

IDIOM OF THE MONTH:

TO PUT YOUR FOOT IN IT!

means to make an embarrassing mistake.

e.g. "I was talking to this guy at a party, and said: "I am really disappointed with HSV – they are playing such terrible football at the moment. What do you say?" He replied: "I am president of the HSV fan club!"

INTERCULTURAL (MIS)UNDERSTANDINGS

If you are active in international business, you are facing the challenge of having to act and react on the international scene in English with the same power and presence that you have when you speak German. This isn't so simple – and it is easy **to put your foot in it!** Only those lucky few who have had the chance to spend years living and working in an English-speaking country feel completely relaxed when they switch languages. But fortunately, that is not the end of the story. Even if you can't take time out to spend some months abroad, this does not mean that you cannot improve your English communication.

Intercultural awareness is the buzz word of the moment. No longer is it just a question of learning another language with its grammar, vocabulary and idioms. It is even more important to understand the differences between cultures. Just translating a phrase directly from one language to another is often not enough, even if the sentence is grammatically correct. The same expression may not have the same meaning in both cultures.

After all, if two animals wag their tails this is fine if they are both dogs – but not if one is a dog and the other is a cat!



THE NAME GAME

People coming from English-speaking countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, as well as the UK and the USA, all have the same custom of using first names and have to adjust quickly to the German way of using surnames. Germans, of course, find it unusual to use first names with someone they don't know. This use of first names is not 'duzen', indeed English has only one form of 'you' in comparison some other cultures, like German, which have a formal and informal form of address.

The problem is made more complicated by the fact that you are sometimes communicating with foreigners for whom English is only their second language, and who have a different cultural background, for example people from Asia or Eastern Europe.

It is usually better to be 're-active' rather than 'pro-active' in the question of formality vs. informality. And it is important to remember that it is easier to move from the 'formal' to the 'informal' rather than vice versa.

If you are talking or writing to a woman and don't know for certain that she is married, use the neutral title 'Ms' (the 's' sounds like the buzz of a bee) rather than 'Mrs or Miss' (the 's' in 'Miss' sounds like the hiss of a snake). Modern woman think that

Mrs or 'Miss' are sexist as these words show whether the woman is married or not. 'Ms' is neutral – like 'Mr'. If you are unsure whether to address people by their

first name or with their title, you can compromise by using both the first name and the surname, e.g. Dear Joe Bloggs:

