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[Jingle 0:00:00 - 0:00:15]

Veronika: Welcome to our 12th episode of “Words and Actions”. Believe it or not, this is actually the end of our season one. We'll be back in October but, for now, we still have one episode to go. So, it's hello from me, Veronika.

Erika: Hello, I'm Erika Darics and I'm calling from Birmingham, UK.

Bernard: Hi, I'm Bernard de Clerck. I'm calling from Ghent in Belgium.

Veronika: And since everybody is so formal, I'm Veronika Koller and I'm calling from the UK as well. (Laughter) Good. So, this is our third and final part of our miniseries on applying for a job. We've looked at job ads, we've looked at application letters and CVs and today we'll be looking at communication channels for both employer and applicant, if the interest is mutual.

Of course, there are a number of communication channels they can use and do use. So, things like trial hours at work or assessment centres. Some employers use personality tests. But what first comes to mind, probably, is the job interview. That is indeed what we'll focus on today.

Erika: The dreaded job interview. I wonder what kind of experiences you have about job interviews?

Veronika: Varied. From not getting a job on a phone line for a pizza delivery to very high-stakes, several-day things for professorships. So, quite a range I'd say.

Erika: Well, I guess interviews are really high stakes. That's why they make us shudder because they can be really painful and stressful experiences. That's because they are highly controlled and

unbalanced. That control also means that how the interviews take place is decided by the panel or the interviewers.

So, I have a question to you, Bernard and Veronika. Which one would you find harder, which one do you find harder: talking to one person or talking to a panel of people who sit behind a desk? Maybe three, four or five people and you sit on a lone chair in front of them?

Bernard: (Laughter) I have a slight idea of what your preference is based on how you describe it! You know, panels are hard because it feels a bit like you're in a court trial, right?

Now, what I find hard when you're addressing a panel is that you know that these people are there with a specific reason. So, they have their own specialty but you have to know what you have to tell to which person. That can be quite hard, I think, if you haven't done your homework.

Veronika: On the other hand, I think if it's one-on-one and you get on with that person, great. But what if you don't? What if it's awkward? With a panel, you at least have a chance that there will be one person nodding at you encouragingly. So, it can have its positives as well.

Erika: All right. How about if we make this question even harder and ask you to do this over the phone or over Skype? Which one would you find harder? Face-to-face, telephone or Skype?

Veronika: Telephone is really tough, isn't it? Because you have just this disembodied voice, really, and you have no idea where they are or what they look like or if they're frowning or anything. So, I think there's probably something to be said for face-to-face interviews. Although, of course, at the moment and for the foreseeable that may not be possible.

Bernard: Yeah, that's true Veronika. In the literature, what you can see is that face-to-face interviews are described as the richest medium because you share the same space, you have visual information, you have verbal information. Of course, with the telephone, which is the

leanest medium in the literature, that is the term that you get there. Of course, you only have, as you said, the input with voices. That makes it very hard.

Then, in between, Skype. Well, we've been in Skype interviews. We've done teaching via Skype. We know that you have lots of drawbacks there, as well. Yes, you have visual information. Yes, you have the linguistic input, let's say. So, the data, the verbal data. But, at the same time, you do not share the space and that has consequences.

Veronika: Yeah. You sometimes don't know when people glance sideways, what are they looking at? Are they annoyed? Do they want to get out of it? Or is their cat just wreaking havoc? (Laughter) So, there's information that you're missing. That's right. Yeah.

Erika: Right. And you also must be aware of where you sit and what's behind you. All those things that could also communicate things about you.

Bernard: Yeah. Actually, this is perhaps worth pointing out: Research has shown that interviews via technology-based media, you can see that employers have lower ratings for the applicants. So, you do have an effect there. It's okay when all the applicants go through the same procedure as in online interviews but sometimes you have a mixed situation. We do need to bear that in mind.

Veronika: So, that would actually put the applicants who are not face-to-face at a disadvantage, unless everybody is on Skype or some sort of video application.

Bernard: Yeah. Yeah.

Veronika: That's definitely worth knowing.

Erika: Okay. Why don't we ask an expert about how to win that dreaded Skype interview?

Bernard: Great.

Veronika: Good.

[Jingle 0:05:01 - 0:05:06]

Erika: We're going to chat to Dorottya Cserző, who works as a research assistant at Cardiff University. We're going to talk to her because her research explores exactly the things we are talking about today. For example, how we do intimacy in video chats. Hi, Dorottya. It's really great to have you.

