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Assumptions and Pitfalls

- Cultural Assumptions
- Language assumptions
- Assumptions about using English



A man attends an interview and is asked what qualities he can bring to the job. He answers by saying that he is a good father and that he has three children, all of whom have gone to university. One of them is a doctor. He talks for a long time about the achievements of his family and gives many examples. The interviewer repeats the question. The man expands on the success of his family giving yet more examples. He does not get the job.



A man goes into a bank and is served by a cashier. The cashier is unsure of the procedures needed to deal with the man's request and calls for a superior to help. The cashier tells the man to wait by saying 'wait here' and in the mean time makes some phone calls and looks at her nails. The man gets angry and leaves the bank.



In a business meeting between two companies, a representative of one of the companies is giving a presentation. Periodically members of the other team interrupt him to ask questions. The presenter deals with the first two in detail but as this continues his responses become shorter. Members of the other team also make comments about the data being presented along the lines of 'that doesn't make sense if you take in to account...' The presenter cuts short his presentation and the delegation leaves the room.



A business negotiation has been going badly. After work, one group meet in the evening to discuss possible solutions. They arrive the next day with their solutions on a powerpoint presentation. The solutions entail changing the timetable for a week. The other group get very angry and accuse the first group of being mad. Both sides leave the room.



Mr Wong and Mr Richardson have a conversation. Mr Richardson has enjoyed this conversation and when they

are ready to part he says to Mr Wong that they really should get together to have lunch sometime. Mr Wong says he would enjoy that. After a few weeks Mr Wong begins to feel that Mr Richardson has been rather insincere because he has not followed up his invitation with a specific time and place. He is unsure whether to do business with him in the future.

- Language is ambiguous
- We work out meanings
 - Context
 - Past experience
 - Assumptions about how things normally work
- We do this very quickly (and are fixed)
 - Smiles are a positive sign
 - Yes means yes
- A lot of what we say has assumptions behind it.

Careless Small Talk Costs...

- My mother? She's 84 and fighting fit. The home she's in is one of the best.
- My son's 30 and he's still living at home.
- The England team? They were rubbish in the World Cup.
- Call me midday around 3 o'clock.

Assumptions about English

- English is the international language of business
- As native speakers we have an advantage
- Non-native speakers of English often prefer talking to each other using English than talking with a native speaker
- What is the impact on business?

What do we get wrong?

- Talk too fast
- Use confusing, non committal language
 - That might be an idea
 - Don't you think that's not really true?
- Phrasal verbs
 - I should get round to that by Monday
 - Can you look it up?

Assumptions about understanding

- Assume that because someone speaks English well they understand everything we say
 - Assume a basic shared knowledge
- Acronyms
- Expressions
 - It's all gone pear shaped
 - Let's get down to brass tacks
- Cultural reference points
 - We've got to keep a straight bat
 - We don't want it to be another Millennium Dome

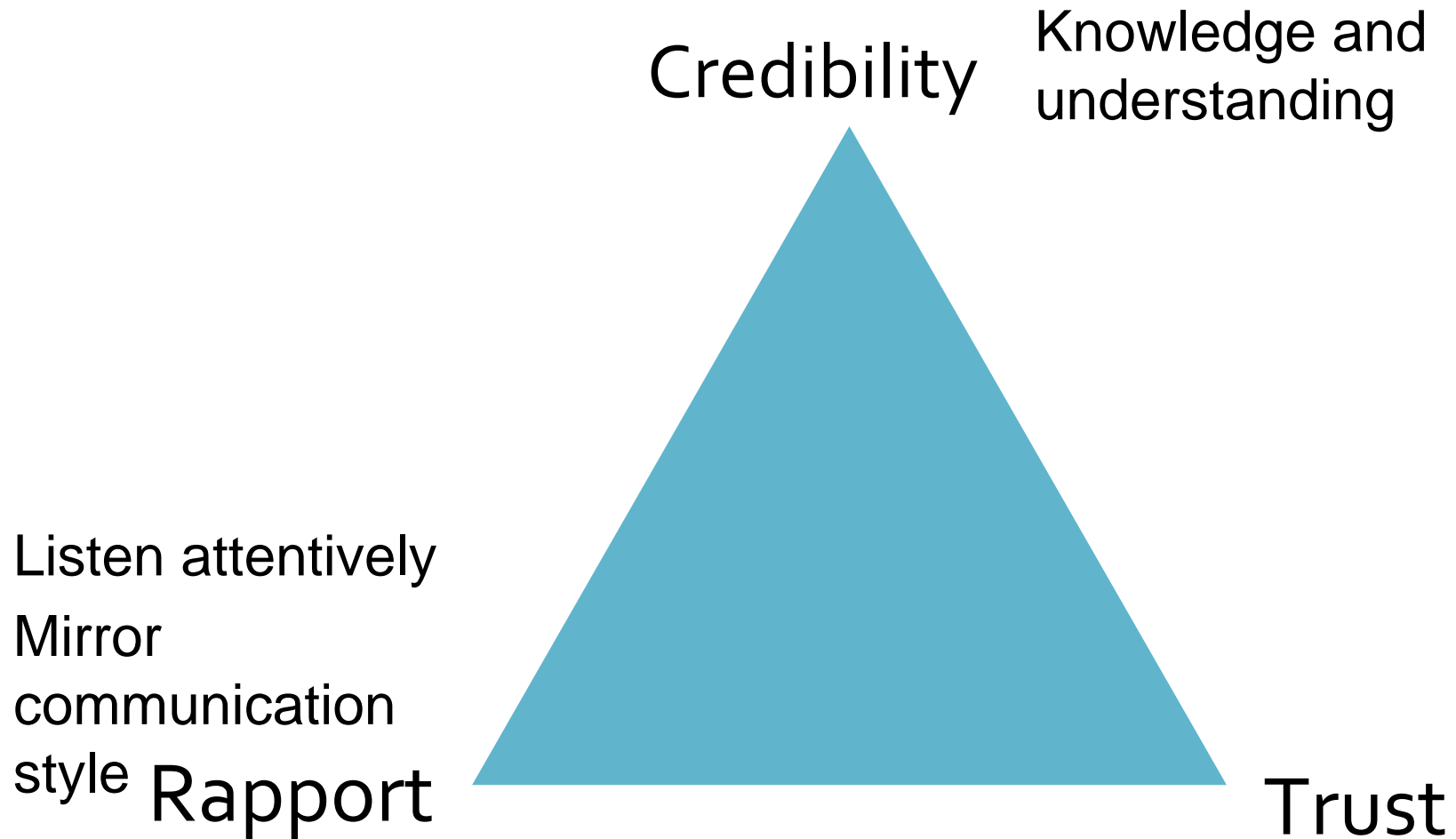
What Can We Do?

- Slow down
 - In a sensible , non-patronising manner
 - Leave greater pauses between chunks of information
- Monitor our own language use and remove
 - Idioms
 - Cultural references
- Include more summary and check back stages in negotiations

Another solution

- Globish
 - Jean Paul Nerriere
- It is possible to conduct effective business communication using a vocabulary of 1500 words and expressions
- English is no longer owned by native speakers
- Native speakers should learn globish

Effective Communication



- Scollon and Scollon *Intercultural Communication – A Discourse Approach*, Blackwell
- [Politeness in Europe \(Multilingual Matters\)](#) by Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart (Paperback - 1 Mar 2005)
- www.globish.com Jean-Paul Nerrière
- *When Cultures Collide*; Richard Lewis

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