


4

Good to hear from you again!

AIMS

- Preparing to make a telephone call
- Receiving calls
- Taking and leaving messages

1 Cross-cultural communication on the telephone (1)

-  1 Listen to the three recorded extracts. Match each call to the appropriate picture below. In each case there is a communication problem.

What is the problem, and how could it be solved?



a



b



c

Conversation 1 Picture — Problem —

Solution —

Conversation 2 Picture — Problem —

Solution —

Conversation 3 Picture — Problem —

Solution —

2 Look briefly at the text. Before reading, say:

- a) what it is about
- b) what the message of the cartoon on the next page is
- c) what you think the text probably recommends.

3 Now read the text. Identify the following:

- a) something that is important before telephoning
- b) advice on how to use your voice
- c) advice on checking your understanding
- d) examples of 'explicit' cultures – what does this mean?
- e) examples of 'subtle' cultures – what does this mean?
- f) a possible problem about the phone that you would not have face-to-face.

Telephoning across cultures

Many people are not very confident about using the telephone in English. However, good preparation can make telephoning much easier and more effective. Then, once the call begins, speak slowly and clearly and use simple language.

Check that you understand what has been said. Repeat the most important information, look for confirmation. Ask for repetition if you think it is necessary.

Remember too that different cultures have different ways of using language. Some speak in a very literal way so it is always quite clear what they mean. Others are more indirect, using hints, suggestions and understatement (for example 'not very good results' = 'absolutely disastrous') to put over their message. North America, Scandinavia, Germany and France are 'explicit' countries, while the British have a reputation for not making clear exactly what they mean. One reason for this seems to be that the British use language in a more abstract way than most Americans and continental Europeans. In Britain there are also conventions of politeness and a tendency to avoid showing one's true feelings. For example if a Dutchman says an idea is 'interesting' he means that it is interesting. If an Englishman says that an idea is 'interesting' you have to deduce from the way he says it whether he means it is a good idea or a bad idea.

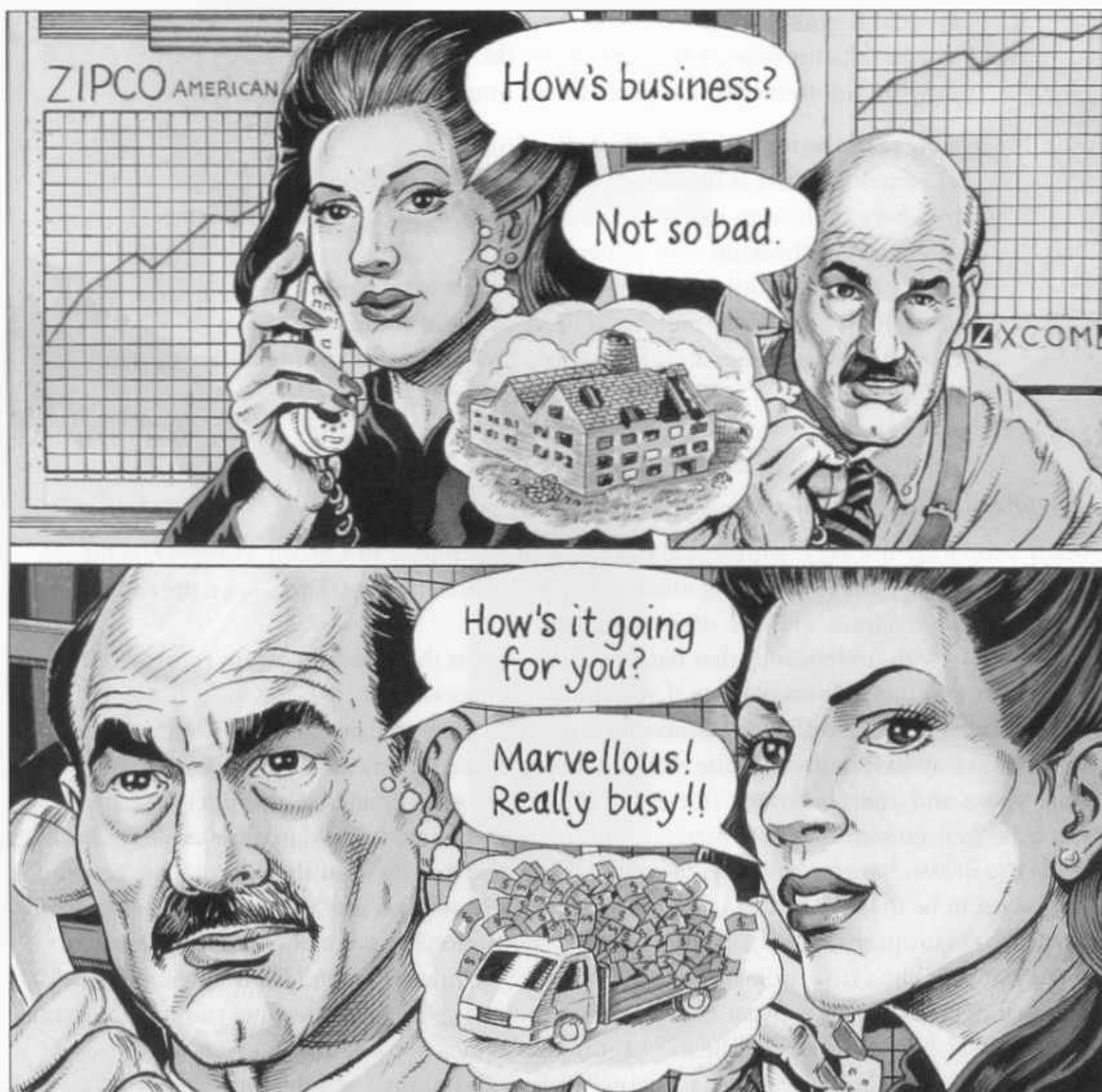
Meanwhile, for similar reasons Japanese, Russians and Arabs – 'subtle' countries – sometimes seem vague and devious to the British. If they say an idea is interesting it may be out of politeness.