Dorottya: Hi, Erika. Thanks for having me. I'm very excited about this podcast.

Veronika: Hello, Dorottya. Your work couldn't be more timely with so many people working from home and also having job interviews on video quite routinely, now. If we say Skype or Zoom, or whatever it is, we do get some information through that channel. So, we can see people. We see their body language, hear their intonation etc. But we still are really obviously not in the same room. We don't have that sense of sharing the same space.

What would you say: how can we best compensate for that? If we don't share the same space but we still want to make a good impression in a video job interview?

Dorottya: Okay. Yes, absolutely, we don't share the same space, which makes it more difficult. But what I would say the good news is, is that if you're having a video job interview right now, all the other candidates are also having video job interviews. So, you wouldn't be at a disadvantage in that sense.

What you can do is make use of the specific affordances that video chat offers you that face-to-face wouldn't. For example, playing with the camera angles and things like that. You can be very aware of what is on camera and what is off camera. You can use that to your advantage.

Veronika: Right. So, there are also affordances of things that you can't do face to face but on video. Right.

Dorottya: Yes.

Bernard: I like what you said about showing what is on and off camera because I've got a specific question on that, as well. In one of your articles, you refer to the fact that people mention the visual background a lot in informal chats. In a way, they're trying to create this kind of co-presence by referring to, "Hey, that's a nice picture of you there that you have on the wall" and things like that.

Now, I was wondering about job interviews because online you can see that a lot of importance was given to backgrounds during meetings. On Twitter, for instance, you had things like, "Rate my Skype room" and another concept was "bookshelf credibility."

Now, Dorottya, this is just purely hypothetical: what if my bookshelf is an awful, right mess? (Laughter) Is it okay for me to then use the blurring background option that we have? Or another background? You can do that as well. Or is that a kind of no-go?

Dorottya: Well, I wouldn't recommend it in a job interview. Short answer: because you don't want to look like you have something to hide. I think if you do that kind of thing, it kind of draws more attention. The people might be wondering, "What is there that is so awful that you would like to hide it?" Also, another thing to consider is that those options use a lot of extra processing power, which makes it more likely that you're going to have problems.

Bernard: Okay.

Dorottya: So, I would say that there is an absolute priority list for job interviews or important video calls. First, make sure you have good internet because if your internet isn't working, nothing is working. That's the most important [thing]. Second, you want to make sure that you're somewhere quiet and there's no noise because research has shown that sound disruptions are more disruptive than image problems.

Then, if those two things are good, make sure you have good lighting. Last on the list would be to have a nice bookcase or art, or something nice in the background. But that, I would say, is on the bottom of the list.

- Bernard: Okay, thank God. (Laughter)
- Veronika: Because we've been chatting in a previous episode [about] how every little decision can make a difference. But your advice, I think, is very pragmatic there, really.
- Bernard: Perhaps just the final question: the one piece of advice that you would give to people who are listening?
- Dorottya: Okay. Well, try to look into the camera as much as possible, and especially at the strategic points when you're saying something important, because that gives a better impression of imitating you looking at the other person. Also, it means you probably won't be looking at your own picture and it might make you a little bit less self-conscious, as well.
- Veronika: That's very sound advice. Thanks a lot, Dorottya.
- Erika: Yes. Well, thank you so much for talking to us and we will post links to your work on our blog, as well normally do, so listeners can go and check out the research that you do. Thank you.
- Bernard: Thank you.
- Dorottya: Thank you. Bye bye.
- Bernard: Bye bye.
- Veronika: Bye.
- [Jingle 0:09:40 - 0:09:46]
- Veronika: So, whether the job interview is on video or face-to-face, let's look a bit at the language of job interviews. Erika and Bernard, what are some of the typical questions that you would expect to be asked in a job interview? Or indeed have been asked?
- Erika: Okay. "Why are you applying?"
- Bernard: Yeah. Motivation. [That's] one of the usual suspects. "What's your biggest weakness?"

