



## Social English and cultural awareness

### Social English

The mind map opposite shows some phrases for typical social situations, and the exercises on pages 74–75 refer to these. The remainder of this page gives an introduction to the closely-related topic of 'cross-cultural awareness'.

### Diversity and tolerance

Here is a question: *Do you think that Americans are more outgoing and informal while Brits are more private and reserved?* We feel instinctively that there is some truth in this.

However, having made a generalization, our next reaction is usually: *But wait, that's a stereotype, and anyway it depends on so many other things: age, ethnic group, regional differences, not to mention the individual person.* Everyone will have their own views. The point is simply this: to recognize that the way we think and behave is not the only way. When dealing with people from other cultures, and especially when actually doing business in another country, we need to observe and listen and show respect. That doesn't mean we have to abandon our normal way of doing things – we are also entitled to respect and tolerance from others, and we cannot just change our personalities. But if we want to have successful friendships and business relationships in an international context, then we have to understand and accept the differences.

### National differences

Writers in the field of cross-cultural awareness look for opposing behaviours (or values) and then place different cultures at different points along the scale. Here is a simplified version of some well-known cultural differences; many are closely related. Notice how the descriptions are all neutral. There are no positive or negative connotations.

- **outgoing / informal** (share feelings easily with a wide circle of acquaintances) vs **private / reserved** (share feelings with care, and only with close friends and family)
- **live to work** (status comes through professional achievement) vs **work to live** (living a full, rounded, stress-free life is more important than just having money)
- **order** (the rules are the rules – society suffers if you break them) vs **flexibility** (sometimes we can ignore rules – the context, your conscience and friends are more important)
- **hierarchical** (we need clear direction from above to do our jobs properly) vs **democratic** (power should be distributed – everyone's opinion is important)
- **loose time** (deadlines are guidelines) vs **strict time** (delay is failure)

- **formality in names** (using *Mr X, Doctor X, Professor X* when speaking directly to someone) vs **informality in names** (moving quickly to first names, even for your boss)
- **expressive body language** (people wave their arms, move chairs around freely in meetings, look each other in the eye) vs **restrained body language** (small, subtle facial expressions carry large meanings, physical contact in public or long eye contact is uncomfortable)
- **large personal space** (people stand at a distance when talking) vs **close personal space** (people stand near to each other)
- **self-determination** (we make free choices and control our lives) vs **fatalistic** (our lives are determined by god or destiny or the government)
- **personal fulfilment** (individual initiative and achievement are valued) vs **group fulfilment** (group harmony is valued – Who needs initiative when duties are fixed by tradition, leaders or team needs?)
- **merit** (respect is given to those who have earned it) vs **standing** (respect is given to those with the right age / social class / rank)
- **relationship** (if we can get along well, we can do a good job) vs **task** (if we can do a good job together, we might get closer as people)
- **welcoming risk** ('go for it!') vs **avoiding risk** ('better safe than sorry')
- **innovative** (new is exciting and always best) vs **traditional** ('if it isn't broken, why fix it?')
- **open disagreement** (competition between ideas is necessary to make the best decision) vs **subtle disagreement** (no-one must lose 'face' by being proved wrong in public, and consensus must be built slowly, so disagreement is signalled using code such as *Really?* or *I'm not sure about that.*)
- **multi-tasking** (people handle several things at the same time) vs **linear tasking** (people do one thing properly, and then move on)
- **lunch is a snack** (business and food do not mix) vs **lunch is a pleasure** (and the restaurant is a place to consolidate a business relationship)
- **pride in your country** (more than just football) vs **foreign is best** ('the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence')

Discuss these points, using your own national culture and others as examples. You can refer to the scale below. '1' means the culture is an extreme example of the behaviour/value mentioned first. '10' means it is an extreme example of the one mentioned second.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**Preparing to go**

Is that the time? I ought to make a move. > Oh, so soon? You don't have to rush off just yet do you?

**Going**

Well, I'd better be off now.  
Well, I really must be going now.  
It's been really nice meeting you.

**Thanking**

Thank you so much for ... I really appreciate it.  
It was really kind of you to ...

**Goodbye**

Have a safe trip!  
Say 'hello' to (Isabel) for me.  
Give my regards to (Michael).  
Best of luck for ...  
Keep in touch!

Saying 'hello'

**Introductions**

Formal: Allow me to introduce (Klaus Neuberger).

Informal: (Klaus), this is (Stefania). (Stefania), (Klaus).

**Visitors**

Hello, it's (Ruth Taylor), isn't it?  
It's very nice to meet you, (Ruth).

Do have a seat.

Did you find us OK?

How was the flight?

Is this your first time in Cologne?

**Ritual**

How are you? > Fine, thanks, and you?  
> Fine.

