Franca Poppi

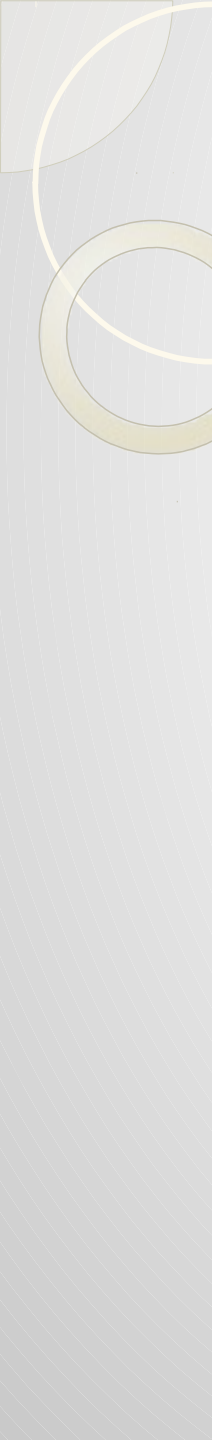# University of Modena and Reggio Emilia

Rethinking the ELT university curriculum: BEFL or BELF?

Teaching tips for teachers of Business English

IATEFL BESIG 27th Annual Conference, 14-16 Nov 2014: Bonn, Germany

Outline of the presentation

- Globalisation
- The spread/distribution of English
  - English Language Teaching (ELT)
  - The European educational context
  - The Italian University context
  - Limitations of the so called 'monochrome model'
- English today
  - Role and function of English in today's globalised world
  - BELF and ELF

- The case study
  - Business communication
  - Competence in BELF
  - Multicultural competence
  - Practical applications
  - Possible outcomes
  - Final remarks

GLOBALIZATION

 an unstoppable process

contacts among people living in the most different places of the world have grown out of all proportions

ELECTRONIC PROPINQUITY

 A language is needed that could be used and understood by everyone

The spread/distribution of English

English has been defined as "the most widely taught, read and spoken language the world has ever known" (Kachru ad Nelson, 2001).

English as Aladdin's lamp

 "knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science and travel. In short English provides linguistic power" (Kachru, 1986)

ELT

In ELT the widespread belief is that "the acquisition of an idealized rendition of a prestigious L1 variety is the given goal of institutionalized foreign-language education"(Modiano, 2009: 208).

English language teaching in Europe is EFL- oriented

Teaching institutions (in secondary and further education) design their courses often to match the requirements of international examination boards such as the University of Cambridge ESOL

adherence to and achievement of

the native speaker standards is

seen as a kind of valid visiting card or key qualification on a CV

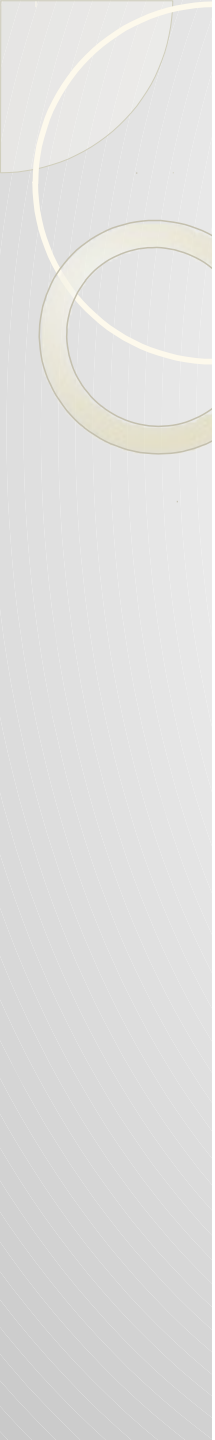## The Italian University Context

University degree syllabuses look to and apply the CEFR for benchmark levels of students' competences

"accurate" B1

required of non-language specialists reading for degrees in disciplines ranging from the Sciences to the Humanities

a highly desirable C1-C2 for language specialists

Limitations of the so called 'monochrome native speaker model' have been exposed

Dialogue between two colleagues (a Malaysian and an American) who teach at a community college in the United States
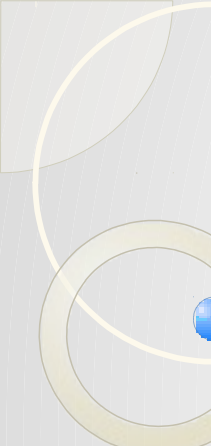
M: Can I ask you a question?

