

Small Talk in Business Meetings Across Cultures

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se podrobně zabývá společenskou konverzací, jejím pojetím v různých kulturách a analýzou témat vhodných a nevhodných ke společenské konverzaci. První kapitola vysvětluje čtenářům podstatu a účel společenské konverzace. Druhá kapitola se zabývá analýzou témat ke konverzaci ve třech odlišných kulturách.

Klíčová slova:

Definice, hovor, kultura, analýza, vhodná / nevhodná témata.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis deals with small talk, its meaning based on culture and analysis of appropriate and inappropriate topics for small talk. The first chapter explains the meaning and the purpose of small talk. The second chapter handles analysis of topics for small talk in three different cultures.

Keywords:

Definition, talk, culture, analysis, appropriate / inappropriate topics.

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INTRODUCTION

In my bachelor thesis I have decided to focus mainly on the perception of small talk across chosen cultures.

At the beginning I was afraid there was not much to write about. Such idea was pretty challenging for me. My poor knowledge about the topic forced me to collect as much information as it was possible. Thanks to local libraries, bookshops and the Internet I soon found enough of them.

As a majority of people I was not familiar with detailed definition of small talk as well as with its rules or factual purpose. Millions of people all around the world perceive any light conversation as a necessary evil. Only a few individuals are aware of its power and use it to gain some benefits.

I believe I explain everything clearly and there are not any confusing facts.

My bachelor thesis consists only of a theoretical part. A practical part for example in a form of questionnaire would not be probably relevant or useful to the theory. Maybe it would not be difficult to make a cross – cultural questionnaire. But there would definitely be a problem with lack of foreign respondents to get any significant results. The theoretical part itself is divided into two simple chapters. The first quite complex chapter deals with various definitions of small talk taken from dictionaries, technical literature and online blogs. Then there are advantages of small talk, suitable time, place and a long list of small talk rules. At the beginning I said there is no practical part but in fact, the second chapter might seem to be more practical than theoretical. It is probably a mix of both and it deals with analysis of appropriate and inappropriate topics for small talk in three different countries - the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Germany. The results of the analysis are more than surprising.

I think the analysis in Chapter 2 brings the most important facts that can be used in real life e. g. when travelling abroad to a business meeting or organizing an international conference.

1 SMALL TALK

The term small talk itself comes from the USA and it spread all around the world in 1980's. These days we cannot do without small talk at any special occasion such as a banquet or cocktail party. And it is both in business and social situations (Maxová 2008). Now we are familiar with the origin of small talk and the fact it is unnecessary part of business and social situations. But that is not enough. Actually, we still do not know what this term really means.

1.1 Definition

A definition might help us to understand the real meaning of the term small talk. When searching for its definition we find out there is not the only one universal definition. There are plenty of them. Some definitions of small talk are poor and vague whereas others on the contrary very detailed and clear. We cannot say which one is more correct or less correct. The most general definition can be found in any English dictionary. Despite the fact the second definition was found in a business English dictionary it can be easily interchanged with the first definition taken from an ordinary non – business dictionary because it does not say anything about business issues.

1.1.1 Ordinary Definition

“Polite conversation about ordinary or unimportant subjects, especially at social occasions.” (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

1.1.2 Business Definition

“Polite conversation about things that are not important, often between people who are meeting for the first time.” (Cambridge Business English Dictionary)

The other definitions vary more because their content corresponds with the meaning based on cultural stereotypes. The Americans entirely associate small talk with business environment, consider it really important and give a list of suitable situations. That is why the definition is so long and complex. The British definition is quite similar – it also contains the list. But it does not say anything about business. Czech people perceive small talk as an unimportant part of any meeting. The term is quite new for Czech managers and the advantages of it are taken less than anywhere else. The Germans do not have any expression for small talk in their language at all. They are not familiar with it.

1.1.3 American Definition

„In broad terms, small talk is the initial conversation you have with a fellow business professional that has nothing to do with business. Small talk may occur during the few minutes you have to chat before a meeting gets underway. It may be the words exchanged when meeting at a networking event or a business conference. It may be the discussion in the hallway, walking into the meeting, if you happen to cross paths at the gym, Starbucks, or a children's sports event“ (Bowman 2007, 40 – 41).

1.1.4 British Definition

“Small talk is the art of fast-tracking beyond the awkward situation in which you find yourself: whether it's a slow moving drinks party, an earnest conference coffee break or the gynaecologist's waiting room.” (Ellis 2011)

1.1.5 Czech Definition

Small talk is a short and unimportant talk that is used for a smooth communication. It does not create any obstacles among people and does not force them to share private information (Maxová 2008).

1.1.6 German Definition

There is no definition or expression for the term small talk (Evans 2011).

Every day there are dozens of opportunities to talk to other people e. g. at a workplace, on a bus, at a meeting, in a lift, at a wedding, in a queue, on a cocktail party etc. The list of opportunities seems to be never – ending. Still people perceive small talk as an ordinary and not true conversation. But in fact, without small talk we would probably not transfer to the real conversation. When getting to know each other small talk cannot be omitted. Its importance is significant - it serves as a great ice – breaker and it creates friendly atmosphere to build stronger relationships whether personal or business. These days many people prefer communicating via mobile phones and emails because it is faster, easier and they can manage it while being at home. But personal contact and face to face communication are irreplaceable. People definitely feel better being in the presence of a person excelling at small talk than in the presence of a silent one. They feel the other person is interested in them and their opinion. The rule – silence is golden - does not apply here. The silence is rather impolite (Fine 2009).

When talking about small talk in connection with business it is one of the most poorly characterised items of business environment. People tend to underestimate its power and perceive it as useless prattle to avoid embarrassing silence. Actually, it can be critical for further business dealings (Bowman 2007). Small talk is essential for forming and enriching business relationships. A business meeting should begin and end with small talk to make a relationship more human. Generally, it influences indirectly but significantly the way companies and individuals spend their money. There are two reasons for spending money – they want to solve a problem, to meet a need or they want to have positive feelings. Majority of people return again and again to the places and institutions such as a bank or insurance companies where they feel to be warmly welcomed and their employees understand them. Excellent speakers are capable of creating pleasant feelings people want to have. According to feelings such as interconnection and kinship they decide to spend their money. An exchange of few sentences with a future customer or business partner can impress him / her. He / she keeps the positive impression in mind and later might decide to find that familiar face to make a deal with. That is the way how we can gain an advantage over competitors.

