

WHY AM I MISUNDERSTOOD?  
WHY DON'T I UNDERSTAND? 😞

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IATEFL Poland, 16 September, 2016**

# In this workshop..



- 1 How do we help our learners to express themselves clearly?
- 2 How do we help our learners to understand English as it is really spoken and written, i.e. often not so clearly ?
- 3 How do we help our learners overcome 'cultural' communication barriers?
- 4 Materials to aid clearer speaking and to improve listening comprehension

# Sorry, what was that??

- We need to build a Russian ship
- It's all about the interpaces
- How ve dolop de project?
- We work with agile management
- First we will stop at derminal do!
- There's been a rabbit increase

# The challenges for Polish learners

## IT Applications specialist (C1)

- Needs to speak and write clearly so that communication partners understand
- Needs to understand 'Chinese and Indian' English/business practices
- Needs to work closely with Finnish and other colleagues

## A machine planner (B1)

Works for a leading global supplier of pressure sensitive labeling solutions.

The company employs 2,900 people.

It has 11 factories and a network of sales offices and distribution terminals worldwide.

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- 1 How do we help our learners to express themselves clearly?

# How to make yourself comprehensible – three tips?

Seamus's tips:



*We should simplify and modify our English*

*We should use 'incorrect' English when appropriate*

*We should slow down*

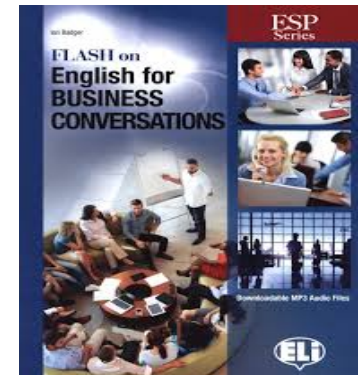
# Helping our learners to be clear speakers

- 1 Develop understandable language output
  - *clear pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary*
  - *appropriate language for international communication*
- 2 Provide examples of 'clear' and 'unclear' language. What are the features of clear language that we need to use?

# Providing learners with a 'clear' language model

## Retirement and redundancy

- How has the takeover affected the company?
- Well, the new owners are going to close down a plant in Manila and another in Dubai.
- About 300 people are going to lose their jobs.
- That's terrible.
- Actually it's not quite as bad as it seems. Most of the staff will be offered jobs in other plants and quite a few want to take early retirement.
- So there are no compulsory redundancies?
- Very few.
- That's good news.



(from Badger, 2016)



# Using grammar appropriately



- They are loading the sacks
- The sacks are being loaded
  
- They load the sacks
- The sacks are loaded
  
- They will load the sacks
- The sacks will be loaded
  
- They will have loaded the sacks
- The sacks will have been loaded

# Using vocabulary appropriately

## **Language used on a guided tour of Bruges, Belgium**

Prosperity waned

It saw a change in its fortunes

It has preserved its charm


That sealed its fate

It remained unscathed

A daring red concert hall

The buildings proved  
controversial

They fought to save the town  
from crumbling into ruin



2 How do we help our learners to understand English as it is really spoken and written, i.e. often not so clearly ?

# How do you say



What are you doing later?

Do you want to meet later?

What time is she coming?

Did you check the router?

Szczecin?

## Would you correct:



- ☐ I've been sat/stood here for half an hour.
- ☐ Please arrange our accommodations.
- ☐ Did you do it already?
- ☐ I come here yesterday.
- ☐ I already done it.


# A Spanish learner's response to the three voicemails (Canadian, English and Chinese)

Which of the three recordings was the easiest to understand? Which was the most challenging?

*Catrina → “easy. Words used, speed ok, accurate info”.*

*Nik → “difficult. Speaks fast and noise environment”.*

*Yue → “very difficult. The accent is difficult and the instructions are not clear”.*



*“Easiest to understand was Catrina’s, because she talks in a normal speed and with understandable accent”.*

