



**Lost in Translation: Language Barriers and Safety Communication
in Multicultural Construction Sites in the UK**

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ABSTRACT

The construction sector of the United Kingdom is an industry that exists in a high-risk environment that is increasingly influenced by a diversified workforce in terms of language and culture. Although the regulatory frameworks are well-developed like the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM 2015), the communication breakdown is a continued cause of unsafe practises and incidents. The current body of research has largely theorised safety communication as either a technical or procedural role, and thus it misses the intricate socio-linguistic and relational processes by which safety is practised in real life.

The present study will fill this gap by pursuing an interpretivist and qualitative approach to explore the mediating role in language and cultural diversity on safety communication and performance on the UK construction sites. Based on semi-structured interviews with 18 participants (both migrant workers, who have a limited level of English proficiency and site supervisors/managers) the study deploys thematic analysis to question both experiential and managerial approaches.

The results reject the premise that the causes of communication breakdown are unambiguously linguistic, showing that McMurphy barriers are multi-layered and include accent variation, colloquial speech, environmental noise, time pressures, and cognitive processing limitations. More importantly, the paper finds a gap between functional compliance and epistemic knowledge: employees often replicate safe behaviour based on observation and imitation without necessarily internalising any safety rationale behind this behaviour. This creates an illusion of knowledge, where apparent compliance masks apparent deficits in latent understanding and its related threats.

Moreover, it is important to note that safety communication is not a progressive flow of information but a socially embedded process that is influenced by informal translation networks, peer-mediated learning and hierarchical power relations. The body of culture and

hierarchical authority restricts upward communication thereby strengthening the silence patterns and passive obedience, and the need to maintain productivity limits the structural opportunities to clarification and dialogue.

The paper leads to a reconceptualisation of communication barriers as organisational systemic risks and not personal linguistic deficiencies. It adds to the theoretical knowledge by conceptualising the idea of safety communication as a socio-cognitive and relational process and to the practical knowledge of providing context-sensitive interventions, such as multimodal communication strategies, standardisation of safety language, and structured peer support mechanisms. Taken together, these lessons can provide a deeper picture of how communication practises can be reshaped to achieve greater performance on safety within multicultural construction settings.

Keywords: *Safety Communication, Multicultural Workforce, Language Barriers, Construction Safety, Migrant Workers, Safety Compliance vs Understanding, Thematic Analysis, UK Construction Industry, Communication Barriers, Workplace Safety Behaviour*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 SITUATIONAL BACKGROUND

United Kingdom construction industry is a risky industry that is characterised by the intricate working conditions, use of heavy machinery, and high-rise buildings. Migrant labour is a major part of workforce, and it is estimated that there are some 280,000 migrant workers in 2020, which is about 10-15% of the sector despite current deflation due to post-Brexit migration trends and economic considerations.

The workers are mostly of South and southeast Asian origin and other EU and non-EU countries, who make great contribution to the project's delivery and productivity (Mikac et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the multicultural composition presents the issue of challenges, especially language that hinders an understanding of UK unique health and safety regulations. Studies have shown that low English skills of migrant workers increase the risks of accidents because the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) data shows that the construction industry contributes 30 percent of fatalities in the workplace in the UK (Okorie & Chima, 2024).

The key aspect of compliance with the regulations, including the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM 2015), which stipulates the explicit risk communication and site inductions, which vary by the type of team, still requires compliance with the principles of effective communication.

1.2 RESEARCH RATIONALE

In spite of strong legislative frameworks such as the CDM 2015 and the HSE guidelines, there are still occurrences of communication breakdown on multicultural construction sites. The problem of language barrier is one of the reasons of a high rate of accidents among people who do not speak the native language, which worsens the human factor of the accident, including

the misunderstanding of hazards and the lack of adherence (Erdocia, 2023). The literature that has been reviewed is more focused on technical training and safety culture and little has been done in qualitative research of the linguistic and cultural interactions that occur when there is a real time site interaction (Team et al., 2022). Thus, this research goes through the analysis of lived experiences whereby informed interventions are developed to address communication gaps to promote multicultural safety management (Lyu et al., 2025).

1.3 RESEARCH AIM

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how a language and cultural diversity affect the safety communication in the multicultural construction sites in the UK and how effective communication strategies and the overall safety performance can be improved.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To review and analyse existing literature on the role of effective communication in improving safety performance in the construction industry, to establish a strong theoretical foundation and identify research gaps.
- To examine current practices, including the cultural and linguistic challenges, gaps, and barriers that hinder effective safety communication and understanding on multicultural construction sites in the UK (or another selected country).
- To assess the impacts of these communication challenges on daily site operations, workers' safety behaviours, and compliance with safety regulations on multicultural construction sites in the UK.
- To develop and recommend strategies and practical measures to bridge language and cultural barriers, with the aim of enhancing communication effectiveness and improving overall safety performance in multicultural construction environments.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does effective communication contribute to improving safety performance in the construction industry, based on existing literature and research gaps?
2. What are the current practices, cultural and linguistic challenges, gaps, and barriers that hinder effective safety communication and understanding on multicultural construction sites in the UK?
3. How do communication challenges affect daily site operations, workers' safety behaviours, and compliance with safety regulations on multicultural construction sites in the UK?
4. What strategies and practical measures can be developed to bridge language and cultural barriers, and how can these enhance communication effectiveness and improve safety performance in multicultural construction environments?

1.6 RESEARCH SCOPE

The research targets large scale and medium-size construction projects in the United Kingdom with a heterogeneous team in terms of ethnicity. The breadth of context that global literature offers is in line with empirical data which is focused on UK practises under CDM 2015. Semi-structured interviews by 18 purposive participants, including 10 non-native English-speaking migrant workers who have at least one year of experience in UK and 8 managers with two years of experience in supervising others are used to contribute. A quantitative investigation of accidents was not viable to keep the dissertation on track with the project timetable. Furthermore, to ensure the study's local relevance, studies conducted outside of the United Kingdom were eliminated.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative, exploratory-descriptive study is based on an interpretivist philosophy that places emphasis on subjective experiences in complicated multicultural situations. Semi structural interviews enable the detailed investigation of the communication phenomena. Thematic analysis involves processing of transcripts to detect patterns against secondary sources such as HSE reports to satiate validity. Relevancy is guaranteed through purposive sampling, and reliability is improved with pilot testing. The methodology is appropriate in subtle social processes rather than generalised statistics.

1.8 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The sample size is very limited, which limits the ability to generalise outside of the chosen contexts of the UK. The use of self-reporting data gives rise to recall bias or social desirability. The differing levels of English proficiency in the participants can affect the levels of responses, regardless of clarifications. There are access restrictions that restrict the wider representation and to prevent subjectivity the researcher must apply the interpretivist lens that requires reflexivity.

1.9 ETHICAL CONCERNS

Some of the ethical concerns of this study are the potential emotional disturbance of discussing the accidents, recruitment pressure using the gatekeepers, risk of confidentiality of safety critique, and compliance with GDPR requirements in personal data. The management implies clear Participant Information Sheets confirming the voluntariness and the right to withdraw; the use of pseudonyms and anonymity of identifiers; secure and limited access storage; neutral questioning and distress monitoring and signposting; online interview, and compliance with university data policies and Faculty Ethics approval, complying with the BPS guidelines.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is usually regarded as one of the most dangerous occupations. This is due to its continuously changing work environments. It is also because of heavy gear use and temporary structures. In the United Kingdom, construction consistently ranks among the top industries for occupational risk (Wang et al., 2023). Figure 1 illustrates construction as the highest-risk occupation in the UK.



Figure 1: Construction tops “Riskiest Jobs” in the UK

(Source: Construction Digital, 2021)

Recent years have seen a huge demographic shift in the UK construction workforce due to increased reliance on foreign labour. Current labour market estimates show that migrant workers account for over 33% of the UK construction workforce (Brucker Juricic et al., 2021).

Safety communication is a significant element of preventing accidents within the construction industry (Zhang et al., 2023). However, the most significant cause of incidents with migrant workers in the workplace is language issues. Practical data indicate that poor language competence is one of the causes of construction accidents (Porru & Baldo, 2022). They contribute to about one-fifth-one quarter of the migrant worker incidents. Such accidents can be frequently triggered by a misinterpretation of the instructions of the tasks and the method statements. This emphasises the augmented dangers of poor safety communication. Moreover, in high-risk building activity, breakdowns in communication play a massive role. Kang (2022) states that more than 40 percent of fatal construction accidents are caused by falls of height. This causes them to be the largest cause of death in the industry. Most of these accidents arise in operations where a lot of coordination is needed. It includes scaffolding, roof installation and steel erection. Failure to communicate properly in such situations can be extremely detrimental. There is increased research in construction health and safety. However, technical hazards and compliance are still the most studied. According to Lyu et al. (2023), language barriers or multilingual communication are identified as a significant issue that is covered in less than 15% of construction safety studies. This inequality is of great concern considering the increased workforce linguistic diversity. It has been demonstrated that communication breakdown is strongly correlated with the occurrence of accidents (Zara et al., 2023).

2.2 HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The construction industry is still a major health and safety challenge owing to the type of work involved. It is associated with continually evolving surroundings and multifaceted work processes. It also involves contact between different contractors and trades. The rate of injuries is very high in construction in the United Kingdom. It has more than 3,500 reportable injuries per workers annually worldwide (Alsharef et al., 2023). According to accident records, the causes of construction mishaps largely include the recurrent types of hazards. Approximately

20 percent of nonfatal injuries comprise slips, trips, and falls. Another 25% is added by the handling and lifting (Howe et al., 2024). Figure 2 identifies typical risks and accidents encountered in construction sites.



Figure 2: Common Construction Hazards & Risks

(Source: Trade Safe, 2024)

Moreover, it also demands the effective safety management. It is usually structured based on formal safety management systems (SMS). These systems involve risk assessment and planning. It also includes observation and constant enhancement of occupational risks. Al-Dmour et al. (2025) report that the rate of accidents is reduced by 30% in construction projects in which SMS frameworks are implemented successfully. The system should be effective in terms of diffusing safety information to all levels of workers. The behavioural-based safety strategies exhibit the significance of individual actions and choices in accident prevention. Wang et al. (2022) allowed finding that unsafe conduct is the reason behind up to 80 percent of construction accidents. This may include not adhering to the procedures or misappropriating equipment. The presentation and interpretation of safety standards is critical to these habits.

Moreover, effective safety management also requires clear instructions and supervision (Darda'u Rafindadi et al., 2025). The safety information may also be too intricate and too voluminous to understand. Research indicates that employees who received inductions taught via lectures retain less than two-thirds of the acquired knowledge a week later (Guo et al., 2021). The understanding and retention are poor when the training occurs in a non-native language. This enhances the likelihood of procedural mistakes. All the normal conditions in construction sites are visual fatigue and cognitive overload. These can worsen the issues. These results demonstrate the inadequacy of conventional safety communication methods in addressing the requirements of a multicultural workforce. They also indicate that the improvement of health and safety performance in construction requires technical controls and formal systems. Moreover, they should also have adaptive communication strategies that take into account language diversity and human cognitive limitations. These concerns are significant to reduce accidents. This may make work more compliant and foster inclusive safety cultures across the construction industry.

2.3 LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND SAFETY COMMUNICATION

Language barrier arises when the workers are unable to understand or communicate the language of work. Safety communication in the UK construction business is predominantly done in English (Lyu et al., 2025). But workforce research indicates that not all migrant workers are well versed in functional English. It has been estimated that approximately a third of migrant construction workers speak English at an understanding level. It is made even more challenging to understand when specialised safety or technical vocabulary is employed (Solati et al., 2022). This heightens the risky environment in an environment where timely communication is a factor important in safe task execution. Figure 3 provides a research trend of migrant workers in the construction industry.

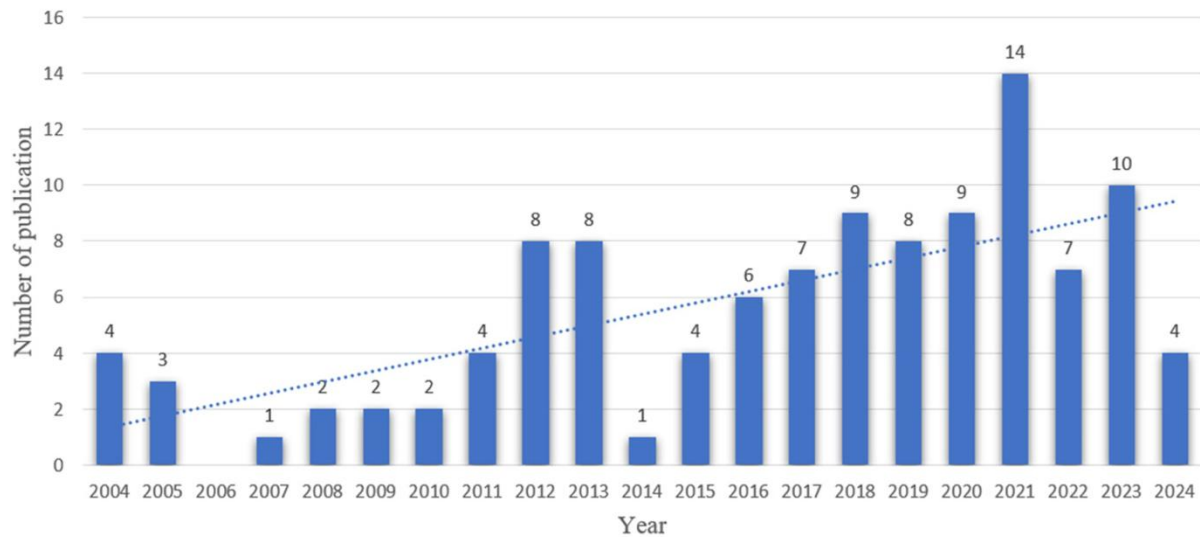


Figure 3: Year-wise Publications on Migrant Workers in Construction

(Source: MDPI, 2025)

Safety communication in construction is diverse. It comprises spoken instructions, written safety documentation, visible signage and formal training sessions. Evidence suggests that over 60% of safety-critical information on construction sites is given verbally. This is usually during toolbox briefings or on-the-spot supervisory instructions (Oswald et al., 2022). These verbal engagements are usually held in noisy, time-pressured settings. This increases the possibility of miscommunication. Studies show that non-native speakers have a 45% decrease in understanding. This happens when safety instructions are solely given verbally without visual or translation help (Ahmed et al., 2022).

The high-risk environments also increase communication challenges. The breakdown of communication is increased in emergencies. It may also occur in time sensitive operations such as crane lifting or space starving labour. The use of the second language in workers has been simulated to indicate that the workers take 25-30% longer to process emergency directives. This tends to slow down evacuation or remedial response (Zara et al., 2023). Such delays can have significant impacts when minutes are significant to prevent damage or deterioration.

Moreover, the accidents are usually associated with communication failures in various workforces, as reported. Hinsberg and Lamanna (2024) argue that a quarter of any incidences involving migrant workers will be characterised by a reported case of communication breakdown. Such failures are brought about by the misinterpretation of hazard signs. They also include the improper sequence of tasks or the use of personal protective gears. Besides this, Oswald et al. (2022) report that employees with inadequate language abilities also face an over 50 percent chance of using guesses and imitation instead of established knowledge, which puts them at risk of being exposed to latent hazards.

Language limitations influence safety behaviour as well, that is why there is underreporting. Involvement in reporting risks, near, misses, and unsafe conditions is at the core of a proactive safety management system. This is though different labour groups are differently engaged. The study shows that migrant construction workers are much less likely to report a near-miss than native speakers, with their reporting rates being around one-third lower. The main reasons for these are the fear of negative consequences at work or lack of trust in one's language skills. It can also include not knowing the correct way to report (Al-Dmour et al., 2025). Lower reporting slows down organisational learning and puts a limit on the possibilities of early intervention.

