

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INTO THE BUSINESS WORLD

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Abstract

New and diverse business communities are being created and it becomes business people's duty to learn about other cultures, including other languages, as to be able to exchange information and to express feelings. Based on specialized research, the present paper tries to illustrate that language is a reflection of culture, giving a certain way of thinking and interaction as well as a life style. It also attempts to demonstrate that communicating in a foreign language would imply a lot of other things besides knowing the symbols (words) of that language, mainly a certain perception of the universe and the awareness that meaning may change from culture to culture and from one age to the other. People have similar meanings only to the extent to which they have had or can anticipate similar experiences. Making people aware of the potential for misunderstanding, for giving and taking offence, for being frustrated in their endeavors, because of not knowing the cultural norms of language use, as well as the gestures accompanying language, is surely a field the ones working across cultures should not neglect.

Key words: language, culture, business communities, awareness, global world

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's business world, companies are trying to fulfil the employees' needs to belong to a community. They are encouraging multicultural teamwork that supposes intercultural communication. This trend can be found in the companies' missions, visions and goal statements and it is emphasized in company sponsored training and communication. Knowing about other cultures, including other languages, as to communicate in business becomes paramount. Robert Eaglestone, for instance, suggested four roles that a language may play: transactional, literary, cultural and conquering (Eaglestone, 2000, p. 34). Our analysis will focus on its first role.

A transactional or business language has always been necessary ever since the evolution of different languages, and it is obvious that today English is the one that has taken the role globally, giving its speakers an immense competitive advantage, although the table of the most spoken languages of the world, given below, ranks English as the 3-rd language on a scale from 1 to 10. A growing number of people have access to English language, the expansion of the internet, the great number of multinationals in the world, the international transactions and conferences make people use English on a daily basis. But in this process of international communication, people are tempted to emphasize their own local variety of English, rather than submitting to colonial standardized norms in order to project their identity and values. This applies to a lot of countries where English is spoken as a second language: Singapore, Malaysia, Nigeria, Philippines etc. The growing prominence of regional and local varieties of English changes the way people approach English in the 21-st century, and the most important aspect they will have to take into consideration is the link between language and culture

Language	Number of native speakers (in millions)
Chinese	1284
Spanish	437
English	372
Arabic	295
Hindi	260
Portuguese	219
Russian	154
Japanese	128
German	98
French	72

Table 1. Major languages of the world in 2017

Source: Nial McCarthy (2018) in Statista-The Statistics Portal, <https://www.statista.com>

2. A DISCUSSION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INTO A GLOBAL BUSINESS WORLD

Language is surely a reflection of culture; in other words, language gives a certain way of thinking and interaction as well as a life style. In Romanian language, for instance, and in other Latin languages we have singular and plural nouns and pronouns, while in other languages the distinction between the singular and the plural form is made by the context of the sentence (Korean). Similarly, in Vietnamese, the same verbal form may reflect past, present and future acts, the real time of the action being inferred from the context. As for syntactical rules, they also vary from language to language. If in English there are strict word-order rules, in Romanian, for instance, word order may vary as to reflect speakers' intentions. In English the subject is followed by a verb and then an object etc., in other languages the subject may be followed by the object and then the verb. So, if in English we will say: *Company A took over Company B*, in Korean, for instance, one would say: *Company A, Company B, overtook*.

Therefore, communicating in a foreign language would imply a lot of other things besides knowing the symbols (words) of that language, mainly a certain perception of the universe and the awareness that meaning may change from culture to culture and from one age to the other. People have similar meanings only to the extent to which they have had or can anticipate similar experiences.

Linguists have estimated that the five hundred most used words in the English language can produce over fourteen thousand meanings (Samovar, 1998, p. 124). And there are also other ways of communicating besides words. In most Asian countries, for instance, a minimum of verbal communication is encouraged. Within this frame, Japanese language is highly contextual and often ambiguous, with verbs coming at the end of sentences, preventing one from understanding what is being said until the whole sentence has been uttered. This is certainly reflected in the way Japanese business people acquire English language and communicate in it. One of the main differences between Japanese and Western communication is the very status of communication. The focus of the Japanese speaker will be on human relations, while Western people will focus on objectives/objects. Thus, in Japanese, a number of words take different forms for different situations, sometimes depending on the relationship between the speaker and the listener, or the person being discussed. There are words used only between husband and wife, for instance, as to express their conjugal relationship, and certain words are only used in a business context. Another aspect of communication reflected in the language picks/choice is indirectness and face-saving. Silence is also known to play an important role in the typical Japanese way of communicating, in the sense that it is intended to save embarrassment.

