

# It's a pony, Ian

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Ian Badger

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# It's a pony, Ian!

- Socialising can be a key part of business life but it is here that many learners struggle to understand and to express themselves.
- A focus on authentic recordings of speakers from a wide range of countries and backgrounds where the topics covered are typical in adult conversations but not necessarily 'businessy'. Such material presents the learner with listening challenges, cultural insights and provides a springboard for discussions.

# My current projects

Paper company supply chain centres in Germany, Finland and Sweden

- *Participants from Germany, Finland, Sweden, Turkey, Denmark, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine and the USA*

International Payroll teams

- *Participants from Finland*

Global IT applications in a large UK insurance company

- *Participants from the UK and other nationalities living and working in the UK*

Daily contacts – mainly in Finland, Germany, Poland and the UK

# So why am I so interested in the 'social' side of business?

- Business people usually need to create rapport with their contacts to be successful in business
- Business does not only happen in meeting rooms
- People need to be culturally-aware
- Because Business English is 'fuzzy....., open-ended, loose-ended' (Roy Bicknell)

# The importance of authentic listening materials

- Learning materials should reflect genuine working/living environments
- People struggle to understand English however it is spoken and authentic materials help them to develop a sensitivity to different 'Englishes'
- Time is short for business learners and they need to put what they learn in the classroom/in self study into immediate use.
- Working with 'real' speakers is key to engagement and motivation

## ..and because:

- My 'students' are like Roy Bicknell's students – they are very often advanced and can handle the everyday exchanges with clear native and non-native speakers
- “They need to improve communication skills with difficult speakers as described – working with high level non-scripted materials helps them to do this, motivates, and gives confidence to handle the unexpected”. Bicknell, 2014

## A Swiss view

“The hardest thing to get in an other language is jokes or sarcasm, so be careful about using it”

“Even though you think you speak English there are many different accents and some of them are hard to understand for a non-native speaker, e.g. Irish, Scotts (sic), Indians, ...”

## A Malaysian view

"Personally for me, it was not easy working with Brits initially. Language is the main barrier, although we speak the common English language, the British accent was very difficult for me to understand, and I think vice versa, Brits find it really hard understanding Malaysian English as well".



# Some Argentinian views - working in a UK office

## Argentinian 1

- Communication: indirect messages do not have a literal meaning as in my home country. We say things explicitly and in a direct manner to achieve the same goal.
- Humour style: you need to be prepared for ironic messages all around.

## Argentinian 2

- organise things well in advance (British don't like surprises and not very spontaneous)
- British sense of humour (very dry and sarcastic)
- and they love talking about the weather.

# Listening challenges

- Accents
- Mistakes
- Fragmented speech
- Complex grammar
- Idiomatic usage

# Choosing your listening material

- Focus on topic
- Focus on accent
- Focus on cultural aspect
- Focus on functional language
- Focus on grammar
- Focus on active listening techniques

# A listening menu

French eating habits



Registering for a GP in the UK



An American view of tea and coffee drinking



Irish business practices



An English attitude to wearing a coat on a cold evening



A Saudi attitude towards dogs



## Hussain: offering constructive advice

- *'This is something to expect when you come to England.'*
- *'Don't be surprised when....'*
- *'Feel free to express what you think about that.'*
- *'So this is also something to bear in mind.'*

Other useful phrases:

- *Be aware that some people...*
- *Make sure you...*
- *Don't be afraid to...*

# Philippe – using the listening text as a springboard for discussion

1. What surprises Philippe about the behaviour of his work colleague at lunch time?
2. What is his/your attitude towards people who use their mobile phones or browse the internet during lunch?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Philippe's attitudes to mealtimes and, if you have been to the UK, his opinion of British food?

# Showing empathy

Eg: The speaker has been to Sydney for Christmas  
The listener responds: '(It) *must have been* hot'.

Phrases for showing empathy:

- That ***can't have been*** a good experience.
- That ***must have been*** very disappointing.
- It ***must have been*** terrifying.

# Fiona's pony – use of tenses

## Simple past

*I went to America for a month  
I left him for over four weeks and  
when I got back...*

## Present perfect

*I've had him for twelve years  
The longest I've been away is two  
weeks*

## 'Would' for habitual past

*He wouldn't look at me*

## Present continuous

*The vet reckons he was pining for me*

## Past perfect

*He had lost two stone in weight  
We had built up that kind of  
relationship*



It's (actually) a pony, Ian



## And finally .... Some references

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Bicknell, R 'Business English may be fuzzier than you think' in EL Gazette, November 2014

To contact Ian Badger:

[ian@bmes.co.uk](mailto:ian@bmes.co.uk)

[www.bmes.co.uk](http://www.bmes.co.uk)

@BMES\_UK