Nonverbal communication methods like demonstrations, pictograms, and hand signs are typically used as supporting methods. It has been proven that the use of visual signs leads to a 20-25% increase in hazard recognition by workers with poor language skills (Yap et al., 2022). Still, relying solely on nonverbal methods is not enough for the communication of complex procedural requirements, legal obligations, or abstract risks. Informal translation by multilingual coworkers is also a common method, but research indicates that as much as 40% of translation is wrong, especially when it relates to the conveyance of technical safety language (Brucker Juricic et al., 2021).

Thus, research shows that language limitations reduce the effectiveness of safety communication in construction. These restrictions raise the risk of accidents. At the same time, they also undermine reporting systems and distort safety messages. Addressing language-related safety concerns necessitates organisational-wide communication initiatives. These are necessary for increasing safety on multilingual building sites.

2.4 HUMAN FACTORS AND MULTICULTURAL CONSTRUCTION TEAMS

Human factors have a huge impact on construction safety performance. This is because they impact how people perceive dangers and make decisions. Cultural norms and communication techniques all have an impact on these aspects in multicultural construction teams (Zara et al., 2023). This is in addition to individual experience and talent. According to research, when communication is not managed properly, projects with very varied workforces have 15-20% more coordination failures. Such problems are noticeable during complex processes that need exact sequencing and shared situational awareness (Hynynen, 2025). Figure 4 shows ways to boost human factors to improve workplace safety.

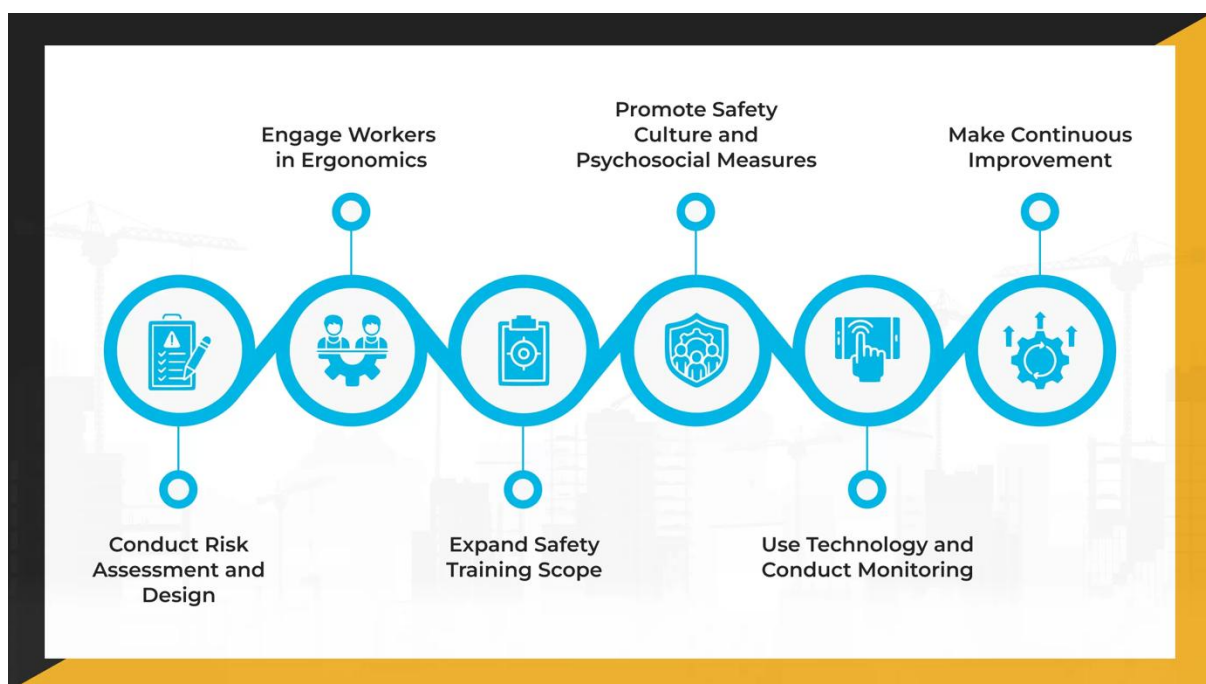


Figure 4: The Human Element

(Source: Safe T Professionals, 2025)

Moreover, attitudes to authority and adherence to safety requirements are also determined by cultural background. Collectivists or high power-distance cultures Workers may prize group cohesion more than personal judgement. This discourages them to challenge bad orders or interfere with production. It has been established that migrant workers are approximately 30 percent less likely to challenge supervisors. This is despite increased risk being perceived. This distaste is heightened in places of work where there are deadlines and production stress. The perception of risk is also culturally different. This has been evidenced through research to show that employees of different cultural orientations assess the severity and probability of risks differently. According to the research, more than 35% of migrant workers estimate the common hazards as less threatening as the native workers (Porru & Baldo, 2022). It may include working at heights or driving around mobile plants.

Moreover, the problem of language adds to the human factors problem, increasing the mental load. Employees who are required to understand instructions in a foreign language have to focus on understanding and performance of tasks. The results of experimental research indicate that task accuracy could decrease with the high cognitive load by the extent of 40% (Fellows et al., 2023). This happens when there is a need to make quick decisions and such tasks demand complete attention. This reduced capacity in construction can manifest itself through the form of slow hazard awareness or misuse of tools.

Besides that, the quality of communication influences teamwork and the trust in multicultural crews. Poor communication may lead to misunderstanding. It may also result in social withdrawal and discontentment. This is the case with the employees who cannot voice themselves with confidence. The socially marginalised construction labourers, according to

research, are 70 percent more likely to neglect safety regulations (Cunningham et al., 2022). On the contrary, teams that adopt inclusive communication practises boast of increased mutual support. Safety common responsibility is also exhibited between them.

2.5 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS AND COMPLIANCE CHALLENGES

The UK construction sector follows a strong set of laws that are designed to protect workers and encourage safe working practices. The Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974 is at the core of this framework, which is also supported by sector, specific legislation like the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM 2015). The CDM 2015 expressly states that information provided to workers must be "clear, understandable, and relevant" to the hazards they face. According to (Zara et al., 2023), one-third of UK sites with many migrant workers struggle to ensure full understanding of regulations.

Even though the law places great importance on the need for clear and understandable communication, the use of translations and other language supports various ways in the different parts of the sector. Based on a study, less than 20% of the firms consistently translate their safety documents into languages that are regularly spoken by their employees (Fellows et al., 2023). This shows a discrepancy between formal conformity and true comprehension.

Also, noncompliance also has big financial consequences. Sentencing guidelines issued in recent years have resulted in a huge rise in punishment for health and safety violations (Lyu et al., 2023). Based on an analysis of court decisions, the average fine for a major safety violation in the UK construction industry exceeds £100,000. (Al-Naser & Al-Tabtabai, 2025). Figure 5 shows the various consequences of non-compliance in high-risk industries.

Consequences of noncompliance?



Figure 5: The Cost of Non-Compliance in High-Risk Industries

(Source: ABE Risk Solutions, 2025)

Though the UK rules heavily rely on the aspects of competence, training, and worker participation, they fall short in offering any kind of support for handling language diversity. No standards have been laid down for employing multilingual communication methods. There are no clear indicators for measuring language skills. Hence, the decision making regarding this issue depends on individual companies which, in turn, leads to an enormous variation in practices. This regulatory gap causes inconsistencies throughout the business. It also puts vulnerable workers at danger.

2.6 TECHNOLOGICAL AND TRAINING INTERVENTIONS

Technological and training interventions are increasingly used to address language-related safety issues in construction. Construction sites are increasingly diversified and complex. Traditional communication approaches frequently fail to maintain a uniform awareness of safety standards. Digital technology and adaptive training tactics provide new potential to improve comprehension. Mobile translation applications, wearable devices and interactive e-learning platforms are being used in construction projects. According to studies, more than 45% of medium-to-large UK construction enterprises use a digital safety communication

platform (Kim et al., 2025). Figure 6 shows various wearable device technologies used in the construction industry.



Figure 6: Wearable Device Technologies

(Source: MDPI, 2018)

Moreover, visual communication strategies can be applied to eliminate language and literacy challenges. Pictograms and diagrams are able to transfer critical safety information. Kim et al. (2025) have found out that employees who are taught safety measures both visually and orally are about 35 percent more accurate in their memories. Pictorial tasks enhance sequencing of tasks and the use of equipment. They are useful in risky tasks such as lifting and constrained areas (Al-Naser and Al-Tabtabai, 2025).

The e-learning systems are also gaining relevance in the provision of safety training. Online training can be customised to fit different languages and different learning styles. Modular online training enables the customization of content to suit different languages and modes of learning. According to Fu et al. (2024), flexible online training boosts the completion of the

course by migrant workers. The success rate is more than 25% compared to the traditional classroom sessions. What is more, digital tests have fast feedback. As well, humanistic methods of training such as technology are also critical. All of them have shown to be significant safety benefits: on-site mentorship and peer support networks (Sepasgozar et al., 2023). Longitudinal research indicates that migrant workers who undergo organised mentoring in the first site placement record significantly reduced rates of injuries. Mentoring facilitates skill development which is technical. It also encourages informal learning concerning the standards, expectations and safe behaviour of the site.

However, technical and training therapies are limited. Translators can use automated translation programmes to produce grammatically accurate yet contextually wrong translations. Researchers indicate that approximately a quarter of the machine-translated safety instructions have flaws that can also influence the meaning of the instruction (Sepasgozar et al., 2023). This emphasises the role of human control and confirmation. There is also a problem of resource limits. The smaller subcontractors and contractors might not have the money to implement advanced digital systems. According to industry statistics, only more than a half of small businesses can utilise digital safety technology in comparison to large contractors (Yap et al., 2022). This inconsistency may lead to different levels of safety in different projects and supplier chains.

2.7 RESEARCH GAP AND JUSTIFICATION

Language barriers are a huge issue impacting construction safety. But significant gaps remain in the existing literature. Much of the present study is based on quantitative data and accident statistics. This offers little qualitative insight into how language challenges impact regular safety communication on UK construction sites. There is a lack of awareness of how safety instructions are perceived in practice (Zara et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the literature offers little insight into how managers ensure non-native speakers understand safety requirements. Regulatory frameworks prioritise clear and effective communication. But few studies look at how these requirements are carried out under operational limitations including time restrictions and labour turnover (Porru & Baldo, 2022). This results in a discrepancy between regulation purpose and site-level practice. This research takes a qualitative approach and carries out semi-structured interviews with migrant workers and managers.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The research follows an interpretivist philosophy. Interpretivism is the view that social reality is a product of human interaction, and people give meaning to their experiences through a combination of the individual, cultural, and contextual factors (Trangbæk & Cecchini, 2023). Hence, safety communication, in this study, cannot be regarded as just a technical process of a supervisor conveying safety information to the workers. It is a mixture of various factors like accent, tone, power relations, lack of time, previous experience, and trust in one's English-speaking ability. The research, therefore, adopted an interpretivist approach because it was more about the attempt to understand how participants make sense and feel about safety communication than a measurement of it quantitatively.