EA: Yes, of course.
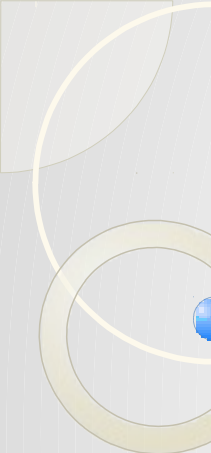
M: Do you know what time it is?

EA: Yes, it's two o' clock.

M: Might you have a little soup left in the pot?

EA: What? I don't understand.

- M (becoming more explicit since the colleague is not getting the point): I will be on campus teaching until nine o' clock tonight, a very long day for any person, let alone a hungry one!

EA (finally getting the point): Would you like me to drive you to a restaurant off campus so you can have lunch?
M: What a very good idea you have!

(Lustig, Koestner, 2006: 111)

In real-life interactions

like academic lectures delivered by visiting professors, CNN or BBC international debates or interviews, etc. it is NOT ENL which is employed as a contact language.

ELFA CORPUS SPEAKER no. 1

...the UN just messes it all up , and ends up with the total non-committal document you know with a long list of all kinds of things that may have to be done which no-one will understand with no signature from civil society so that citizen in the world you know will feel why would they take this seriously because this has got nothing to do with them i think then we do a real step backwards then we have to do all the work all over again missed opportunity ...

ELFA CORPUS SPEAKER NO. 2

Less fluent speaker

... er and er but today i'm going to speak little bit about the difference between the li- public library and soviet mass mass or masses library er because er from er point of view many foreign er researchers the initiatives...

CNN interview

- HK (Japanese): […] so I agree we have so many poor people but you have to remember that in the past seven eight years **Asia had been successfully reduced** the number of poor people substantially and we are quite certain…

- SS: (interrupting, overlapping) …you've made the safeguard looser

- HK: No no non no at the same time the safeguard itself has not been compromised **has not been never loosened** actually […] **our safeguard has been quite stringent quite strong and have never been loosened**

- "a grammatically and lexically 'correct' message doesn't necessarily do the job, but a message with many mistakes may do so" (Kankaanranta & Lohuiala-Salminen 2007: 56).

Even NSs are sensitive to these winds of change

Ier: "The worst thing I saw written about you perhaps is that you are an **Anglo-aburrido,** you're an English bore (laughing) is is that…

Ier: " you er… quoted Cervantes in an article on the bombings er.. **Paciencia y baracar,** patience and shuffle in the cards is that how you think most Spaniards feel about this?

English today

- 1,400 million people in countries where English has an official status

- 750 million people have some command of English

- one out of five of the world's population speaks English to some level of competence

- ONLY for a limited number of people English represents the mother tongue

"The centre of gravity of the English language has moved from the native speaker to the non-native. For every one native speaker, there are now three or four non-native speaker, a ratio that will increase as time goes by..."

(Crystal, 2008: 6).

Until a short time ago…

"The 'success' of NNs discourse tends to be judged not according to how well discourse functions and "gets the job done", but rather according to how well the speakers are able to emulate the language use of native speakers" (Charles, 2001: 263)

Nowadays in real-life interactions

like "meetings at the United Nations headquarters in New York, tourist cruises around Sydney harbour, or academic conferences in Hyderabad" (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7) it is ELF, which is employed as a contact language.

