

# Investigating Language and Standard Setting in the Workplace

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BAAL TEA SIG  
June 2013



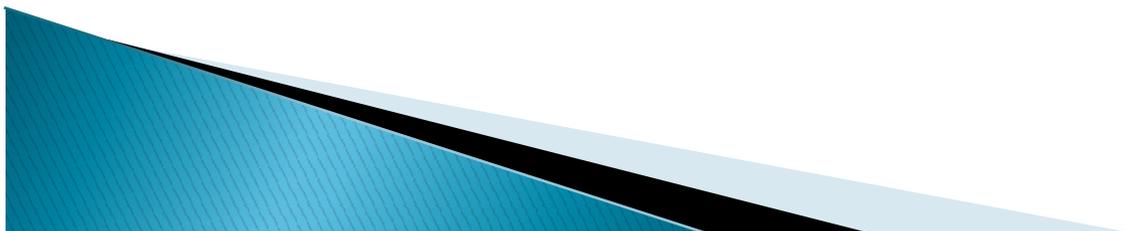
# Background to this talk

- ▶ Fieldwork in construction, engineering, hospital management, hotel & catering, call centres, back office
- ▶ UK, India, Tunisia, Vietnam and the Middle East
- ▶ OFSTED inspector incl vocational training and work-based learning
- ▶ UK standards writer for interpreting and translation
- ▶ *Language in Construction* (2004) CITB
- ▶ *APTIS report* (2012) British Council



# Session aim

- ▶ Findings from fieldwork
- ▶ Key language aspects needed in the workplace
- ▶ Implications for language and occupational standard setting



# English in the workplace

- Employee observations



Call centre advisers, clerks

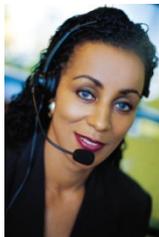
Waiters in restaurants, coffee shop, in-room dining

Front of house staff, receptionists, telephonists

Teachers of English, maths and science

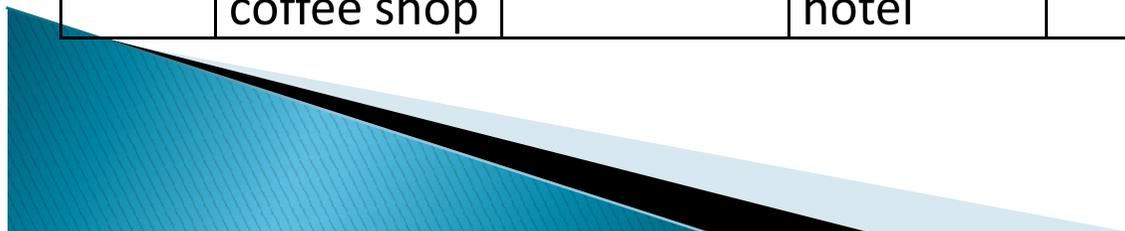
Managers: HR- store- restaurant – office

Shop assistants



# Language levels – work functions

CEFR						
C1		Marketing manager				
B2	Office manager	Assistant store manager	Call centre advisors	Science & maths teachers	English language teachers*	Restaurant manager
B1	In-room dining waiter					Hotel receptionist
A2	Restaurant waiter	Store assistant				Hotel telephonist
A1	Waiter in coffee shop		Bell boy in hotel			



# Findings of interest

- ▶ Employers and employees tell us:

‘Spoken language skills are the most important in the workplace’

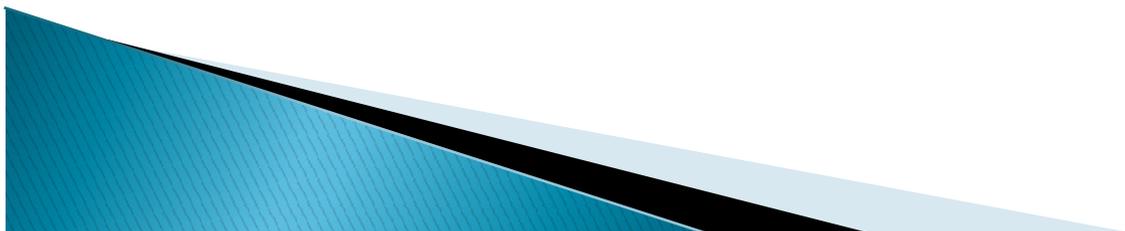
- ▶ Speaking and listening usually key to communication in the workplace

