.
- ___ d The chauffeur realized he couldn't change the wheel.
- ___ e The chauffeur left the tool kit behind.
- ___ f The billionaire paid off the mortgage.
- ___ g A passing motorist stopped to help.
- ___ h Some flowers arrived at the house.
- ___ i The billionaire spoke to the man.

2 Underline all the verb forms in the story. What tense is used to

- 1 set the scene and give background information at the beginning of the story?
- 2 describe the main action and events in the story?
- 3 talk about an action in progress that is interrupted by another action?
- 4 talk about an action that happened before another past action?

» For more information and exercises, go to **Practice file 14** on page 129.

3 Complete these sentences with the past continuous, past simple or past perfect form of the verbs in brackets.

- 1 They cancelled my flight because it _____ (snow) so I _____ (sleep) in the airport lounge.
- 2 I didn't want to interrupt my colleague while he _____ (talk) on the phone so I _____ (send) him an email instead.
- 3 I felt very embarrassed when I realized that I _____ (forget) my host's name so I _____ (apologize) quickly.
- 4 During the time I _____ (stay) in Denmark, I didn't know whether to arrive on time for dinner so I _____ (decide) to arrive five minutes late.
- 5 My host offered me a small gift just as I _____ (leave) for the airport and I _____ (give) her a souvenir from my own country.
- 6 I didn't know if the party was formal or informal because I _____ (lose) my invitation so I _____ (wear) a smart outfit.

4 Work with a partner. Take turns to talk about one of the situations below. Give some background information about the situation, explain how it came about what happened and how it was resolved.

- a time when you had a minor accident or injury of some kind
- a time when you had car problems
- a time when you were extremely late for something

📄 » Interactive Workbook » Exercises and Tests

Investigating an intercultural communication problem

Background

Frustrating time for PCR

PCR is a medium-sized company based in Germany. It produces software solutions for banks and has acquired a new client – a large, well-established bank in Malaysia. Since finalizing contracts well over a year ago, very little progress appears to have been made. Employees working on the project at PCR are frustrated because everything is taking so long and 'cut over' (the transfer from the old system to the new system) has been postponed for the fifth time. There seems to be reluctance

from the Malaysian bank to take on the new system. Constant changes are being made to suit the customer – something that PCR normally works on once the system is up and running, so users can input their problems. Training has taken place on an ad hoc basis and hasn't run very smoothly – it has often been decided on at the last minute so PCR doesn't have much time to prepare. Communication has been unpredictable and difficult, and critical decisions haven't been made.

Discussion

- 1 What problems might a company face when changing to a new IT software system?
- 2 What could be the reasons for the difficulties that PCR is experiencing with its Malaysian client?

Task

Work in groups of four. You each have some further information about PCR's situation. Student A, turn to File 32 on page 145. Student B, turn to File 40 on page 147. Student C, turn to File 45 on page 148. Student D, turn to File 29 on page 144.

- 1 Read your information and make notes on the problem. Think of one or two possible reasons why the problem has occurred.
- 2 Take turns to report your information to your colleagues using your notes. Give reasons why you think the problem occurred. While you listen to your colleagues make notes under these headings.
 - Problem
 - Possible reasons for problem
- 3 Discuss and analyse the situation. Try to establish what went wrong and why, and what lessons can be learned. (Read the cultural information about Malaysia in File 49 on page 149 to help you.)
- 4 Compose a short verbal report about the situation. Give your report to the class and compare your analysis of the situation.

The Expert View

We have a natural tendency to interpret the behaviour and attitudes of individuals from different cultures according to our own pre-conceived ideas of cultural norms. But if we focus selectively only on actions or words that appear to fit these pre-formed views, this can lead to a serious misinterpretation of interactions. To understand other people's cultural frames of reference and value systems, we need to be self-aware and, by watching and listening for all the signals, remain sensitive to the nuances of communication. If we are patient and respectful, make an effort to 'put ourselves in another person's shoes', and to build trust, we can minimize the potential for misunderstanding.

David Simmons, International Development Director & Graham Heard, Lecturer in Languages
Cranfield School of Management



Case study