

## Avoiding misunderstandings

- 1 Misunderstandings often arise in the business world especially when two different cultures are involved. Read the article about an American presenting his products to a Japanese company.

### AMERICAN'S PERFORMANCE IS A SORRY SHOWSTOPPER

THE AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN strides confidently into the conference room and sits at the head of the table to direct the proceedings. He stands to deliver his opening remarks and emphasizes his points by speaking in a strong *booming* voice and making wide arm gestures. He adds a bit of humor by telling some jokes along the way and constantly *reiterates* how outstanding his product or service is; especially in comparison to the competition.



DURING THE PRESENTATION, the American reclines in his chair with a bored expression, and grows irritated when asked the same questions over and over again, believing that the Japanese should understand by now.

THE LONG SILENCES adopted by the Japanese are extremely *disconcerting* to this *gregarious*, talkative American, so he invariably fills these silences and chatters incessantly.

AS THE MEETING PROGRESSES, he becomes more informal, takes off his jacket, loosens his tie, rolls up his sleeves. He addresses his Japanese clients by their names and omits their titles. These gestures, he feels, are designed to make them more comfortable and relaxed. He makes direct eye contact only with the leader, as he will, no doubt, make the final decision.

FINALLY, AS THE MEETING draws to a close, he has a strong feeling that his proposals will be accepted. After all, the Japanese team smiled and nodded in agreement at everything he said and surely they would be impressed by his strong presentation. He even shook hands with the leader of the *delegation* and slapped him on the back in a gesture of *camaraderie*. What could go wrong?

- 1 Discuss with your partner the meaning of the words in *italics*.
- 2 Underline any cultural mistakes you think he makes, both from your own and a Japanese point of view. Would his approach be acceptable in your country?



- 2 **5.5** Listen to this Japanese businesswoman explaining how Japanese business people would have interpreted the American's performance.
- 1 Does she note the same mistakes as you did? And for the same reasons?
  - 2 What other kinds of misunderstandings can arise in cross-cultural communication? How can they be resolved?
  - 3 What problems are involved in translating documents and in the use of interpreters?