At the beginning of the research, the researcher acknowledged that communication failures do not always manifest as in the formal statistics like the rate of accidents. A toolbox talk can be presented as a completeness of the regulations on paper, and the workers can walk away without reading what is said. On the same note, a manager may believe that safety communication has been effective by merely the fact that no one is questioning. Yet in actual sense the workers may be silent out of respect to authority in applying a certain culture or may be afraid of repercussions. These subtle and subjective processes cannot be captured through quantitative data alone and require in-depth exploration.

Choosing interpretivism also implied that the researcher acknowledged the co-creation of meanings by the researcher and the participants (Jyoti & Efpraxia, 2023). The researcher was reflexively aware throughout the study, and acknowledged that their personal background, assumptions about safety culture, and engagement with the literature could influence data interpretation. After each interview, reflective notes were taken to capture immediate

impressions, the tone of the discussion and any signs of discomfort. This reflexive practice facilitated the detachment of participants intended meanings from the researchers' own assumptions. The study intended to establish the credibility and transparency of the interpretation process.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study used a qualitative research method, exploratory, descriptive in nature, with the support of inductive reasoning. A qualitative approach was chosen as the main aim of the research was to investigate the experiences, perceptions, and communication patterns of the workers (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2024). Quantitative methods can be used to find out the injury rates of migrant workers, but they will not capture the process of misunderstanding during the briefings or the reasons for workers' reluctance to ask for clarification. Hence, with a qualitative design, the participants were allowed to share their personal experiences, describe in detail the incidents, and express their feelings about the authority and safety compliance.

The exploratory aspect of the work was very significant as prior studies have concentrated mostly on technical training, regulatory compliance, and safety culture. There has been little qualitative research into how language and cultural interactions influence safety communication at UK construction sites (Hall et al., 2023). Several studies have recognised the existence of language barriers and their role in causing accidents. But they are still lacking a deep understanding of how such barriers function during regular work. The research has therefore tried to identify the areas where previous research is still very limited.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Primary data source method was a semi-structured interview design. This format offered a degree of structure via predetermined core questions (Nuzhat Naz, 2022). At the same time, it permitted the use of follow-up clarifications. Due to the intricate nature of communication

experiences, structured interviews with very few questions would have limited the participants' capability to discuss specific events in detail. On the other hand, totally unstructured interviews could have led to a lack of consistency in addressing the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews thus represented a compromise.

Two interview guides were created: one for migrant or non-native English-speaking workers and the other for supervisors and managers. The migrant worker questionnaire covered topics such as English language proficiency, experiences during toolbox talks, instances of misunderstanding, questioning authority, and unsafe situations caused by communication problems (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). The managerial questionnaire was concerned with safety briefings delivery, understanding verification, organisational support, CDM 2015 compliance, and communication difficulties noticed.

The study planned to conduct 20 - 25 interviews to improve representation. Nonetheless, data collection was discontinued after 18 interviews due to data saturation. Though the sample size was slightly less than that planned, it still provided an opportunity for the researcher to make a meaningful comparison between different perspectives. Interviews duration varied from thirty-five to sixty minutes. They were held either in site offices after working hours or via secure online platforms. The choice depended on the respondents' availability.

The research used purposive sampling to select participants who had direct experience of safety communication on multicultural construction sites in the UK. The researcher reached the participants through their professional contacts in two construction companies. Site managers acted as gatekeepers by handing out information sheets and invitations to participate.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Researchers collected the data over a period of six weeks. Obtaining permission to visit live construction sites was a major challenge in practice. The first contact was made through

professional networks and gatekeepers who helped the researcher to find the potential participants. Information sheets outlining the purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of the research were provided in advance. Also, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Trust building with migrant workers was a very sensitive issue. At first, some participants seemed reluctant to talk about safety issues. This was maybe because they were afraid of a bad reputation or losing their jobs. For this reason, the researcher pointed out the anonymity, and no company names were to be used. Data collection was continued until data saturation was reached, with no new topics emerging from subsequent interviews (Khoa et al., 2023).

3.5 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to maintain focus and relevance. The migrant participants had to be non-native English speakers who are currently working on construction sites in the UK and have site experience of at least six months. The native English speakers and the administrative staff were excluded from the research because it was only about linguistic barriers in operational contexts. Managers had to have direct supervisory or safety responsibilities. Senior executives without regular site engagement were excluded because their perspectives would not reflect everyday communication dynamics. These criteria helped to make sure the participant's experience was in line with the research objectives (Gartlehner et al., 2022).

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was performed to analyse the interview data. The researcher commenced familiarisation by rapidly re-reading the transcripts (Ahmed et al., 2025). Next, initial codes were developed that reflected significant text excerpts pertaining to communication barriers,

cultural influences, safety compliance, and organisational pressures. To stay very close to the data, the researcher did the coding manually.