AS A CONSEQUENCE

Since it is the teachers' responsibility to prepare their students for the world outside the teaching-learning institution…

Role and function of English in today's globalized world

The role of English needs rethinking in the English language classroom.

Re-evaluation of one basic and widely accepted tenet of the ELT curriculum development:

- the goal of English learning is ONLY native-speaker competence

THEREFORE

Within the BUSINESS CLASS the focus will be on BELF and not on BEFL!

BELF

- Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) define BELF in terms of 'English as a lingua franca in business contexts'

What is ELF?

«any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option» (Seidlhofer 2011: 7)

Characterised by flexibility and dynamism

This is not the "English" as a property of its native speakers, but is democratized and universalized in the 'exolingual' process of being appropriated for international use.

Conceptual differences between EFL and ELF (Seidlhofer 2011: 18)

	Foreign Language (EFL)	Lingua Franca (ELF)
Linguacultural norms	Pre-existing, re-affirmed	*ad hoc*, negotiated
Objectives	Integration, membership in NS community	intelligibility, communication in a NNS or mixed NNS-NS interaction
Processes	Imitation, adoption	accommodation, adaptation

EFL

In EFL the NNSs' ultimate goal is to approximate the native variety of English as closely as possible. Therefore, deviations from ENL are considered deficient.

ELF

Deviations from ENL are considered 'different' in an ELF perspective, where language contact and evolution are greatly praised (Mufwene 2001).

BELF vs (B)EFL

| CRITERION	EFL	BELF
▪ Successful interactions require	NS-like-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.
▪ The 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

The case study

1st year students of a two-year master course

'Languages for communicating in businesses and international organizations'

Model of GCC in business context (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 258).
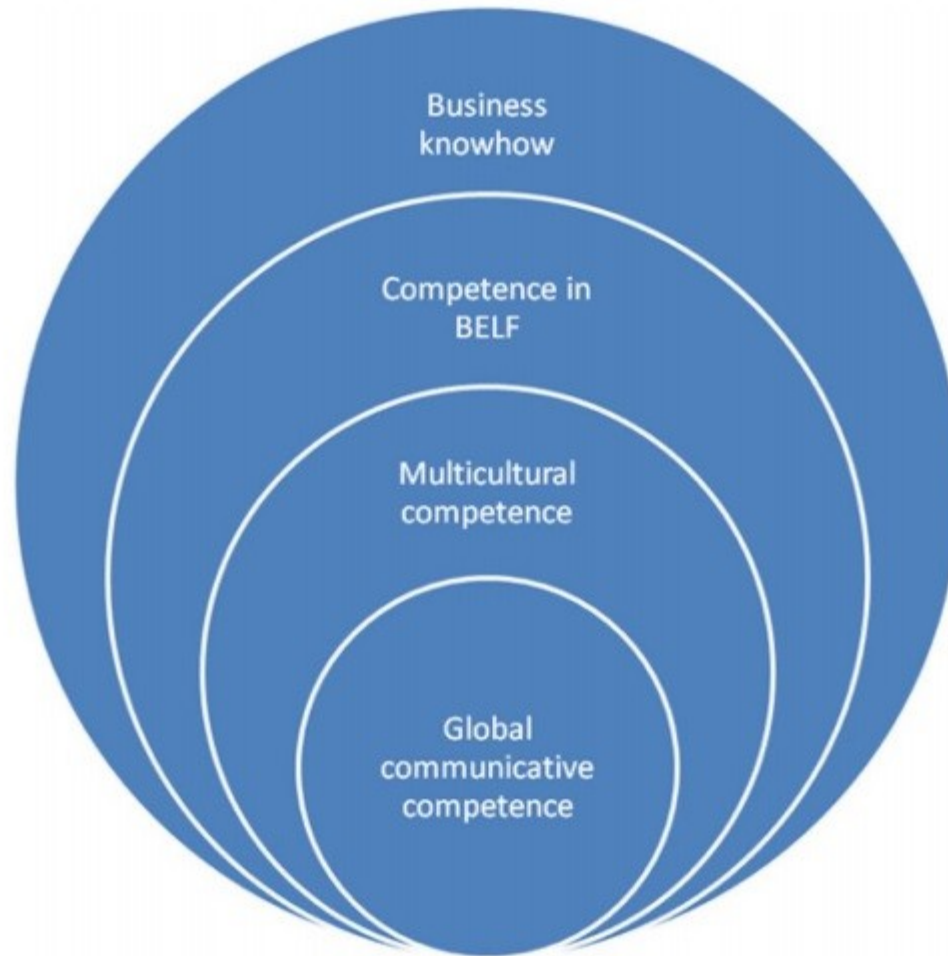
Beware of the grey area