Consequently, the use of direct and indirect language may be considered a major linguistic difference between some cultures and others (North Americans on the one side and most Asian cultures on the other, for example). Another difference in culture is given by the way in which people choose to say *yes* or *no* in a discussion. Belonging to a collective culture, the Japanese usually use *yes* or *no* to express respect for the feelings of others, unlike North Americans who choose to say *yes* or *no* only to express their individual views. That is why, such aspects of Asian behavior, in what the verbal language is concerned, can be confusing to people belonging to other cultures. Some people's values of indirectness and face-saving are evident in their use of language. They are greatly concerned about respecting the individual and preserving dignity. Direct arguments are considered rude in this type of behavior. Thus, the interactions are intended to be harmonious, and in so doing, people may appear to agree with other persons' opinions. The very sincere opinion in such a type of culture will be expressed only when one knows the interlocutor very well or has enough time to explain his/her opinion, without causing the other person to lose face. Unfortunately, the representatives of other cultures will not understand this behavior as a sign of individual respect, but rather as a dishonest way of treating people, and therefore, communication may be disturbed.

If we move on to another type of culture and language, we will remark that Latin people, for instance, love the art of conversation and would normally introduce famous quotations in their speeches, trying to create emotional bounds with their partners. The Latin languages, among which Romanian, have verbal structures for formal and informal speech, the persons for *you* differ, and therefore, speech is more nuanced, as shown in the table below.

Language	English	Spanish	Italian	Romanian	French
Degree of formality	Formal / Informal	Formal / Informal	Formal / Informal	Formal / Informal	Formal / Informal
Personal Pronoun	You / you	Usted / tú	Lei / tu	Dumneavoastră / tu	Vous / tu

Table 2. Personal Pronouns

African culture will also bring a certain influence on the way in which business people will communicate in English. The use of proverbs in their discourse is transferred to the table of negotiations, and sometimes it is difficult for the foreign partners to have a good understanding of the way in which Africans use words. "Appearance can be deceptive" is a simple statement that can come in different ways from an African, adding the power and credibility of the elder ones: "A fat child is not always a healthy one" or "something may smell nice, but after testing it you realize it is not good to eat" etc. Negotiators will often feel puzzled by such statements brought into discussion in the middle of a business meeting. Translation and interpretation problems may arise when engaged in such conversations unless business partners are aware of African culture and traditions.

Coming back to the cultures of the Pacific region, courtesy plays an important role in communication, in the idea of maintaining social harmony as the primary function of speech. This is reflected in those structures used in their languages (Chinese, Korean, Japanese), representing hierarchy. For example, in Thai language, there are at least 47 pronouns, including 17 forms for *I* and 19 for *you* (L. Samovar: 1998). There are different forms for different social classes: the royal, the ecclesiastic, the common or familiar and the slang. Then, the same sound pronounced with a different intonation can have a different meaning, and that again is transferred to the way in which people use and interpret English in international settings.

Similarly, Arabs usually transfer their language intonation patterns to English, which makes it difficult to be understood by another English speaker, as it usually means a tendency to exaggeration, repetition and over assertion that might seem ridiculous in a business context, for example.

Rhetorical techniques are also praised by Greeks, who often use sayings with much meaning in short phrases and they expect to be answered in the same way.

It is obvious that one's cultural background influences the way one uses a foreign language in an international context. Cross cultural communication is about dealing with people from other cultures in a way that minimizes misunderstandings and maximizes one's potential to create strong cross cultural relationships.

The tips on cultural awareness we put into the Annex of this article should be seen as a starting point to greater cross cultural awareness. The different national profiles we considered were chosen from among the native speakers of English (UK, USA, Canada, Australia), but also from second language (India) and foreign language (Denmark) speakers of English, as to prepare readers to deal with foreign partners, both from a linguistic point of view and from a non-linguistic one.

Culture will affect the way in which one uses English to communicate in business, and it may mean the extent to which one speaks loudly and animatedly or quietly, whether one uses lots of "I" statements, whether one chooses a very explicit language or an indirect language to communicate.