1.2 Suitable Time and Place for Small Talk

Generally, people think small talk is a part of the initial stage of a business meeting. In some countries during the first meeting people do not discuss business issues at all. On the other hand, in some countries they do not practice small talk at all. However, in majority of countries small talk can and rather should appear two times during the business meeting – before and after the business conversation. It functions as a frame of a meeting and it makes the relationship more human. The beginning of small talk is quite clear – the first mentioned starts after greeting and introducing of all participants. It brings us all the advantages mentioned above (see 1.2). The other one starts almost at the end of the meeting - when the business conversation finishes. The problem might arise when thinking about the end of small talk. So when is small talk over? The end of the small talk depends on situation in which we are - if we have called the meeting or we are visitors of another company. In case we have called the meeting, we are responsible for the duration and transition from a light conversation to business conversation. It depends on us when we

consider we run out the time intended for light conversation. If we are guests it is essential to follow our host (Bowman 2007).

When talking about an appropriate place for small talk two places are distinguished: inside of a business environment and outside of it. Small talk inside of a business environment could take place in an office or a meeting room. It gives us a great opportunity to prepare ourselves for a successful following negotiation. A cocktail party, training, football match or a recreational facility could be examples of a proper place for small talk performed outside of a business environment. Remember this is not an appropriate moment for discussing business issues. People visit such events because of having fun and relaxing. Mentioning business affairs probably discourages anybody. However connecting with a concrete person can have a positive impact on our future business dealings. Serious business conversation will take place later inside of a business environment (Bowman 2007).

1.3 Advantages of Small Talk

As it was written in the definition above, during the small talk we discuss various topics not related to business (see 1.1). A light conversation gives us a chance to get to know the other person more than people think. At the beginning of any meeting we have two options – let the other person start the light conversation or take the initiative and be the first person to speak. People often waste time by waiting for something that might will not come and thus they do not realize that being the initiator of a conversation brings them great advantages. We immediately gain control over the whole conversation. We hear the partner's voice first, see his or her behaviour. The voice indicates person's feelings – confidence, happiness, anxiety, nervousness etc. By means of small talk we can easily adapt to the style of our partner, built some connection and trust. Nobody would make a deal without trusting the other side. Small talk represents a way how to gather information about a business partner before a business conversation starts. Some of the information that we receive can be used later and therefore develop a strong relationship between ourselves and our partner. We might recognize common hobbies or similar / opposite interests. The better we do at this time, the better position we will have later during the business discussion (Bowman 2007). At the same time we give a chance to the other person to learn something new about us. Small talk at the end of the meeting might not seem to be as

significant as the first mentioned but still there is an opportunity to strengthen or weaken the existing relationship.

1.4 The Rules of Small Talk

To devote a little time to small talk is a duty itself. Having a little conversation or chitchat before getting down to business is very common in many countries. Breaching it or any other rule of conversation etiquette might signify impoliteness and have so serious consequences for business relationships we cannot imagine. As I said earlier in some countries, during the first meeting, people do not deal with business issues at all. The meetings are called for another purpose. They are aimed only at building the relationship and trust (Martin and Chaney 2006).

Leaving aside the necessity of small talk, there are certain rules that have to be followed. These golden rules deal with types of appropriate questions, topics, feedback and participants' activity and behaviour.

1.4.1 Information

As it is written above in one of the definitions small talk does not force people to share private information. It implies the shared information should not be connected to private life. Our partner is not interested in our personal problems or issues for example an upcoming divorce, low salary, poor health or sexual experiences. The information we want to share should be positive and not controversial. Also questions about personal topics directed towards a partner are uncomfortable and out of place (Maxová 2008).

1.4.2 Questions

Open – ended questions are supposed to be the best type of questions to ask. The other person cannot answer yes – no. A more detailed answer is expected. By asking open – ended questions we learn something new what we did not know before about our partner. We ask him / her a question he / she answers. Then we can create another question related to the previous answer to find out more over and over again. Moreover, our partner has an opportunity to reveal information he is willing to share with others (Fine 2009).

1.4.3 Topics

Appropriate and inappropriate topics for small talk I am going to explore in detail in the following chapter (see Chapter 2). In general, experts recommend avoiding topics too

difficult to discuss. People discussing such topics think they are important and others look up to them. But they are wrong. In fact, it is irritating. People visit cocktail parties, banquets or other events for the purpose of meeting new people, getting to know each other, exchanging business cards and leaving a good impression (Maxová 2008).

1.4.4 Opposing

Opposing our partner certainly does not bring any benefits. By a negative reaction we can easily offend our partner what is the the last thing we probably want to do. In addition to this, we could be seen as an opponent and future enemy. Neutral reaction is accepted better than the negative one (Maxová 2008).

1.4.5 Assumptions

Incorrect assumptions might create a really embarrassing situation that everybody remembers. We feel embarrassed as well as the other person (Bowman 2007).

1.4.6 Criticism

Also criticism eliminates the possibility to develop any relationship. It is recommended to avoid such situations. If it is unavoidable it is better to skip the topic and introduce a new one (Post 2004).

1.4.7 Speaking vs. Listening

Another rule deals with participants' activity and behaviour. It can seem that being good at small talk involves only the ability to speak continuously and that is all. The opposite is true. The ability to listen carefully is as valuable as the ability to speak. A good conversationalist knows that the whole process of any conversation takes place on both sides. One person is speaking the other one is listening and vice versa. Some people are convinced they are not able to think, speak and listen at the same time. But it is really possible to manage all. Experts and researches say people are able to absorb about three hundred of words in one minute. Ordinary people are capable of producing about one hundred and fifty to two hundred words. This implies we can absorb more information than we actually need. But we tend to start thinking about other things and we miss some information the other person says. Effective listening consists of visual, verbal and mental part. The process of listening is not visible. So we need to express our listening in other way. By nodding our head and keeping an eye contact we confirm our interest in partner's speech. It shows we are actively involved in the conversation. It is known that non – verbal

aspects prevail to the verbal ones. Carefully selected verbal signals encourage our partner to speak. An ideal situation looks like this – speaking half of time, listening half of time. When somebody speaks to us it is impolite not to listen to him / her. Not paying attention to our partner's speech endangers the whole conversation. All signals such as our responses, eye contact etc. show if we participate in the conversation actively or passively (Fine 2009).

1.4.8 Sitting Etiquette

The posture when sitting cannot be forgotten, too. Right position of the whole body indicates how much attention a person pays to a speech or presentation the other person delivers. It also shows the respect. Hands are placed on the table so they are visible for others. Both feet are located on the floor and the whole posture is relaxed (Fine 2009).

1.4.9 Interrupting

People often interrupt the other person too much to show their active participation in conversation. But that is wrong. It is really impolite to interrupt somebody in the middle of a sentence. In case of planning to interrupt the other person it is essential to apologise first and then tell the rest (Post 2004). This chapter deals with better ways how to show quietly our interest in partner's words (see 1.4.7 and 1.4.8).