- Veronika: A tricky one that, isn't it?
- Erika: Weaknesses, strengths and questions like, "Why should we hire you?"
- Veronika: Yes. Not only "Why are you applying?" but also, "Why should we hire you?" Yeah. Anything else?
- Bernard: "Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, first?"
- Veronika: Yeah. Now, that's interesting because that, as we shall see, isn't actually a question. But most of what you said, like "Why are you applying? Why should we hire you? Biggest weakness?" are what's known as open questions. Which means that the answer needs elaboration. You can't answer them with yes or no. That would be a so-called closed question. If you are asked in a job interview, "Do you own a driver's license?", you either do or you don't. So, it's a yes or no.
- A bit more tricky, perhaps, [would be] a closed question such as "Do you perform well under stress?" You could just say yes or no, technically, but if somebody asked you, "Do you perform well under stress?" "No", that may not be enough. So, there are answers where, in the context, even if you could just say yes or no, you want to elaborate a bit.
- We have open questions, closed questions, but we also have rhetorical questions. Any idea? An example? What would be a rhetorical question?
- Bernard: Things like "Would you say that in that situation?"
- Veronika: Yeah. Or "Would you really turn down such an opportunity?" A kind of question where only one answer really makes sense in the context. Then finally we have tag questions. Now, what are they?
- Erika: Things like "It's nice, isn't it?"
- Veronika: Yeah. So, when you put this little bit at the end, "isn't it?" Or things like "You just don't seem to care, do you?" That shows us the difference

already because a tag question can be just to prompt somebody to answer and engage in a bit of chit chat, but it can also be quite confrontational. The kind of question like "You just don't seem to care, do you?" is not a nice tag question, right?

As we said, some questions are not even real questions. Things like, "Why don't you tell us a bit about yourself, first?" or "Would you like to sit here?" or whatever. They are somewhat different.

Bernard: Yeah. They're just more than ways to elicit information, right? In this particular case, you're not asking the person "Would you like to sit over here or not?" with the answer being yes or no. You're inviting the person to actually engage in the act of sitting down. These are what we actually call indirect speech acts.

I think we can introduce terms that we have from linguistics, [such as] a basic distinction between locution, illocution and perlocution. That will be very important when we analyse job interview questions.

So, locution could be the literal meaning of what you say, with the intonation and with the meaning of the actual sentence and the words in itself. An example could be "Hey, what are you doing?" That could be a genuine request for information: "Tell me what you're doing."

Now, Veronika and Erika, I will add a couple of words to this question and then we can start thinking about the illocution. So, not the literal meaning but the intended meaning. What the person really means. So, not the literal meaning. This is what I would add to this. "What do you think you're doing?"

Erika: Okay.

Veronika: Oh, yeah... That's a different beast, isn't it, really? Yeah. That's much more... I use that sometimes. When I see my son doing something that he's not supposed to do, like doing painting and half of the colour lands on the carpet. I might come into his room and say, "What do you think you're doing?" (Laughter) Usually pretty much with that intonation! (Laughter) That's a confrontation.

When he says "Painting?" then he either doesn't understand or wilfully doesn't understand. Because what I really want to say is "Stop doing what you're doing right now."

Bernard: Yeah.

Veronika: That's my illocution.

Bernard: Okay. And the perlocution would be him stopping doing whatever he was doing, right?

Veronika: Hopefully. (Laughter)

Bernard: That is the uptake of the message. The perlocution is the effect of your message on the addressee's behaviour. So, how it was perceived.

That is important, of course, when we talk about job interview questions. The question we were talking about before, "Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?", what is the actual intended meaning there? What is the perlocution? What are you supposed to do or to provide in terms of an answer?

Erika: I think the illocution is quite complex here. "Why don't you tell us about yourself?" means, in my interpretation, something like, "We would like to know how well you would fit into this company so we invite you to tell us some examples from your previous life and experiences to demonstrate how well you will fit into this job."

Veronika: It works on two levels, though, doesn't it? First of all, it's pretty clear that it's not an actual question. If you say, "Why don't you tell us a bit about yourself?" and you answer, "Because I can't be bothered", that's probably the end of the job interview. (Laughter)

On the first level, it is a request, isn't it? "Tell us something about yourself." It's just phrased as a question to be perhaps a bit less confrontational, a bit more polite.

But then, as you say, Erika, behind that it's also you don't just tell them anything about yourself. You don't tell them that you grow gooseberries in your allotment. What do they really want to hear?

That's where it gets really tricky because here you then have to guess the purpose of a question.

Erika: Exactly. I guess this is a good time to introduce another concept which is the concept of cooperation. Which basically means that we assume that, if people interact or talk with each other, they want to cooperate. They want to make sense in that context. This is why you're not talking about your gooseberries. You are talking about stuff that fits into that context of the job interview.

Veronika: Yeah. We talk about something that's relevant. That's right.

Erika: Yes. Building on this idea of cooperation, I think another technical term is due, which is "conversational maxims." These maxims are analytical tools that help us understand how people make sense of speech acts and those implied meanings.

