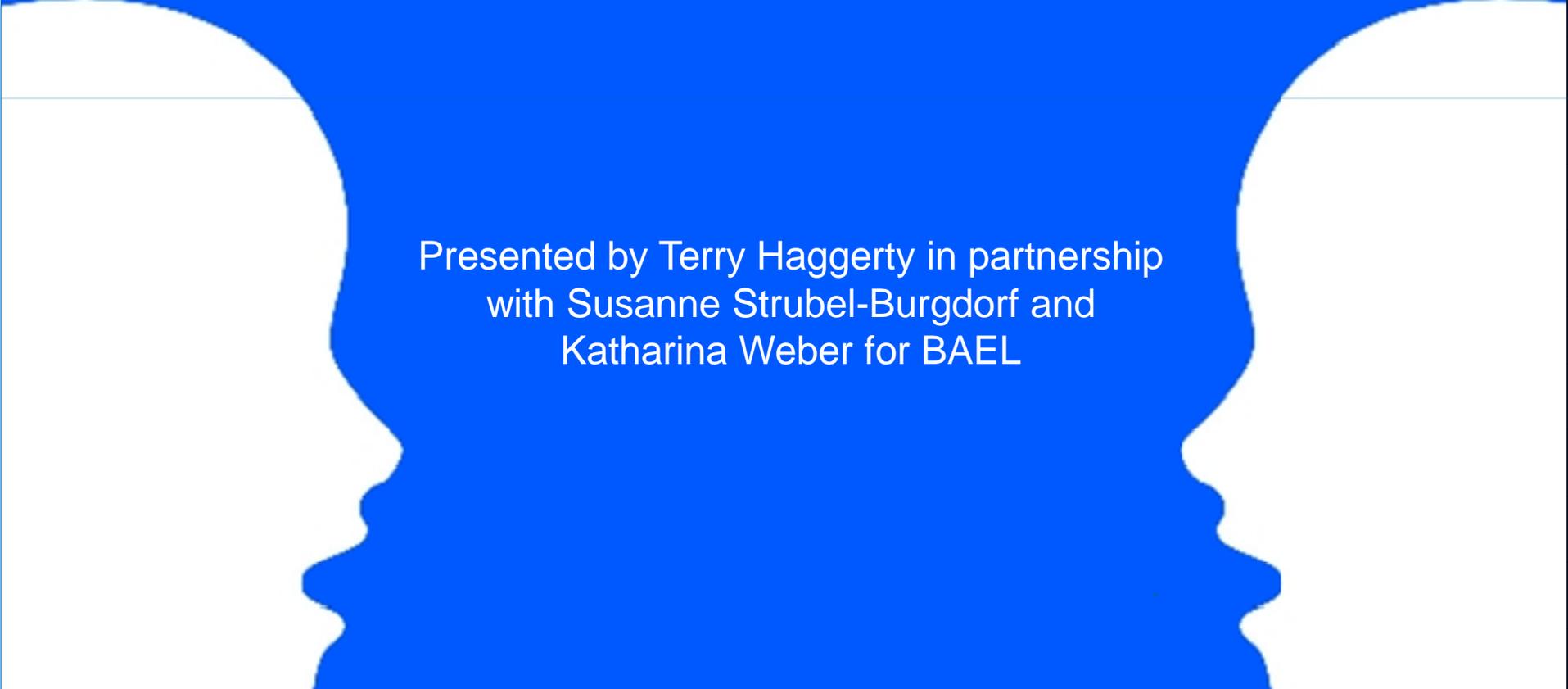# Business English in International Organisations

A Presentation for Dies Academicus at the
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität Bonn

5 December 2012

Presented by Terry Haggerty in partnership
with Susanne Strubel-Burgdorf and
Katharina Weber for BAEL

Agenda

1. Introduction of Research Project and Team

2. Join us in an experiment

3. What is 'idiomatic' language?

4. More about our research

5. Q&A

Meet the Team

Terry Haggerty: Director of research project + SAP manager for onboarding of new staff

In cooperation with Bonn Applied English Linguistics (chair: Prof. Klaus P. Schneider) at the University of Bonn:

Susanne Strubel-Burgdorf, MA: Senior researcher at BEIO project, coding manual and methodology

Katharina Weber: Junior/student researcher at BEIO, literature search

Experiment

On the next slide we have an article for you to read.