1.4.10 Body Language and Other Nonverbal Aspects

As any other conversation also small talk consists of verbal and nonverbal aspects that work together. It is not only about words and talking. A great importance is attributed to language and words however they form the smallest part of a message. The biggest part is created by nonverbal aspects. Nonverbal aspects are a kind of an alternative method of communicating and almost all of them are culture specific. During the process of small talk we use eyes, facial expressions, touch etc. They help us to emphasize what was said, reveal emotions, show respect, confirmation, listening etc. (Martin and Chaney 2006). They are characterized as very powerful elements of communication. Many people think that communication begins from the moment when somebody starts speaking (Langford 2005). Surprisingly, that is not true. It begins much more earlier.

“We begin to send messages from the first moment we are in our listeners' presence. The way we enter a room, the way we make eye contact, the way we shake hands or nod in greeting, the way we take a seat and where we choose to sit, all send signals about whether

we are friend or foe, knowledgeable or incompetent, and confident or nervous” (Langford 2005, 27).

Many specialists say that nonverbal communication also covers clothing, makeup, jewellery, accessories and personal possessions. The best way how to use these aspects in our advantage is to synchronise them with the other person. That makes him / her feel better (Langford 2005).

1.4.11 Jargon, Slang, Idioms, Euphemism and Other Foreign Phrases

Jargon covers a special vocabulary needed to know in specific areas. Informal words and expressions are covered by slang. Idioms are also special kind of vocabulary. Euphemisms help people to replace too direct expressions with less direct. Using a lot of jargon, slang, idioms and euphemisms when talking to friends is alright but it does not sound very professional at a working place. It is rather annoying and it can easily cause misunderstanding (Post 2004).

1.4.12 Compliments

A well – chosen and honest compliment creates positive feelings. A badly – chosen compliment does the opposite. Remember another rule that says everything in moderation – overusing compliments causes the loss of their credibility (Bryant 2008).

1.4.13 Correcting

No matter how much incorrect the grammar or pronunciation is. Correcting him / her does not help to create deeper relationship (Post 2004).

1.4.14 Gossiping

Sharing private information about other people is definitely not a sign of maturity and intelligency. Such information should be kept to ourselves in order to respect someone's privacy. People caught in such silly situation will never be viewed as trustworthy. It is hard to get rid of bad reputation (Langford 2005).

2 ANALYSIS OF TOPICS FOR SMALL TALK

To avoid misunderstanding and embarrassing situations it is good to be aware of the acceptability of chosen topics for small talk. Not all the topics are equally acceptable. The topics are divided into two opposite groups – safe topics and dangerous topics. Generally, safe topics are topics suitable for small talk. It means that they are welcomed and cannot cause any problems or misunderstanding both in social and business situations. Dangerous topics are often called conversational taboos. “Conversational taboos are topics considered inappropriate when conversing with people in one's own culture and with people in another culture.” (Martin and Chaney 2006, 131). Both of them often relate to a particular culture (Martin and Chaney 2006). While one topic can be discussed frequently, passionately and for hours in one culture, its mentioning might raise a conflict in another culture because of its controversy. Taboo topics might relate to an unpleasant recent situation or to some inconveniences from the history of a particular culture its people do not want to hear about and on the contrary they try to forget about it. During a conversation everything can change within few minutes. An almost signed contract might be left unsigned. When discussing badly chosen topic there is a high risk of an unintentional offending our partner. Simply, what is once said cannot be taken back (Martin and Chaney 2006). That is the enormous power of words. They might enhance the relationship and at the same time worsen it. Considering each topic carefully is one of the essential rules of small talk we need to obey (see 1.4). Thinking about the acceptability of chosen topics leads to many extra questions – Does each culture have its own safe and taboo topics? Or are there any similarities in them among cultures? If yes, why is it so? Is there any universal topic for discussion across cultures at all?

2.1 The United Kingdom

“Small talk is the art of fast-tracking beyond the awkward situation in which you find yourself: whether it's a slow moving drinks party, an earnest conference coffee break or the gynaecologist's waiting room.” (Ellis 2011)

According to the definition the British associate small talk with any social situation and do not think about it only in the relation with business as the Americans do. The British, the Americans, Canadians, Australians, South Americans and the French belong to the group of cultures excelling at small talk (Martin and Chaney 2006). After reading such statement many non – British people might become surprised and uncertain. How such culture full of cold fish can excel at small talk?

As the country is separated geographically from the rest of Europe, the British values, attitudes, stereotypes and behaviour are different, too. The UK has always been a strong and individual country in every aspect and it insists on maintaining its individuality and independence. Many books and tourist guides describe the UK as a country full of traditions. The reality differs. Yes, there are some situations in which old traditions must be followed such as the coronation of the monarch or opening the Parliament. But other traditions like wearing of a bowler hat are not followed anymore. Also the illusion that all British have milk, toast, cereal, marmelade, butter and tea together for breakfast or they drink an afternoon tea with biscuits still exists. But the fact the British are conservative is irrefutable. They follow many rules - they do not like any changes, love living in their old houses, go to their favourite old – looking pubs, send typical Christmas cards. If they could they would probably turn back time. They claim that the old times were better and safer (O'Driscoll 2009). Also conversation has its certain rules – wider space bubble, no touching, indirect eye contact, certain safe topics and taboo topics (Fox 2004).

2.1.1 Safe Topics

The safest topic to talk about in the UK is definitely the weather followed by TV programmes, nature and animals (Fox 2004).

2.1.1.1 *Weather*

The English weather is so unique and different from others. It changes a lot and because of the global warming it becomes more and more unpredictable. In the UK nobody is surprised by wind, blizzards, showers or sunshine at any season of the year (Bryant 2008). On the other hand there is a lack of extreme temperatures and other ups and downs. But the weather still catches people's attention. The British seem to be obsessed with discussing the weather although they do not talk about weather at all. Actually, it is a part of their greeting or rather a code that helps them to overcome difficulties in talking talk to each other. The difficulties are caused by their reserved characters. The beginning of every English conversation deals with the weather. The British have been practised it for ages. The quotes of important historical people prove that it is a longtime tradition. It might sound weird but discussing the weather in the UK has its certain form and rules. The set of rules contains the context rule, the reciprocity rule, the agreement rule, the weather hierarchy rule, snow and the moderation rule, the weather - as – family rule (Fox 2004). All the rules relate to each other and should be strictly followed.

