

# Cultures

*'When overseas, you learn more about your own country than you do the place you are visiting.'* Clint Borgen, American activist

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### LANGUAGE REVIEW

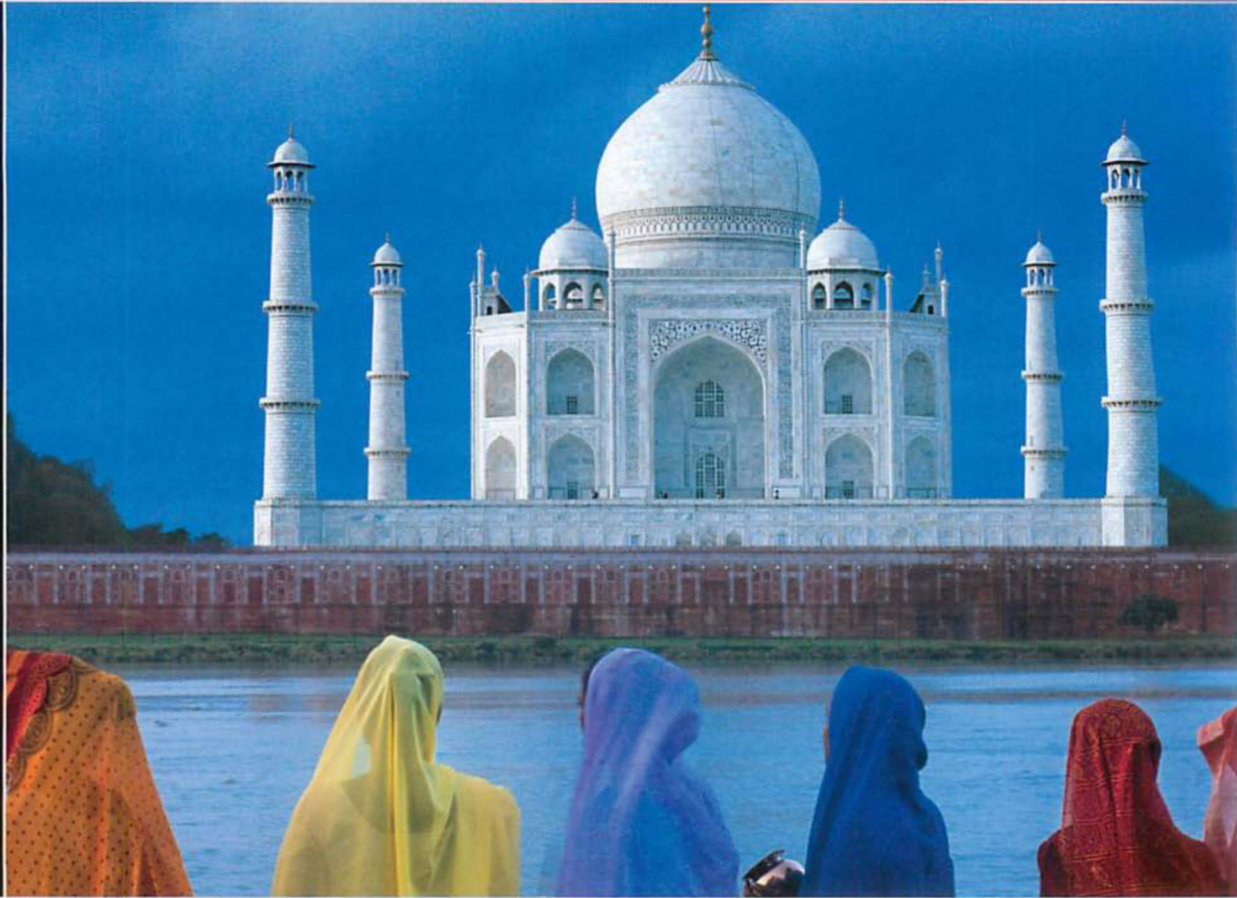
Advice, obligation and necessity

### SKILLS

Social English

### CASE STUDY

Business culture briefing



## STARTING UP

- A** What do you miss most about your own culture when you go abroad?
- B** Why is cultural awareness important for businesspeople? Give examples.
- C** What is culture? Choose the four factors that you think are the most important in creating a culture. Give your reasons.

