[MUSIC PLAYING]

[AUDIO OUT]

KAREN FOLEY: Good morning, everybody, and welcome to Student Hub Live. Well, it's wonderful to be with you here today. In West Wales, it's lovely and sunny at the moment, but I imagine that the weather is very inclement over all sorts of places across the land where you're all talking right now. So big, warm welcome to this session, which is called Lost in Translation-- Navigating the Challenges of Connecting in a Globally Connected World. Something that we've been talking as OU students about a lot lately.

And I see Tarla, who has joined the chat, has spoken about some of her needs to come along to the session. Because very often, it's not just culture and language but being in different places of the world. Being international students can represent very specific challenges. So I've got some wonderful colleagues today to come and talk about some really key issues that we think are important.

But this is a live, interactive event, so it's your opportunity also to be able to talk about some of the things that are on your mind also. Now, you'll see in the chat that HJ's moderating that, and I'm going to introduce him. And we also have the lovely Karina and Carly, also, who will be coming and talking to us today from the School of Implied Linguistics. But HJ, how's everybody at home, and what's going on?

HJ: We're doing really well at home. We're all just introducing ourselves, which is fantastic. So if you've joined us before, do let us know that you're here in the chat. Let us know how the weather is. That seems to be the topic of conversation today in South Wales. It's very chilly, so I'm very jealous of Karina's sunny east London. But if you're new here, do introduce yourself.

This chat room is just for you. So it's your space to let us know your thoughts, comments, and questions. We got a very interesting topic today, and our fantastic guests would love to hear from you, love to hear your questions, and love to know what you think about our conversation as well. So do let us know in the chat, and everything and anything goes in the chat. And it's nice to hear as well that our dogs are joining us today, and our cats as well.

I'm sure they'll be very interested. Carol's not sure if it's the topic that's keeping her dogs here or if it's just the treats. But I'm sure the topic is interesting to them as well.

KAREN FOLEY: My dog's asleep. Or not, as the case may be now. I've had to separate them because they're going to fight otherwise. But yes, very, very good study buddies here. Well, let me introduce my panel of guests for you today. I've got MirJam Hauck, who is the associate head for internationalisation, equality, diversity, and inclusion in the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics. Now, she does a lot on the use of learning technologies for the teaching of languages and cultures. In particular, in virtual exchanges. So big, warm welcome to MirJam.

We also have Stefanie Schneider, who is a lecturer in intercultural communications. And her main interests are in the role of intercultural communicative competence in professional settings. So this is something that we're going to talk a little bit about later. We also have Kerry Jones, who's a lecturer in end-of-life care. And her work and research is mainly on death, dying, and bereavement and end-of-life care across the course, but particularly with nurses' encounters and care of the dying.

And we have Michael Ngoasong, who's a senior lecturer in management. Michael does a lot in enterprising and development and is also the teaching director for the postgraduate business programmes at the OU. So big, warm welcome. Let's kick off then. MirJam, we all speak at least one language and we communicate with each other all of the time, so I guess my first question to open this up is, what's all the fuss about language and communication? Why are we putting such a spotlight on it right now?

MIRJAM HAUCK: Well, you just mentioned it. We all speak a language. Language is key to everything we do. And I think COVID and the pandemic have made this painfully clear. How to establish and how to communicate truthful and reliable information became key to managing public health in the four nations. Now, think for example of the government's confusing Stay Alert message and the endless stream of fake news since the beginning of the pandemic and the often very contradictory voices of authority we've heard.

So that's why it's crucial to equip ourselves and our learners here at the OU and elsewhere with relevant communication skills. Beyond the pandemic, there are communication challenges that come with living, with interacting in a globally-connected world, as you've mentioned, Karen. So there is the dominance of English, for example, and the power imbalance this creates in global communication. We need to make sure that all voices in many different languages around the world get heard.

KAREN FOLEY: To talk a little bit about whether you've experienced some confusion, in particular around communication from the government, or even health professionals during the pandemic. So let us know your thoughts on some of those. I guess because, MirJam, English is such a dominant language right now in particular and it's one of those things that we often rely on certain things have different connotations for others.

MIRJAM HAUCK: It's true. I mean, it is a dominant language and we all need, in certain contexts, a lingua franca, a joint language that we can use, also it might be an additional language for us. But it's actually not just the fact that English is dominant that is a challenge. It's also the fact that, with different languages, there come different cultural contexts. And even English comes with different cultural contexts.

So there are issues of access and inclusion. There are also issues that come with whether communication is online, whether it's across time zones, whether it's across geographical distance, or whether it is in the same room with those we are talking to. But even when we are in the same room, and even when we are speaking the same language-- English, for the sake of the argument-- there are still challenges, and those are related to nonverbal communication.

And if we are online and in the same virtual room, this can also be a challenge because this nonverbal input often gets lost in translation.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, absolutely. I don't know about you, MirJam, but I found in the pandemic that the use of masks and things has made me communicate in quite different ways. Sometimes I find it really hard to hear people, and I guess I didn't realise the amount that I lip read, for instance. I've been working on gestures a lot more because I haven't been able to show quite as much of my face as I had.

And as you say, it's not just language, it's ways in which we communicate. Those nonverbal aspects can be just as important. So it can present different challenges. And sometimes I wonder what the impact of some of those challenges are, in terms of how much we can really connect with another person.