2.1.1.1.1 Form of Question

The form of question about the weather looks like this e. g. 'Warm, isn't it?' or 'Ooh, isn't it chilly?'. Both look like ordinary questions but if we look and think about the structure in more detail we notice some interesting facts. The first example 'Warm, isn't it?' is an affirmative sentence that is phrased as a question with the help of a question tag and right intonation. The grammatical rules concerning question tags say if the main part of the sentence is positive the question tag is negative and vice versa. The intonation determines the meaning. It is rising in case it is a real question or falling in case we expect confirmation (British Council). The second example 'Ooh, isn't it chilly?' is a negative question. Two types of negative questions are distinguished – contracted and uncontracted. This sentence is an example of contracted negative question. It consists of an auxiliary verb, negation and subject. The word order is the same as it is written. The contracted negative questions differ a bit from those uncontracted in the word order. Whereas in contracted questions the auxiliary verb is followed by negation and then subject, in

uncontracted questions the auxiliary verb is followed by subject and then negation. They also differ in formality. Contracted negative questions are less formal than uncontracted. By both types of negative questions we can ask for confirmation, express surprise, exclamation, invitation, complaints or request and opinions in a more polite way (English Grammar). When talking about the weather questions the meaning and intention are quite clear – they ask for confirmation and agreement (Fox 2004). The details are going to be explained later (see 2.2.1.1.4).

2.1.1.1.2 Context Rule

The context rule states basic situations in which the the weather topic can be used. There are three situations when it is appropriate – a simple greeting, an ice – breaker or a filler topic. People greet differently all around the world. In some cultures they greet each other by shaking their hands, kissing or just saying hello. In other cultures they greet by saying hello and asking about well – being. In the UK they do it in a similar way. Except for the topic - they do not ask about well – being but about the weather. When having difficulties and being nervous about starting a conversation with a stranger the weather topic definitely breaks the ice. And when a conversation is not going as well as it should it is recommended to fill the pause with weather chitchat. All three cases might occur separately as well as in one longer conversation (Fox 2004).

2.1.1.1.3 Reciprocity Rule

The reciprocity rule says that an answer is always expected and required. In fact, people exchanging this type of greeting do not talk about weather at all. People are simply supposed to answer somehow. Nobody cares of the content of the answer but whether the answer is present or not (Fox 2004).

2.1.1.1.4 Agreement Rule

The reciprocity rule is followed by the agreement rule. As it was said earlier the answer is always required and expected. It was also said people do not care about the content of the answer. In fact, it is not entirely true. We might respond in any way under one condition – the delivered answer must be in a form of agreement with the other person question. An appropriate answer to 'Warm, isn't it?' / 'Ooh, isn't it chilly?' could look like this e. g. 'Yes, isn't it?' or 'Mmm, very warm / chilly.' The negative answer such as 'No, in fact, it's cold / hot.' is considered rude. Foreigner are not told about the faux pas they have just made but

sudden change of the atmosphere indicates there is something wrong. The British are interested in social answer not in the answer based on facts. Disagreeing offends them. The reaction is might be following – embarrassing silence, immediate change of the topic, exclusion the person who disagrees from the weather discussion, ignorance of the faux pas, covering it. But as any other rule the agreement rule has its exceptions. If a person feels that full agreement is not possible to deliver according to a really wrong statement then it is enough to agree at least partly. The beginning of the answer must contain an expression of agreement. The end of the answer can differ and express a little bit of disagreement. It might sound like this e. g. 'Yes, but ...' or 'Mmm, but ...'. In the case the answer begins with 'Mmm ...' it should be accompanied by nodding a head to express the agreement (Fox 2004).

2.1.1.1.5 Weather Hierarchy Rule

Despite various personal tastes the English weather has its unofficial hierarchy that everybody respects. There are six stages and the order is following: sunny and warm / mild, sunny and cool / cold, cloudy and warm / mild, cloudy and cool / cold, rainy and warm / mild, rainy and cool / cold weather. Sunny weather is on the the top of the hierarchy because it is the most preferred kind of weather. On the contrary, rainy weather is at the bottom as the least pleasant weather. Also when watching a weather forecast in a television we are able to see weather forecasters keep to this hierarchy. If they cannot tell anything nice about the current weather they try to add at least a positive note relating to the weather in following days. A face to face weather talk does not differ in its content e. g. 'Terrible weather, isn't it?' 'Yes, but forecasters say it's going to be warmer tomorrow.' (Fox 2004)

2.1.1.1.6 Snow and The Moderation Rule

If we look back at the hierarchy we notice it does not deal with snow. The snow occurs in the UK rarely even at the end of December. It is a special occasion if it falls at Christmas. That time it is welcomed. People are surprised by this rarity and enjoy chitchatting about it. But as one proverb says - everything in moderation – the British become anxious if there is too much snow or anything else. They are afraid of natural disasters such as floods if it rains too much or drought when it is too hot etc. (Fox 2004).

2.1.1.1.7 Weather – as – family Rule

Although the British moan and groan about the weather they treat it specially . They have a patriotic approach to it. They regard it as a member of their family – they can complain about it but anybody else not. Foreigners criticizing and belittling the English weather unintentionally get the British into a defensive position (Fox 2004). It really hits a nerve.

2.1.1.2 *TV Programmes*

Since a television became a part of every British household people have enjoyed discussing TV programmes with their friends and relatives. There are five main channels – BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Five (O'Driscoll 2009). Each channel tries to offer their viewers something different than rivals do. BBC1 and ITV focus on quizzes, soaps and children's programmes during the daytime in the week, and news, soap style dramas, films and comedies in the evening. BBC2 and Channel 4 deal with educational programmes and documentaries all day. On weekends there is a space for sports programmes on all four channels (O'Driscoll 1994). Five is a quite new and special channel. It started as Channel 5 fifteen years ago and focuses mainly on entertainment (O'Driscoll 2009). Despite having an opportunity to watch various types of high quality TV programmes, the British viewers have always had a passion for watching soap operas. The British soaps slightly differ from those broadcast all around the world that are based on American model. Whereas the typical American soaps deal with young, attractive and successful characters doing well – paid jobs e. g. lawyers, doctors or entrepreneurs, living in expensive houses and having secret extra – marital relationships, the British soaps do the opposite (Fox 2004). They tell an ordinary but sometimes unbelievable story of imaginary people's daily lives. It mixes dramatic and entertaining elements and does not idealize anything. Soaps are shown more than once a week and they last less than one hour. Concretely, one episode lasts about 30 minutes (Vaughan – Rees 1995). Two surveys were made to find out the sequence of the most popular TV programmes in the UK. The first was made in 1994 and the second was made fourteen years later in 2008. In 1994 two places at the top of the results were occupied by British soap operas called Coronation Street and EastEnders (O'Driscoll 1994). Although the number of its viewers has declined significantly, the results of the second survey were surprisingly the same (O'Driscoll 2009). Coronation Street was introduced in 1960, it is still broadcast by ITV and it has about eight thousand episodes. EastEnders soap was shown for the first time in 1985 by BBC1. As well as Coronation