The opposite of this is that plain speakers can seem rude and dominating to subtle speakers, as Americans can sound to the British – or the British to the Japanese.

The British have a tendency to engage in small talk at the beginning and end of a telephone conversation. Questions about the weather, health, business in general and what one has been doing recently are all part of telephoning, laying a foundation for the true purpose of the call. At the end of the call there may well be various pleasantries, *Nice talking to you*, *Say hello to the family* (if you have met them) and *Looking forward to seeing you again soon*. A sharp, brief style of talking on the phone may appear unfriendly to a British partner. Not all nationalities are as keen on small talk as the British!

Being aware of these differences can help in understanding people with different cultural traditions. The difficulty on the telephone is that you cannot see the body language to help you.


Adapted from *Faxes, phones and foreigners* by kind permission of British Telecommunications plc.

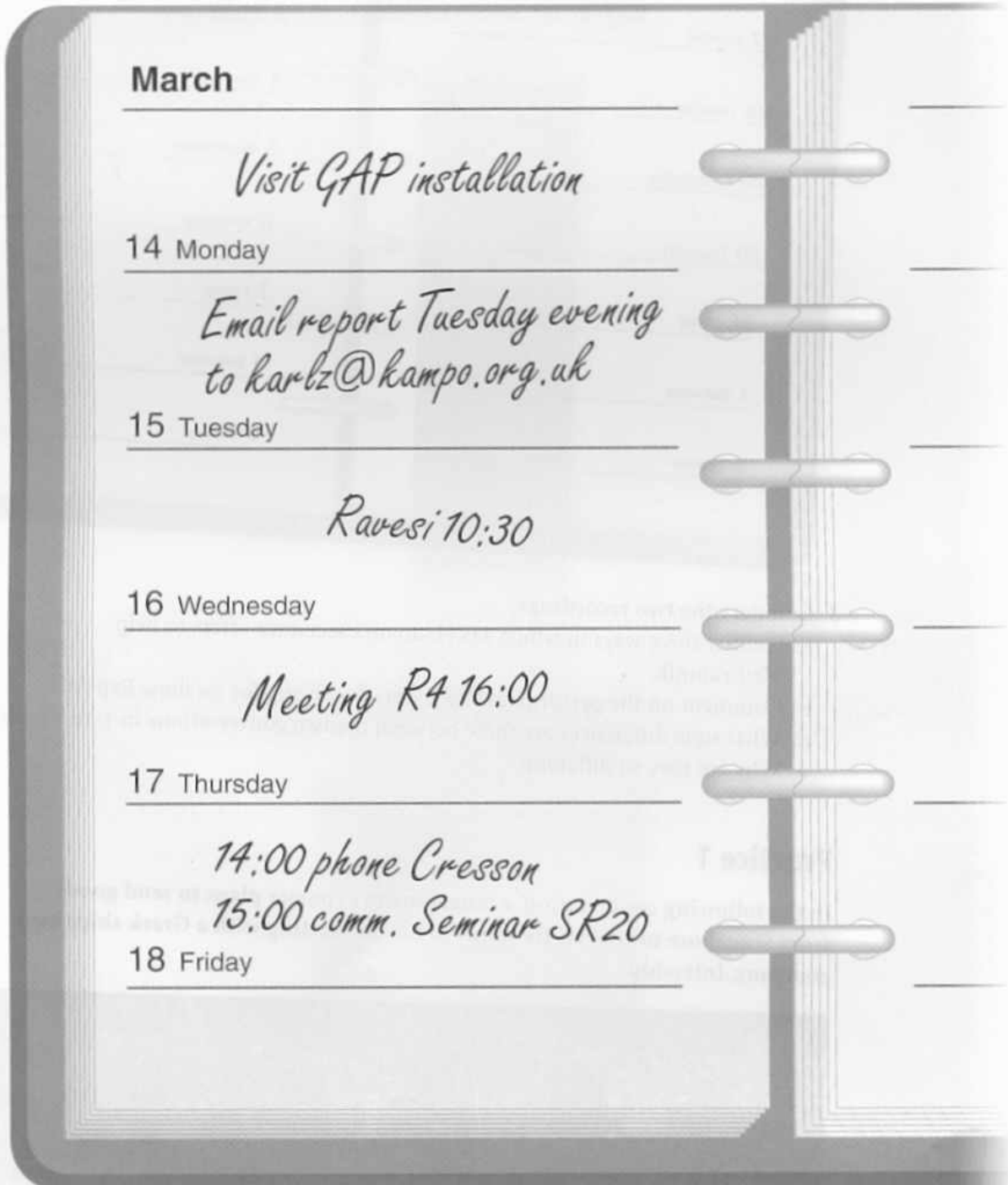


4 Choose the closest definition of the following words from the text.

- 1 literal (l.7)