Not so effective English

Effective English

COMPETENCE IN BELF

RAISING STUDENTS' AWARENESS

Welcome to Lombardia.
The official Region site. A Region to act.

In the files here attached, you can find figures of our Region;economic ad territorial data, history,political guidelines divided in themes, Presidentships' activities, useful addresses, values and the mission of Regione Lombardia

1. Stress *first* the positive or doable, wherever possible

2. Approach the negative, the unpleasant, the error indirectly and with understatement by

   ✔ proposing a positive, beneficial alternative rather than stressing the problem („I think we should try option B because it will allow us to....")

   ✔ giving the other the benefit of the doubt („*I* may be overlooking something, but could there be an error here?")

   ✔ relativising phrases and „downgraders" („That's *perhaps* not *such* a good idea at the moment..")

   ✔ the subjunctive, or conditional voice („I'*d prefer* if you *didn't do* that...")

   ✔ the passive voice to avoid the direct „you" („It looks like an error *was made* here...")

   ✔ the suggestive voice („*Could it be* that an error might have been made here?")

„Would you be so kind?" - Adding an extra touch of politeness to soften your English

- ✔ Use *please* together with the conditional voice when making a request („*Could* you please take a few minutes and glance quickly through this report?")
- ✔ Use *will* when expressing a promise („I'll call you tomorrow", not „I call you")
- ✔ „I was wondering...." is a good way to start a request („I was wondering if you could give me a call tomorrow morning?")
- ✔ Use *just* to soften the language and general tone („If you'll just wait a few minutes outside, I'll be with you shortly.") („I was just wondering if you could...")
- ✔ Throw in a suggestive *maybe* when it isn't necessary to sound commanding („Maybe we should consider another delivery date.")
- ✔ Don't *be afraid* to apologise, express polite disagreement, or to soften bad news („I'm afraid she isn't in the office today.") („I'm afraid we only offer discounts for orders of over 100 units.")
- ✔ Use *quite* to understate the negative or disagreements („I'm afraid that's not quite correct.")
- ✔ Avoid the active *you* and use *seems* to complain politely („There seems to be an error here" is much more polite than even „you seem to have made an error.")

Expressions of Agreement

I agree...
Absolutely,....
Sure.
That is a (very) good point.
Without a doubt.
That goes without saying.

On the whole, I would agree with that ...
Generally speaking, yes.
Point taken.
OK
If you say so.

Expressions of Disagreement

Yes, you make a good point. Don't you think perhaps...?
Well, that's an (very) interesting way of looking at it, but don't you think...?
That's not entirely incorrect.
Well, I think perhaps...
On the other hand, it is possible that....
Actually, I was thinking ....
Another way of looking at it may be to consider that...
With all due respect, I think/don't think..
Well, I would be more likely to say....
It may be more productive to consider...
I think the point here is rather that...
I would tend to disagree.
I would probably disagree with that.

I disagree
I beg to differ.
I don't think so.
Absolutely not.
Forget it.
No way.