Street it is still broadcast and it has about four thousand episodes (Vaughan – Rees 1995). The setting of both soaps is quite similar – a working – class area. The location is different – the story of Coronation Street takes place near Manchester and the story of EastEnders in London (O'Driscoll 2009). The authors were not afraid of including controversial topics into the plot e. g. AIDS or prejudices towards people belonging to another race (Vaughan – Rees 1995). The popularity of British soaps lies in its characters and the way they live. In reality, they could be easily the people living the next door. For British who keep certain things private and know only a little about their neighbours it is a great opportunity to insight into somebody's private life and discover things they would never find out. In the UK there are many soap operas but each of them is intended to be watched by different class because of its setting and characters. While working – class people are addicted to watching Coronation Street and EastEnders, lower – middle and middle – class like spending time by watching Emmerdale and middle – to upper middle – class cannot miss any episode of This Life. Emmerdale's characters face both ordinary situations such as love triangle, jealousy or bullying and many less usual sometimes tragic events e. g. amnesia, death in a car crash, etc. (ITV). This Life tells a story of lawyers. According to their appearance and attire it might seem they are inspired by the typical American soaps. But the similarity ends with their appearance. Their behaviour is totally different. Another favourite soap is called Hollyoaks that is said to be a teenage version of EastEnders. Although the British make sufficient amount of soap operas, non – British soaps e. g. Australian soap called Neighbours or American soap called Desperate Housewives are in the lists, too (O'Driscoll 2009). Situational comedies are not as popular as soap operas but it is worth mentioning them because they appear quite frequently on TV. Again, they slightly differ from American sitcoms that deal with ordinary characters such as in Friends. In comparison with American characters the British sitcom characters look like real losers – they are unattractive, do unsatisfactory jobs, never get promoted, live in weird houses, belong to working or lower – middle class, etc. There are plenty of sitcoms e. g. Red Dwarf, My Family, The Royle Family or Butterflies (Fox 2004).

2.1.1.3 Nature

The British admire nature and countryside (Vaughan – Rees 1995). Authorised bodies take care of many national parks such as Lake District National Park or Snowdonia National Park. Almost every person wishes to have a house located in a countryside because such

place is associated only with positive issues - quiet, peace, tremendous beauty, stability, health and safety. Moreover, it is a sign of a status. The house in a countryside they dream of differs from those houses that are located in cities. While a detached house is the most desirable kind of housing in the town, in a countryside it is a thatched cottage built near a pond with ducks. Unfortunately, there is not enough opportunities to get a job and live there permanently. While not having a chance to spend some time in a such place people do not give up having a little contact with nature and do the gardening. Doing the gardening has always been a common hobby of British people. Its popularity increased a lot after introducing a TV programme called *How To Be a Gardener*. Its protagonist Alan Titchmarsh gives useful tips on growing the plants, using the tools, etc. His show caused many times a situation that many gardening tools he used were out of stock across the whole country (O'Driscoll 2009).

Vaughan – Rees, O'Driscoll, Fox and many other experts say that having a garden is as important for the British as having own house. Every house usually has two gardens – front and back. The front gardens are situated in the front of houses, they are small, well – arranged, nice and there is a path and no place to sit. They are lined with a low fence to enable others to admire their beauty. That is the main intention of having such garden. The back gardens look different. They are located at the back, they are bigger than the front, messy and lined with high walls to prevent others from looking there. There is a place to sit, relax and drink a cup of coffee. Doing a gardening in the front garden cause a situation that does not happen anywhere else. Neighbours stop in front of the fence and start chatting with 'gardeners' and commenting on the garden (Fox 2004). In case people do not have a garden there is a possibility to rent a piece of land from local authorities (Vaughan – Rees 1995).

2.1.1.4 Pets and Other Animals

Apart from passion for flowers and plants, majority of British people cannot imagine living without pets. Fifty percent of households have one or more pets (O'Driscoll 2009). The reason for having a pet is to somehow substitute relationships with human beings that lack of emotions. They treat them specially, talk to them and when having a problem with a partner they communicate through them. They do not buy them luxury things but they allow them to do everything e. g. lying on a bed, sofa (Fox 2004). Many special cemeteries were built in order to bury beloved dogs, cats, rabbits and other animals. No matter how

much it costs (O'Driscoll 2009). Despite claiming it is not true, pets function as a class indicator. Upper classes possess dogs, horses and ponies. Middle classes own dogs and cats. And lower classes keep mice, hamsters, guinea pigs or goldfish (Fox 2004). The British love all animals in general. The TV channels broadcast popular documentaries about wildlife. Many people like watching the birds outdoors. Wooden platforms called bird tables can be found in every garden. The platforms protect the birds from being caught by cats during their feeding (O'Driscoll 2009). Treating animals is subject to special laws, regulations and organizations such as Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Vaughan – Rees 1995). Despite having these strict laws and regulations to protect animals, it does not force particular groups to stop a popular kind of legal entertainment – foxhunting. It has been a long tradition followed by upper – class but these days more and more people call for its banning. Yet unsuccessfully. They describe it as a trivial and cruel leisure activity. The activity itself has not underwent any significant changes throughout history. The hunters wear special attire. They ride horses accompanied by trained dogs (O'Driscoll 2009).

2.1.2 Dangerous Topics

The list of taboo topics includes death and dying, sex, politics, religion, money, family and personal belongings and offending / joking about the royal family.

2.1.2.1 *Death and Dying*

Talking about the death and dying seems to be a longtime problem. When searching for the reason that made this topic so unpleasant to discuss we need to go back to the Victorian period. During the reign of the significant monarch Queen Victoria the death and the process of dying were accompanied by many extraordinary rituals and superstitions to prevent people from bad luck. Watching the dead, stopping the clock, covering mirrors, turning the photographs face - down or wearing mourning were usual practices. Even though many years have passed and most of the weird rituals and superstitions have disappeared, the British still find difficult to discuss such topic. It seems the death does not have a place in their lives (Bryant 2008). Not only the ill patients even the doctors who are supposed to be able and brave enough to announce a true diagnose are afraid to mention the fact the end is coming soon. Due to this difficulty, many terminally ill patients die alone in hospitals although they could be at home with their relatives and die there in better conditions (Bindham 2012). Unfortunately, this is not the only problem. Pretending the fact that the death does not exist leads to difficulties announcing somebody's death and treating the beheaded people. When discussing the death issues the British avoid direct words and rather use euphemisms. One of the small talk rules says people should minimize using euphemisms (see 1.4.11). However, using euphemisms when talking about the death is an exception. Actually, it is a duty. So when somebody dies the British say e. g. 'he / she passed away', 'he / she moved over' or 'he / she is not with us any more longer' instead of 'he / she died' (Bryant 2008). There is one rule – when choosing a right euphemism avoid humorous expressions e. g. 'he / she kicked the bucket' or 'he / she is pushing up the daisies'. They are completely inappropriate at that very moment.