Veronika: The important thing to understand here is that cooperation... We usually mean you're anxious to cooperate, you want to be helpful. But we use it here in the technical meaning, which means following these conversational maxims. You can say something that is not particularly pleasant, polite or helpful, but you would still technically cooperate.

So, if somebody asks you, "Oh, could you just make me a cup of tea?" and you say, "Buzz off, can't be bothered!" (Laughter) That is, technically speaking, cooperative because it sort of answers the indirect request to make them a cup of tea. So, that's important to understand.

Erika: Yes. We would like to introduce the four maxims that help us explore this cooperation a bit. The maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. These maxims help us make sense of how people make sense of implied meaning. Take, for example, the maxim of quantity. Quantity is all about trying to give as much information as we can but not more than is needed.

Veronika: Yeah. As we've seen, what exactly... How much is needed in the context can be tricky in job interviews. The other one is the maxim of

quality. So, that is about somebody being truthful. That means that you don't say anything that you don't believe to be true. It may be factually incorrect but, as long as you think that you're telling the truth, you're following that maxim of quality.

Bernard: The third one is the maxim of relation. Perhaps relevance could be a nicer word, here, to explain its meaning. The answers that you provide to those questions... Make sure that the answers are relevant, of course. Make sure that they answer the question.

We introduced the concept of dialling up or dialling down your skills [in episode 11]. I think this could be very relevant here when you address these issues. What is a relevant answer to a question, for instance, like "Can you give me an example where you displayed leadership?"

I have this anecdote about a guy who thought he was going to provide a relevant experience and he said "You know, I took a gap year after my studies and I herded cattle in Australia for a year." In terms of leadership... hmm, yeah. But not quite what you would expect in a job interview.

Veronika: Yeah. I take it that he wasn't applying to be a shepherd, right? (Laughter) So, clearly not really relevant. No.

Bernard: Yeah. So, choose your examples wisely.

Erika: Yeah. Go on to elaborate and say how you managed the other members of staff there in that community. Then that could be a good example.

Veronika: Yeah. Give evidence, perhaps, as well. So "Under my leadership, sales increased or employee turnover decreased" or something like that.

Erika: Exactly. Your example feeds nicely into the fourth maxim, which is the maxim of manner. Which is basically trying to be clear and orderly. But clarity also means using the right language in the right context.

You talked about employee retention or vocabulary that is often used in management circles. That is evidence from the interviewee's perspective that they know what they're talking about. They understand management talk. They know how to formulate the answer. So, the maxim of manner is about using the right language to the level when it's still clear and understandable.

Veronika: Yeah. Now, we know, of course, that this is the ideal, right? Everybody follows the conversational maxims, is being cooperative in that sense, etc. Of course, in a job interview you do want to get that right.

But if you just take one moment to think about everyday conversations you have, we all know that these maxims are often not followed. Sometimes they are just broken.

People, if they break the quality maxim for instance, they lie. That's not a good idea on your CV, obviously, or in general. But sometimes people also choose not to follow a maxim because they want to create some sort of implied meaning. So, sarcasm. Also perhaps not the greatest idea in a job interview.

Or, perhaps more to the point, they don't follow a maxim because they want to manage the impression they give off. For instance, one of my weaknesses if I was asked that, is that I can't multitask. Can't do it for the life of me. (Laughter) I could say truthfully "I can't multitask". But I could also say "Oh, I'm very good at keeping a sustained focus", which I am. But only on one thing at a time. (Laughter)

So, that's a sort of re-framing of a weakness as a strength. It's relevant. It's also truthful but it's a sort of selective truth, perhaps. Or a selective way of presenting a particular truth, if that makes sense.

Bernard: Then you're dialling up, again, a little bit in a way. The last thing, perhaps, that is important to remember is that this notion of cooperation and being cooperative is also culture specific. We do need to bear that in mind.

Some people, if they get yes or no questions in interviews, for instance, depending on the culture they're from they will actually give you a yes or no answer. From their perspective, they're being cooperative but from another culture's perspective that might not be... In terms of flouting the maxim of quantity, that might be an issue here. You see? So, we do need to take that into account as well.

That's what we will talk about with Celia Roberts, who is a specialist.

[Jingle 0:21:21 - 0:21:26]

Erika: Our guest today is Celia Roberts who is a professor, or an Emeritus professor, at Kings College London. She is a sociolinguist who has been very interested in how language works in institutions and institutionalised contexts. Specifically, issues of power, discrimination and problems that arise due to inter-cultural conflicts and problems.