Thus, when people prepare themselves to deal internationally, they should become aware of the different communication styles they may be exposed to, from the very explicit language used by low-context cultures¹, to the imprecise and ambiguous language favored by high-context cultures. Then, understanding such phrases as "hard sell" – used by Canadians about Americans, or what "small talk" or "thank you toasts" mean for different nations, native or non-native speakers of English, as well as the differences between British and Irish attitudes towards time and business manners, or how important wearing ties is in the British tradition might help a lot the communication in English, both in native and in non-native settings.

In linguistics, various terms have been attached to certain types of key expressions that are related to specific contexts or situations. These conversational routines/prefabricated expressions/politeness formulae/situation-bound utterances could well be useful in raising people's awareness about the relationship between language and culture. In essence, they are expressions whose linguistic meaning is distorted because of the role they have in a specific situation: linguistic meaning versus use. When a British English speaker asks the question: "how are you", as we were mentioning above, s/he doesn't expect a lengthy reply about the state of the respondent's health.

If a Japanese businessperson answers affirmatively in a meeting, this surely means politeness, and doesn't necessarily indicate agreement or the wish to undertake a certain act.

If we consider the language of agreement, we will notice that the overall message is a combination of body language and carefully chosen words. Only voicing agreement is not enough to tell you that somebody does agree with a certain statement. And this is because it is rather difficult to express plain disagreement for all sorts of cultural reasons. In a very hierarchical society, for instance, expressing open disagreement to a superior would be unwise. On the other hand, in a group-oriented culture, one wouldn't disagree if the group as a whole went in the opposite direction. And actually, agreement, as well as disagreement could be also expressed by adding other types of linguistic behavior, as clarifying, echoing or summarizing. And more than that, gestures and face expressions, such as the ones mentioned in the table above, would function as reinforcements of linguistic statements.

Asking questions is another communicative activity that is worth mentioning, when it comes to cross-cultural communication. By questioning we may be seeking to influence the hearer in ways beyond the apparent intention of seeking information. We can ask questions:

- to show we are actively listening to what someone has to say in order to encourage them to

^{1 1} High-context culture and the contrasting low-context culture are terms created by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his book *Beyond Culture* published at 1976. It describes a culture's tendency to use high-context messages over low-context messages in routine communication. His works have played a key role in describing how people's view of the world and behavior are largely determined by a complex grid of unconscious cultural patterns.
Source: wikidot.com accessed in February 2019.

elaborate and expatiate (a typically feminine behavior) – *Isn't that so?/ Didn't you feel the same when your colleague said that to you?*

- to draw timid or less confident people into a conversation (open ended questions) – *How would that be treated in your country?*
- to interrogate (yes/no questions) – *Is that allowed in your culture?*

Apart from direct questions one can also use eliciting techniques, such as re-formulation or invitations to explain further and sometimes the results are better because in the case of direct questions that might be offending, people may become defensive or resentful.

Therefore, before dealing internationally, a business person should be aware of all these things and use questioning techniques more effectively and match them to an appropriate communicative strategy.

3. CONCLUSION

Most business organizations today, even governments and educational institutions in various countries lay great emphasis on English as an international way of communication and on preparing coworkers for cultural differences. Businesses are built on relationships, and relationships rely on efficient communication. People from different cultural backgrounds and communities meet in the field of International Businesses. Even if they are not working together in a physical space, they are interacting virtually. Using a common language (English) certainly helps communication and eases the flow of ideas for better innovation and cooperation across borders. Consequently, making people aware of the potential for misunderstanding, for giving and taking offence, for being frustrated in their endeavors, because of not knowing the cultural norms of language use, as well as the specific behavior accompanying language, is paramount in a globalized world.

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ANNEX

Cross cultural awareness²

AUSTRALIA

General profile of the people

Australians, or "Aussies", as they are called, prefer an easy-going lifestyle, they are friendly people and relaxed, they appreciate modesty and equality among people.

Business behavior

Australians praise personal relationships, especially in business settings. Having connections is essential, and being introduced by an important representative, in one's line of business may be helpful in starting a relationship with an Australian firm. Punctuality is quite seriously taken by Australian business people. It is advisable to arrive a couple of minutes early for an important meeting, because Australians will immediately get down to business. Conversations will be direct, good-humored and to the point. Business people from Australia are known to be pragmatic, efficient and profit-oriented. They prefer straight-forward, open and to the point presentations, and do not appreciate one's boasting or the overplaying of one's qualifications, rank or titles. Negotiations have rapid proceedings. Bargaining is not very common, because proposals should be presented with acceptable terms, from the very beginning. They usually leave some allowance for some give and take. Although Australian business people may well negotiate major issues without taking into account all the minor aspects of the deal, when they sign contracts they pay attention to every detail.