Remember:
Speaking English effectively in tricky situations means
- first emphasising the positive or some common ground,
- indirectly „suggesting" the actual point.
- adopting the passive voice to avoid using the potentially confrontational-sounding „you"

HIGH-CONTEXT VS. LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

COVERT AND IMPLICIT	OVERT AND EXPLICIT
MESSAGES INTERNALIZED	MESSAGES PLAINLY CODED
MUCH NONVERBAL CODING	DETAILS VERBALIZED
REACTIONS RESERVED	REACTIONS ON THE SURFACE
DISTINCT INGROUPS AND OUTGROUPS	FLEXIBLE INGROUPS AND OUTGROUPS
STRONG INTERPERSONAL BONDS	FRAGILE INTERPERSONAL BONDS
COMMITMENT HIGH	COMMITMENT LOW
TIME OPEN AND FLEXIBLE	TIME HIGHLY ORGANIZED

Range of Low to High Context Cultures and their Communication Patterns

Swiss — Germans Northern Europeans — U.S. Americans — Anglo-Saxons — French — Latins Mediterraneans — Africans Indians Arabs — Japanese Asians

Low Context
- What is said is what is meant,
- Communication performs informational function: exchange message
- Direct language is efficient, problem-solving tool, avoids misunderstandings
- Aim of discourse: convince the other, carry one's point, isolate issue quickly and clearly

High Context
- What is *unsaid*, *how* s.th is said is at least as important
- Indirect, „cushioning" communication promotes harmony and „face", defers to higher rank
- Indirect diplomatic skills diffuses tricky situations, sign of education
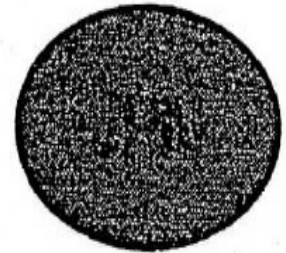- Aim of discourse: preseve everyone's face, esp. higher ranked individual

Situation: You are an employee in a company. It's Friday lunch time, your boss enters and informs everyone the books will be checked on Monday so everything has to be in order in this respect before the end of the day.
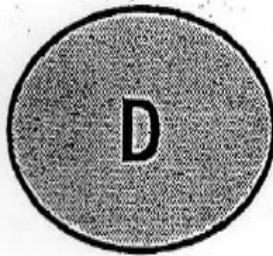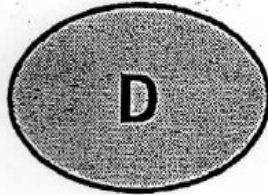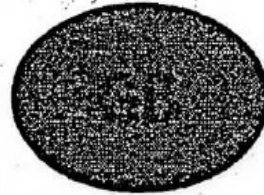

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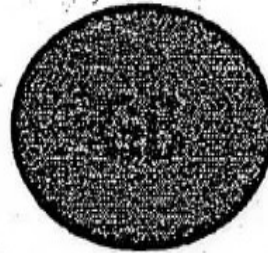
GB

JAP

D

„On Monday we're having visitors. Please make sure the books are in order. Everything must be done before we leave today."
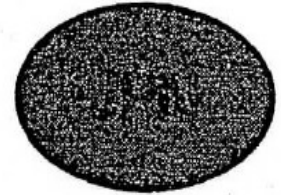
- Fact-based info
- Explicit instructions

GB

„On Monday we're having visitors. Perhaps we should take some time before we leave to check and see if everything is in order?"