In fact, one of her early books included, "The Interview Game and How It's Played". Her recent works focus on patient health communication, language and cultural practices in the workplace and English to speakers of other languages and institutional selection processes. She is the best person to interview for our episode on interviews. So, we welcome Celia.

Celia: Thank you. Hello.

Bernard: Thank you for being here. My first question... Of course, everything revolves around language. And in your research, as well, in many different ways you have underscored just how important language is. Of course, also in job interviews.

Now, what is interesting is that even in the case of low-skilled and low-paid jobs—and I'm thinking of stacking shelves or packaging—you've also shown that people were discriminated against based on their language proficiency. We would think that in those types of jobs, language proficiency is not that important, yet it is.

What you showed in your work is that people were not discriminated against because of their accent or because of "bad grammar" or

because they didn't produce standard English, but there was something else going on. I would like you to talk a bit more about that. It's very intriguing.

Celia: Yeah, okay. Sure. I focused on low-paid jobs, as you say, because there was so little work done at that level. But I've also worked with junior management jobs at interviews. I prepare quite a lot of people who I know, friends and family, for graduate-level jobs, too.

I think it's interesting if we look across the whole spectrum to see the design of the job interview from really low-paid work, so-called "unskilled" work, right through to graduate-level and professional jobs. The job interview is very similar in design. Whatever the skill or professionalism that's required of a job, they all seem to be driven by this market ideology which seeps into all kinds of ways of thinking. The market drives the performing self. So, the self becomes a kind of product which one manages, not only in the workplace but in any environment.

So, it's how you do that. How do you come across as a reflexive person, self-aware, self-organised, expressive in particular ways? What Paul du Gay calls the, "Entrepreneurial self" really that's what I've been looking at. How the design of the job interview actually penalises people at all levels, but particularly people at the lowest level. I can talk a bit more now about the kinds of ways in which that design works and how the penalty works.

Bernard: Right. Because you refer to it as a kind of language game in a way, right?

Celia: Yes. I mean, I think one of the issues is "What is language?", of course. One of the difficulties is, I think, that people who are not in our world of work, who are not applied or sociolinguists, think of language in a very narrow way and in a very static way. But what we see in a job interview is that there are a whole lot of resources that have to be

used. Plus—and I can talk about this later—a kind of familiarity with exactly what the game is.

At every level, in most job interviews in the UK at the moment, we find around five competency questions. Similar competencies at all levels, which is really interesting. So, team-working, crucial. And a kind of self-awareness about how you organise yourself and your time. These are crucial at all levels. It's interesting that these same competencies seem to occur right across the board.

Let me give you a question that we have recorded in low-paid job interviews: "How does an organisation manage change?" That's quite an analytical question to ask.

Veronika: Blimey. That's for shelf stacking? Wow. Yes. (Laughter)

Celia: So, there's a real problem with knowing how to cope with a question like that. But then what's also interesting is the implicit criteria that are actually used. You have these competencies, the design, it's well structured, it all looks great. When you come to what they call the "wash up sessions", this is when they decide "Who should we give the job to? This person or these people?"

Veronika: So, that's after the interviews.

Celia: It's called wash up because you're kind of washing up after the dinner, so to speak.

Veronika: Ah, okay.

Celia: What's so interesting is that, almost entirely, people talk in terms of personal attributes. How the candidates managed the interaction. For example, on the positive side you get comments like "likeable, engaging, confident, humorous, resilience, toughness, dry". Similarly, negative attributes like "patronising, garrulous, out of control, laid back, over-confident, cocky". You can see that these are quite contradictory.

So, despite this kind of fancy footwork which is required to get through the interview successfully, ultimately people seem to get judged very much on how they come across and what were the particular personal characteristics that the interviewers think the candidates have displayed.

Veronika: Right. And you're saying that the interview structure doesn't actually differ that much between interviews for low-skilled or more highly-skilled jobs, is that right?

Celia: Yes. It's quite interesting. Of course, there is variety. But I was just helping a young friend of mine get a job in the civil service. This is a graduate-level job. So, he showed me the kinds of things he was going to be asked about. There were five competencies. (Laughter) Five competencies seems to be the way in which interviews are structured at the lowest level and even at the highest level.

It was the same old stuff. The same old kind of soft skills about self-awareness and managing yourself, how you deal with problems and how you learn from your mistakes. So, it's really extraordinary how, even for very low-paid jobs, you're still faced with the daunting task of managing these difficult questions.