Nice / Pleased to meet you. >

Nice / Pleased to meet you, too.

**Real question**

How's it going?

How's life?

Leaving



SOCIAL ENGLISH

Showing interest

**Preparing for difficult news**

Have you got a moment?  
I have an apology to make.  
There's something I've been meaning to tell you.

**Action**

Just bear with me for a moment.  
I'll see what I can do.  
Don't worry, I'll deal with it.  
I'll do my best to sort it out.

**Big requests**

I was wondering if you could ...  
Is there any chance you could ...  
Would you mind ...? > No, not at all.

**Apologies and Replies**

I do apologize, I didn't mean to ...  
I'm so sorry, I didn't realize that ...  
That's quite all right.  
Don't worry, it happens all the time.

Problems

**Reacting to good news**

You must be delighted!  
Wow, that's fantastic

**Reacting to bad news**

How awful!  
What a nightmare!  
What a pity!  
Poor you!

**Reacting with surprise**

You're joking! (UK)  
You're kidding! (US)  
That's strange!  
Really?

**Active listening**

Mhm.  
Uh-huh.  
Right.  
Really!

**Add a follow-up question**

So what happened next?  
Why was that, then?  
How come?  
(= Why / How did that happen?)  
What for? (= Why?)

**17.1 Underline the words that a native speaker would probably say in the introductions and greetings below.**

- 1 Diana, *here / this* is Steve.
- 2 Nice to meet you. ➔ Nice to meet you, *also / too*.
- 3 *Pleasure / Pleased* to meet you.
- 4 Hi, (Kristina), how are you *going / doing*?
- 5 How's it *going / doing*?
- 6 How's *life / the life*?
- 7 May I *present / introduce* myself?
- 8 You *must / should* be Chris Wood, is that right?
- 9 How are you? ➔ *Fine / Well*, thanks, and you?
- 10 Hi, (Peter), *good / I'm happy* to see you again.
- 11 Thank you so much for coming. I really *appreciate / appreciate it*.
- 12 Can I *have / take* your coat?
- 13 Did you find *us / here* okay?
- 14 Water? *With gas or without gas? / Still or sparkling*?

**17.2 Tick (✓) the responses that are both possible and appropriate in a business context. Cross (X) the ones that are not. More than one may be correct.**

- 1 Allow me to introduce Petra Reinhart.
  - a) Pleased to meet you. ☐
  - b) How are you? ☐
  - c) How do you do? ☐
- 2 Hi! How's it going?
  - a) Nice to meet you. ☐
  - b) Fine, fine. And you? ☐
  - c) Actually, I'm having one or two personal problems at the moment. ☐
- 3 Did you arrive last night?
  - a) Yes, of course. ☐
  - b) Yes, that's right. ☐
  - c) Yes, certainly. ☐
- 4 Could you bring me a glass of water?
  - a) Yes, of course. ☐
  - b) Yes, that's right. ☐
  - c) Yes, certainly. ☐
- 5 Would you mind opening the window?
  - a) Yes, of course. ☐
  - b) Yes, I mind. ☐
  - c) No, not at all. ☐
- 6 Do you mind if I open the window?
  - a) Please do. ☐
  - b) I do. ☐
  - c) I'd rather you didn't, actually. ☐
- 7 Wonderful food!
  - a) Yes, I think so. ☐
  - b) Yes, certainly. ☐
  - c) Yes, fantastic. ☐

**17.3 Put the lines of this dialogue into the correct order 1-9. You are introducing Leon to Teodora at a conference coffee break.**

- ☒ 1 a) **You:** Do you two know each other?
- ☐ 2 b) **You:** Let me introduce you, then. Leon, this is Teodora. Teodora, Leon.
- ☐ 3 c) **You:** Leon is at UBS – we used to work together in Zurich.
- ☐ 4 d) **Teodora:** No, we've never met.
- ☐ 5 e) **Teodora:** Yes, you too.
- ☐ 6 f) **Teodora:** Ah, so you're at UBS. That's interesting. I work in the area of security for online banking.
- ☐ 7 g) **Teodora:** Of course, I'd be happy to explain. Perhaps we could have lunch together?
- ☐ 8 h) **Leon:** Hi, Teodora. Nice to meet you.
- ☐ 9 i) **Leon:** Really? That's a very important field for us. I'd like to find out more about what you do.