 - a) direct and clear b) full of literary style c) abstract and complicated
- 2 understatement (l.8)
 - a) kind words b) less strong way of talking c) clever speech
- 3 deduce (l.14)
 - a) reduce b) work out c) disagree
- 4 vague (l.17)
 - a) unclear b) unfriendly c) insincere
- 5 devious (l.17)
 - a) rude b) dishonest c) clever
- 6 pleasantries (l.24)
 - a) questions b) requests c) polite remarks

2 Setting up appointments

-  1 Listen to the recording. Two colleagues, Bob and Lara, need to meet because a third colleague, Leon, has resigned. As you listen, write the details of the appointment they make in Bob's diary.



March

Visit GAP installation

14 Monday

*Email report Tuesday evening
to karlz@kampo.org.uk*

15 Tuesday

Ravesi 10:30

16 Wednesday

Meeting R4 16:00

17 Thursday

*14:00 phone Cresson
15:00 comm. Seminar SR20*

18 Friday

UNIT 4 Good to hear from you again!

- 2 Here Vladimir Kramnik from Moscow calls Joanna Hannam of Swallow Exports Ltd., in London. He wants an appointment with Ms Hannam. Complete the details of the arrangement made in Ms Hannam's diary.

May	June
27 Monday	3 Monday
28 Tuesday	4 Tuesday
29 Wednesday	5 Wednesday
30 Thursday	6 Thursday
31 Friday	7 Friday
1 Saturday	8 Saturday
2 Sunday	9 Sunday

