



# Minimizing miscommunication in the workplace

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I'm at anchor.

I'm a tanker.



**토파즈:** Busan VTS, Busan VTS, Topaz Ace, Three person make the fall, Okay?

**부산항:** Yes... Three person fall?

**토파즈:** Motor Vessel Topaz Ace, After we, we saved one small boat which uh... capsized

**부산항:** Topaz Ace. This is Busan VTS. Say again.

**토파즈:** Busan VTS. This is Topaz Ace, There is one small vessel on my astern which is capsized, over.

**부산항:** One small boat on your astern, okay, thank you.

**토파즈:** Yes, I can see that there is also another boat, wandering distance. She is rescuing uh... the crew onboard through the capsized vessel.

**부산항:** Please uh... rescue the crew and please time that uh keep her, over.

**토파즈:** Uh.. there is a little ship [unintelligible] on another one small uh.. picking up the crew.



Avianca  
Flight 52  
(1990)

“we’re running  
out of fuel”

“emergency”

Listen to two recordings. What is the problem?



# A recent email

Dear Evan

I hope this email reaches you well.

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Best wishes

# A meeting

An internal company meeting with eight people. (one American, one Spanish, one Russian, one Indian, one British (project leader), three German).

One of the Germans has just finished presenting a new design for a jib (part of a crane). The team is now discussing the presentation. The American is new to the company.

[Laughter]

British: ... although then that was an insider comment I didn't understand the joke you two had about a dog

[All talking at once]

German 1: [yea well actually]

British: [yea that's fine but ... ]

American: what does that mean? was that a joke? a [company name] joke?

German 1: actually we we brought all the ideas of the lightweight design into one jib when we looked at it we thought it was like a *Bunte Hund* which would directly translated direct translate into colourful dog

American: wow

German 1: like combination of everything

British: some people understood that and some didn't you didn't understand that Ranita?

Indian: no I didn't understand that

German 2: jibs internal joke

American: internal joke hehe

British: sad people who have jokes about jibs

[laughter]

“A misunderstanding is a potential breakdown point in conversation, or at least a kind of communicative turbulence”

Mauranen, 2006

# Discuss

Think about the examples we have just looked at. What were the causes of the “communicative turbulence”?



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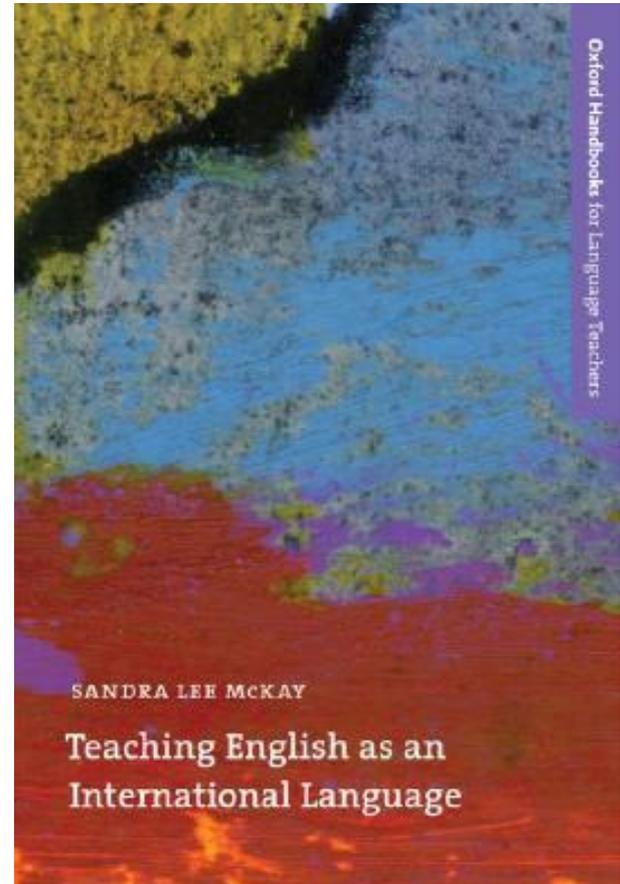
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# Understanding

- Intelligibility – recognizing the expression
- Comprehensibility – knowing the meaning of the expression
- Interpretability – knowing what the expression signifies in a particular context



# Miscommunication

non-understanding

aware

The listener realises that s/he cannot make sense of (part of) an utterance

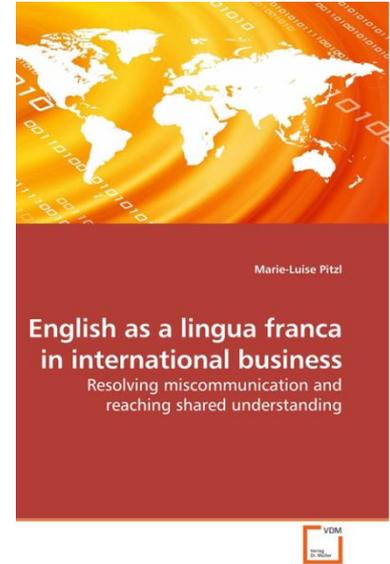
misunderstanding

unaware

# Miscommunication

non-understanding

“Non-understanding relating to the level of lexis or grammar were very scarce” (p. 133)



misunderstanding

- Ellipsis
- Global
- Strategic

# Possible causes – Zhu Hua

- Inadequate linguistic proficiency
  - Lexical comprehension problem
  - “Mishearing” a lexical element
  - Syntactic complexity
- Pragmatic mismatch
- Clash of styles
- Mismatch in schemas & cultural stereotypes
- Mismatch in contextualisation and framing

# Options for the classroom



# Discuss

How might you prepare your learners to deal with these and similar situations?