climate	historical events	language
architecture	behaviour and attitudes	institutions
religion	social customs and traditions	cuisine
geography	ceremonies and festivals	arts

- D** Do you think cultures are becoming more alike? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Give reasons for your answers. Think about:
- improved communications
  - cheap foreign travel
  - global business
  - trading groups (such as the EU, ASEAN, USAN)
- E** How important are these things when doing business in your country? Are they a) important, b) not important or c) best avoided?
- exchanging business cards
  - being formal or informal
  - shaking hands
  - punctuality
  - bowing
  - humour
  - kissing
  - eye contact





- socialising with contacts
- small talk before meetings
- accepting interruption
- giving presents
- being direct (saying exactly what you think)
- using first names

### LISTENING

#### Cultural differences



Jeff Toms

Watch the  
interview on  
the DVD-ROM.



**A** CD1.44 Jeff Toms is Marketing Director at an international cultural training centre. Listen to the first part of the interview and answer the questions.

- 1 What two factors affect the 'Middle East clock'?
- 2 What can cause problems for Americans when they do business with Latin cultures?

**B** CD1.45 Listen to the second part of the interview and say what qualities companies should look for when sending staff abroad.

**C** CD1.46 Listen to the final part of the interview and complete the gaps.

I think also one of the key features of the successful .....<sup>1</sup> is to be non-.....<sup>2</sup>. For instance, if you're coming from an Asian culture to try and do business with a Western culture, for certain the way that people do things will be fundamentally different – the .....<sup>3</sup>, the structure, the .....<sup>4</sup>, the seniority and the .....<sup>5</sup> of the people you're doing business with – will be fundamentally different.

**D** If you could be sent anywhere in the world to work, which country would you choose? What aspects of its culture do you particularly like?



## VOCABULARY

## Idioms




## A

**Complete the idioms in the sentences below with the words in the box.**

end      eye      eye      fire      foot      ice      water      water

- 1 Small talk is one way to *break the ice* when meeting someone for the first time.
- 2 I was *thrown in at the deep* ..... when my company sent me to run the German office. I was only given two days' notice to get everything ready.
- 3 We *don't see eye to* ..... with our US parent company about punctuality. We have very different ideas about what being 'on time' means. It's a question of culture.
- 4 I *got into hot* ..... with my boss for wearing casual clothes to the meeting with the potential Japanese customers.
- 5 I really *put my* ..... *in it* when I met our Spanish partner. Because I was nervous, I said 'Who are you?' rather than 'How are you?'.
- 6 I *get on like a house on* ..... with our Polish agent; we like the same things and have the same sense of humour.
- 7 When I visited China for the first time, I was *like a fish out of* ..... Everything was so different, and I couldn't read any of the signs!
- 8 My first meeting with our overseas clients was a *real* ..... *-opener*. I hadn't seen that style of negotiation before.

## B

 **CD1.47** Listen to eight people using the idioms from Exercise A and check your answers.

## C

Consider the context of each idiom in Exercise A and decide which have:

- a) a positive meaning                      b) a negative meaning.

## B

**Match the idioms in Exercise A (1–8) to the correct meanings (a–h).**

- a) given a difficult job to do without preparation
- b) quickly have a friendly relationship with someone
- c) feel uncomfortable in an unfamiliar situation
- d) say or do something without thinking carefully, so that you embarrass or upset someone
- e) disagree with someone
- f) an experience where you learn something surprising or something you did not know before
- g) make someone you have just met less nervous and more willing to talk
- h) get into trouble

## E

**Work in pairs or small groups. Discuss the following.**

- 1 What tips do you have for *breaking the ice* at meetings with new clients/people from other cultures?
- 2 Talk about a place you have visited which was *a real eye-opener*.
- 3 Describe a situation when you
  - a) *put your foot in it*
  - b) *felt like a fish out of water*
  - c) *got into hot water*
  - d) *were thrown in at the deep end*.