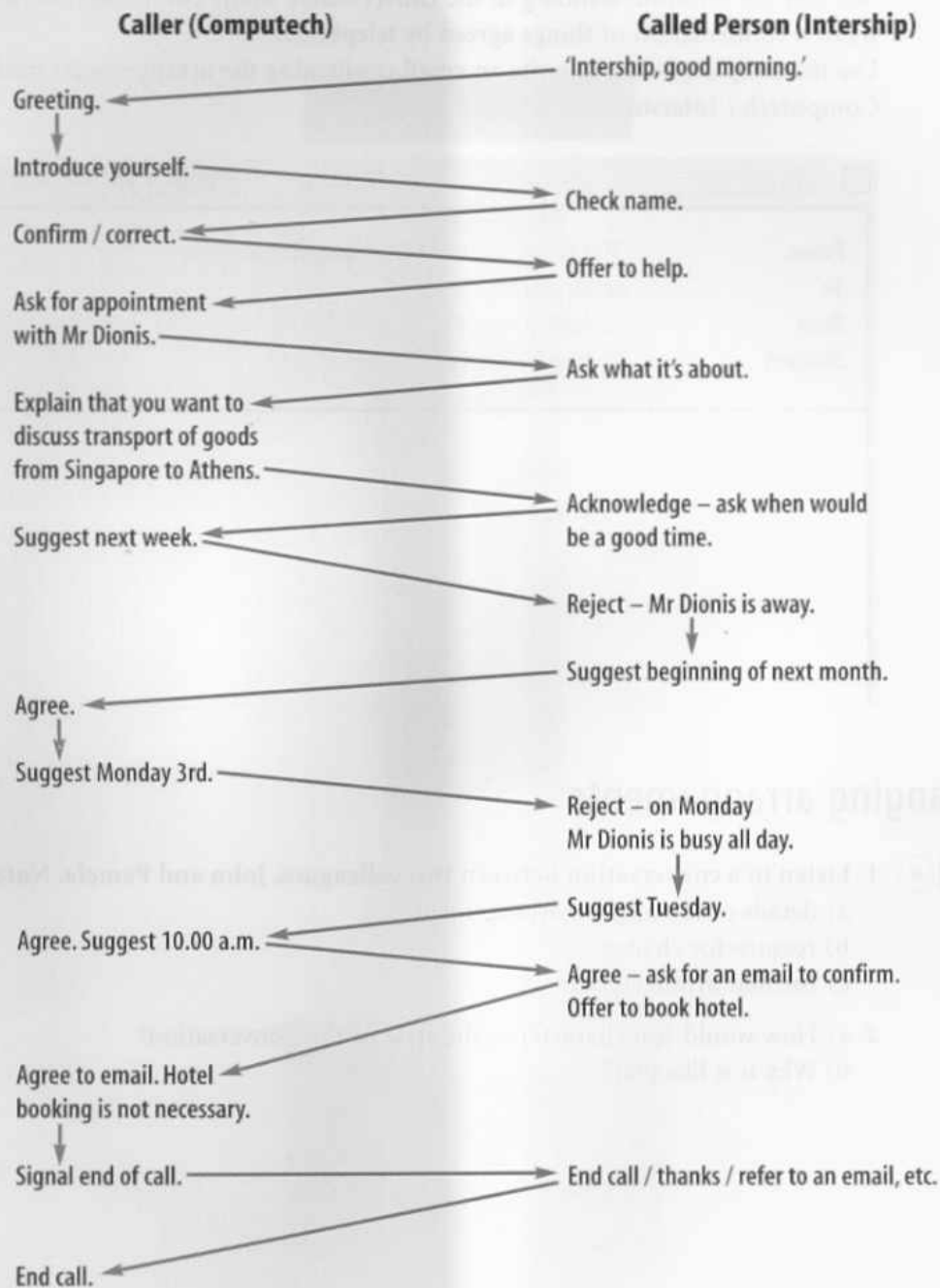
- 3 Compare the two recordings.
- Identify three ways in which Ms Hannam's secretary offers to help Mr Kramnik.
 - Comment on the performance of the staff working for Swallow Exports.
 - What style differences are there between the two conversations in 1 and 2 above? Why are they so different?

Practice 1

In the following conversation, a Singaporean exporter plans to send goods from Singapore to Greece. He wants to have a meeting with a Greek shipping company, Intership.



Suggest suitable phrases for each step in the conversation, then practise the dialogue with a colleague.



Practice 2

Sending an email after a telephone conversation is an important way to check that there has been no misunderstanding in the conversation. Many companies also like to have written confirmation of things agreed by telephone.

Use the template below to write an email confirming the arrangements made in the Computech / Intership conversation.

Re: Meeting	
From	"P G Smith" pgsmith4@computecharcos.com
To	petakr2@intership.com
Sent	15 April 20-10.45
Subject	Meeting Mr Dionis
<p>Message</p>	

3 Changing arrangements

- 1 Listen to a conversation between two colleagues, John and Pamela. Note:
 - a) details of the original arrangement
 - b) reasons for change
 - c) the new arrangement.
- 2 a) How would you characterise the style of this conversation?
 b) Why is it like that?

- 3 Listen again to the conversation between John and Pamela. Note the four-part structure of a conversation about changing arrangements. Complete the missing words from the key phrases below:

(1) reference to original appointment

'We're _____ today ...'



(2) Statement of problem → Need for change

'I'm _____, I really can't _____.'



(3) Fixing new appointment

'Can we _____?'



(4) Confirmation

'See you _____.'

Role play 1

Work in pairs. Student A should turn to File card 9A. Student B should use File card 9B.

Role play 2

Keep to the same A or B. Student A should turn to File card 10A. Student B should look at File card 10B.




4 Ending a call

- 1 You will hear a recording of Catherine Welsh, a Communications Consultant, talking about telephoning and, in particular, ending phone calls.

Before you listen, suggest what she might say about the following:

- ways to avoid misunderstandings
- a way to check that there's nothing left to say
- the importance of small talk
- ways to get off the phone when the other person keeps talking and you are very busy.