- Enough facts for clarity
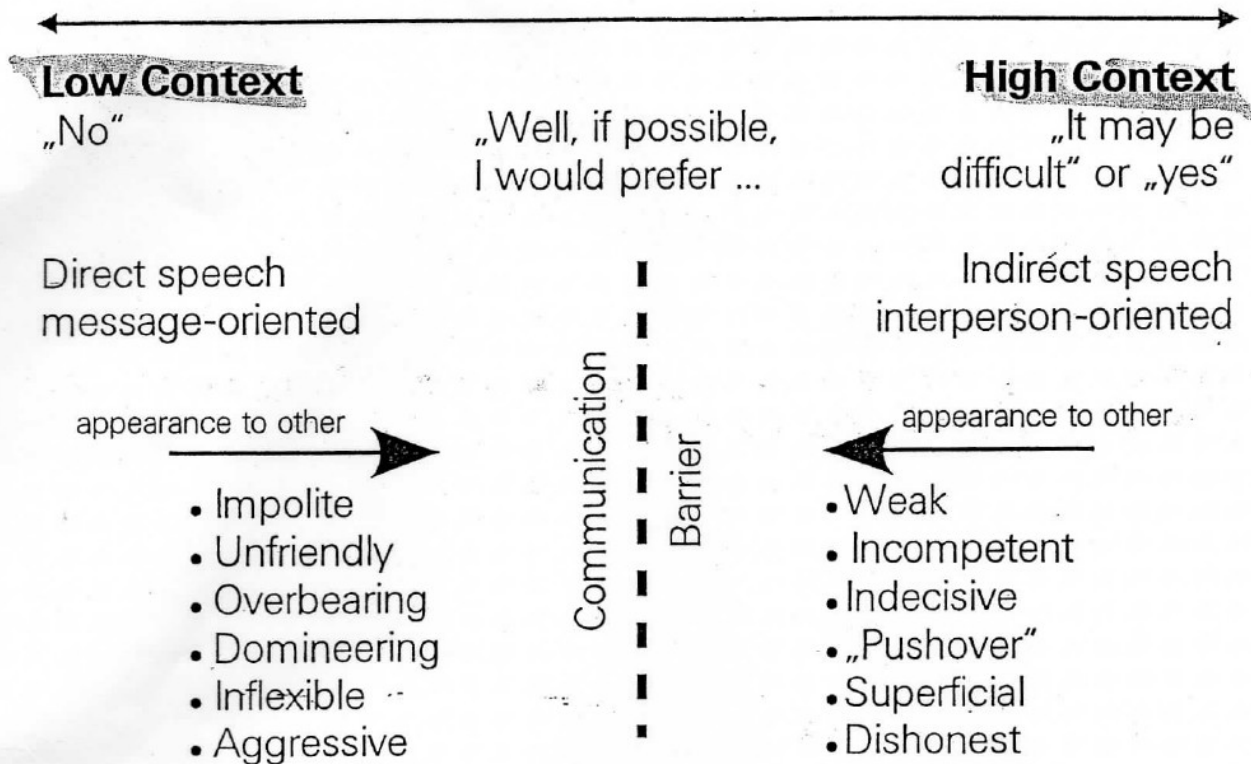- Suggestive, understated instructions

JAP

„As we haven't seen Tanaka-san in a while, we would wish him to get the best impression of our department when he next comes."

- Description of ideal situation or context
- Implicit instructions

Example: Saying „No"

Low Context
„No"

„Well, if possible,
I would prefer ...

High Context
„It may be
difficult" or „yes"

Direct speech
message-oriented

Indiréct speech
interperson-oriented

appearance to other

Communication Barrier

appearance to other

- Impolite
- Unfriendly
- Overbearing
- Domineering
- Inflexible
- Aggressive

- Weak
- Incompetent
- Indecisive
- „Pushover"
- Superficial
- Dishonest

Example of a cross-cultural dialogue

An Unexpected Visit

MS. SCHMIDT: Mr. Kim. It's good to see you again.

MR. KIM: Thank you.

MS. SCHMIDT: How are things?

MR. KIM: Fine, thank you. Our new vice president for distribution is coming next week.

MS. SCHMIDT: Good. Was he expected?