2.1.2.2 *Sex*

The British have a particular attitude towards sex. It is strictly considered as a personal issue that people have to keep private. As well as in the case of previous topic the attitude towards sex has its roots in the Victorian period. That time the Queen introduced many moral standards called Victorian values. These values reflected the way she behaved - she attended church regularly, she was faithful and devoted to her husband Prince Albert and

she gave birth to nine children. The same behaviour she expected from her vassals. Deviations from the rules were unjustifiable. The Victorian era was also reflected in literature - authors and playwrights wrote only moral books and plays. The most popular piece of work read by every generation and both genders was a magazine called Punch. This magazine fulfilled all the requirements (Maurois 1995). These days the deviations such as extra – marital affair or homosexuality are still viewed in a negative way but they are no more illegal. Fatal consequences of persisting reserved attitude towards sex relate to each other. Parents and teachers refuse to talk to children about sex and vice versa because they are too ashamed. Thus, the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies becomes higher and higher (O'Driscoll 2009).

2.1.2.3 Politics

When thinking about going into politics it is advisable to take into consideration current politician's reputation. Lying, extra – marital relationship or child and many other scandals are the reasons for lack of trust in politician's promises. Thus, the politicians are targets of criticism. On the other hand, many people do not care who the current ministers and leaders are. Today's attitude differs from that in the past. While in the past discussing politics caused violence, today it let most of people calm (O'Driscoll 2009). Although the attitude is different, it is better to leave the topic out in places such as office or dinner party. Any political argument is not desirable there (Bryant 2008).

2.1.2.4 Religion

Religion has always played an important role in the history of the UK. It is a long time ago when the King Henry VIII being angry with the Roman Church established himself as a head of the Church of England to be independent from Rome and having the right to divorce his wife. The coronation of Queen is also connected with religion. Queen Elizabeth II has been crowned as well as Queen Victoria by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Westminster Abbey and has become the official head of the Church of England. The national anthem called God Save the Queen indicates monarch's connection with the God. In this century people are allowed to practise any religion. The number of atheist has increased and the country becomes more secular than ever before (Sabath 2004). Although less and less people attend the church, practise traditional wedding ceremonies and are able to explain the meaning of many religious events and festivals such as Easters, still many of them describe themselves as Christian (O'Driscoll 2009). In the past there were many

religious conflicts among individual faiths all around the world. In the UK it was the same. Fortunately, the situation significantly calmed down in recent years. But it does not mean there are no problems at all and the faiths have the same rights. Few years ago there was a law that did not allow Catholic priests to be elected to the Parliament and become its member. The first former Catholic priest to be elected in Parliament was David Cairns in 2001 (BBC News 2011). Another old, absurd and still valid law prohibits the monarch from practicing Catholic religion (O'Driscoll 2009). But there is no need to change it. At least two future monarchs, Prince Charles, son of the Queen and William, the Duke of Cambridge are faithful to the Church of England. In 2008 a conflict between political views and religious views appeared. Members of some religious groups refused not to discriminate people according to their sexual orientation that was stated by law. Other conflicts might arise when focusing on teaching about the origin of the Earth and its people. Faith schools teach the theory of some superior creator. State schools teach evolution but there is no restriction to teach other theories (O'Driscoll 2009). Generally, the British follow an unwritten rule about not speaking about religion in public to avoid arguments. Even at Christmas people do not send cards with religious messages (Bryant 2008). In 2010 a Christian GP broke this rule when he persuaded his patient to think about converting to Christianity during an ordinary consultation. The patient complained about it and the doctor's insensitive approach was criticised and the doctor had to appear before a GMC Investigation Committee (Pulse 2011).

2.1.2.5 Money

According to Kate Fox there is no rational answer on the question why money is one of taboo topics in the UK. The British do not feel comfortable discussing money, fees or payments face to face or on the telephone. It is much more easier for them to discuss it in writing. Even bankers and brokers who cannot work without various money expressions behave the same way (Fox 2004). In social situations the British never reveal or ask about personal income, the cost of possessions, etc. (Bryant 2008).

2.1.2.6 Family and Personal Belongings

The British share their personal information only with close friends and relatives. They do not disclose anything private in public. When having a problem to solve such as divorce, heavy illness or cellulite they rather go and buy a magazine or book tackling with the same issues (Fox 2004).

2.1.2.7 Offending and Joking about The Royal Family

There has never been any monarch in British history who would not face any criticism. King George IV ate and drank too much, king Edward VII was not faithful to his wife (Vaughan – Rees 1995). Also these days there are scandals that journalists know they are worth writing about in details. The list of scandals is pretty long – lots of divorces, some extra – marital affairs, drugs, etc. Despite facing such troubles that lowered the prestige of the royal family, the Queen Elizabeth II remains popular among people. Her role slightly differs from the role of the Queen in Victorian period. That time people viewed the royal family as a perfect model of family believing in God and living in harmony with its faith. Today the Queen attends many important events e. g. opening the Parliament, electing the Prime Minister, etc. (O'Driscoll 2009). The royal family is respected and all jokes and offences concerning the Queen and her family are undesirable. If somebody does so, it is followed by serious consequences. In 2009 there were three passionately discussed affairs when some individuals offended Her Majesty. The first mistake was done by a politician who called the Queen a 'parasite' at one of social networks. He removed the comments but it did not help. They were published. He was criticised and forced to apologise (Martin 2009). The second offender was a comedian who described the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince of Wales and other important people in a really offensive way. For instance, he stated the Queen was an 'old sad lady' and her husband a 'mad old bigot'. After being criticised he was also forced to apologise (The Telegraph News 2009). A radio presenter who switched off the traditional Queen's Christmas Message after few seconds in December and said the speech was boring, faced really tough situation. His employer fired him immediately (The Telegraph Culture 2009).

