

TOOL- BRITISH COMMUNICATION STYLE

 ANGLO-DUTCH TRANSLATION GUIDE 		
What the British say...	What the British mean...	What the Dutch understand...
I hear what you say.	I disagree completely.	They accept my point.
With all due respect ...	I think you are wrong.	They are listening to me.
Oh, by the way ...	This is the primary purpose of this discussion.	This isn't very important.
I'll bear it in mind.	I won't do anything about it.	They will use it when appropriate.
Perhaps you could give this some more thought.	Don't do it, it's a bad idea.	It's a good idea. Keep developing it.
Very interesting.	I don't agree/like it.	They are impressed.
Could you consider some other options?	Your idea is not a good one.	They haven't decided yet.
That is an original point of view.	Your idea is stupid.	They like my idea.
I am sure it's my fault.	It is your fault.	It is their fault.



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Communication In Great Britain

The complete Oxford Dictionary contains 500,000 words. This may easily lead to the conclusion that the repertoire of linguistic expressions is very differentiated and varied in English. Therefore there is a wide range of possibilities for sidestepping in order to linguistically dodge unpleasant matters.

There Is More Than One Way To Skin A Cat

The British are individualists inside. They like flexibility, they like to be able to choose, they like options. This is also reflected in their communication. The British very rarely think in terms of black and white but rather in grey tones. They don't like to be driven into a corner nor to be pressured, they don't like to commit themselves for eternity.

Even if you have a clear idea of something, don't emphasise this too much in your communication. Show flexibility in thinking and acting. Have several options ready and don't spend too much time elaborating on your idea in the beginning. The more you argue in order to convince the more sceptical your British counterpart will get. Less is more!

Coded Speech

Inconveniences are ›wrapped up‹ in friendly words. This way of communicating is called coded speech. In this respect it is not enough to say ›please‹, ›thank you‹, ›you're welcome‹ and ›sorry‹ as

often as possible. The following example sentences will give you an idea of all the facets of this indirect communication style.

Apologising

The British apologise permanently. Even if something isn't their fault: ›

- Excuse me!, or Excuse me, that's not quite right!
- Sorry for being late.
- Use ›I'm afraid!‹ if you are about to say something unpleasant and are aware of it: ›I'm afraid, I'm going to have to say no.
- I apologise for any inconvenience, this has caused to you.
- Please accept my sincere apologies.‹ ›Apologies!

Postponing Appointments

If you would like to postpone an appointment the following phrases will help you:

- I think Monday is a bit too optimistic. Tuesday is more like it.
- I can do Tuesday instead. How does that sound to you?‹

Give your reasons:

- I've been tied up with a computer course all week. Would this coming Monday be possible for you?‹

Establishing clarity

The meaning of ›I don't understand‹ sounds very impolite. There are better alternatives:

- I'm not sure, we're actually talking about the same thing. What do you mean by ...?
- Could you explain that one more time, please? I'm not sure, I've truly understood you.
- Just to make sure, that there are no misunderstandings. You think we should ...? Or do you mean we shouldn't ...?
- Just to make sure, that we are still on the same page.‹

Sending Reminders

No matter what you need to remind someone of – a pending reply, a report, a due payment, an appointment – a great method is to ask questions instead of making statements.

Reminding of appointments:

- We're looking forward to your visit tomorrow. Is there anything, you would like us to prepare for you?
- Only one week to go, so this is just to ask you if everything is on track?
- Are we still on for Friday next week?
- HR need the report tomorrow. Do you think you can get it to them on time, or is there anything, I could do?‹

Reminding of something that remains to be done:

- I am not sure, but didn't you want to get that document to me by Friday? If you need further details, please let me know.

- I just wanted to check, whether you have everything you need to provide the necessary information?
- Do you think it would be still possible to get this done by Monday?

Voicing Opinions Or Criticism

When it comes to voicing your opinion directness isn't very popular in Britain. Hence, you ought better not to state your view as a fact but rather phrase it moderately. Instead of ›I find, that ...‹ or ›My opinion is, that ...‹ it is better to say: ›Perhaps we should consider...‹ ›Could I propose, that we ...‹ Or : ›Could I suggest, that we take a devil's advocate position and consider doing exactly the opposite?‹

Typical sentence beginnings when voicing criticism are:

- It's probably me, ...
- I might be wrong, ...
- I see where you are coming from ...
- Good point. Have you also thought of ...
- I might not be up to date ...
- I can't find the sales figures in your report.
- Is there any reason why ... hasn't been done?‹

You should, however, also voice your positive view as often as possible. If e.g. a meeting went well, express this at the end with a kind sentence:

- Well, I think our session was quite productive. What do you think, James?
- I certainly think my trip has been worthwhile. Do you feel we've left anything uncovered?‹

In general, the British like to praise frequently. Praise functions as motivation in any situation.

Dealing With Complaints

Do not go into counterstrike but have a look at the following procedure as an alternative:

1) Show empathy:

- I'm sorry to hear that.
- I see what you mean.
- I can understand that you are feeling upset.‹

2) Ask for further details, so the other person can vent his or her displeasure:

- Please, tell me, what happened.
- Can you tell me when all this was?‹

3) Apologise, no matter if it was your fault or not or if you have entirely understood the background story.