MR. KIM: We just heard yesterday. We're setting up appointments for him with all our suppliers and he'd like to see you, if you have free time, of course. We'd like you to come on Wednesday at 9.00, if you can.
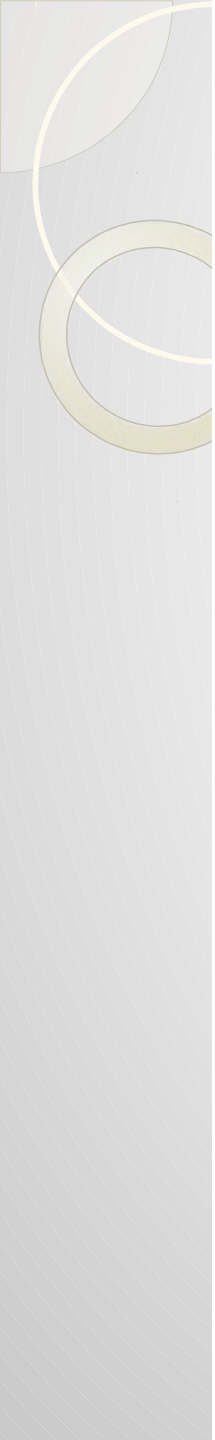
MS. SCHMIDT: Let me check my calendar. We have our regular staff meeting on Wednesday mornings, but I'm sure I can change that. Let me just check and get back to you later this morning.

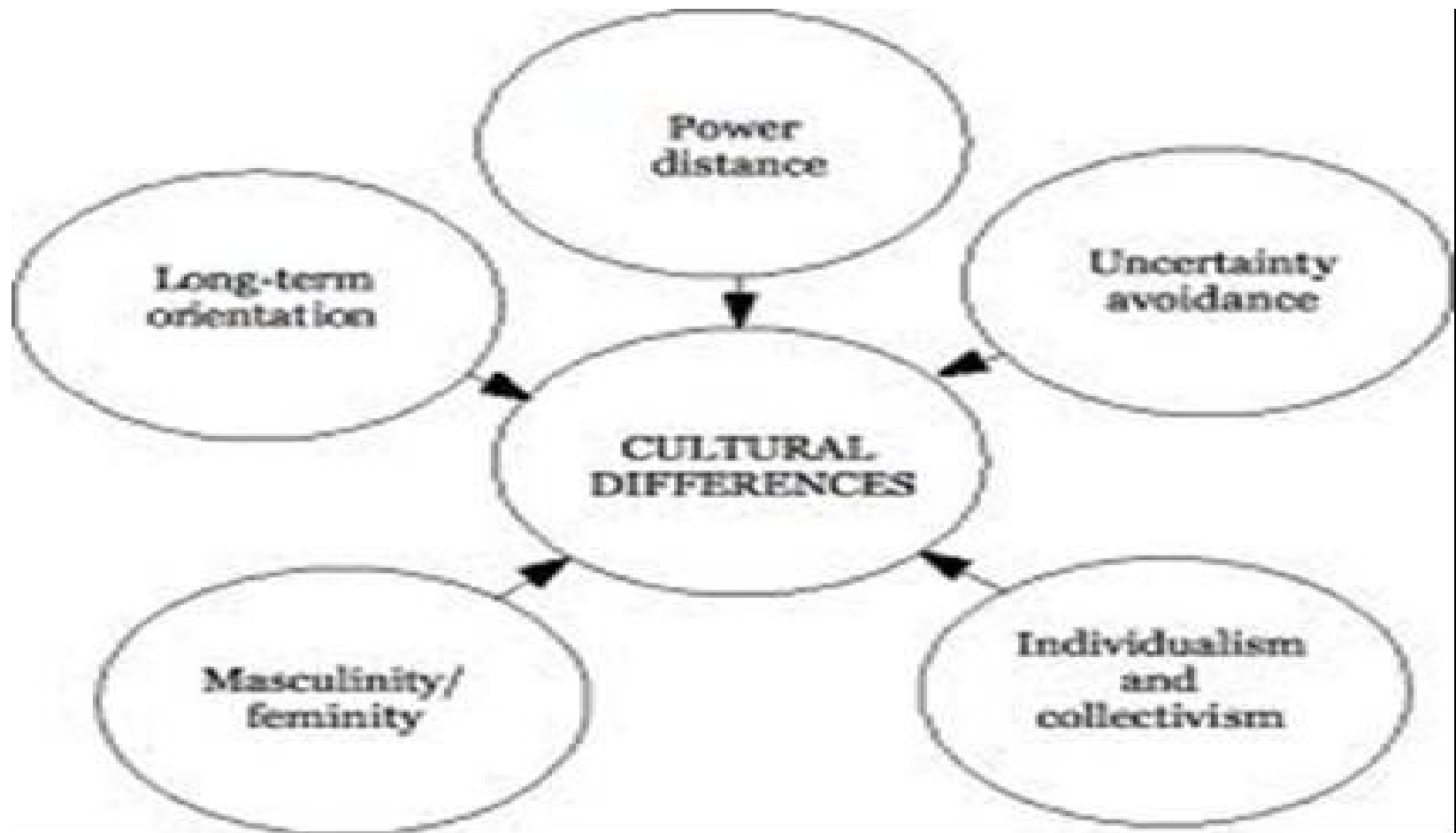MR. KIM: I'm sorry to trouble you.