See the **DVD-ROM**  
for the *i-Glossary*.



## READING

## Culture shock

**A** Read the article below quickly and decide which of the following (1–5) are:

- a) referred to in a positive way in the text
- b) referred to in a negative way in the text
- c) not referred to at all.

- 1 understanding the culture of the country you are living in
- 2 asking British colleagues personal questions when you meet them for the first time
- 3 hiring staff who are flexible and tolerant
- 4 providing staff with practical support
- 5 looking at the role of the spouse (husband or wife) in the selection of candidates for overseas postings.

**B** Read the article again and answer the questions.

- 1 What things are people from different countries in an organisation:
  - a) likely to have in common
  - b) likely not to have in common?
- 2 What is 'cultural awareness'?

**C** Work in pairs. What do you think should be covered in a cultural training course?

**D** Write a paragraph using information from the article and giving tips to people doing business in the UK.

## Standard Bank overcomes culture shock

It is increasingly common for multinational businesses to send employees on international assignments, but without the right cross-cultural skills, staff will often struggle. Wayne Mullen, Head of Learning and Development at Standard Bank, discusses the impact that cultural challenges can have on employees relocating to another country. In order to be successfully transferred, employees must understand the host-country culture, he argues.

Colleagues from different countries might share similar professional knowledge and skills within a single international organisation, but their ways of working, social skills, body language and ways of doing business are likely to be completely different. They may have different patterns of behaviour which need to be understood and appreciated in order for everyone to work together successfully. For example, while it may be acceptable for Chinese office workers in Hong Kong to use the door-close button on a lift no matter how many people are also getting in, doing

such a thing in London would make people extremely angry. It is common for South Africans to ask personal questions of their counterparts shortly after being introduced, while a British colleague may perceive this as impolite and inappropriate. Latin Americans' need for personal space is much less than that of their British colleagues.

Global companies should never underestimate the effect that culture can have on international assignments. Cultural awareness is much more than simply knowing about a country's history and geography. It is about understanding how and why cultures work differently. It is also important to understand your own cultural make-up in order to work more effectively, maximise teamwork and strengthen global competence.

The Standard Bank group operates in 38 different countries, and its London office alone has 56 nationalities. This wide range of nationalities needs to communicate effectively in order to work as one

team. The bank recognised that in order to harmonise working practices within its culturally diverse office, it needed to provide foreign workers with a meaningful understanding of British business culture and communication styles. It also needed to offer practical support which allowed employees to cope with the challenges of living and working in an unfamiliar environment; their reactions to day-to-day issues such as the weather, public transport and social etiquette are often the most visible manifestations of culture shock.

Standard Bank has engaged Communicaid, a European culture and communication skills consultancy, to design a tailored training solution which introduces delegates to some of the key cultural differences that they are likely to face in the UK.



from Finance Week



## LANGUAGE REVIEW

Advice,  
obligation and  
necessity

## 1 Advice

- We can use *should* and *shouldn't* to give or ask for advice.  
*Global companies **should** never underestimate the effect that culture can have.*
- For strong advice, we can use *must* or *mustn't*.  
*You **mustn't** invade a British colleague's personal space too soon.*

## 2 Obligation/Necessity

- We often use *must* when the obligation comes from the person speaking or writing.  
*We **must** show more cultural understanding.*
- We use *mustn't* to say something is prohibited or is not allowed.  
*You **mustn't** smoke inside any building.*
- We often use *have to* to show that the obligation comes from another person or institution, not the speaker.  
*You **have to** get a visa to enter the country. (This is the law.)*