Erika: Talking about difficult questions, in this episode we explored those a lot. We talked about conversational maxims. The maxims of quantity and relevance and why they are tricky in job interviews.

On the one hand, people don't want to get lost in the anecdotal when answering requests about telling about themselves. But at the same time, people have to be able to tell the story in a way that shows their strengths to the interviewer. What advice can you give to potential candidates to tackle this problem?

Celia: Well, I think generally they have to cope with different kinds of discourses. There's a kind of institutional layer to how you have to be. And there's a very personal level, also. But in between the two, and a kind of crucial one, I call "professional discourses". These are very

much done through narratives. Through stories. If you can get your stories right, you'll probably get the job.

They're a very powerful mechanism because they do establish people's work experience and people's work attitudes. It's the story that matters. In a way, they play a very central role in helping the interviewer imagine who is the real person.

Of course, the idea is that somehow what you say in the interview is what you are. In German they have the concept of the "glass citizen" don't they? In a way, I think interviewers see the candidate as kind of sitting behind a glass cabinet. You can just look straight at them. So, what they say is who they are.

There is the problem of how to be entertaining and relevant but not too long and rambling. The answer is to find and tell a good institutional story. By that, I really mean three things. It's got to be well-structured, it's got to be vivid and detailed and you've got to have a very clear stance. So, the structure that is commonly used in many interviews is called the STAR structure.

Veronika: What's that?

Celia: Situation, Task, Action, Results. If you think about it, you will immediately go back to typical narrative structures and to Labov, who was discussed, I know, in your March 13th podcast [episode 7]. The STAR structure is a kind of simplified Labovian narrative structure.

I can give you an example of that. So, here's a guy applying for a job to deliver mail. Throughout the interview, he wears a black woolly hat which nobody is bothered about at all. Very often, of course, in interviews people think it's all about the dress. It's not. It's all about the story.

He tells this story about how he's had to work for an agency doing a very boring job. That's the situation. Then he talks about building headsets for helicopters. There's the task. The action is that actually you can stand, chat and still get the job done well. That's the action.

The result is, "Keep yourself amused for boring work." In that structure, he has replicated Labovian structure. He's got the STAR.

In fact, in this particular organisation, they keep the STAR on the sheet. So, they tick off, "Yes, he did the situation. Yes, he did the task." You know? So, you are actually ticked off for how good your Labovian structure is.

Veronika: That's fascinating. I read in your work about the STAR structure but it's good to get an example of that. In your work you also mention the notion of gatekeeping when it comes to job interviews. Could you explain a bit what you mean by gatekeeping?

Celia: Yes, I can. I think what I've found a very powerful way of thinking about it is an installation made by two Scandinavian artists that's called "Social Mobility Staircase". The installation consists of a set of stairs leading to a door with the word "administration" on it. The irony lies in the fact that all the lower steps are missing.

So, you can't actually climb the steps to get to the administration. And when you do get there, the door is shut anyway. First, you've got to be able to climb the steps to get to the gate. Which is, if you like, all the stuff you do in the early stages of selection for a job interview. But you've got to get through the door. So, it's a symbolic boundary crossing. Sometimes we do have to go through real gates to get into a building. But obviously the gate in the job interview is symbolic.

Veronika: Yeah. Of course, where you have a gate, you also have gatekeepers.

Celia: Yeah. In this case, obviously it's the interviewers. They're, I think, very interesting because they have to look two ways. I use the image of Janus, the Roman god. Janus looks two ways, as we know. He and the interviewers look out to the candidate and, "Will this be a good person?" but they're also looking inwards at the workplace. They know they've got to defend themselves and the workplace.

For example, they might be accused of racial discrimination if they don't take somebody. They might select somebody who is then found

to be inadequate and so on. So, you've got this real paradox of being both offensive but also defending yourself.

This leads to lots of problems, to go back to what we were saying earlier. Lots of contradictions, double binds, paradoxes which make, for both the interviewer and the candidate, the job interview really hard work.

Veronika: Right.

Bernard: Now, one of the questions that we asked to the other guest we had, Dorottya... And I know it's complicated because there are so many things that are important. But here it is: what is the one piece of advice you would give to the listeners when it comes to preparing for a job interview?