MIRJAM HAUCK: It's huge. I mean, it's not a secret I have an accent, but usually people do tend to understand me because they can see me, they can see my face. And I've realised in the pandemic that I was asked much more often to repeat what I had said. And I can only imagine how hard that would be, let's say, if I was a nurse or if I was a carer and the patients or the people I'm looking at cannot see my face. I mean, we make up his hands and gestures, you're right. But even that might often not be enough.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And sometimes those gestures can mean different things in different settings. So even though language can sometimes have, to some extent, a universal aspect, gestures can have very different meanings elsewhere. People are talking about some of the languages that they speak in the chat. Some are very bilingual. Daria is speaking English and Russian, also Greek and some Japanese and German.

Donia speaks Romanian, English, German, and can keep a conversation up in French. And David is learning Mandarin. So lots of people learning different languages, but for very different reasons. And interestingly, I know when I talk to some people who do speak many different languages, they sometimes say, well, I like to speak in this, but I think in this one or I dream in this one, and sometimes we use those different languages, even if we are multilingual, for different purposes.

MIRJAM HAUCK: Yeah, that's true. That's still true for me, for example. And I'm sure the students can relate to that. Numbers are a classic. I mean, it's a simple example. But we tend to carry on using numbers and using figures in our first language. Why that is the case, I don't know.

KAREN FOLEY: No, I know. It's interesting. I've got colleagues who do this. And in fact, I'm learning to count in their language also now, as we work through things. So let's take this idea of nonverbal communication a bit further. And I wonder, Kerry, if I might talk to you about some of these things, because what we've been talking about-- the pandemic and the health care settings, in terms of masks, et cetera-- but I wonder what your thoughts are on some of these aspects of nonverbal communication, and in particular, how this might relate to people's ability to deal with each other often, I guess, in slightly more challenging and different circumstances.

KERRY JONES: Yeah, sure. I mean, obviously we've already talked about the pandemic, and that's brought up so many issues, because we've had personal protective equipment that we've had to use, so the way that we communicate with people has had to differ. So sometimes you can go in with a warm smile. We've talked about that. That we're having to express in different ways, so we turned to gestures.

And communication is more than just about talking. It's about movement. It's about that nonverbal communication. So you might check in with somebody if they want a drink, for example, so you give a sign for a cuppa. You might want to check in how they were doing that day-- you might not be familiar with somebody, but you're looking for other clues-- pictures on the fridge, or if you're working in a care setting, pictures within the room. You say, oh, is that you in the picture, and you open up a conversation that way.

But we're sort of thinking about different environments as well. So we could be caring for somebody experiencing dementia. It could be frailty. It could be learning disabilities. And the way that we communicate is not a one-size-fits-all. It's still that individual's history perhaps, their likes and dislikes. What's interesting about that picture that we've just shown there, which really spoke volumes, in terms of the pandemic and working in those kind of care environments, you can see somebody's got a mask on there. They're showing a phone as a way in which that particular person can communicate with their family.

But they're also showing other things that it could be-- a picture that might relate to that particular person. There's other ways in which we can communicate, in which we can care for those people in our roles of whether we're informal carers.

KAREN FOLEY: And a lot of it is very relational, isn't it, Kerry? I mean, sometimes people might find something funny, for example, for different reasons, and we can't always go in with our assumptions about what we hold in terms of values for specific things. One of the important aspects in health and social care is about understanding the meaning for that individual person-- that subjective and phenomenological way that they view the world.

KERRY JONES: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the lovely thing about when you work in those particular environments and you're going around doing your various duties and your roles-- and you kind of pick up on these things as you're going around-- and you could see somebody having a chuckle in the corner, and it might not be because the television's on. It could be that there's a thought or a memory. And if we think particularly about dementia, it's not that we're thinking about short-term memory that people recall upon, it could be something that's gone way back.

It could be something that they remember about something that Dad did or something in their childhood. And you can just say, what's so funny, you know? And you can open up that conversation and really get an insight into somebody's lived experience, into those really precious memories. So it opens up so much. And you're right. It's very subjective, it's very personal. But it's a way in. It's a dialogue. It's communication.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm-hmm. And some of those aspects in communication, as we've been saying, some can be verbal and some can be nonverbal. I know in the case of dementia, for example, many people can do certain things, like perhaps dancing or play music, and remember certain things in a way that they may not be able to remember other aspects. And so we're able to shift some of the communication from, perhaps, the verbal to the nonverbal, depending on our situations.

KERRY JONES: Absolutely. And I think it's really important when we think in terms of communication that when we check in with people, it's not always about, oh, how are you doing today, Paul, or Sam, or whomever. It's about looking at those signs of it could be distress or slight confusion. If somebody is not sure about when a certain meal time is, for example, or they think that somebody is coming to visit them today and actually this isn't the day.

So it's kind of picking up on those clues and providing that reassurance. And you know, we're kind of used to smiling and things like that and we've been wearing masks. It could be that, actually, it's a slight movement, it's just a reassuring hand on the shoulder, if that is appropriate. As obviously, culturally, we have to think differently and careful around things and think about what's appropriate. And one of the reasons I like this particular picture is, it shows a multicultural take on this, if you like.

Is that we-- in terms of the care environment, those sorts of roles are occupied by lots of different people coming from different cultures. We'll have things that they know that are appropriate. And it's about communicating in a way and having the confidence to pick up on ways to communicate with people, whether they experience dementia, whether they experience learning disabilities. Because each of those people that we care for are very individual.