The following sentences are supposed to be soothing:

- I'm sorry this happened.
- That was entirely my / our department's fault. I apologise sincerely.‹

4) Explain the situation short and precise from your point of view and emphasise that you will find out about the causes:

- I don't know how that happened, but I will definitely find out and let you know.
- We've been having teething problems with our new computer system.«

5) Show immediate initiative:

- I'll tell you what I'm going to do right away ...
- I'll go straight to the ... department and see that they send you the missing parts.
- Of course we will give you compensation for the damage.«

6) Ask for cooperation. This aspect is especially helpful if you are dealing with upset persons who demand impossible things. Involve them in the solution process and address fairness:

›Let's try to reach an agreement. What do you think would be fair?‹

7) Give thanks for their openness:

- Thank you for (calling and) letting me know.
- Thanks very much for pointing this out to me.«

Problems?

No way! Losers have problems – winners face challenges! This is why inconveniences tend to be played down linguistically and by no means made an issue of. Instead of talking about ›problems‹ rather talk about ›challenges‹. If someone talks about ›slight inconveniences‹ don't let the word ›slight‹ hide the fact that there is a need for action.

Emotional behaviour (working oneself up, being annoyed, being stressed out etc.) is considered highly unprofessional in British business culture. ›Keeping one's composure!‹, is the name of the game or ›Stop complaining!‹, ›Be positive!‹, ›Be professional!‹ – and if you do kick over the traces the following sentence will help: ›I am sorry. I think I got carried away!‹

The Glass Is Always Half-full

No matter how bad it is; there is something positive to be found in every negative aspect. That is the preferred attitude towards life in Great Britain. And indeed, it is almost always possible to phrase negative wording positively. Have a look at the table:

Negative statement	Positive statement
›Don't be late!‹	›Please be on time!‹
›We cannot deliver the goods until the beginning of next month.‹	›We will deliver the goods first thing next month.‹
›No, I haven't finished the report.‹	›Well, I've been tied up with project X all week. How does Tuesday sound to you?‹
›I don't think so.‹	›My thinking may change, but I now believe ...‹
›I don't know what to say.‹	›I'll have to think about it.‹
›Your ideas were good, but your project plan is badly worked out.‹	›Your ideas were very good. I think they could be put into practice, once you've rethought some of the project plan.‹

British Humour

There is always a distinct touch of irony, sarcasm, self-mockery or morbidity to British humour (black humour)! It doesn't only serve to have fun but it is also a popular ›lubricant‹ in even the smallest of tricky situations. Even, in business a good sense of humour is important, especially in risky situations. Negative emotions are kept under control and a good atmosphere is maintained through humorous comments. No one should lose face. You should therefore be able to laugh at yourself and shouldn't be too full of yourself.

Questions As An All-round Tool

For the British, questions are something positive, they enable a change of perspective, self-reflection and they allow you to reveal blind spots. Typical questions are:

- What makes you think that ...?
- Have you already thought of doing ...?
- Have you thought of other options?
- What did you experience before?
- How do you feel about ...?‹

Giving feedback

British are very proud of their feedback culture ; so, learn the sandwich method for giving feedback:

1) Positive introduction:

First of all, they praise everything that went well. Even small details are acknowledged.

2) Working out development areas:

Importance of promoting employee's self-reflection, to lead him to self-awareness and to give him the opportunity to address potential performance obstacles himself. It is about working out development areas together and not about confronting the employee with what you might consider his weaknesses. Learn the art of asking good questions!

A question can hint at specific development areas such as:

- How would you describe the current interaction with your colleagues?
- How do you feel about your last presentation?‹

Do not offend the person receiving the feedback. You might begin as follows:

- From my point of view, I would say that you ...
- To me, it seems that you ...‹ or ›I have the impression that ...‹

3) Encouraging, praising and offering support:

Giv the employee the feeling that he is not left alone with his performance goals and show you are approachable and interested in promoting him. British managers consider themselves people mangers and it is their task to care about ›their‹ people. A boss is only as good as his staff.

Communicating Problems On The Phone

The British tend to answer the phone without saying their name. That may be irritating, however, this has got nothing to do with being impolite but is simply common practice.

Establish clarity with the help of the following sentences:

- Would you do me a favour and slow down a little bit?
- Sorry, I didn't hear what you said. Would you mind repeating that for me, please?
- I'm sorry, but it's rather noisy here. Could I ask you to speak up, please?
- Sorry, I didn't quite catch what you said. Come again, please.
- I'm afraid, the signal is breaking up.
- This mobile connection is bad. Can I call you on a landline instead?
- May I read that back to you to make sure I got it all right?
- Could I ask you to confirm that by e-mail, please? Just to make sure I got it all right?
- I'm not sure I understood you correctly.
- Just a moment please. I would like to take the details down.
- Can you read that back to me, please?
- Just to make sure that I've got that right, I'll repeat it.
- Would you mind spelling your name, just to be sure?
- Excuse me for interrupting. May I have a word?

E-mail Correspondence

In contrast to the usual so decent, genteel and polite way of British people they keep their e-mails fairly objective and short. The politeness that is of such great importance in personal meetings seems to be almost completely abolished in e-mails. Don't get upset, if you are not addressed by your name in the one or the other e-mail, they hardly exchange any personal words, the valediction and the name of the sender is missing. Also it is common practice to address each other by first name immediately and has nothing to do with impudence or a friendship-offer.

Iris Engler- Extract from Business Culture Great Britain, Courtesy of CONBOOK Verlag