- But compare back office functions where written contracts and policies are checked for accuracy

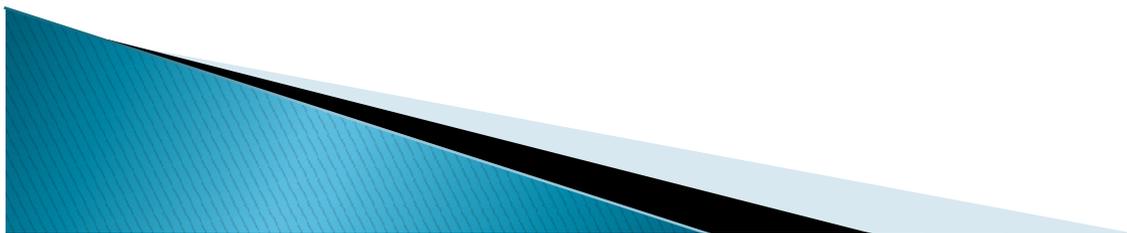


# Findings of interest

- ▶ language for work ↔ general conversation
  - Examples collected during fieldwork where the employee communicated at a higher level in the work context
- ▶ Implication for the relevance of general English language standards and tests, especially when testing candidates with prior work experience



What types of language skills  
do learners need most for  
work?

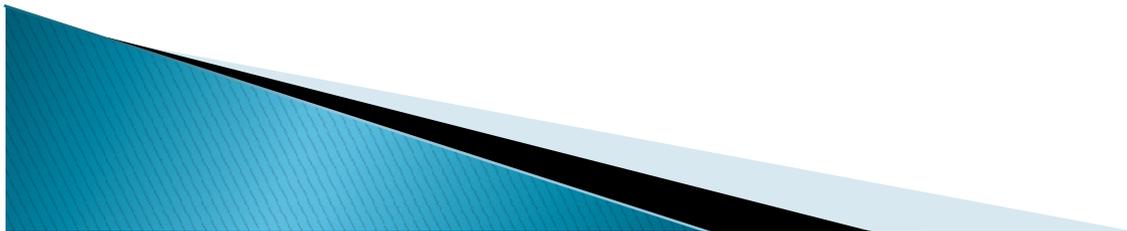


# Language skills 1

- ▶ Understanding spoken English, ie identifying words in a stream of sound
  - ▶ Pronunciation, intonation and stress patterns
  - ▶ Checking back you have understood; asking for repetition, clarification etc.
  - ▶ To some extent vocabulary, jargon and idioms  
*He's tied up at the moment or drywalling*
  - ▶ Frequently used chunks in the workplace, phrasal verbs like *set* and *set out*; *run* and *run out of*; *pop in, pop this on*
- 

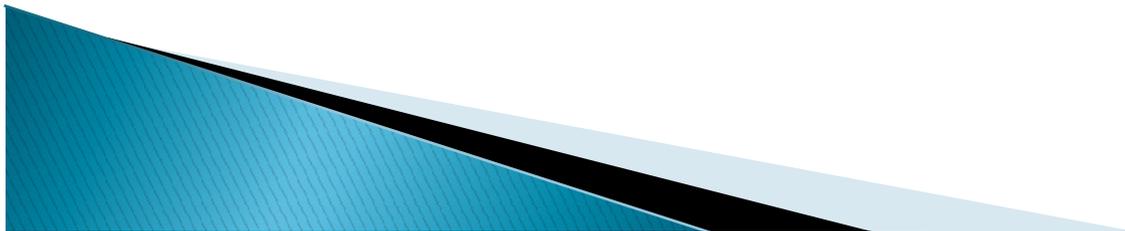
# Language skills 2

- ▶ Description of process and instruction: *The engine should be turned clockwise before inserting it*
- ▶ Understanding instructions and explanations: *Before you do X, you do Y*