So again, it's not this one-size-fits-all, that we go in with a particular model or a frame in mind. It's really picking up on those subtle nuances. So I think that's important to bear in mind. And within that role, if somebody is coming in, whether it's a nurse or social care practitioner-- as we mentioned before, English might not be their first language. They might think in a different language. [INAUDIBLE] numbers has been mentioned.

And again, it is how that has translated to those people that are cared for. And also, bearing in mind, the people we care for will have different language abilities, be bilingual, trilingual, et cetera. So there's the whole gamut we need to think about here. But there are ways through, in terms of communication. And we've talked about gestures. We've talked about--

It's interesting when you mentioned about the COVID. When I wear a mask, I'm really conscious of the fact that I smile even wider now, because I want somebody to see my eyes, the creases or anything, so they know that I'm smiling-- even though I've got plenty of wrinkles anyway. But you get what I'm saying.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Now, there's something about meaning and about, I guess, humouring and valuing the way in which we muddy through some of these connections. HJ, I see Terry saying it's weird that when you meet someone for the first time, the language can stick, even if you can both use other things. And people talking in the chat about different words they use which can be quite funny.

And I have colleagues who do some of these things also, and I think it's really wonderful when we have different words for things and they mean something else. What are you guys talking about? Oh, I don't know if you-- are you on mute? HJ--

HJ: Apologies. I need to be--

KAREN FOLEY: You've muted yourself again. Do you know, you keep doing this, and it's no good. I did it earlier, actually. But yeah. Anyway, you'll have to start all over again.

HJ: Oh, I do apologise. But yeah, we're having a great conversation about the oddities of language and sometimes how there can be words in some languages for some things that we don't have words for in other languages. So Vanessa was saying saudade-- I don't know if I said that right at all-- is a very specific word in Portuguese which doesn't exist in any other language. And Miriam's talking about how there's oddities in English languages with common phrases that we talk about.

So, for example, when we say near miss, it could mean near hit. Or if a fire alarm goes off or an alarm goes off, surely it's an alarm that's gone on. And Karina, who's helping us in the chat, was saying, let us know that at least 70% of communication is nonverbal, which is really interesting given a lot that we're doing things on Teams and digitally these days because of the pandemic and we're having to think about how that's affected our communication as well, only having these digital means and not being seen or these nonverbal cues as well. So we're having a great conversation about all of this in the chat.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, good. Oh, that sounds really, really fruitful. Excellent. I think it's one of those things that we think about some of the stuff that we say. But Stefanie, I wonder if I might come to you now and talk a little bit about maybe stuff we don't say. Because one of your arguments is that language is pervasive, it's something that we do. And you make a really interesting point about how sometimes we say things, but sometimes silence can also speak. And this is something I often find in some of those Teams meetings. You do wonder what is meant by the unsaid. Can you tell us a bit more?

STEFANIE SCHNEIDER: I think with nonverbal communication, the first thing that always comes to mind is gestures. So if you think about nonverbal communication and culture, we think about all those gestures that can mean something very rude in one culture and something very positive in another and the jokes, or maybe problems, that arise from that. But nonverbal communication is so much more than that. So we just touched on that, for instance, with artefacts that we see.

So it could be clothes that we wear to communicate something, hairstyles. It could be the way we design where we live. And all of these things communicate something. And facial expressions, obviously, now that we all have to wear masks, or we don't have to wear masks and we choose to, that people smile more or smile differently and realise, for the first time maybe, how much they actually communicate without talking.

And nonverbal communication also includes, for instance, the posture that we have or the distance that we keep to others. Distance is also something that we now talk about more, in terms of social distancing. But beforehand as well, the closer we stand to someone, that usually means that we have a closer relationship to them. So this communicates something.

Or the way we lean forward can communicate that we want to say something. And there are so many more things, and we often don't realise it. And I think if we want to communicate effectively, we have to be more aware of these things and how other people might see us. And silence is a really nice example, because we often brush over it and think it just means that somebody doesn't have something to say.

But if you for instance, think about-- we just spoke about words having different meanings in different languages or cannot be translated-- just think about idioms. Idioms tell you a lot about a culture and about what is valued in a culture. And I'm pretty sure that in every language that was mentioned in the chat, there will be an idiom about the value of silence. And silence means something very different across cultures.

In some cultures, it can simply mean that you may be shy. In others, it's valued because it shows that you're very modest or that you're being thoughtful. So it's very fascinating to understand what's not being said and why it's not being said.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. There are so many differences, and I'm just thinking-- tonight, I'm doing a tutorial where we're looking at autistic spectrum disorders and theory of mind. And we're thinking about some individual differences that also can come into play, in terms of how we interpret things. There are these cultural aspects but also different ways of being, and judging, and negotiating a very changing landscape, both in terms of cultures and also individual people, and our relationships with the wider world, and our relationships with various others also.

So very interesting points there. HJ, there are lots of other topics coming through in the chat. Might we just go to you very briefly and see some of the other things that people are bringing to the forefront?

HJ: Yeah, of course. So one thing we're talking about is experiences that we've had of people speak in different languages and how sometimes it can be hard to think of words, and sometimes how they can be embarrassed about getting it wrong. But we all know it's part of the learning process. And Daria's also talking about how for deaf people or people who use sign language, how the pandemic has been a massive challenge for them being able to communicate, with having to wear masks and not being able to lip read.

Tessie's also talking about idioms and sarcasm. Which if English isn't your first language, it can be really hard to understand these things and kind of take them literally as well, which can lead to some miscommunication. And we're talking about dialects, as well, being a bit of a barrier, because, depending where you're from, you could have different dialects.