Celia: Well, I would first of all say everything you can to persuade the organisation not to have a job interview at all. (Laughter)

Veronika: Okay, apart from that, if you do have a job interview...? (Laughter)

Celia: I'm very serious about that and I did talk to the Minister for Work and Pensions about it when I was doing the research. She was not at all happy, of course, with what I said and said it was anti-business not to have job interviews.

But I actually believe that the job interview represents penalties for so many people at so many levels. I'm talking about graduate levels, too. Because to get the job, you have to be good at doing the job interview. But it doesn't tell you if you're any good at doing the job. (Laughter)

I think that was worked out a long time ago. If you look at the literature on job interviewing, actually all it does is to see whether you're good at job interviewing. Most people are not going to have to do job interviews as part of their job. They've got to do something else. So, that's my big answer. Get rid of the job interview.

I would say to more low-skilled, what are called "entry level" jobs, we have made a video called "Frequently Asked Questions" and in that,

we've shown the kind of competencies that are going to come up all the time. We've shown how you need to produce a good story and how you need to manage the fact that this is both an institutional event and also something very personal and intersubjective. Those suggestions are absolutely the same at whatever level.

So, be ready for competencies. Know that they're looking for the soft skills not your qualifications or your professional standing in the field or anything like that. They're looking for good stories about these competencies.

Bernard: Okay, great. I'm not sure whether that was one piece of advice but it's at least very helpful, Celia. Thank you again for joining us on our podcast on job interviews.

Veronika: Thanks a lot. Bye.

Celia: Bye.

Bernard: Bye.

[Jingle 0:35:25 - 0:35:30]

Bernard: So, for the data analysis, we've decided to have a look at a reality TV show, "The Job Interview", where we are introduced to three applicants. The particular job that they're applying for in this particular case is technician group leader at one of Britain's most famous car manufacturers, Aston Martin. The successful applicant will oversee production, manage a team of over 50 specialist technicians.

We have two interviewers in this case, Director of Production, Scott Ward, and Director of HR, Hazel Martin. The candidates: Steve, age 41. He runs a family business in the Midlands. He used to work for Rover MG for 12 years until they shut it down. So, he has lots of experience and he's hoping to get back in.

Then we have Syd, which is an anglicised name. He's of Pakistani descent, aged 48. He works as a supervisor in a production line for

car seats for Jaguar. He's got lots of experience as well. 20 years, that is.

Then we have Nathan. He's only 26 years old. A former colleague of Syd's. It's a nice touch, there. He's a supervisor in a decking factory. Least experienced but he's gone up the ladder quite fast.

So, we'll have a look at the interview, now, with some of the typical questions. But you will see that the profiles have difference in terms of the hard skills that they have but also in terms of the soft skills that they have. Okay, let's pick out a question. Veronika, Erika?

Veronika: Yes. The first one is one of the classics that we mentioned in the introduction: "Why are you applying for this role? What motivates you to apply for this role?"

It's interesting, there, what Syd says. He talks a lot about his father there who has passed away not too long ago at that point. He talks about his father giving him advice to always progress higher and aim for better. And that Aston Martin is the best he can get. So, a bit of flattery there for the interviewer.

But there's also, in the programme, interview bits where they talk on camera to the producer. He also says that he felt he needed to do his father proud. Perhaps also working for Aston Martin as a manager would be a sort of masculine thing to do that his father would appreciate. So, we have particular ideas of gender, here. Perhaps also culture-specific ideas of gender.

It's a very honest answer [in the job interview] so definitely the quality maxim is adhered to. It's also relevant but it also indicates the value that family and tradition have for him.

Erika: Yes, but the relevance angle is interesting here. I would like to refer back to what one of the interviewers says at the beginning. He says, "What we are looking for is does the character fit within our organisation?" This kind of shows that the interviewers are there to

tease out or to find examples of how that applicant fits in with their organisation.

I wonder if the candidate talks about their family for their motivation for wanting to join an organisation instead of talking about the organisation. I wonder where that falls on the maxim of relevance.

Veronika: In terms of what's required, yeah. That's true. It sort of ties in with the next question, doesn't it? "What's your understanding of our business?"

Bernard: Yes. What we get there are two different answers by Syd and Nathan. Syd says, "Aston Martin... Um, quality, quality and quality". Which is a fairly vague answer, isn't it? Flouting the quantity maxim. You will see that when we compare his answer to Nathan's answer.

Veronika: It flouts the quantity maxim because he says 'quality' three times over. Now, once would be enough, right? But of course, he says it three times to have an implied meaning to say, "Aston Martin is super high quality." But it's still vague.