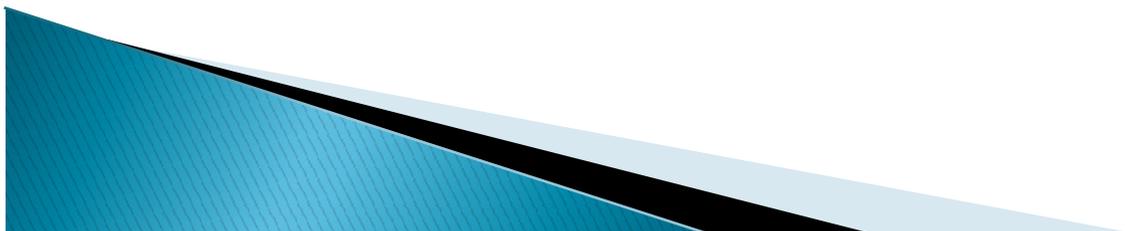
# Language skills 3

- ▶ Register: formal, informal and colloquial language, especially spoken language
- ▶ Language for social interaction  
Second language speakers are often seen as aloof



# Language syllabus and testing

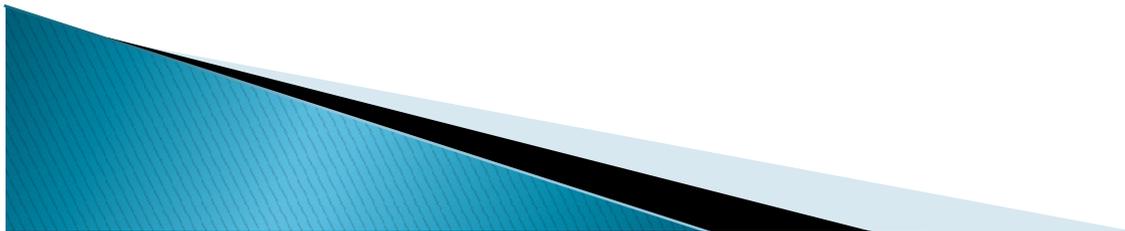
- ▶ The priorities for work-related language learning differ significantly from the typical ELT syllabus & course book
- ▶ Standard setting and testing should reflect real work situations



# Work and language requirements

- ▶ Work functions are often routine and predictable
- ▶ Language and communicative requirements are potentially much more complex and variable

...especially when things go wrong



# It's a tough world out there: actual language used on site

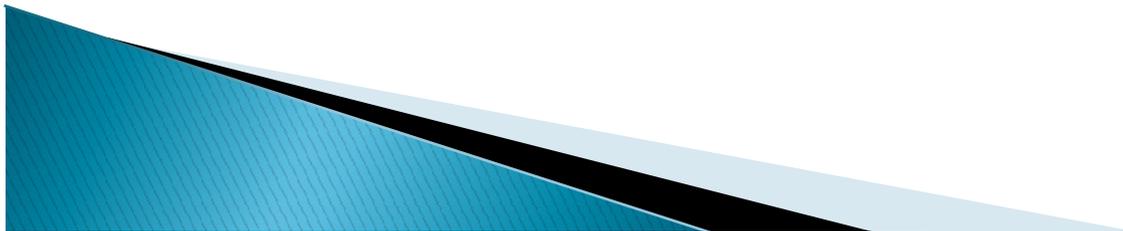
Regulations require that we separate pedestrians from vehicles

Everybody should have been familiarised who is using the cradles

This upper ground floor is very congested and we are  
reallocating it to be used

# Language in the context of vocational training & work

- ▶ A major challenge
- ▶ What do we know about employment outside our own sector?
- ▶ Industry practice
- ▶ Language requirements



# An excellent source of information

National Occupational Standards

<http://www.ukstandards.org.uk>

- ▶ For employers, language teachers and ministries
  - To plan learning programmes
  - To check that the learning content is right
  
- ▶ For teachers, standard setters and testers
  - To familiarise yourself with work practice before you meet the employer

Any questions / comments

