

DIVIDED BY CULTURE

Britové a Američani hovoří stejným jazykem a přesto je odděluje mnohem víc než jen oceán. V čem ony rozdíl spočívají? Britský autor ROBERT GIBSON o nich hovořil s Američanem Patrickem Schmidtem, školitelem mezikulturních dovedností.

medium

George Bernard Shaw described Britain and America as “two countries divided by a single language”. One would think that Britons and Americans must have a similar culture because of common roots and, above all, a common language. Perhaps surprisingly, however, subtle cultural differences have a much more significant impact on British–US communication than the relatively minor linguistic ones. These cultural differences are particularly dangerous because they are so unexpected.

In her bestselling book *Watching the English* (see box, page 32), the British-born writer Kate Fox comments on differences between Americans and Britons. One key area involves people’s attitude to modesty. She writes: “While the English are no more naturally modest or self-effacing than other cultures — if anything, we are inclined to be rather arrogant — we do put a high value on these qualities.”

This means, according to Fox, that most Britons dislike “hard sell” in advertising and marketing, which they associate with Americans. She also writes that the English, unlike Americans, distrust salespeople and do not express their complaints directly.

Privacy is highly valued by the British, who can be shocked by Americans’ apparent wish to talk to everyone they meet. Americans often comment on the indirectness of British communication. Kate Fox quotes an American visitor who asked her why the British could not be “a bit more direct, you know, a bit more up-front”? We would, as she pointed out, save ourselves and everybody else a great deal of trouble.” For the British, American directness is seen as a sign of rudeness and of a lack of education.

To get a better idea of some other important differences between Britons and Americans, I spoke to US

intercultural expert Patrick Schmidt, who has spent many years working with people from Britain.

What has been your involvement with the British?

When I started to work in Germany, I found most of my colleagues were British. Since we spoke the same language, I assumed that it would be easy to connect with them. Yet, with time, I noticed there were subtle differences in their communication style that surprised me. For example, it never occurred to me that an accent could give an indication that you went to an exclusive “public” school and not to a state school. My American upbringing of “all men are equal” made me blind to class status.

It took me several years to start to understand the British mindset. George Bernard Shaw’s comment about Britain and America being two countries divided by a common language illustrates what I went through. What he meant was that there are invisible cultural differences that can make communication between the two nations at times difficult, even with a supposedly common language. And he was so right!

Your remark about class differences is interesting. I have the impression that these things are easier for outsiders to notice than for those brought up in the country. I am always surprised to experience the differences between Britain and America — the common language, in my opinion, is deceptive. It leads people to think that the culture is the same as well. What do



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apparent [ə'pærənt]	zdánlivý
bring sb. up [ˌbrɪŋ 'ʌp]	vychovat
complaint [kəm'pleɪnt]	stížnost
deceptive [dɪ'septɪv]	zrádný
hard sell [hɑ:d 'sel]	agresivní prodejní metody
impact ['ɪmpækt]	dopad, vliv
inclined: be ~ to be sth. [ɪn'klaɪnd]	mít sklon být něčím
indication [ˌɪndɪ'keɪʃən]	náznak
invisible [ɪn'vɪzəbəl]	neviditelný
mindset ['maɪndset]	způsob myšlení
modesty ['mɒdəstɪ]	skromnost
occur to sb. [ə'kɜ: tə]	napadnout koho
privacy ['prɪvəsi]	soukromí
public school ['pʌblɪk sku:l] UK	soukromá škola
quote sb. [kwəʊt]	citovat
rudeness ['ru:dnəs]	nezdvořilost
salespeople ['seɪlz,pɪ:pəl]	prodejní personál
self-effacing [ˌself ɪ'feɪsɪŋ]	nenápadný, zdrženlivý
subtle ['sʌtl̩]	jemný, slabý
upbringing [ˌʌp'brɪŋɪŋ]	výchova
upfront [ˌʌp'frʌnt]	otevřený, přímý



“British people
and Americans
have fundamentally
different ways
of communicating”