**Notice in this dialogue how the person doing the introductions (You) gives some personal information in line c) to help the conversation to continue.**

**17.4 Make phrases by matching words from the first column with words from the second.**

- |                 |                                   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Wow, that's   | kidding, right? ('joking' in BrE) |
| 2 You're        | change.                           |
| 3 How           | be delighted!                     |
| 4 Poor          | fantastic!                        |
| 5 You must      | news! Congratulations!            |
| 6 Yes, of       | done!                             |
| 7 What a        | you.                              |
| 8 That makes a  | awful. I'm so sorry.              |
| 9 Well          | course. Sure.                     |
| 10 That's great | nightmare!                        |

**17.5 Look at how B shows interest in this dialogue:**

A: *Mary went into hospital again.*

B: *Did she? Poor her. Which hospital?*

B replies in three stages. First with an 'echo question', then with a personal response, and finally with a follow-up question to keep the conversation going.

**Respond to each piece of news below in the same way. First use a phrase from Box A below, then Box B, and finally Box C.**

1 I'm going to France next week for a holiday.

2 Hey, guess what. I got that job I wanted.

3 Apparently, hundreds of people were made homeless when the Danube flooded.

4 My car is being repaired – again. It's going to be three days before I get it back.

5 Dave arrived an hour late this morning.

Box A

Are you? Did he? Did you? Is it? Were they?

Box B

Three days – what a nightmare!

Lucky you, I wish I was going! How awful for them.

That's not like him. Congratulations – you must be delighted!

Box C

What are your responsibilities going to be?

What did the boss say? Can I give you a lift anywhere?

Which areas were affected? Whereabouts?

**17.6 Complete the two dialogues by using the words in brackets to make whole phrases.**

#### Dialogue 1

**Naomi:** Frank, <sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (have / got / moment?)

**Frank:** Just <sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (bear / me) while I close down this program on my PC. Okay, what's the problem?

**Naomi:** I <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (wondering / if / help me). I tried to import a file into Excel and now the whole spreadsheet just looks like a big mess.

**Frank:** I'm not an expert, but I'll <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (do / best / sort / out).

#### Speaking practice

- Exercises 17.2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 can be read aloud with a partner. Practise them, taking the other role when you finish. Think about intonation: sound friendly and interested.
- Work in pairs.
  - You meet a colleague during the coffee break at an international conference. You have not seen each other for four years.
    - Greet each other and make small talk.
  - Find another pair. One person in each pair knows the other (decide who).
    - Make introductions.
    - Make more small talk.
    - Arrange for all of you to meet in the bar this evening.

#### Dialogue 2

**Emil:** Oh no! How stupid of me!

**Roberta:** What's up?

**Emil:** I <sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (have / apology / make). I've put cream in the soup. I completely forgot you were allergic to dairy products. I'm really sorry, I <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (do it / purpose).

**Roberta:** Don't worry, that's quite alright. It

<sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (happens / time).

**17.7 Complete the explanations by writing Sorry or Excuse me.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ is used: i) before you inconvenience sb; ii) to ask sb to repeat sth (in AmE)
- \_\_\_\_\_ is used: i) after you inconvenience sb; ii) to ask sb to repeat sth (in BrE)

**17.8 Complete these three conversation extracts in a restaurant.**

**Alice:** Is that the time? I ought to <sup>1</sup>m\_ \_ \_ a m\_ \_ \_.

**Pavel:** Oh, <sup>2</sup>s\_ \_ s\_ \_? You don't have to <sup>3</sup>r\_ \_ h o\_ \_ just yet, do you? <sup>4</sup>H\_ \_ a\_ \_ \_ some more coffee?

(10 minutes later ...)

**Alice:** Well, I really <sup>5</sup>m\_ \_ \_ be g\_ \_ \_ now. My flight leaves at 8:30 in the morning. It's been <sup>6</sup>r\_ \_ \_ \_ n\_ \_ \_ m\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ you. And <sup>7</sup>th\_ \_ \_ you s\_ \_ m\_ \_ \_ for showing me round Prague. I <sup>8</sup>r\_ \_ \_ \_ a\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ it.

**Pavel:** Don't <sup>9</sup>me\_ \_ \_ \_ it. It was <sup>10</sup>m\_ \_ p\_ \_ \_ \_ .

(5 minutes later, outside the restaurant ...)

**Pavel:** Have a <sup>11</sup>s\_ \_ \_ tr\_ \_ ! And <sup>12</sup>s\_ \_ 'h\_ \_ \_ \_ ' to Isabel f\_ \_ me.

**Alice:** I will do. And <sup>13</sup>b\_ \_ \_ of l\_ \_ \_ for the presentation next week. Bye!

**Pavel:** Bye! <sup>14</sup>K\_ \_ \_ in t\_ \_ \_ !

c) Now you are in the bar.

- First, each of you tell a short story about something interesting / funny that happened to you recently. The others show interest.
  - Then continue the conversation by talking for a short time about some of the following topics:
    - interests / sports / home
    - current affairs and the economy
    - business travel
    - cultural differences
- d) Now it is the end of the evening.
- Prepare to go and then leave the bar together.
  - Say goodbye.