2.2 The United States of America

„In broad terms, small talk is the initial conversation you have with a fellow business professional that has nothing to do with business. Small talk may occur during the few minutes you have to chat before a meeting gets underway. It may be the words exchanged when meeting at a networking event or a business conference. It may be the discussion in the hallway, walking into the meeting, if you happen to cross paths at the gym, Starbucks, or a children's sports event“ (Bowman 2007, 40 – 41).

The American definition says that small talk has nothing to do with business. It might seem that such kind of light conversation does not have any serious purpose. Actually, it has. It is used in order to gain some advantage.

The American are said to be the masters of the art of small talk. Nobody is as aware of the power of small talk as the Americans. They know it is the best way how to get what they want especially in business situations. Everybody knows the USA are a nation of fast talkers (Bowman 2007). Everything is based on their moto – time is money. And wasting time means wasting money. Thus, they are viewed as being obsessed with it. Other quite negative characteristics that are attributed only to this nation include self – centredness because of low interest in other countries and tendency to think everything American is bigger and better. But the Americans have also rational values - they respect self – made people and do not respect people who acquired money illegally for example from drug dealing. They do not care about social status very much. In case the status is important it is not associated with money but with education. It is a culture oriented to work and action. Therefore, hard work is valued and rewarded. Whereas some cultures work to live, the Americans live to work. When speaking to each other they take short turns. One person says one or two sentences and then gives a signal to the other person to take turn. The exchange of small talk is very brief (Bočánková et al. 2006). They rarely touch each other, keep a direct eye contact and prefer standing a little away from the other person involved in the conversation. As any other culture the Americans have their safe and taboo topics (Martin and Chaney 2006). Sometimes the appropriateness depends more on a particular situation and its participants than on the topic itself.

2.2.1 Safe Topics

Americans prefer to talk about topics of a nonsubstantive nature for example the weather, books and movies, physical surroundings, favourite restaurants, day's news etc. Sometimes the suitability of topics depends on gender. While men like discussing sports and fast cars, women like chitchatting about family and home (Martin and Chaney 2006). Appropriate topics can easily become inappropriate when not considering the marital status or current work of the person.

2.2.1.1 Weather

The weather is probably the most discussed and safest topic all around the world. The USA are not an exception (Hollet 2011). The weather affects everybody. It is such a rich and interesting topic (Bowman 2007). Ordinary people apart from specialists cannot predict if it rains the next week or it is sunny. In some states the weather is rather stable and the inhabitants have never seen the snow or on the contrary they know only freezing weather. In others it can be so changeable – very hot in summer and cold in winter. While some states face drought, others wish it stopped raining. It really depends on the location of the country and its climate. Generally, the inhabitants of Northern states are used to cold winters and floods in spring months. The states located on the Midwest and south meet tornadoes. Atlantic and Gulf states face hurricanes. A few parts of the West Coast struggle with forest fires, mudslides or instability of tectonic desks (Morrison and Conaway 2006). On the contrary to the UK there are no written or unwritten rules how to talk about the weather. People do not have to agree with each other, to keep to some hierarchy, etc. They are allowed to moan about the weather as well as praise it.

2.2.1.2 Transportation

Participants of the meeting most likely use a vehicle to get to a meeting. It does not matter if they use a car, bus, plane or underground. It is natural and very polite to ask a person how he / she arrived at the place of a meeting. He / she might tell you an interesting story because the traffic is sometimes as unpredictable as the weather. The journey by car or bus might be dangerous because of an accident on the road, long because of a traffic jam, comfortable because of low traffic. The flight might be delayed for various reasons and the staff can lose luggages (Bowman 2007).

2.2.1.3 Current Events, Books, Movies

Being well informed and able to discuss current events, a good book or movie can impress anybody we talk to. This ability shows and reflect person's intelligency because these days a learned person is hard to find (Bowman 2007). Surveys show people read less than before. Such conversation might start like this e. g. 'I really like XY's books. Have you read the last one?' or 'I think XY is a great director / actor. Have you seen his last movie?'. These questions cannot scare anybody (McShane 2011). In case the other person has not heard about any of them he / she might be interested in recommendation (Bowman 2007). When discussing current events, books or movies it is reasonable to choose a much more sophisticated genre than for example a novel for women with a boring, sentimental and easily predictable plot. Generally, the prose is more popular than the poetry. The Americans like reading various genres - romance novels, science fiction, fantasy, mystery novels or horrors (Shearer 2008). The New York Times website updates a list of best – selling books every week. It also provides all unnecessary information - the title of the book, its author, publishing house, short description and a few numbers indicating any changes in the sequence (The New York Times). Few years ago the sequence of books on the list was influenced by The Oprah Winfrey Show. The Americans loved the recommendations on books she made regularly during the show on TV (Shearer 2008).

2.2.1.4 Interests

The Americans like displaying things they are proud of - photos of their family or holiday, medals and diplomas from sports events and other personal items on desks and shelves in their offices. These items provide valuable information. They show people's interests, hobbies or even they show their character. A university diploma might tell us the field the person graduated from and the university location. A whistband might indicate the person plays tennis. Car key with Ferrari logo says he has a passion for fast cars. If there are some visible clues and items indicating a partner's interests such as a holiday photo album, picture on the wall or anything else it cannot be wrong to start conversation with asking about these items (Bowman 2007).

2.2.1.5 Job

Experts partly agree in case of questions about job. Morrison and Conaway say it is appropriate to ask somebody about his / her occupation and a person or company he / she works for. Many Americans say a person is what he does. Martin and Chaney agree the job

is one of appropriate topics for light conversation but it is inappropriate to ask about personal income. An American lecturer on conversation Debra Fine would not recommend such question because it might cause an embarrassing situation in case the other person has just been fired. Bowman claims it depends on some circumstances – how the question is formulated and the age of the person we talk to. Young generation does not mind it but the older generation might think they are asked about their income. In case the person is unemployed a meeting is a great opportunity how to get a new job.

2.2.1.6 Family and Personal Belongings

It is the same case as in the question of job – experts have slightly different opinions. Martin and Chaney say whereas all men loves discussing sports, women like discussing homes and children. Having children does not always mean the woman is married. Questions about marital status are inappropriate. Fine claims such questions kills the whole conversation because they are too direct. Moreover, they are closed and in case we receive a negative answer then it is hard to continue chitchatting. Morison and Conaway say if the woman mentions she is married that it is polite to ask a few questions about her husband or children. Bowman mentions family only in connection with personal interests – a family photo (see 3.2.1.4).

2.2.2 Dangerous Topics

The list of US taboo topics contains religion, terrorism and disasters, politics, some personal issues e.g. personal income, family etc. Such topics cause arguments and the Americans hate arguing. They are taught to avoid arguments because of negative impact on any relationship (Martin and Chaney 2006). The dangerous topics are not as much connected to past events as the taboo topics in the UK but somehow relate to each other.