And even in the UK, English seems like this universal language, but between all the different areas of the UK, there's loads of different dialects and different words for things and different ways we talk about things as well. So we're having an absolutely fantastic discussion in the chat.

KAREN FOLEY: I love Miriam's point about her mum making the mistake, telling her partner she had concussion but forgot the word and said it was a cucumber on my here, which I think is hilarious. And it's funny, actually, because we're able to talk. Other people are only able to chat here today, so we're having to pronounce things. And I always remember, one of my library colleagues said, never take the mickey out of anyone who says something incorrectly, because they've learnt it through reading, which is very admirable. So that's my excuse, always, also.

The other thing that you're talking about in the chat today is business and relationships that happen in those business senses. Ronald makes the point that every time he's spoken with business people who've learnt English as a second language, they speak it much better than he does, which is awesome. And Sally makes a point about people getting annoyed with business speak, but sometimes it's a different form of English.

I mean, very often, especially at the Open University, there are all these acronyms we use all the time, which can be useful if we don't want to say tutor marked assignment all the time. So we can use things to shorten these things, and these shared languages can also create connections and shared understanding. But Michael, I wonder if we might come to you and look at things from this business perspective.

I remember a time when I used to spend ages agonising over some of my gestures in business, in particular things like handshakes and being mindful about the extent to which you might kiss somebody or not or shake hands, how far apart you were from them. All of these things really signified different areas of importance and different cultural connections in business. I wonder if you might fill us in a bit more.

MICHAEL NGOASONG: Yes. I mean, it's an interesting discussion so far. In the business and management area, how a business defines itself-- people can see it in the way that people within that business communicate. So, for example, we see businesses that are profit-oriented and not-for-profit. And you often hear how people say that the way a particular business or people in that business communicate, they sound too profit-oriented, they are thinking too much about profit and not people.

So people-oriented, customer-oriented, employee-oriented, and all of that plays out in the way they communicate inside and outside the organisation. If you take-- just because you were talking about the pandemic earlier-- handshakes-- the pandemic also meant that people were unable to have proper handshakes. And in a business context, when we send people out for sales to meet clients in a face-to-face context, they want to have handshakes.

And you've heard stories of how the more firm your handshake are, the more they take you seriously. And sometimes we train students we are sending out for internships about what professional handshakes mean. And all of this also means that you need to think about the person you are going to meet. So if you are talking about customer-oriented, employee-oriented how is that customer or that employee going to interpret whatever gestures you are using to communicate.

And just to give some examples of gestures-- I've talked about handshakes-- people talk about a steeple hold as a sign of confidence. You talk about the more [INAUDIBLE] in a conversational manner. But what if the person you are talking with does not interpret it in that way? So that can be embarrassing as well. Then it's always important to think about who you are talking to, what sort of message you are trying to put out.

But ultimately, communication is about making sure that the information that you are trying to put out, whether it's verbal, nonverbal, or written, is as clear as possible and taking into account how that information is going to be received by the end user.

KAREN FOLEY: So there are certain things, like were saying, that we can train and certain gestures. I mean, I remember often open hands was a good symbol, not squeezing harder than a person in a higher position of power, for example, if you were a woman. So there are various things that can come into not just power dynamics but, also, social hierarchies and constraints also.

One of the things people are talking about is confidence in the chat-- and Miriam makes this point about being so mindful, I guess, of what the other person was thinking about her instead of focusing on herself-- and this whole notion of developing confidence. There are various things, I think, within business settings that we use nonverbal communication to perhaps display confidence, maybe, when it's not there.

So some of these signals that you were talking about. I also remember leaning back, et cetera. There were various things that we can use to try and implement those nonverbal cues, in terms of power.

MICHAEL NGOASONG: Yes, absolutely. And you see a lot of organisations running training on that. So if it's a presentation you are giving standing up, how to hold your chest up and firm, how to demonstrate that what you are presenting, people should be careful with the fine details. So you talk about bringing this up, saying that we all have to come together.

Another one, even, is the voice-- the voice projection. In the past, some people used to think that you need to be talking very slowly and sluggishly, and then they say people can fall asleep. And then they said, why not just be able to talk to us, explain what you are saying. So people can train for these.

There are some people who are born to be communicators, and then you can become overexcited in a way that people start to misjudge you. So being trained to do it, and then on being aware of how you are going to be received by the end user also becomes very important as a result of that.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm-hmm, excellent. HJ, Miriam's made a really interesting point about differences and how she feels really included from some of the ways she's been valued as somebody who doesn't have English as a first language. Can you tell us more?

HJ: Yeah. So Miriam was saying that she's done a summer internship for one of the Big 4. And she said it was the first time "I didn't feel different in an organisation," and attention wasn't drawn to the fact that she was different or wasn't a native English speaker, not local, but the focus was on her work and what she brought on the table. And she said that made her feel really valued and included.

And the great thing for Miriam, after all of that, is that she's accepted an offer to start work for them after she graduates. So what a fantastic achievement. And it's great to hear that she'll be going into a work environment where she knows it's her work that's valued rather than the fact that she's not local or from somewhere different.