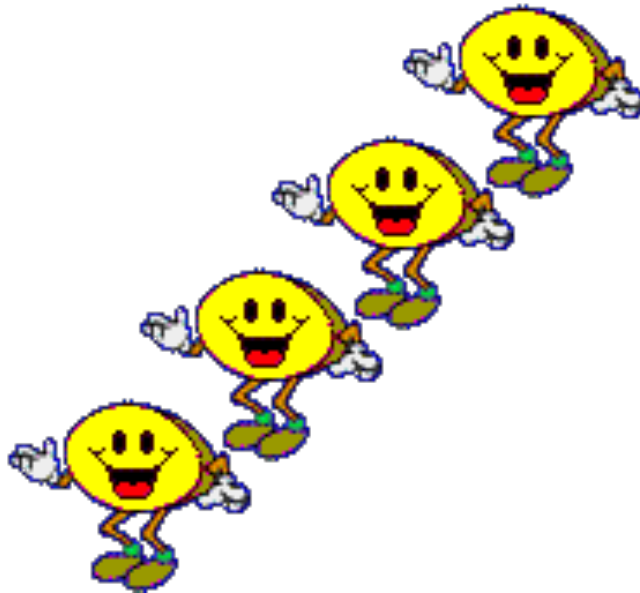
*“The most difficult maybe was Nick’s as he talks very fast, “eats” some words and the accent is difficult to understand”.*

*”Yue’s message, was not so difficult even if she does not have a good accent, because she talks very slowly”.*

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- 3 How do we help our learners overcome 'cultural' communication barriers?



# An American point of view – comments on written communication



from Badger, 2011

# Emails from Germany (1)

Good morning Pirjo,

Mrs. Gruner fom XXXXX asked for crosschecking the Q2/2014 volumes in GERMAN to Mrs. Weber and Mrs. Huber.

The answer from Matti is in ENGLISH – is this agreed with the customer? If not it's absolutely unacceptable and further "Hello".....

Pls instruct your team members accordingly.

Br

# Emails from Germany (2)

Hallo Y,

Der Kunde SWP hat alle Rechnungen für den März ( Rabattrelevant ) bezahlt. Bitte **HEUTE** noch die Quartalsgutschrift dem Kunden per E-Mail mit

Report schicken. Der wartet schon DRINGEND darauf !!!

-

[Erika.xxxxxmann@xxxxxprinters.ch](mailto:Erika.xxxxxmann@xxxxxprinters.ch)

-

Mich und Z bitte in CC. DANKE

-

Viele Grüsse

# Translation



The customer has paid all the invoices for March. Please send the customer by email all the quarterly credit information TODAY. Send the report. They are waiting URGENTLY for it!

Please copy me and Z in. THANKS

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- 4 Materials to aid clearer speaking and to improve listening comprehension

# ‘Scripted’ texts

## BOOKING A HOTEL

A Wellington Hotel. Can I help you?

B Yes, I’ve been trying to book a room on your hotel website but I can’t complete the booking.

A Sorry, sir. I can do the booking for you.

B Thank you. I’d like to book a twin room for two nights, the 12th and 13th of June.

A Just one moment. I’ll check our availability. Can I have your name please?

B Yes, it’s Cook. I won’t be arriving until 11.00 p.m. Do you need my credit card number to hold the reservation?

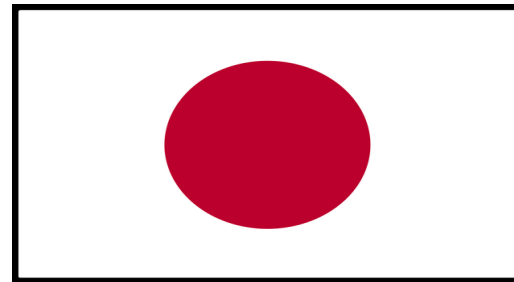
A Yes, please.

# Staged and 'authentic' texts (from Badger 2014 and 2011)

'Staged'



'Authentic'



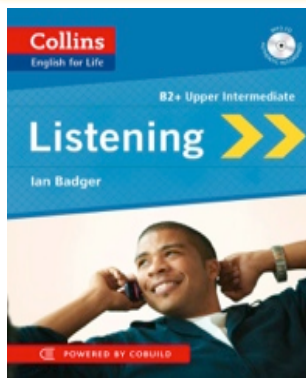
**C****1**

## Registering with a doctor

Jo, the administrator, is from Bristol in the west of England. The new patient, Yasmeen, is originally from Kenya, but she has lived in the UK for many years.

Read through the notes below and then listen to the recording to familiarize yourself with the speakers' accents. Note, for example, Jo's rising intonation even when she makes statements. This is typical of a Bristol accent. Some details have been omitted from the recording for confidentiality purposes.