## 3 Lack of obligation / Lack of necessity

- Don't have to* and *mustn't* are very different.  
*don't have to* = it is not necessary  
*You **don't have to** hurry. We have plenty of time.*

➔ Grammar reference page 149

**A** Choose the most appropriate verb. There are some situations where both verbs are possible. Can you say why?

- If you are invited to a Brazilian's house for dinner, you *must* / *should* arrive at least 30 minutes after the time mentioned.
- You *mustn't* / *don't have to* give purple flowers as a gift in many countries.
- All personnel *should* / *must* read the health and safety notices in the building.
- Staff *don't have to* / *mustn't* disclose information on the project unless authorised.
- I think you *should* / *must* encourage the team to develop interpersonal skills.
- Simone *doesn't have to* / *shouldn't* work so hard – she is looking very tired.
- When going to a new country to do business, you *should* / *must* do some research into their culture.
- You *mustn't* / *don't have to* pay immediately. We can offer you credit.

**B** Read these notes on Chinese business protocol. How does each piece of advice compare with the situation in your country?

### Chinese business protocol and etiquette

#### Greetings

- You must greet the oldest person first.
- You don't have to be serious all the time. The Chinese have a great sense of humour. You should be ready to laugh at yourself sometimes.
- You mustn't move to a first-name basis until advised to. You should address the person by an honorific title and their surname.

#### Business cards

- You should exchange cards after the initial introduction.
- You should hold the card in both hands when offering it.
- You mustn't write on someone's card unless asked to.

#### Gift-giving

- You shouldn't give flowers, as many Chinese associate these with funerals.
- You mustn't give four of anything, as four is an unlucky number.

#### Entertaining at home

- It is a great honour to be invited to someone's home. If you cannot accept the invitation, you must offer a very good excuse.
- You should arrive on time, remove your shoes, bring a small gift and eat well to show you are enjoying the food.
- You don't have to eat loudly, but if you slurp or belch, it shows that you are enjoying your food.

## SKILLS

## Social English



**A** CD1.48 Listen to a conversation between two people who have recently met. What is wrong? How can it be improved?

**B** Work in pairs. In what business situations would you use these expressions?

Congratulations!	I don't mind.	I'm afraid ...	After you.
Cheers!	Excuse me.	Yes, please.	That's no problem.
Make yourself at home.	Sorry.	Could you ... ?	Bad luck.
Help yourself.	It's on me.	That sounds good.	Not at all.

**C** What would you say in the following situations?

- 1 You don't hear someone's name when you are introduced to them.
- 2 You have to refuse an invitation to dinner with a supplier.
- 3 You are offered food you hate.
- 4 You want to end a conversation in a diplomatic way.
- 5 You have to greet a visitor.
- 6 You have to introduce two people to each other.
- 7 You offer to pay for a meal.
- 8 You have to propose a toast.
- 9 Your colleague has been made redundant.
- 10 You arrive half an hour late for a meeting.

**D** CD2.1 Listen and compare your answers to Exercise C.

**E** CD2.2 What can you say in the first five minutes of meeting someone? Match the questions (1–10) to the answers (a–j). Listen and check your answers.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Is this your first visit to the region? | a) At the Metropolitan Hotel.   |
| 2 Oh really! What do you do?              | b) Nearly five years now.   |
| 3 How long have you been there?           | c) No, I come here quite a lot, but usually to Hong Kong.                 |
| 4 Have you been to Tokyo before?          | d) I'm an Account Director for a marketing company.                       |
| 5 Business or pleasure?                   | e) Business, I'm afraid.  |
| 6 How long have you been here?            | f) Until tomorrow evening.  |
| 7 How long are you staying?               | g) No, this is my first trip.   |
| 8 Where are you staying?                  | h) Six days.  |
| 9 What's the food like?                   | i) I really like it. There's so much to see and do.                       |
| 10 So, what do you think of Tokyo?        | j) It's very good, but eating at the Metropolitan can be quite expensive. |