2.2.2.1 Religion

The most controversial question relates to religion that is regarded as a highly personal issue (Bowman 2007). Religion is a feature of any culture, especially in the USA that are strongly religious. The Christians form the major group of people believing in God but due to the 'melting pot' origin of American society the inhabitants profess also other religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism etc. which were brought by colonists and immigrants. The Americans believe their land is led by God whose presence is visible everywhere. In the USA there is a guaranteed freedom of religion (Shearer 2008). The church and state are strictly separated. It is written in a special document that the government cannot support any of these religions (Martin and Chaney 2006). The main problem is that each religion has different attitudes and opinions on key topics e. g. homosexuality, evolution, euthanasia and abortion, etc. – the last mentioned is controversial itself not in connection with religion. Surprisingly, it does not mean people belonging to the same religious group share the same opinion. Even two Christians can have distinct views on the same topic (Bowman 2007). While one person might support homosexuals, their legal partnerships and their opportunity to adopt children the other one does not. As it was written above the Americans like displaying things they are proud of - photos of their family or holiday, medals and diplomas from sports events and other personal items on desks and shelves in their offices. But they do not display anything that could reveal their belonging to a particular faith e. g. a photo with a Catholic priest (Bowman 2007). Despite being so important for Americans religion does not play any role in conducting business there (Martin and Chaney 2006).

2.2.2.2 Abortion

As it was written above the abortion is controversial in all aspects. It is one of the key topics its strong views on cannot reach a compromise. Laws and opinions for or against interrupting pregnancies were changing within history all around the world. USA also deals

with the question of abortion for a long time. In times of colonies abortions were carried out secretly because of prohibition to have sex before getting married. At the beginning of twentieth century it became illegal to terminate women's pregnancy in case the mother's life was not endangered. In 1979 it finally became legal (BBC Ethics).

2.2.2.3 Terrorism and Disasters

To mention terrorism and disasters also belongs to risky and sensitive issues (Martin and Chaney 2006). It is well – known that USA is tackling with the problem of terrorism for a long time. Till September 11, 2001 the Americans used to think they were the strongest country in the world because of the largest economy, occupying first place in industry, tourism, trading etc. This opinion led to an idea that nobody could endanger their sovereignty. When Islamic terrorists unexpectedly attacked cities of New York and Washington and killed a huge number of people, everybody were scared. This tragic event changed the US history and will never be forgotten. It had a big impact on all spheres – economic, political etc.

2.2.2.4 Politics

Talking about politics can easily destroy the whole conversation leading to signing a contract. It is highly recommended to avoid this topic (Bowman 2007). We never know who belongs to the Democratic Party and who supports Republicans. These are the most powerful political parties in the USA. Again, its leaders and supporters have opposite views on key topics – abortion, gay marriages, etc. One is for, another one is against. A great importance is attributed to every elections. They are accompanied by advertisements, public speeches, promises and so on. People all around the world impatiently wait for results.

2.2.2.5 Jobs and Family

For more information see sections 2.2.1.5 Job and 2.2.1.6 Family and Personal Belongings.

2.3 Germany

There is no expression or definition for the term small talk (Evans 2011).

When searching for the definition of small talk in Germany it is impossible to find any. It does not exist. The Germans, Japanese, Swedes or Finns find difficult to start chatting with anybody apart from their close friends and relatives (Martin and Chaney 2006). Why do they have an aversion to casual conversation?

'Nice to meet you.', 'How are you?' or 'Would you mind ...?' are a few examples of sentences used in social situation the Germans are not familiar with (Evans 2011). When meeting each other they just say 'Hello.' and that is all (Parlour Magazine 2011). They are not used to exchanging the typical greeting phrases as the British or the Americans do. In fact, they criticise such way of greeting. It is dishonest in their eyes. The Germans simply do not understand there is a cultural gap between what people say and what they really mean. It is so because of their directness (Evans 2011). They do not talk about topics of non – substantive nature such as weather (Martin and Chaney 2006). They strictly separate their work and personal lives and do not have many friends (Parlour Magazine 2011). They perceive compliments as embarrassing (Morrison and Conawy 2006). The fact the Germans have difficulties in conversing is reflected also elsewhere. When translating a children book 'A Bear called Paddington' written by Michael Bond the translators were forced to make some unnecessary changes because of cultural differences. In the English original there is a passage where two people greet each other and ask about well – being. In the German edition this passage is missing. There is no way how to translate it correctly. If it was literally translated it would not make any sense to readers. It was necessary to leave it out (Evans 2011).

Due to Germans' negative attitude towards a light conversation it would be useless to analyse any appropriate / inappropriate topics for small talk.

CONCLUSION

In my bachelor thesis I tried to demonstrate the power of small talk both in social and business situations. At the beginning of the first chapter I found out there are many definitions for small talk. That is so because various cultures perceive small talk differently. The meaning and content are based on cultural stereotypes. Whereas, some cultures consider it really important and cannot manage without it, others do the opposite. Especially the Americans are said to be masters of small talk because they are aware of its importance and advantages it brings. On the other hand, there are cultures such as Germany that do not have any expression for small talk in their language. They do not have any clue what it means.

For analyzing topics for small talk I have chosen three different cultures – the UK, the USA and Germany. I have decided to choose the UK and the USA cultures because they are close to my field of studies and I attended the seminars concerning these two countries. Then I have decided to add Germany because it is geographically close to the Czech Republic and it is one of the strongest European countries.

When doing the analysis I realized the UK and the USA have many things in common. They discuss quite similar topics and consider similar topics inappropriate for small talk. But the reasons for discussing or not discussing certain topics are not the same. The small talk itself looks differently. In the UK everything follows particular rules. Even the weather talk has its strict rules there. Almost all taboo topics in the UK refer to some events or periods in its history. A strong influence of Victorian period remains for example in attitude towards sex, death and dying. In the USA it is less strict. They have their taboo topics but they do not much relate to historical events. But they have something in common – abortion relates to religion and politics, terrorism also relate to both and vice versa.

Germany is a unique culture in perceiving small talk. As I said earlier, they have no clue what it means. There is no definition for it and therefore there are no topics to analyze. They are not used to chitchat with people about topics of non – substantive nature. This can be clearly seen also when comparing translations of literature. Passages containing any light conversation simply do not appear in German version.

The whole analysis enriched my knowledge with detailed facts I did not know before about any of these cultures. I really enjoyed looking for the information and writing the thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

e.g.	For example.
etc.	And so on.
i.e.	It means.
GP	General practitioner.
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America