Gradually, the patterns that cut across both groups of participants started to become visible. One example is that several workers said they nodded during the safety briefings even when they only partially understood the message. On the other hand, managers often assumed that silence meant the workers were confirming that they had understood. Thus, the themes, assumed understanding, cultural reluctance to challenge authority, and time pressure limiting explanation, were developed by comparing different transcripts. The researcher regularly checked the data to verify that the themes were a true reflection of the participants stories.

3.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In qualitative studies, the concept of validity is mainly based on the notions of credibility and trustworthiness. Credibility was increased by the fact that data came from two different but related groups. This allowed for the triangulation of perspectives. Thus, when managers gave their reasons for being sure about the effectiveness of their communication methods, the workers' accounts were used to confirm those explanations or to provide different ones. Consistency was also ensured using structured interview guides (Shaheen et al., 2023). The questions were pilot tested with a construction worker, who was not part of the final sample, before formal data collection started. This allowed for rewording and clarification of questions. The achievement of data saturation further strengthened the credibility of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2025).

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics approval was obtained through the university's formal review procedures (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). Participants were given detailed information sheets that explained the voluntary nature of the participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and the steps taken

for anonymisation. All transcripts and reporting were done using pseudonyms and coded identifiers. During the interview, the participants were told that they could refuse to answer any question if they wished. Nonetheless, the researcher was mindful of any emotional response in the case of discussing accidents or incidents of the close call.

The researcher obtained the required risk assessment and ethics approval for this study. The Certificate of Ethics Review received from the University has been attached as Appendix B of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS/ FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter essentially provides the empirical results based on semi-structured interviews with migrant construction workers, site supervisors, and managers who work in multicultural construction environments in the United Kingdom. A descriptive thematic approach is taken, concentrating on the systematic presentation of participant profiles, a summary of interview answers, and the identification of major themes directly emerging from the data. Following qualitative research traditions, this chapter mainly focuses on the representation of participants' accounts even more than giving interpretations or analytical comments. More detailed analysis, theoretical embedding, and clear connection to the research questions are discussed in the next chapter.

4.2 RESPONDENT PROFILE

To give context to the findings, features of respondents are summarised for the two participant groups: migrant construction workers (MW) and supervisors/managers (SM). This diversity enabled exploration of safety communication from both operational and managerial perspectives.

Table 4.1: Profile of Migrant Construction Worker Participants

Respondent Code	Age	Nationality	First Language	Time in the UK	Role on Site	English Proficiency (Self-reported)	Reason for Working in Construction
MW1	24	Romanian	Romanian	10 months	General Labourer	Basic	Immediate employment upon arrival; no UK qualifications required
MW2	31	Bulgarian	Bulgarian	1 year 2 months	Groundworks Operative	Basic	Stable income while improving English and settling in the UK
MW3	27	Lithuanian	Lithuanian	8 months	Steel Fixer	Basic	Better wages compared to home country; short-term financial goals

MW4	35	Albanian	Albanian	1 year 6 months	Formwork Labourer	Basic to Limited	Temporary work while studying English part-time
MW5	29	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	11 months	General Labourer	Basic	Employment obtained through community networks after arrival
MW6	42	Pakistani	Punjabi	1 year 4 months	Site Cleaner / Labourer	Limited	Entry-level work while adapting to UK work environment
MW7	22	Indian	Gujarati	7 months	Drylining Labourer	Basic to Limited	Recently arrived; employed via extended family network; construction work required minimal UK experience
MW8	38	Nigerian	Yoruba	1 year	Skilled Painter & Decorator	Basic	Prior trade experience; higher earning potential compared to previous employment; barriers in qualification recognition
MW9	26	Syrian	Arabic	9 months	MEP Assistant / Helper	Limited	Employment accessed through community contacts; prior technical exposure but significant language challenges
MW10	31	Ghanaian	Twi	10 months	General Labourer / Groundworks Support	Limited to Basic	Migrated for economic reasons; construction offered rapid entry to work without formal UK certification requirements

This group consisted of workers from different national backgrounds, with varying English language proficiency and different lengths of employment in the UK construction sector. Almost all participants were previously involved in construction work in their home countries and were working as general labourers, skilled tradesmen, or plant operators.

Table 4.2: Profile of Supervisor and Manager Participants

Respondent Code	Role	Years in UK Construction	Site Type	Responsibility Level	Experience with Migrant Workers	Primary Perspective
SM1	Site Supervisor	9 years	Residential & Commercial	Daily task allocation, on-site safety	High	Pragmatic, delivery-focused
SM2	Site Manager	12 years	Large Commercial Projects	Overall site safety, programme delivery	Very High	Compliance-driven, risk-aware
SM3	Assistant Site Manager	7 years	Residential Developments	Inductions, toolbox talks, coordination	High	Supportive, reflective
SM4	Health & Safety Manager	11 years	Multi-site (Commercial)	Audits, investigations, policy implementation	Extensive	Policy-focused, critical of site pressures
SM5	Project Manager	10 years	Mixed-use Developments	Budgets, timelines, client liaison	Moderate–High	Strategic, conflicted by productivity pressures
SM6	Section Supervisor	5 years	Commercial Fit-out	Small team supervision, front-line safety	High	Empathetic, developing leadership
SM7	Senior Site Supervisor	9 years	Large Commercial / Tier 1 Projects	Direct supervision of multiple subcontractors, daily safety coordination, toolbox talks, task sequencing	Extensive	Safety communication must be structured and system-driven; believes communication failures stem from management design rather than worker limitations
SM8	Site Manager	11 years	Mixed Residential & Mid-Size Developments	Overall site responsibility, safety compliance, inductions, contractor coordination, behavioural management	Extensive	Emphasises relational and trust-based safety management; believes workers understand safety through informal networks and supervisor relationships rather than documentation

This group was made up of various site supervisors, safety officers, and project managers at different levels of work experience. Their functions included site coordination, safety

supervision, induction delivery, and communication of daily tasks. Collectively, these profiles offer a context for understanding the communication experiences and safety practices across the different organisational levels.