Dress

The clothes Australians wear are similar to those worn by Europeans and North Americans. For business settings, men are advised to wear conservative jackets and ties, but during the summer time, jackets may be removed. Women, when in business settings, are advised to wear decent skirts and blouses or dresses.

Gift-giving

In Australia it is not a habit to exchange business gifts during initial meetings. However, when invited to an Australian home, one should bring a small gift (flowers, chocolate, or items that would represent one's home country or region) for the hosts. Since Australia produces excellent wines, taking wine as a gift would not be an excellent idea.

CANADA

General profile of the people

Most of the Canadians claim European origins. Four in nine Canadians claim some British origins and a little less than one in three believe they have some French origins. Very many seem to identify themselves very strongly with their province. One of their preoccupations is to answer in a dignified manner the question: "What does it mean to be Canadian?" and try hard to differentiate themselves from citizens of the United States. Ontario, the most populous province and the country's economic, political and cultural place consists of people generally considered more business-like and conservative than other Canadians. Quebec, as well as other areas of Francophone Canada, are populated by French Canadians, and especially the Québécois (or citizens of Quebec) are known to have a very high sense of cultural identity, being quite nationalistic in their views. Quebec is an area where the European influence is strongly felt. People consider themselves the representatives and defenders of French civilization in North America; that is why the Québécois are also called the "Latins of the North".

² Adapted from Murray, M., *Put Your Best Foot Forward*, Bosrock, USA, 2005.

Business behavior

English and French are both official languages of business settings in Canada. However, virtually all international business is conducted in English. Most French Canadians speak and understand English, but prefer to use French. One is advised to check ahead of time to find out if an interpreter will be necessary and available. Punctuality is considered essential for business meetings and social occasions. If a conflict arises, one should let one's Canadian partner know immediately. That said, Canadians are not obsessed with time. Business cards are commonly exchanged in Canada. For Quebec, one is advised to print one's business cards in English or French, including one's academic degree(s) and/or title. A double-sided business card (one side in English, one side in French) is best. As Canadians get down to business quickly and meetings are well-organized, small talk is kept to a minimum. Although Business communication is quite direct in Canada, it is still more reserved than in the United States. When writing letters and calling, one should be direct and brief. Pleasantries are dispensed with very quickly. Business culture varies somewhat throughout Canada, depending on the region. Although the relationship between Canada and the United States is generally quite good, some Canadians may dislike the American "hard sell" approach.

Dress

Generally speaking, Canadians dress more conservatively (and more formally when going out) than their American neighbors, although practices vary by region. Dress in Vancouver, for example, is somewhat more casual; in Toronto more British. French Canadians dress in a more relaxed European style than their fellow Canadians. For business meetings, men usually wear suits and ties, while women dress in conservative suits or dresses.

Gift-giving

When invited to a Canadian home, it is advised to bring flowers, wine or chocolate for the hostess, but to avoid red roses (which are associated with romantic love) and white lilies (which are associated with funerals).

DENMARK

General profile of the people

Danes are known for their fine works of science, art, literature and architecture. They value tolerance, but also individualism and diversity. Danes are quite satisfied with their excellent educational and social service systems. Although family remains an important value for the Danes, they have one of the highest divorce rates in Europe. Most women have a job outside their home.

Business behavior

Danes take punctuality for business meetings very seriously and expect that you will do likewise; therefore, one should call with an explanation if in delay. Meetings usually begin and end after a strict schedule. Danes generally engage in 15 minutes of small talk before getting down to business. Agendas are clearly set for meetings with a stated purpose to briefly discuss or decide an issue. Decisions are made after discussing with everyone involved in a business, but tasks are individual. Danes are not very formal.

Dress

One should never dress sloppily. Black-tie events are common for the business settings. Jeans (clean and neat) are acceptable for casual wear.

Gift-giving

Gifts are opened immediately upon receipt. When invited to someone's home, it is advisable for the guest to bring a small gift for the hostess. One should pay attention to the appropriateness of such gifts. They may be flowers (wrapped), liquor (quite expensive in Denmark), but not sharp objects. Gifts are normally not exchanged at business meetings, but small gifts may be given at the successful

conclusion of negotiations. They may be again liquor, wine, chocolate, whiskey and symbolic presents with company logos.