KAREN FOLEY: That's really, really wonderful. And as Ronald says, it's really important to recognise we're all the same on this world, and he's always made a pointed effort to connect with people from different cultures. There's a point here Suzanne makes about understanding a culture is the best way to know its language. And we've spoken now a lot about some of the nonverbal aspects of communication, and I wonder if we might turn to the verbal, so the things that are and aren't said and in particular, how language as a communication vessel can be really important in those

Stefanie, I wonder if we might come to you and think about some of those things, and also what aspects of language may be relevant for people, particularly in professional and intercultural contexts, so where we're dealing with people from one place to another. Somebody said here-- oh, Tessie it was-- said she's working with American customers and they always call her ma'am, which I think is really wonderful. She said it makes her feel like she's Caroline Ingalls.

But what are some of the things that we should be mindful then, in terms of these verbal things, in particular in transcultural settings?

STEFANIE SCHNEIDER: Well, there are many. But just to start, when we think about culture, probably, at first, it's important to consider or to keep in mind that culture is not the same as nationality. So when we talk about intercultural communication, we don't just keep in mind that there's people coming from different national backgrounds, speaking different first languages.

Cultures is so much more. And I thought in the chat, everybody seems to be very aware of this, because there were some amazing examples. For instance, the inclusion of the deaf community. So intercultural communication can be about communicating with different physical abilities. It can be communicating being from different regions, being from different generations. There are so many aspects to it.

And when we put this all into a professional context-- and obviously, we have the corporate culture as well. So every workplace has their own dynamic, their own language as we said earlier. And we cannot really learn these type of behaviours by studying them in advance. It's something we observe, and then we adapt to it. And I think if we talk about language and verbal communication, we should consider that language is a social action, it's behaviour, so it includes not just the vocabulary that we use, that if we translate it word-for-word that it makes sense, it's also the way we phrase something.

So there are different speech acts, which all are social actions. So phrasing a complaint, an apology, or a request for something, we adapt this message depending on who we are talking to, and we need to know the rules about this. So how do I talk to a superior in my company? In that specific workplace, can I approach them the way I would approach somebody who's on my level, or do I have to acknowledge explicitly that they have a higher social status by using a specific title, or using a different pronoun, or maybe phrasing a request differently, mitigating it more? How direct can I be?

And it's important to keep in mind that this is not a rule book that exists. So if we say we want to study intercultural communication, for instance, or quiet intercultural competence, this is not about learning national facts and then applying them in any contexts. It's a lot about what people make of it, what a community makes of it. And we learn it through observation. And I think that's why when we ask, OK, what's intercultural communication at work, or how does culture matter at work-- oh, it matters in so many nuanced ways.

And it's nice when there is a specific set of rules in an etiquette book, but there are so many unspoken rules about how we talk. How do we ask for help, for instance. Who is it appropriate to ask for help? Would it be read as a sign of weakness, or would it be read as a sign of engagement? There's so many things to consider. So it's really fascinating, and it's a very broad field. But it shouldn't feel like it's overwhelming, because, again, this is a process, and we never stop learning.

So if we think about intercultural communication at work, it's really a process of how we make sense of each other and how we find ways to be ourselves with each other. And it starts with awareness, with observation, and with talking about it.

KAREN FOLEY: It's interesting, actually, I'm just thinking about some of the things you were saying about being direct. And I was having conversations with other people the other day, and I said, oh, you know, they're just like that because they're a New Zealander. And I'm completely cool with the idea of being very direct and explicit about things. But for some people, that can be quite rude. And sometimes, I'm mindful I might need to frame or flower some of the things that I'm asking for.

So if I ask somebody for a file, in particular if I'm stressed and I need it right then and there, I might just say, please, can you give me this? Whereas sometimes, it's more appropriate to be diplomatic, I guess, and frame those things in a way that's appropriate. So as you're sort of saying, there are various aspects to consider here. It's not just what happens within that business setting but what happens within that individual-- the cultural connections that you have with them and, I guess, your understanding of each other.

And if you don't know each other very well, then there are certain, I guess, more general rules that you might want to adhere to. Is that the main point, Stefanie?

STEFANIE SCHNEIDER: Yes. So it's probably a mix of all of that. So what you just said with directness-- in intercultural communication, in research, there's often this idea of that there's different types of societies, in terms of how the individual sees themselves. So if group harmony is placed higher in terms of priorities of how people talk to each other, then you do much more relational work when you talk to each other.

So you wouldn't, even if you're in a rush, phrase something highly directly, but you would acknowledge that the other person might have different commitments and so on. So that's definitely something where culture comes into play that might not necessarily be an individual factor. And in other cultures, directness is absolutely fine because the task at hand is the priority, and not so much the relational work.

So there are definitely cultural differences here. But if we, again, consider everybody who's watching or listening and participating in the chat when they said how many languages they speak, how do these ideas that people from different nationalities are different, how does that apply to them? Aren't they between cultures because they have experience in living in different places and they have worked for multiple companies, maybe, so they're used to different things? So we cannot really clearly categorise everybody according to where they were born, maybe, or what language they were raised with.

So there's definitely a factor of, if you want to achieve intercultural competence-- meaning if you want to communicate more efficiently, maybe, or with more empathy-- you need to change your frame of reference, which means that you have to be aware of what you're doing and you have to be able to be open-minded and observant of what other people are doing. So that definitely-- in interpersonal communication-- so when two individuals talk to each other-- it's key to have a willingness and an openness in seeing how the other person approaches something without judging them.

So moving away from this idea of what I do is normal and if other people do something differently, that's either inferior or just different and absurd. No, there's no normal. There's different approaches. And it's an open-mindedness that is key to making sense of those. So what you said is definitely right. There's no rulebook. It's all about reading each other and being willing to do so.