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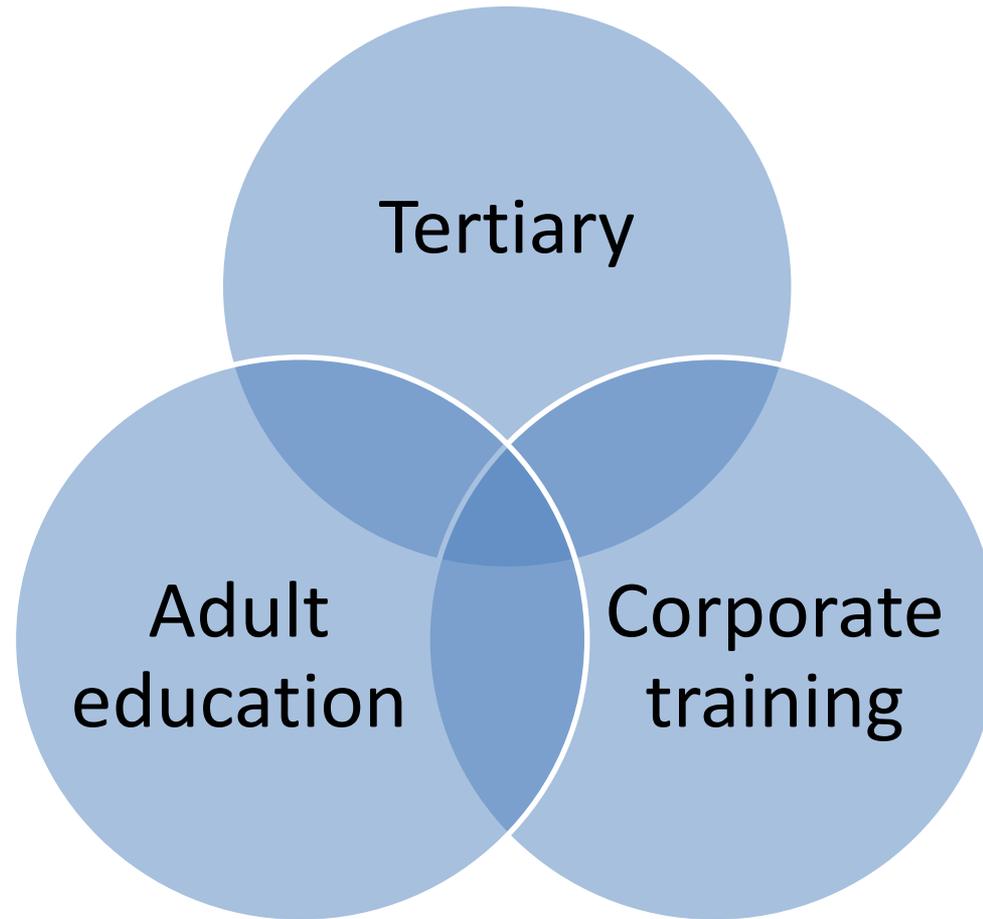
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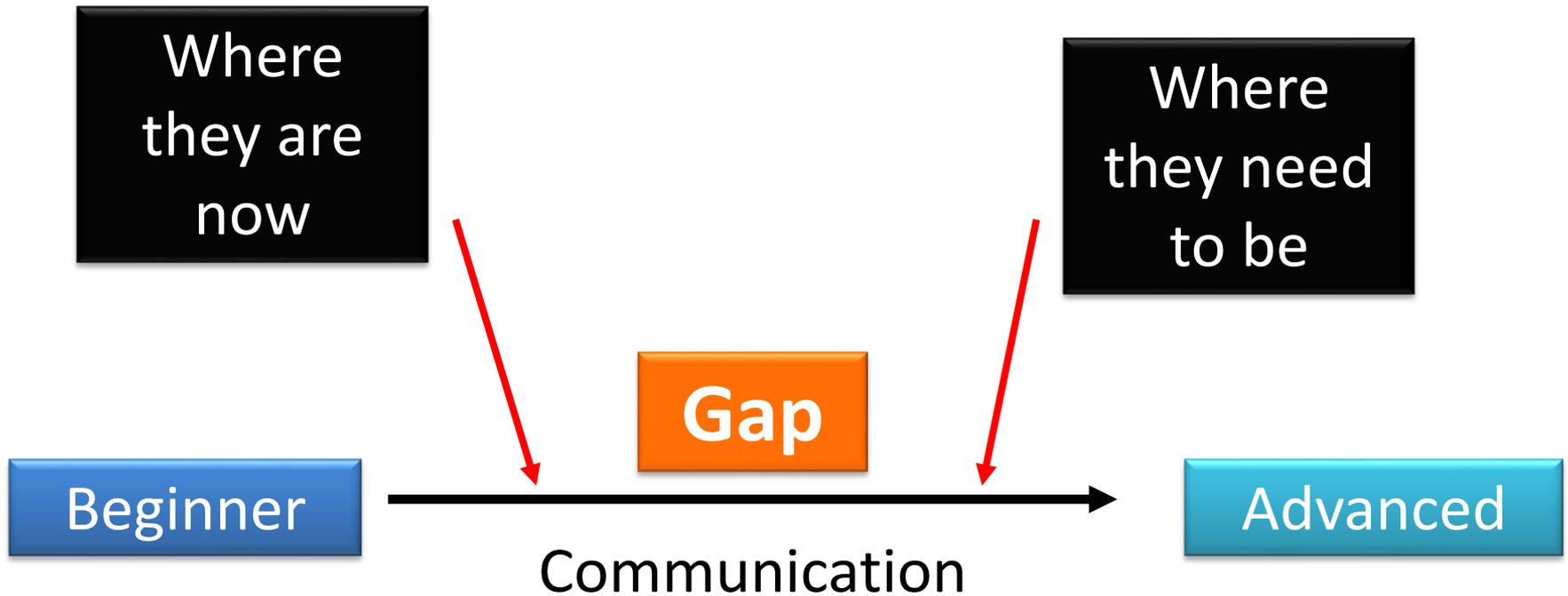
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# Business English contexts



# Finding the gap



It's not about “native  
speaker” English!

(whatever that is ...)

# Defining BELF

(Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013, p.17)

“today most researchers seem to agree that English as a lingua franca is used in **communication by speakers of different native languages**, which suggests that also **native speakers are included.**”

“In other words, **ELF is considered distinctly different from ENL and must thus be learned by native speakers as well.**”

# EFL and ELF

“EFL is considered successful when it converges to a target model, ELF when it is mutually intelligible.”