Bernard: Yes. And actually, some people would disagree with that because Aston Martin is not really known for its reliability.

Veronika: Yeah but you don't say that to the Managing Director of Aston Martin in a job interview! (Laughter)

Bernard: Absolutely. But in a way, he's also acknowledging that he doesn't know that much about Aston Martin. He says the things that most people would say: "quality."

This is what Nathan says. He says, "Last year was your best profit year so far in the last 10 years." So, this is very factual. This is information that not too many people have. This is a guy who did his homework. Here, we have no flouting of the maxims and it's spot on.

Erika: Then the follow-up question that comes from the interviewers: they ask him specifically, "Do you know how many cars we make a year?" That reveals just how an in-situ performance an interview is.

Because the interviewers clearly like the fact that Nathan is prepared and so they want to follow up. They want to probe that more. They want to get more information.

I guess that's a lesson for our listeners. Even though interviewers may have pre-prepared questions, very often what happens with these probing questions is they reveal whether they liked an answer and whether they want more information.

Bernard: A nice example of that in-situ situation is the question where they ask, "If you had to compare yourself to a car...?" Of course, there they are at Aston Martin. So, "If you have to compare yourself to a car, which one would that be?"

Veronika: That is something... this is a long time back now but I remember we said something like that in our third episode on branding. Do you remember? About how brands are people but people can also be brands.

Erika: Yes. We spoke about the very car that Syd mentions here, the Volvo.

Veronika: We did. Yeah, that's right. So, he hesitates a bit. He says, "Hmm, I would actually [be] a Volvo." Then he stops. So, quality maxim is adhered to but then the interviewer follows up and says, "Okay, so why would you be a Volvo?" He was obviously expecting a bit more.

And then Syd says, "They're reliable, they never break down, they never give up on regardless of how old and tatty they get." He may be aware that there's a much younger person than him applying for the job as well. Interesting implied meaning there going on again.

Erika: Yes. Also, this little snippet shows the performed nature of the interview. Because when you watch Syd answering, you see hesitation. At the beginning, he goes, "I would be actually a Volvo."

Then the interviewer asks the follow-up question. Then he goes, "They're reliable." He raises his intonation, almost kind of waiting for the reactions of the interviewers. When he gets a very positive

reaction, smiles and nods, he picks up. From then on, he's confident and he speaks. His speech is much more fluent and less hesitant.

Veronika: That's right. We haven't talked about the third applicant yet, Steve. For the question of what car would you be, he actually says the DB5, which is an Aston Martin car of which I think they have a model on the desk or something like that. He actually does a bit of flattery, again.

Bernard: Yeah.

Veronika: "What would I be but an Aston Martin?" But then he also says... Because James Bond fans among you will know that the James Bond mobiles are Aston Martins. Steve orients to that or mentions that. He says, "The DB5 in 'Doctor No', the Bond film, was my favourite car."

He not only flatters them; he also shows that he knows the background of Aston Martin cars and that he's a proper petrolhead who likes his cars. Which is good in this situation, obviously.

Bernard: To sum everything up, we might actually round off with a bit of advice. What do you think? The one piece of advice that we would give to our listeners. What would that be?

Veronika: Well, we've talked a lot about implied meanings and kinds of questions. My advice for a job interview would be, when you are asked a question in an interview, consider what the deeper purpose of that question is. Why are they asking this? What would be an appropriate answer in the context?

Erika: Okay. What would you say, Bernard?

Bernard: I think I would have to say please do your homework. Make sure that you can say as much about yourself as you can about the company. Now I'm focusing on the company. Say things like, "I've seen in your annual report" or, "I've read in your sustainability report" or, "From your website, I gathered this and I gathered that." Which makes you one of them already, from their perspective. Do your homework as far as the company is concerned, I would say.

Veronika: Erika?

Erika: Okay. Following up from that, bring evidence. So, don't only do your research but also bring evidence about how you fit in. It's not enough to have the skills, you have to become aware of what these skills are and find ways of talking about these. Think about stories, instances, examples of how you've showcased those skills before.

Veronika: Right. I hope that's helpful. That brings our miniseries to a close on applying for a job. We wish you really all the best for your own job applications and job hunting, really.

We'll be back in October with a sparkling new season of the "Words and Actions" podcast. But so far, it's bye bye from me. Bye bye.

Bernard: Bye everyone. Bye bye.

Erika: Bye.

[Jingle 0:44:46 - 0:45:11]

END OF AUDIO