KAREN FOLEY: And of course, very small things could go a long way. HJ, I'll come to you in just a second. But Sally's been talking in the chat about how she's had conversations with people in France and Spain, trying to exchange information and mixing in random words and using other things like maps, et cetera, just to try and get a sense of things. I've done things like that.

But again, some of those aspects and some of those offering to try to contribute, perhaps even when our confidence may not warrant it, can actually go a long way, in terms of being able to communicate with other people. Tell us some of the other things going on at home, HJ.

HJ: So one thing we're talking about is how different things come across in different languages. So going on from what Sally said-- she was speaking to having dinner with someone from France, and saying they were very proud of their English accent, as they thought it was perfect. However, they didn't realise that their perfect accent was actually a very posh English accent and aligned them with a certain set of people in the UK. And it's really interesting how we come up with interpretations for people as well based on their accents, especially in English.

I know when a lot of companies look through it for customer service, they like to have a lot of their call centres in Wales because apparently it's a nice, warm, and friendly accent. It's what people want to hear. And they try and avoid Newcastle for any new contact centre. So that's a bit of how we think about different accents and what we put onto them.

And Doina said the idea of politeness and keeping face is very important in German, and every exchange has an exaggerated politeness to it. And Karina was saying-- who's helping us in the chat-- said with my friends from Sparta, we often exaggerate our local accent, not to mock it but to highlight or accentuate our shared background, which I think is absolutely lovely.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, that's [INAUDIBLE]. And I love Ronald's story, as well, about learning Arabic with a Welsh accent as well. So yes, that Welsh accent goes a long way. Michael, I wonder if we might come to you for a second, because we're talking now about the ways in which we use language. And your key area is entrepreneurship, and I'm just thinking about things like *Dragons*' *Den,* for example-- I mean, other programmes are available-- but the way in which we often use language to pitch particular ideas, to make people do things in a business sense is often very well considered, rather like the gestures and handshakes you were talking about beforehand. So something that we can train to do, something that we might consider, but also things that do have a very high value in that context.

MICHAEL NGOASONG: Yes. And that's very important. One of the things we see within a business context is how to make sure that communication is all underpinned in the mission or the value of the organisation, and even helping staff to be briefed whenever they are going out to communicate anything. So, for example, for entrepreneurs, when they are going to pitch, it might be that they are targeting a specific investor in the audience that is interested in businesses that have a social orientation, even though they're commercially driven, and so they prepare their pitch to really make sure that they communicate the social impact that their business is going to have as a priority, in the sense of impact first, finance second.

And then there might be other sorts of venture competitions, where the investors are more interested in high-growth businesses that can multiply in the shortest space of time. And so you channel your communication to focus on the market, the pricing, the profits, the profitability, and the scalability of the business. The other thing I think that has been mentioned earlier about from that cultural perspective is the point about the stereotypes.

So sometimes you can make these judgments about what your organisation stands for, and therefore what they're communicating, and thinking that you have done your homework to understand what the national culture, as Stefanie was saying, says about the particular culture without being aware of some of the stereotypes within those contexts which can lead to misinterpretation of the national facts in that country. And we also see this, then, in businesses, in the sense of we often hear when new staff are recruited, you want to integrate them into the culture of the business. But you also want to be aware of-- there was a business woman that was explaining to us how they recruited a group of staff from India and Ethiopia.

And they did a lot of work to help them understand the culture in the UK but also to adapt to the cultures they have brought in from their own country. But most of the time, when they tried to speak to them, it was causing a bit more problems because they were less interested in their culture. They were much more interested in integrating into the UK culture and really proving their worth, in terms of how they want to progress their career.

So there's always that point about what sort of space is created for people to get to know each other, understand what we all stand for, what our aspirations are, what we are interested in. And sometimes, that can be an important nonformal training that can really help everyone to get a sense of what sort of culture of communication is emerging and can drive the activities of the business.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm-hmm. Miriam's talking in the chat about picking up some of these various aspects. And I wonder if, Kerry, we might come to you now to think about some of the ways in which we deal with things differently. Because rather like Michael's saying, different things have different contexts. I'm just very mindful that, I guess, in a health and social care setting, the value that we have around certain things, like Miriam's talking about how much more prolific talk about mental health is in the UK than perhaps other countries right now.

But these notions of diagnoses, of words, of values, of stereotypes, all of these things, I guess, need to be treated quite sensitively within a very different setting. I wonder if you've got any thoughts on how language might be used within those spaces.

KERRY JONES: Yeah, that's a really interesting point when you're talking about diagnoses and things like that. I mean, what is acceptable in one particular arena or culture is different. So, for example, it might be OK to receive a diagnosis of dementia, for example, because there's some planning and you know there's been some symptoms behind it, and so you're thinking, OK, I know what's going on now, so this is how it's kind of panned out. And for other people, that's just not acceptable because the stigma associated with it.

So there is a great deal of sensitivity around it. And how we negotiate that as health and social care workers is also bound up culturally about what is acceptable. Say, for example, in this country, that we reveal a diagnosis, compared to other countries, where it's actually a no-no. Even if somebody is within a hospice-- see, I'm thinking of words here, sort of language. It's withholding about what is actually going on for somebody.

