

Business Conversations 1- Notes

The two podcasts highlight the importance of what we refer to as “register.” When we talk about register we mean the general feeling, or tone, of the speaking or writing that we are considering. In some ways register can be compared to formality or politeness. We could say, for example, that the first podcast demonstrates Mr Smith being too informal, and, as a result, impolite. Mr Smith is also too direct, and again this results in him sounding impolite. The end result is that Mr Brown does not like Mr Smith, or his proposal, very much.

In the second podcast Mr Smith is more polite, and Mr Brown’s reaction to him is more favourable. How has he achieved this? The better effect is achieved partly by better listening. Mr Smith now responds to Mr Brown’s questions, rather than dismissing them and putting forward his own questions. This was the approach that was too direct in the first podcast. In the second podcast Mr Smith does not “push” his proposal at all, but rather waits for Mr Brown to refer to it for him.

A grammatical device that is used effectively, particularly in the second podcast, is the “question tag.”

It’s nice here, isn’t it? (isn’t it = the question tag).

The use of these tags involves the listener in the conversation, by inviting them to agree with the statement. Listen to the rising intonation (pitch) at the end of the tag, it is this rising sound that highlights this invitation to agree. It is possible to say the tags with a flatter intonation – in this case the listener is not invited to agree – it is more of a statement. Question tags are highlighted in orange in the tapescripts. Why not listen to them and pay attention to the intonation patterns?

The tapescripts are also highlighted in blue where there are examples of particularly polite constructions or phrases. There will be a more in-depth discussion of these devices in the next Business Newsletter.