(Hülmbauer, 2009)

# Comparison between EFL and BELF approaches

(Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013, p.29)

Criterion	EFL	BELF
Successful interactions require	NS-like language skills	business communication skills and strategic skills
The speaker/writer aims to	emulate NS discourse	get the job done & create rapport
NNSs are seen as	learners, “sources of trouble”	communicators in their own right
Main source of problems	inadequate language skills	inadequate business communication skills
“Culture”	national cultures of NSs	business community cultures and individual cultural backgrounds
English is “owned” by	its native speakers	nobody – and everybody

# English as a lingua franca

“conformity with standard English is seen as a fairly irrelevant concept”

“I don’t actually care whether something is correct or incorrect. As long as the meaning is not distorted”

Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 418

# Accommodation



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/heimdahlrecounts/4344251652>



# Accommodation

"the process by which speakers adjust their communicative behaviour to that of their interlocutors in order to facilitate communication"

(Cogo, 2009, p. 254).

# Why accommodation?

“in international communication, the ability to accommodate to interlocutors with other first languages than one’s own... is a far more important skill than the ability to imitate the English of a native speaker.”

(Jenkins, 2007, p. 238).

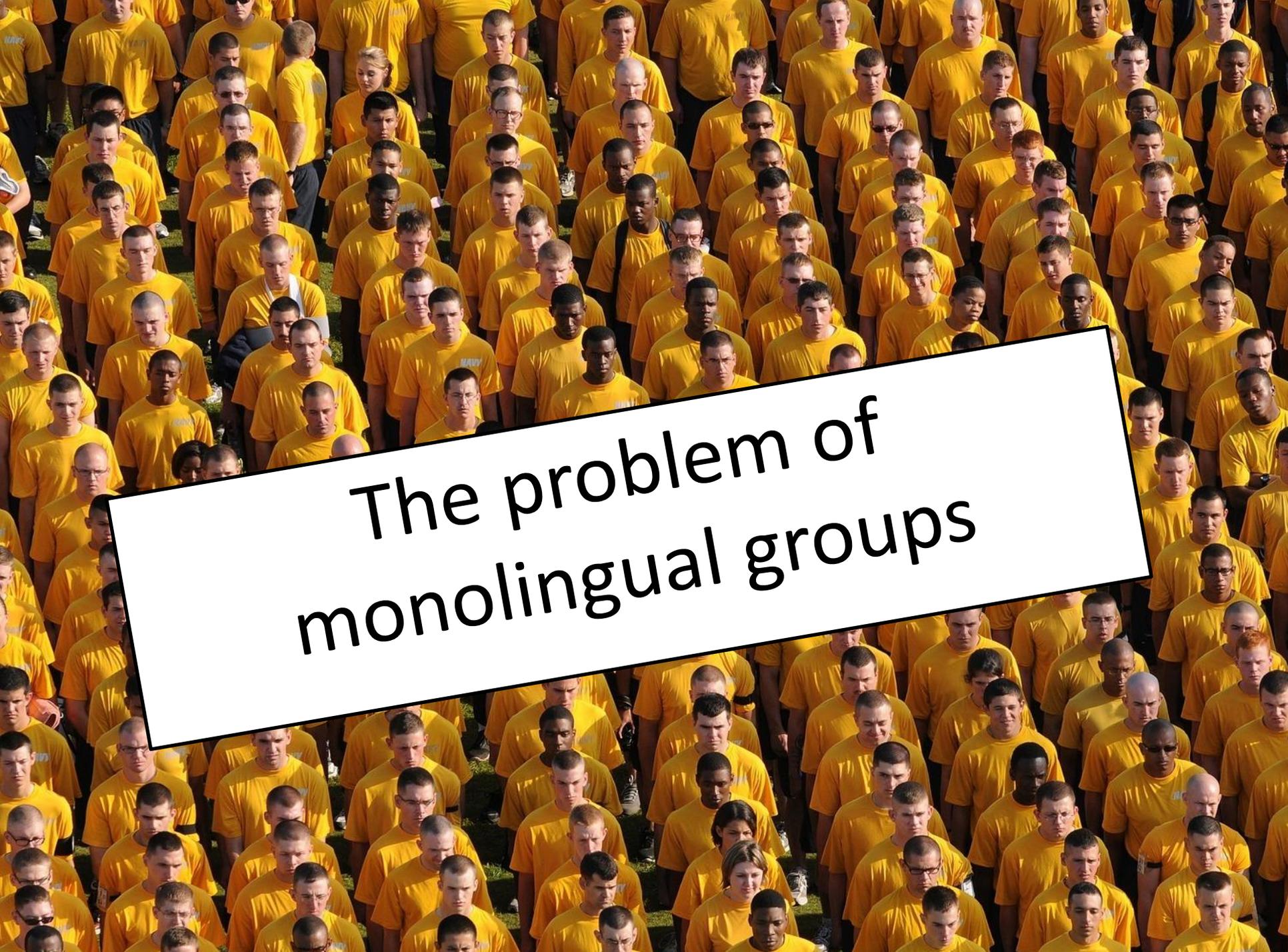
# Discuss

Do you change the way you speak when you talk to someone from another country?

- Why / why not?
- How?

# Strategies

- collaborative utterance completion
- back-channelling
- showing agreement
- encouragement
- repetition
- paraphrase
- code-switching

A large crowd of people, mostly young men, are wearing bright yellow t-shirts. They are standing in a dense group, filling the frame. The t-shirts have some faint text on them, but it's not clearly legible. The background is a mix of green grass and a light-colored ground. A large white text box is overlaid on the lower right portion of the image, containing the text "The problem of monolingual groups".

The problem of monolingual groups

# Active listening

“For optimal efficiency in ELF communication, it is not enough that speakers adjust their pronunciation. Listeners need to be more flexible in interpreting what they hear.”

(Walker, 1996, p. 88)