1. Read the article

2. Decide how easy or difficult it was for you to understand.   Score it from 1 to 10 like this….

									Very difficult to understand
Very easy to understand									

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
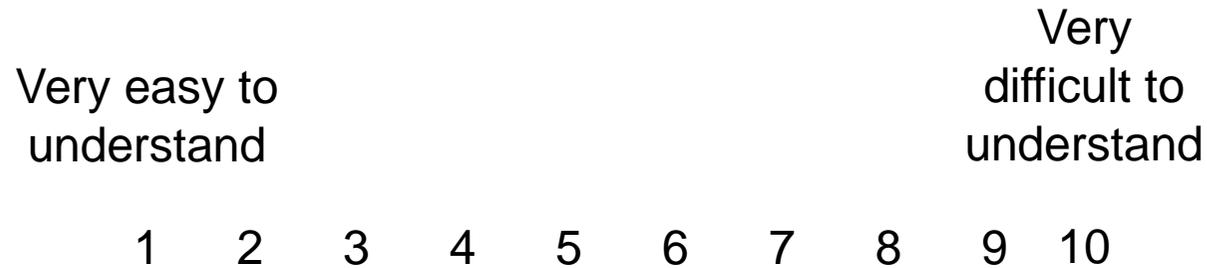
Experiment (A)

Hi everyone,

Thank you for joining the call today. Here are the actions:

John Smith: to give a call to action for the whole 70 people who are in our project team call to volunteer to be a location lead or help with the infrastructure part

Barbara Schultz: to put together a all hands Sales Division call to introduce the project pilot

Lars Svensson: to schedule a call with the central communications representative, David Steel, to discuss the messaging

Shubo Mukajee: is looking into piggy backing the automation of volunteer registration and matching with the current websites set up today

Sibylle Janssen: to work with Simon Stenzel and Peter Weiss and any additional volunteers on setting up the infrastructure and processes going forward

Thanks,
Alex

Experiment (B)

Hi everyone,

Thank you for joining the call today. Here are the actions:

John Smith: to instruct the whole 70 people who are in our project team call to volunteer to be a local representative to help with the infrastructure part

Barbara Schultz: to organise a call with all members of the Sales Team to introduce the project pilot

Lars Svensson: to schedule a call with the central communications representative, David Steel, to discuss the messaging

Shubo Mukajee: investigate how we can share the existing automation of volunteer registration and matching with the current websites set up today

Sibylle Janssen: to work with Simon Stenzel and Peter Weiss and any additional volunteers on setting up the infrastructure and processes in the future

Thanks,
Alex

Our Hypotheses

1. There are parts of native English that non-native English users find difficult to understand.

2. In multi-national organisations (that use English as the official working language) these difficulties cause communication problems that affect speed, cause mistakes and affect morale.

3. Problematic aspects of native English include idioms, phrasal verbs, long sentences, jargon, stylised writing/speaking, superfluous words, different terms with the same meaning, using established words/phrases in new ways

4. For our first study we chose idiomatic, written language because there is a research gap, specific expertise at BAEL and we – last but not least – suspect it is one of the major factors for miscommunication

What is an Idiom?

An idiom is considered to be a "set, multi-elemental group of words" (Bußmann 1996) where the meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of the individual words. The meaning comes, usually, from some cultural idea in the country of origin.

Examples of idioms:

"play it by ear", "kick the bucket", "pull someone's leg"

Examples of idioms from the communications of a international organisation - 1

'at the tip of the spear'

Meanings found on-line:

§ in the lead (be first and show the way)

§ fighting at the front – in the face of the enemy

Intended meaning in an SAP communication:

§ (our people need to be) highly skilled and effective

Examples of idioms from the communications of a international organisation - 2

'lower the centre of gravity'

From physics: put the weight nearer to the ground – to make something more stable

From sport : increase the strength in your lower body

Intended meaning in an SAP communication:

§ To simplify (an idea or initiative), to make it more consumable, in order to increase acceptance and make the implementation faster

An example of an anonymised communication (e-mail)

Hi everyone,

Thank you for joining the call today. Here are the actions.