**F** What are the 'safe' topics of conversation for this sort of situation? Which topics would you avoid?

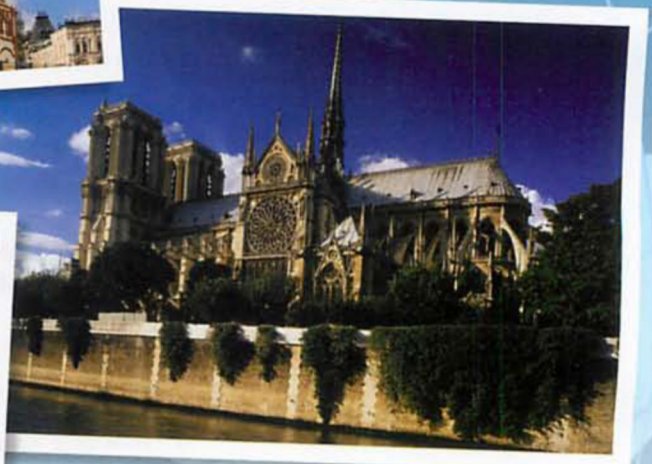
**G** In your opinion, which of these items of advice for a successful conversation are useful and which are not?

- |                                    |                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Listen carefully.                | 5 Ask questions.    |
| 2 Give only 'yes' or 'no' answers. | 6 Stay silent.      |
| 3 Interrupt a lot.                 | 7 Keep eye contact. |
| 4 Be polite.                       | 8 Be friendly.      |



## Business

### culture briefing



**A group of managers is attending an informal briefing about the business culture of your country.**

#### **Background**

You work for Better Business Communications, a company which prepares business people who are visiting your country for the first time. A group of top managers will shortly be visiting your country in order to decide on the location of an overseas subsidiary. During their visit, the managers will attend meetings with a number of business people, and be entertained at their homes or in restaurants. They also plan to do some social visits and excursions. You will run an informal business culture briefing for the management group, informing them about aspects of business culture in your country and answering their questions.

**Discuss what kind of topics you could include in your briefing about the business culture of your country.**



**CD2.3** Rosana, a Brazilian client, is planning a European trip to Germany, France and Russia. She asks Enrique, who works for Better Business Communications, for advice about the countries she'll be visiting. **Note down the five topics that Rosana mentions. Are they on your list as well? Do you agree with what Enrique says about the three countries? Give your reasons.**



## Task

- 1 Work individually or in national groups. Prepare an informal talk about the business culture of your country or a country you know well. Use the list of topics and questions below to structure your talk. During each talk, the other members of the class will play the role of the top managers.
- 2 Give your talk to the top managers. Try to answer any questions they may have.
- 3 In one group, discuss the talks. What advice/information surprised you? Which was the most interesting talk? Why?

## Topics

### Appearance

- How do men and women dress in business?
- Is casual dress permitted in business meetings?
- How do people dress on social occasions, e.g. at an informal dinner?

### Behaviour

- Do people like a lot of personal space?
- Do they usually stand close or far away from another person when talking to colleagues?
- Do staff use first or family names when addressing each other?

### Entertainment

- Do businesspeople prefer to entertain guests at home or in a restaurant?
- What advice can you give about gifts?
- What are good/bad topics of conversation?

### Meetings

- How important is punctuality in your culture? Is it OK to be late for a meeting?
- Is a person's status important in meetings? Does the most senior person always lead a meeting?
- Is decision-making slow or fast in business?

### Business practice

- Do you have to make appointments well in advance?
- What are the usual business hours?
- What is the usual time for a business lunch? How long does it last?

## Writing

Write a short report summarising the most interesting information you have learnt about a culture in this unit.

➡ Writing file page 130

Watch the Case study commentary on the DVD-ROM.