# Task

Listen to the conversation about travel plans after a conference. The Chinese speaker uses “companion” and “back” in unusual ways.

- 1 How are these words used?
- 2 Does this usage cause any problems in understanding?

“What day is good for me to back ...”

“then I can companion with you ...”

“so far I haven’t booked the back tickets”

## **Contracts**

**What is a contract?**

**Listen to the conversations about contracts. What different attitudes to contracts do the speakers have?**

**How do you think this affects international business?**

# One

A Listen. A contract is a written agreement. Your company signed and my company signed. Now we both have to stick to it. To keep to it.

B Well I am very sorry, but the person who signed no longer works here. We will have to renegotiate the terms.

A What do you mean renegotiate? We already have an agreement.

B Yes, but the person who signed no longer works here.

# Two

A Ok. I have sent you the contract and the appendices. Do you have any questions?

B No. Not at all.

A Well. Erm can I ask you a question? Have you read it? Normally we have many small points to discuss. For example, how what about the terms of delivery? And the terms of payment?

B Put it this way. We are happy to do business with you and your company. The details are unimportant. It is trust which is important. And we trust each other.

# Three

A But what you want is a completely new specification? I mean, we will need to get a lawyer and have a new meeting and everything. You know. To redraft the contract.

B No, no, not at all. There is no need to change anything in the contract. The goals are clear.

A But ... but this is a ... what happens if we have a problem? I mean that's what contracts are for? Aren't they? Shouldn't we at least go through some of the key clauses? I mean.

B Let us talk about your next visit. When are you coming over? It would be good to take you out for a meal again. It's been a long time.

# Four

A I understand that you would like to make some changes? To the contract I mean?

B No, no, not at all. We want to make some changes to the project.

A Yea, but surely that means we need to have another look at the contract?

B No, no, otherwise we would be redrafting it every few days. It's not flexible enough to handle the detail.

# Options for the classroom

## -some thoughts

- Needs analysis – find the gap
- ELF not EFL
- Accommodation skills
- Active listening
- Intercultural awareness



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Do we need to  
change what  
we are doing?