-  2 Now listen to what Catherine actually says. Compare her suggestions with what you suggested above. Discuss these and other suggestions.
-  3 Hans Rossler is an Export Manager for a German company in Munich. An agent, Hassam Akhtar from Morocco, is planning to visit him. You will hear two versions of how Hans ends a phone conversation with Hassam. Notice how they are different.
- What is wrong in the first version?
 - Which key phrase is in the second ending that was not in the first one?
-  4 Listen to the next recording of a conversation between two colleagues, Celia Walton and Gerd Hoffmann, who work for a Swiss toy manufacturer.
- What is Celia's problem?
 - How does she resolve it?

Practice 3

Sit back-to-back with a colleague and have a telephone conversation about any small talk topic. One of you should try hard to keep the conversation going. The other should politely try to get off the phone.

Reverse roles and repeat the exercise.

TRANSFER 1

Work in pairs, A and B, to devise and practise two role plays. First, each of you should think about your own work or real-life situation. Choose a situation where you need to call someone to arrange a meeting. Explain the situation to your partner. Then practise first one conversation, then the other. Remember to end the call appropriately.

TRANSFER 2

Next time you have to arrange a real meeting by telephone, use the language and recommendations made in this unit. Prepare the call, think about the call structure (see Skills Checklist) and think about how to end the call.

Language Checklist

Telephoning (2)

Stating reason for a call

I'm ringing to ...

I'd like to ...

I need some information about ...

Making arrangements

Could we meet some time next month?

When would be a good time?

Would Thursday at 5 o'clock suit you?

What about July 21st?

That would be fine.

No, sorry, I can't make it then.

Sorry, I'm too busy next week.

Changing arrangements

We've got an appointment for next month, but ...

I'm afraid I can't come on that day.

Could we fix an alternative?

Confirming information

So ...

Can I check that? You said ...

To confirm that ...

Can you / Can I confirm that by email?

Ending a call

Right. I think that's all.

Thanks very much for your help.

Do call if you need anything else.

I look forward to ... seeing you / your call / your letter / your email / our meeting.

Goodbye and thanks.

Bye for now.

Skills Checklist

Telephoning (2)

Voice

- speed
- clarity
- volume

Structure

- background information
- key information
- repetition, emphasis and confirmation
- possible confirmation by fax

Style

- formal / informal
- cold call / new contact / established contact
- in-company vs customer
 - supplier
 - outside agent
- colleague / friend / business associate / public
- company image

Structure of a call

Beginning

introduce yourself

get who you want

small talk

state problem / reason for call

Middle

ask questions

get / give information

confirm information

End

signal end

thank other person

small talk

refer to next contact

close call

check that there's nothing else to say

Quick Communication Check

1 Making arrangements

Complete the dialogue below.

- A I'd like to (a) v _____ you some time next month, to meet Mr Lomas.
 B That's (b) f _____. I could give you an (c) a _____ next week.
 A No, unfortunately I'm (d) a _____ next week. The (e) f _____ week would be okay.
 B Yes, well (f) h _____ a _____ Thursday morning at 10 o'clock?
 A That's good. Please can you (g) c _____ by email?
 B Yes, of course.

2 Changing arrangements

You have an appointment to see Ms Keppel at 11.30 today. Unfortunately your train is delayed. You will not arrive until 12.30. Telephone Ms Keppel's secretary, John Cousins, to explain the problem. Complete the conversation with words from the box.

- A Hello, Mr Cousins. This is (your name). I (a) _____ at 11.30, with Ms Keppel.
 But unfortunately the train (b) _____. I'm going to be (c) _____.
 B I understand. What time do you think you'll arrive?
 A About 12.30. Is that a (d) _____?
 B No, no problem at all.
 A Thank you. I am (e) _____ about the (f) _____.
 B It's okay. It's not your fault. See you soon. Thanks for (g) _____.
 A Thank you. Bye for now.

late
 delay
 have an appointment
 problem
 sorry
 calling
 is delayed

3 The structure of a call

Put these sentences in the correct order.

- A I understand. That's very kind of you. Thank you very much.
 B Can I confirm that? The date is 4 December and it's at the Clyde Hotel.
 C Excellent. I look forward to seeing you there.
 D I'm ringing to find out some information about the Direct Line Conference in December.
 E Hello, my name is Patrick / Patricia Lefèvre. I'm calling from Paris.
 F Could you tell me the date and venue of the conference?

1 (a) visit, (b) fine, (c) appointment (d) away, (e) following, (f) how about, (g) confirm
 2 (a) have an appointment, (b) is delayed, (c) late, (d) problem, (e) sorry, (f) delay, (g) calling
 3 E, D, F, B, A, C