INDIA

General profile of the people

One should know that religion and language usually separate people in India, because of the caste system. In this country social mobility is limited (as around 700,000 people belong to the lowest caste). There is a great disparity in the distribution of wealth, meaning that a huge gap separates the few wealthy people from the many poor ones.

Business behavior

Business cards are usually exchanged when introduced, in a business setting, and English is the appropriate language in such situations. Decisions emanate from the top. It is common for one person to make all important decisions in Indian business settings, and that is why it is advisable to address to the highest-level person available, when trying to deal with them. When negotiating, it is not appropriate to get down to business discussions immediately. Instead, one should ask about one's counterpart's family, interests etc. before getting to business deals. As business tends to be slow and difficult in India, one is advised to be polite, but persistent and to restate the request firmly but with a smile. A couple of visits will be necessary before one usually reaches an agreement. And it is not appropriate to refuse your counterpart, if he/she offers something to eat or drink in a business meeting. As for scheduled meetings, Indian counterparts may not be very happy to observe them, therefore, one should be prepared to reschedule, in business settings.

Dress

For business, men commonly wear suits and ties except during warm months, when one may omit the jacket. Women are advised to wear decent, conservative pantsuits or dresses.

Gift-giving

When offering gifts, one should do it with both hands. And the receivers will not usually open them in the presence of the giver. Indians appreciate gifts from their counterparts' countries (as perfume, chocolate, ceramics, etc.). Gifts are not usually exchanged at the first meeting, but when the business relationship develops.

UK

General profile of the people

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Therefore, the people of any of these countries may be called "British". As well as "English", "Scot", "Welsh" and "Irish" or "Northern Irish" when one is sure of a person's origin. There are traditions and customs common to the four countries, but there are also very specific sets of cultural nuances for each of the four. In England, politeness, reserve, and restraint are appreciated. The English are known to be courteous and distant at the same time and are very proud of their long and rich history. Scots are passionate about their country, prizing its uniqueness and refusing to go along with English ideas. While being quite distant externally, they are very sentimental when it comes to their family and their country. In general, Scots are not attached to class consciousness and social elitism, except in religion. In this sense, Protestants will generally mix only with Protestants and Catholics only with Catholics. Scots are famous for their keen, subtle sense of humor and appreciate generosity and respectability. Although Wales has been part of the United Kingdom for more than 400 years, it has kept its own language and traditions. Most citizens of Wales are of Welsh or English origins, but there are a lot of immigrants from former British colonies and other parts of U.K. as well. Welsh are very proud of their country and their traditions. They love entertainment, and spend much

of their time with their families. One should know that two-thirds of the Northern Irish have Scottish or English origins, the others being of Irish descent. Irish are known to be friendly and sincere people. They do not appreciate pretentious behavior and have a particular work ethic. Family is an important value in Northern Ireland.

Business behavior

The fact that British people are reserved, may make them appear distant and indifferent or very formal. Actually, they are friendly and polite people and quite helpful to foreigners. At business and social meetings, people shake hands with everyone present, including men, women, and children. Women usually offer their hand to men first. It is advised to use last names and appropriate titles in such settings until specifically invited by your British hosts or colleagues to use their first names. In general, the British do not touch their interlocutors and do not manifest their affection in public. Such manifestations are reserved for family members and very close friends. They appreciate a certain amount of personal space when dealing with other persons. Therefore, one is advised not to stand too close to another person or put his/her arm around someone's shoulder. Staring is not appreciated either. It is also good to remember that usually, men open doors for women and stand when a woman enters a room. One is advised to also honor rank when entering a room in the sense that one should allow higher rank entering first. Remember that one should not insult the royal family or show great interest in their private lives. It is advised to respect the British desire for privacy and to avoid personal questions, such as where a person lives or what a person does for a living. It is considered rude to push ahead in a line, to shout or be loud in public places or use excessive gestures when speaking. The English avoid speaking in superlatives, but humor is ever-present in English conversation. Even if it may be self-deprecating, sarcastic, sexist or racist, sometimes, one should not take offense for that. In Scotland, where kilts are worn by men at formal occasions, one should not make jokes about or ask a Scot what he wears under his kilt. In Northern Ireland, one should avoid discussions on religion and politics, because they have created conflicts all along history.