Jo responds positively and with encouragement to Yasmeen using words like 'lovely' and 'wonderful'. Although common, such words are not used frequently by all British speakers of English. Jo also uses 'OK', 'Alright', 'Yes' and 'Yeah' frequently to maintain a high level of interaction.





## Clear usage: 'colloquial' expressions

Jo and Yasmeen use some everyday UK-specific colloquial expressions such as:

'Do you mind awfully?' = *Do you mind very much?* (very polite!)

*Do you mind me asking awfully? Do you really, really mind?* (extremely polite!!)

'If you could complete that for me, please' = *Please complete that.*

'Okay, if you'd like to pop that on there?' = *Could you write that down?*

'Cos' = *Because*

'There we go' = *That's it, that's done.*

# Conclusion



You do not always need to be grammatically 'correct'

Avoid complex vocabulary if you want to be understood.

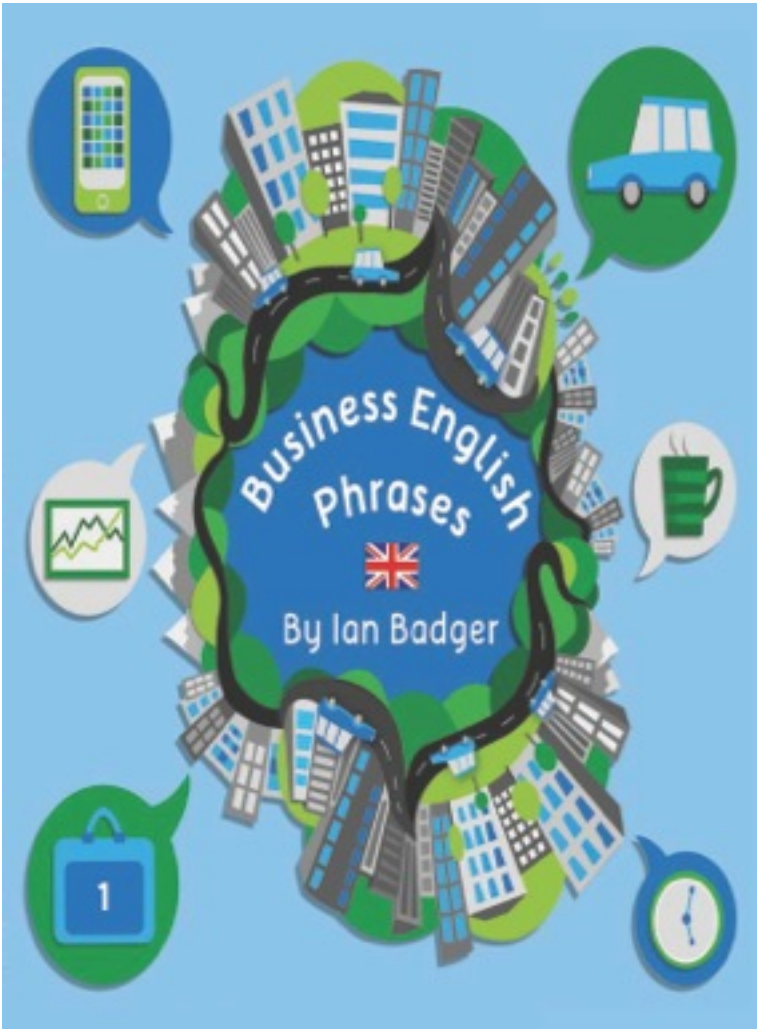
Don't speak too fast.

Develop sensitivity to 'non-standard' pronunciation and grammar.

Develop active listening and writing techniques to ensure meaning is understood

Develop awareness of different cultural business practices

# Thank you for coming!



Please take a sample copy of Business English Phrases and let us have your feedback.

Enjoy the conference and see you around!

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# References to recordings used

Badger, I 'English for Business Conversations' Eli Publishing 2016 ('Flash on' ESP series)

Badger, I 'Business English Phrases 1' BMES Books 2016

Badger, I 'English for Business Listening' Collins 2011

Badger, I 'English for Life Listening B1 + B2 levels 2012 and 2014

Badger, I 'English for Business Listening' App for Ipad Collins/Red River Press 2012

## Recommended reading

Walker, R 'Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca', OUP 2010

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