

Why am I misunderstood? Why don't I understand? ☹️ (*summary slides*)

Ian Badger, BMES, Bristol

www.bmes.co.uk

ian@bmes.co.uk

@BMES_UK

At BESIG Sitges – 14 November 2015



Notes

- Photos and some BMES copyright material included in Ian's original talk have been removed from this .pdf
- Reference to audio sources are given on each slide. For further details and any other queries/comments, contact Ian at www.bmes.co.uk/contact-us

The international sack business

Year 2000

Korsnäs Packaging (production facilities in Denmark, England, Germany, Italy, Poland, the Ukraine, Croatia and Yugoslavia (sic) acquires Walki Sack. The following production facilities are included in the deal:

- Walki Sackin Pori, Finland
Walki Sack B.V. in Edam, The Netherlands
- Walki Sack, Ploiesti, Rumania
Walki Sack s.r.o., Uvalno, The Czech Republic
- Walki Sack S.A., Zaragoza, Spain
Walki Sack S.A., Almeria, Spain
Walki Sack S.A., Gran Canaria, Spain

Year 2007 Segezha Packaging (Russia) acquires Korsnas

Year 2013 Bank of Moscow takes full control of Segezha

In this talk..

- 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?

(Has poor/inappropriate teaching led to our learners' communication difficulties?)

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

Native-speaker views

Kara from New York?



Rohit from Bangalore?



-

(from Badger 2011/2012)

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

1 Develop 'clear' language output

and

- *using pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary activities*

exercises

- *using authentic recordings such as 'Seamus'*

- *working with scripted/staged 'model' recordings*

2 Provide examples of 'unclear' language. Why is this language difficult to understand?

A 'clear' language model: pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar

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)

Clear grammar?

- 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 be loading the sacks
- The sacks will be being loaded

- They will have loaded the sacks
- The sacks will have been loaded

Clear vocabulary?

Language used on a guided tour of Bruges

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

Working with voicemails

(from Badger 2011/2012)



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”.

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

An American point of view – comments on written communication



Some emails from Germany

Good morning Pirjo,

Mrs. Schmidt from 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

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 !!!

–
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

Summing up...

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

References and resources

Badger, I 'Business English Conversations' Eli Publishing (2016 – forthcoming)

Badger, I 'English for Business Listening' Collins 2011

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

McMaster, I 'The Language of meetings: how authentic should we be?' in Modern English Teacher, V24/4 2015

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

For further resources contact:

ian@bmes.co.uk