

# Global Etiquette A

By Maralyn D. Hill

**A**merican English can jeopardize negotiations and understanding, whether in business or traveling abroad.

An Austrian, German, Frenchman, Japanese, Greek, or other nationality may understand each other speaking English, but not understand the American. Frequently, there is a huge communication gap. Confusion is based on the misuse of sayings that are understood by Americans, but not by those from other countries.

It can't be stressed enough by companies and individuals to speak clearly, when dealing with those from different countries.

Let's look at some titles: On a first visit, the individual may be the Personnel Director, Director of Human Resources, or Director of Employment. The next time, it is changed. Basically, all three titles above share the same responsibilities. The individual in charge of insurance may now be Risk Management Director. Next year, a new buzz word may replace that title. Sales representatives are an entire different category, ranging from Account Managers to Service Representatives.

#### **Local terms that confuse**

Raining cats and dogs  
Dog and pony show  
On a roll  
Flying by the seat of your pants  
Coming up roses  
Don't make waves  
Flat as a pancake  
Old as Methuselah  
Keep a low profile  
Give me a ballpark figure  
This is a new ballgame  
Let's make a homerun  
Make a touchdown  
Jump the gun  
On the same wave length  
Shotgun approach  
Run it up the flagpole  
It will never fly  
Drive me up the wall  
Sounds like a winner.

Many of the above terms refer to U.S. sports. Someone else, from somewhere else, is not going to know what you mean. If you have watched any of the television series NCIS, you will have seen Zeva's struggle with American clichés. Someone in that position is trained beyond belief, but they still find themselves struggling with these terms.

#### **Accents and conjunctions can cause confusion too**

"Y'all" has been interpreted to mean bring more people. However, another ethnic group considered it an insult, as it was interpreted to bring subordinates.

"Can't" some times is pronounced "caay-yunt," which simply does not make sense.

"What did you" may be stated, "wadja."

Avoid conjunctions whenever possible.

#### **Silence**

All silence does not need to be filled. Many cultures use that to think. Always remember that those who speak English as a second language may take every word you say quite literally.

#### **Behavior**

Maybe you are an occasional curser or a regular one. Forget it when conducting business. In Buddhist and Islamic cultures, "thank God" is considered blasphemy. Be careful, rather than being considered too casual or disrespectful. After a day of meetings and you are going out, you may not have your briefcase, but business may just be starting. Stay aware. Your host wants to discover more of the real you. Avoid anything you may regret the next day.

#### **Acronyms**

Americans are quick to use acronyms. When dealing with people from another country, spell it out. It may take longer, but you will be understood.



# American English

**Senseless Names**

Frequently, Americans rename boardrooms or the like to launch pads, command central, or the like. Stay clear with your wording.

**Grammar and Vocabulary**

The idea may seem right, but you may be using the wrong word. Many of those who speak English as a second language are not privileged to an extensive vocabulary and sentence structure. However, the English they are apt to speak may be more technically accurate than ours. We stopped learning early, maybe in sixth or eighth grade. They would avoid dangling participles, misplaced modifiers or metaphors. I'm not sure those rules of grammar are taught in the U.S. schools any longer. It may be, but not like they used to be emphasized.

Frequently, in our excitement, we will use words like "fantastic," "fabulous," or "disaster," i.e., "The meeting was absolutely fantastic and produced fabulous results." "The non-American may view those two words as make believe, imaginary, or unreal. "The service was a disaster." "Disaster" to most non-Americans means hurricanes, war, deaths or the like. Using words accurately matters.

English is spoken around the world and every country has its own set of short-cuts and sayings. Americans are not unique in this practice. But I do think we stand out more than most. "When an Englishman says a project will be done at the end of the day, he means it will be done when it's done." (from *Dos and Taboos*). When I was in Australia, I heard numerous different terms. However, when talking business, it can be the U.K., Switzerland, Germany, Australia, Singapore, or anywhere in the world, the English spoken is clear and concise. We Americans need to respond accordingly and gain good business negotiations, attention and respect.