So it depends on preferences and what's acceptable. So there's a great deal of sensitivity that's needed around it in a way that that is communicated. So say, for example, if somebody is struggling with their memory a bit, and somebody to say that the amount times of it's said, well, that's just old age. You know, it's fine, it's old age. And actually, that can have consequences. Because if you don't remember certain things, whether it's a certain time of day, when to eat, where to be, then how you're treated and dealt with, it really has a huge significance.

So sometimes it's better for that individual to know, so you can plan and have that level of caring and look to the future, even though that's really hard to imagine, what the future self can look like-- I mean, not many of us want to really do that. So yeah. It's a lot of sensitivity around it and working with individual, that family, and getting to know them about what was OK.

KAREN FOLEY: No, really, really important. Thank you for that, Kerry. The final thing I wanted to talk about, which I think might be very relevant to many people here today as OU students, is that, while there are these various nonverbal and verbal ways in which we communicate, written communication, particularly in an academic context, has a very high value.

And this is something that I think-- we were talking about confidence a little bit earlier-- this can really be coupled with confidence, when people, for a variety of reasons, may not feel very confident in their ability to communicate in that academic sense. So I wonder if we might think about, then, written communication. And Michael, this is a very important area, both in terms of how students might communicate. So be that an email to their tutor, or be that in an assignment, or essay, or report, et cetera-- the words that we use will be well considered and have different values associated with them.

But in enterprise, there are two different perspectives that we use that written communication for.

MICHAEL NGOASONG: Yes. In enterprise, we distinguish enterprise in the sense of individuals in an organisation being enterprising or individuals as students being enterprising and creative in the way they write. And from an organisational perspective, whether that organisation is a formal limited company or just a charity social enterprise. So if we just take an individual in the sense of communication and assessment for students, what we see is, you have some students whose creative approach to writing is to start with some interesting story before going to talk about the assessment task that they are trying to answer.

And then sometimes, we, as academics or tutors, say to them that you get lost along the way, because the reader or the marker is struggling to see the answers. And then you have some students who are much more direct. They give you the answer to the question, and then they substantiate with evidence. And so, in order to really encourage that enterprising aspect, you are saying to those students who want to develop that approach to writing to always remember that-- ask yourself, have I answered the question in this paragraph or in this 1,000 words, and where can I point to that answer?

And for those who are much more direct, to just start with the answer, just to ask themselves how far they have diagnosed and elaborated on the evidence that they are using to support that answer. And then, with respect to the other aspect that is for all students, is the clarity then, the clarity of communication. And sometimes, some of the words we've been using here have come, in the sense of some cultures like to use some big words.

I was reading a piece of writing from one of my PhD students where they were setting an objective to say-- the objective is to delineate and demarcate the unique combinations. And I was just joking to say what does delineate means. So when we look at the dictionary, it was identifying about three or four different definitions. But straight away, it occurred to her that maybe if she had thought a little bit, she could have been clear which of these definitions that word might feed, and therefore, that was not the appropriate word to use.

So I suppose what I'm saying, in the sense of enterprising then, is how enterprising and creative you want to be in what you are communicating, whether it's in an assessment context or in a work context. But doing so in a way that responds to what the end user wants to hear from you and is as clear as possible in the way it is written. And do a bit of homework to convince yourself that the sort of words you are using is channelling the message you are interested in.

KAREN FOLEY: And for those of you interested, we do a lot of workshops at Student Hub Live. You can take a look at the website and log on to those. We do things on effective communication, and also on essay writing. So if you're interested in thinking about how the language you use, as Michael says, can be used to clarify and structure particular ways of allowing your reader to understand your narrative, then do check out those workshops and book your place on them. So Michael's point, really, was about, I guess, how we use particular words to encourage people to do or think or understand certain things.

And just thinking about this a little bit more broadly-- and I guess returning back to the pandemic, which we started this discussion with-- Stefanie, I wonder if we might ask your thoughts on how people can use language to evoke different reactions. For example, encourage people to respond to a crisis in particular ways, either by getting them to action or by alleviating any anxieties that might be there. Words can be very, very powerful, as MirJam initially introduced with the Stay Alert image.

STEFANIE SCHNEIDER: Yeah. So when it comes to crisis communication, I think that's a big field in business communication, because there's so many different ways of if something goes wrong to build trust back. And we spoke earlier about how most of the communication-- or I think Karina mentioned that in the chat how 70% of communication can be nonverbal.

That might certainly be true for interpersonal communication, that we pay a lot of attention to nonverbal cues that might show us if somebody is trustworthy or honest, which is, to be honest, if we do read the studies, these are usually not really reliable indicators, but we still believe that they are. But when we think about corporate communication, it's an entirely different story, because nonverbal communication is quite absent when we read statements about why something has gone wrong or when we read statements about how something's going to improve.

So I think if you are interested in finding out more about this, there's a lot of fascinating articles written about impression management and how we can read between the lines, read through certain strategies. So there's lots of work done about if we have to explain why a crisis occurred, how external factors are to blame, how it's basically the opposite of what Michael described if we want to have more efficient communication within a company, where we make clear that-- or where we make a message clear.

Often in crisis communication, it's the opposite. So we try to be a bit vague about who's to blame here. We might turn abstract things into actors. Like we would say that 2020 has certainly been a difficult year or has certainly led to issues, and not company decisions, for instance. So there's lots done about impression management on the public stage to create trust between a company, or a government and the people who are voting for the government, or the people or stakeholders who are interested in how the company performs.