<u>Actions:</u>

_PA_<FN> _TY_<LN> – Will give a call to action for the whole 70 people who are in our *<project title>* team call to volunteer to be a location lead or help with the infrastructure part

_P_<FN> _J_<LN> – To put together a all hands *<department name>* call to introduce the *<name of strategy>*

_T_<FN> _H_<LN> – Will schedule a call with the *<name of department>* representative, *<person name>* to discuss the messaging

_R_<FN> _HO_<LN> – is looking into piggy backing the automation of volunteer registration and matching with the current *<name of programme>* sites set up today *<name of programmes>*

_T_<FN> _H_<LN> – to work with *<list of person names>* and any additional volunteers on setting up the infrastructure and processes going forward

Thanks,

_D_<FN> _R_<LN>

Example of anonymised email – idioms and figurative speech in red

Hi everyone,

Thank you for joining the call today. Here are the actions.

<u>Actions:</u>

_PA_<FN> _TY_<LN> – Will give a call to action for the whole 70 people who are in our *<project title>* team call to volunteer to be a location lead or help with the infrastructure part

_P_<FN> _J_<LN> – To put together a <u>all hands *<department name>* call</u> to introduce the *<name of strategy>*

_T_<FN> _H_<LN> – Will schedule a call with the *<name of department>* representative, *<person name>* to discuss the messaging

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_T_<FN> _H_<LN> – to work with *<list of person names>* and any additional volunteers on setting up the infrastructure and processes going forward

Thanks,

_D_<FN> _R_<LN>

Our research questions

1. What types of figurative speech do non-natives speakers of English find difficult?

2. What are the effects on non-native English speakers when they do not understand?

3. Do native English speakers adapt when communicating in multi-national groups/situations?

Our research questions

1. What types of figurative speech do non-natives speakers of English find difficult?

2. What are the effects on non-native English speakers when they do not understand?   Distinguish between immediate and long term effects.

   - Immediate effects is the reaction while reading or listening (stop, guess, find out, continue and hope it will become clear from more context)

   - Long term means the effect on morale, motivation, number of mistakes, speed of working, quality of results etc.)

1. Do native English speakers adapt when communicating in multi-national groups/situations?

More about our Research – The Context

1.Many multinational organisations use English as the shared language (lingua franca) to communicate (spoken and written)

2.The non-native English users tend to use a form of English that is different than any native English variety, for example US English or British English.

More about our Research – findings (1)

q   In international companies communication misunderstandings can cause
    cooperation problems and financial losses. (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010)

q   The most significant problems in international communication are :
    § Cultural factors
    § Language competence
    § Native speaker problems (the way they use English) (Sweeney; Hua, 2010)

q   Many non-native speakers think that communication with native speakers is
    more demanding than with non-native speakers. (Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010)

More about our Research – findings (2)

q   All native speakers thought it was necessary to speak slowly and clearly
(Rogerson-Revell, 2007)

q   Some native speakers suggested the need to avoid idioms, jargon or unusual
words (Rogerson-Revell, 2007)

q   The non-native speakers think that native speakers are difficult to understand
mostly because of speed and sophisticated words/phrases (Ehrenreich, 2010)

q   The native speakers are aware of the need to 'accommodate' non-native
speakers but they are not successful (in accommodating). (Kankaanranta and
Planken, 2010)

'Accommodation' Theories

1. Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973)

2. Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al.,1987) *includes non-verbal factors*

Accommodation theories have two basic strategies:

§   Convergence (moving towards other's language)

§   Divergence (moving away from other's language)

Why should we **converge** in business communication?

"Relative similarity in speech rates, response latencies, language and accent is viewed more positively, on dimensions of social attractiveness, communicative effectiveness, perceived warmth, and cooperativeness" (Giles; Coupland, 1991: 73)

Our Plan

Current activity

§ Literature search

§ Coding manual and method(s)

Next activities

§ Collect a corpus of electronic communication and possibly record some meetings/conference calls etc.

§ Design our first study.

Thank you!

Contact information:

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