MS. SCHMIDT: Not at all.

All the previous texts have been taken from:

Alexia & Stephan Peterson, English Communication for Professionals. Enabling you to communicate across cultures.

www.aspetersen.de

Hofstede's cultural dimensions model. Adapted from Hofstede, 2001.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (1)

Hofstede's analysis suggests that in the Central American countries of Panama and Guatemala where the IDV scores are

very low (11 and 6) a marketing campaign should be organised in such a way that …

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (2)

- In high PD countries like Malaysia (104) you would probably send reports …

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (3)

Japan is highly masculine (95) whereas Sweden has the lowest measured value.

If you were to open an office in Japan, you might have greater success if...

In Sweden, on the other hand, you would ...

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (4)

When discussing a project with people in Belgium (94 on the UAI) you should…

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (5)

According to Hofstede people in the Usa and UK have low LTO scores. Therefore people there are likely to …

help you execute the most innovative plans

OR

insist on the respect of traditions??

Welcome to the official site of the Italian Regione Lombardia

Come and visit us!

Find out about our region:

- Economy
- Territory
- History
- Political issues
- Regional government activities
- Useful addresses
- Traditions and future achievements

DEPLOYING CO-OPERATIVE SKILLS

But… What is the **Atcm** Card?

- It is a rechargeable card;

- It has 3 years of validity;

- It can be used within Modena and several surrounding towns;

- It is personal and you can (re)charge it directly on your own student card;

And… Where to apply for it?

Ticket Office

c/o Bus Station

Via Bacchini, 27 (near Parco Novisad)

The town is divided into 4 administrative areas called *circoscrizioni,*: Centro Storico (Historical Centre, San Cataldo); Crocetta (San Lazzaro-East Modena, Crocetta); Buon Pastore (Buon Pastore); San Faustino (San Faustino-Saliceta San Giuliano, Madonnina-Quattro ville).

Possible outcomes

- to enhance students' awareness of the current status of English as an international means of communication (ELF and BELF)

- to make students practise those skills needed in the professional world outside the teaching-learning institution (accommodation, negotiation, easification)

  –

FINAL REMARKS

ELF and BELF should be judged in terms of ACCEPTABILITY with reference to the communicative purpose, rather than in terms of adherence to the prescriptive rules of the 'Standard' language

We are NOT rejecting all norms and standards, but asking for a reappraisal of their justification

Insisting on a Monochrome native-speaker standard inevitably leads to some confusion in the discourse of and about linguistics and language teaching (Seidlhofer, 2008)

THANK YOU!

Franca Poppi

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