So I think, for us, in this context, this might be more interested from the perspective of a consumer. So just paying a bit of attention of is there actually an apology there or not, or is an apology a non-apology, how much attention is paid to the past, and how much is it paid to the future, how concrete are future plans. And-- I don't know-- if we, for instance, read-- now that we think about climate change more in the UK-- I got lots of notifications today about how different leaders, world leaders have committed to different climate change agendas in their countries, but then you also see that all of them-- almost-- have arrived in private jets.

So what does that communicate? So there's a single message obviously that we pay attention to in crisis communication, but there's so much more going on, and there's so much work that we can do to read between the lines to interpret actions, and also to really see how committed people are when they publish these messages and what they attribute change and problems to.

KAREN FOLEY: And so much of it, I think, is about-- the point you're making here is about congruence, about not just saying things but actually delivering those. Tessie makes a really important point about many of these companies branding themselves as diversity and inclusion championships and being tokenistic in terms of how they may have various people employed in those organisations. So, again, it's about really being able to trust, as you say, Stefanie, what companies are actually saying.

And I think, Kerry, this is very important in a health and social care setting as well, in terms of how organisations pitch themselves and that trust we have with what people say.

KERRY JONES: Absolutely. Yeah, I can think of various care organisations that I know of and I've worked for and what they say they do and then what they actually deliver. And that's really, really important to families, to those people who are going to be entering to those organisations. Because when you're working in those sorts of organisations, it's not just about the obligations that you have but also your own personal values about what you think care should be. And it kind of differs across the board.

So it's a really, really tricky one. But in terms of thinking around diversity and inclusion, in terms of organisations, it's very much about what they say, what they do, and whether they do what they do. So it's a really tricky one. And it's very complex, actually, because what you might want to deliver as somebody in your role as a health worker might be influenced by somebody much further up in the hierarchy who ends up making that final decision. And so your hands could be very much tied. So there's a lot of ethics and morals involved as well in these particular scenarios and situations that need to be borne in mind.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's all very, very complex. MirJam, you outlined some of these issues right at the beginning, in terms of these complexities. So I wonder if I might ask-- we've been listening to all of the things that Michael and Stefanie and Kerry have been talking about, as well as the discussions in the chat today, and I wonder if we might think about trying to draw some of this to a close, in terms of some of the areas that you see in a key and the discussion we've had today.

MIRJAM HAUCK: Yeah. I want to come back to what I said at the very beginning-- is about to make sure how important it is that everybody's voice gets heard and understood. And we have heard about the many, many nuances of what voice actually is, what it means. Language in a traditional sense is only one part of it. But if we wanted to start, just start with language or languages then to make a step in the right direction.

It is important that we do not only acknowledge, or maybe in some cases tolerate-- we shouldn't even be thinking along those lines-- but it is important that we acknowledge everybody's language, that we-- in education, in particular-- take a multilingual, plurilingual approach to learning and teaching. There is a fantastic white paper from UNESCO that has the title "Multilingualism is the Key to an Inclusive Education."

And this is also very much in line with sustainability issues, with the United Nations' sustainability goals, which ultimately are aimed at a more equitable and a very diverse society and world. And that will only happen if we do hear everybody's voice.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm-hmm And I think one of the things that I'm very mindful of is part of the discussion we've had today really focuses on the extent to which language, culture, communication are also fundamental in terms of our identities, how we act our identities-- be they real or who we would like to be-- how we connect with other people, and, I guess, how fundamental these are to our ways of being.

MIRJAM HAUCK: Yeah. Everyone has said it in many different ways. Because it is such a defining factor of who we are, it is important that we learn to walk in someone else's shoes if we really want to be with them, understand them, do business with them, care for them, teach them, whatever, and learn a few words in their language.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm-hmm. Thank you, MirJam. That's a wonderful summary and a really nice way to close the session up. Before we do go, though, let me go back to you, HJ. Marcus has made a really interesting point about social media and the use of construction that I think links really nicely to that notion of how we perform identities.

HJ: I know. We've had an absolutely fantastic discussion today, and social media is definitely one of the things that we're talking about. Because we were having a good conversation in the chat about how language can be used to encourage or evoke reactions. And social media is one of the places where that takes place a lot. And we're talking about how language has been used around Black Lives Matter and then in the past as well.

Ron was saying about the time of the Blue Books in Wales, when the Welsh language was essentially attacked for being nonconformist and its morality was put into question. But I think, overall, from today, just from having a conversation with each other in the chat about our languages, our experience, and our thoughts, we've learnt a lot about each other, and that's what it's all been about today-- is understanding, learning from each other. And we've had an absolutely fantastic experience.

I know Carly and Karina have been fantastic in the chat today, giving us lots of great information and discussing things with us. And there's been lots of fantastic links posted in the chat as well for OpenLearn. And those links are available on the session page as well. And I'll put them in the chat before we finish, because if you want to continue finding a bit more about what we've been speaking about today, there's so much information and resources.

And I know we've talked about a lot, so if there's anything that we missed or there's anything you want to feedback to us, just send us an email-- studenthub@open.ac.uk. But thank you for everyone for such a fantastic conversation. I've learned a lot, and I'm sure everyone in the chat has too.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you, HJ. And thank you to Carly and Karina. And also big thank you to my guests, Kerry, Michael, Stefanie, and MirJam, who pulled us all together and came up with the wonderful idea. It's been a really, really fantastic, very fruitful discussion. I've certainly learned a lot as well. And it's always wonderful connecting with you guys.

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I hope you've enjoyed. I hope you come to another event soon. Enjoy the rest of your day, and see you soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]