Dress

In the larger cities people tend to dress more conventionally, in business settings, especially in London. Both men and women usually wear wools and tweeds for such occasions. Slacks, sweaters and jackets are considered appropriate for both sexes. But one should avoid striped ties that represent copies of British regimentals, although, in general, men's clothing often expresses affiliation, and ties are important symbols. In business meetings, men are advised to wear dark suits and ties, and women are advised to wear suits, dresses or skirts and blouses. It is not appropriate to wear a blazer to work, since it is blazer is considered rather country or weekend wear. For very formal events men usually wear black ties, business suits, or even tails. One should inquire which is required. For the same occasions, women are advised to wear cocktail suits or dresses.

Gift-giving

Generally, gifts are not exchanged in business meetings. But when invited to someone's home, one is expected to bring a small gift, at least for the hostess. It could be flowers, chocolate, wine, or books. The gifts should be presented upon arrival, and usually opened upon receiving. It is also traditional to send flowers in advance of a dinner party, but they should not be white lilies, which are usually attached to death.

USA

General profile of the people

Most of the USA history is marked by influxes of immigration. The ethnic mix shows around 85% white people (of both European descent, and of Middle Eastern and Latin American ones), around 11% African-American, 3% Asian and about 1% Native American people. It seems that nowadays, the greatest immigrant groups are from Latin countries.

Business behavior

In Northern America business is discussed over breakfast, lunch and dinner with the same success. Some relationship building may start off the meeting, but the conversation will get down to business very quickly. Usually, in a business setting the person addressing the invitation to a meal pays for it. Table rules are important, and one should remember that the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right hand, but after cutting the food, and the knife is laid down, the fork may be used with the right hand to eat the food. However, continental style (where the fork stays in the left hand all along the meal) is also acceptable. In more formal meetings, the guest of honor is often given a toast and is expected to reciprocate it by uttering a "thank you" toast. It is good to know that the napkin should be placed on one's lap shortly after one sits down, and kept there during the meal. It is not common to tuck one's napkin under one's chin. In such settings one will only raise one's hand or index finger and establish eye contact to call a server. When invited to dinner at an American home, things are usually more informal, but one should not be late (5 to 15 minutes delay are acceptable) for such a gathering, neither should one come earlier than the hour written on the invitation. If unexpected things appear and one is going to be more than 15 minutes late, it is appropriate for the person to phone the hosts and apologize. At table, it is not polite to begin eating before everyone is served and the hosts have begun. It is common and advised to offer food or drink to others before helping oneself. Women are usually served first. If offered a second helping of food, one should feel free to take whatever one likes. When invited to an event, it is common to call or drop a note letting the host know if one will attend. This is expected because Americans are known for not responding to invitations. Therefore, one should not be afraid of hurting someone's feelings by responding "no" to such an invitation. They will feel offended instead, if one says yes, he/she will attend, and then does not come. If on an invitation the written hours are "5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.", one should leave very close to the ending time stated. And it is good to know that Americans tend to eat more quickly than other people, because the idea, when going to a restaurant, is more often to eat rather than socialize and enjoy the food.

Dress

Americans do not necessarily observe the same rules when it comes to the appropriate clothing for business, because it depends on the region of the country, the company's own rules, the person's position in the hierarchy of the organization and, last but not least, the industry in which the person activates. That is why the most common approach is to be conservative until one has had a chance to see what others wear in a business setting. Then, one can get more casual. But at the beginning, one is advised to be dressed and to behave professionally, meaning that men are expected to have socks that would match their suit and no leg should be seen between the pant hem and the shoe. In the case of women, they should not overdress for daytime or wear flashy or noisy jewelry. They are advised not to use a lot of makeup, low-cut blouses, short skirts or too tight clothing, since they are considered inappropriate in business settings.

Gift-giving

In USA there are not very specific customs and taboos concerning gifts as many other cultures have. They will surely appreciate gifts from the partner's country, such as local and regional arts and crafts, books, sweets, even traditional foods, wine or spirits from a counterpart's country. When invited to someone's home for a meal or a party, one is advised to bring flowers, or even a potted plant, a fruit basket, sweets wine, books or a small decorative gift for the house. It is important to know that in USA, some companies have policies that forbid their employees from giving or receiving gifts. Most government employees are in this situation. Therefore, one should not feel offended if someone cannot accept a gift, and should never try to offer cash, which is considered inappropriate.