4.3 SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW DATA

In-depth conversations with a total of eighteen participants were conducted under a semi-structured format. This included ten migrant construction workers and eight site supervisors and managers. The discussions thus conducted revolved around their safety communication experiences, knowledge of safety procedures, communication barriers and strategies to overcome them, as well as daily social interactions on-site in multicultural construction environments. After the eighteenth interview, the researchers ceased data gathering because they observed data saturation. The last few interviews did not present any new themes or major insights. The detailed interview transcripts supporting these findings are provided in the Appendix for reference.

4.3.1 Summary of Migrant Worker Interviews

The migrant workers interviewed revealed through their testimonies that they have been facing communication and safety problems at the construction sites in the UK. Majority of the respondents worked in labour or trade-support roles and had very short experience of the UK, often moving from one site to another. Such discontinuity made it difficult for them to get used to specific safety procedures of each site. All the participants declared that they came from non-English speaking backgrounds and their English level was only basic or functional, though oral communication was more difficult than understanding the written signs. Accents, fast talk and the use of informal language were most of the time mentioned as the main obstacles to understanding. As stated by MW1 - *“Accents change everything - familiar words sound unfamiliar”*.

Safety briefings and toolbox talks were mainly verbal, and it was generally felt that the talks were rushed. On the other hand, visual demonstrations, gestures, and practical examples really helped the workers to understand and retain information. Workers rarely questioned their supervisors directly but used their observation or asked the peer to explain when only partially understanding the message. Cultural norms, hierarchical relationships, and fear of losing face prevented the workers from asking for explanations leading to passive behaviours such as nodding even though being unsure (Schein & Schein, 2025). As MW2 explained: “*Nodding feels safer than admitting confusion*”.

The interviewees admitted seeing unsafe acts and near-misses resulting from communication difficulties, but these were generally considered to be contributing factors rather than the main causes. It was suggested that people should speak slower, give clearer instructions, provide more visuals, and conduct more interactive safety briefings to help employees understand better and thus, reduce safety risks. This preference is captured in the statement: “*Showing works better than telling*” (MW10).

4.3.2 Summary of Supervisor and Manager Interviews

The report of supervisors and managers shed light on the intricate facets of safety communication in multicultural construction environments. All the respondents held supervisory or managerial positions with a direct role in safety instruction and compliance and managing culturally diverse teams was considered a routine part of UK construction practice. The participants observed the over-representation of non-native English speakers, and different trades and subcontractors varying the workforce composition, hence making communication both a requirement and a challenge. As noted by SM2, “*Language issues are rarely just about vocabulary*”.

Supervisors talked about changing their communication ways to more understandable language through simplification, repeating, demonstration of visuals, gestures, and employing bilingual

intermediaries to help understanding. They also commonly used behavioural observation to judge workers' comprehension especially when they carried out their tasks. The respondents made a clear distinction between a worker's external compliance to the rules and the inner understanding of such regulations. They remarked that a large number of workers were learning mainly through practice and the use of reinforcement. As highlighted by SM1, *“Compliance is often procedural rather than conceptual.”*

Among the reasons given for communication problems were linguistic limitations, cultural norms, productivity pressures, environmental noise and the burden on the humans' ability to process that information. The cultural factors of not questioning authority, silence, and nodding were acknowledged by all. Language barriers, although they rarely were the sole cause of incidents, were seen as important contributing risk factors, especially when there was time pressure. As noted by SM5, *“Cognitive load on site amplifies communication problems.”* The changes could be achieved by focusing on clearer communication design, more visualisation, simplified language, and practical-site aligned training that would serve as a bridge between organisational policies and the site reality. This is reinforced by SM4, who stated, *“Operational pressures shape communication depth.”*

4.4 BROAD THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DATA

Thematic analysis yielded many overarching themes which were continuously reflected in the experiences of the participants, thus depict the recurring patterns in the aspects of communication, safety understanding and behaviour adaptation in the multicultural construction environments. One major theme was the separation of functional from deep safety understanding, in which migrant workers often were on the surface of the matter and only followed instructions without a thorough understanding of formal regulatory frameworks. On the other hand, supervisors saw this phenomenon as typical and tried to help workers through frequent supervision and repetition.

Language barriers were found to be a complex issue, which in addition to the limited vocabulary members of different groups also included accents, speech speed, use of slang, background noise and mental overload. Altogether, these factors were regarded as situational and changeable rather than as permanent limitations. Safety communication was also recognised as a deeply social issue, with a reliance on interpersonal relationships, peer support, informal translation, observational learning, etc. Colloquial language was repeatedly identified as a hidden barrier, often causing more confusion than technical terminology (Shermamatova et al., 2024).

Authority gradients and silence behaviour further moulded communication practices, as workers often refrained from seeking clarification because of the hierarchy that they felt, embarrassment, or fear of negative judgement. Visual communication was consistently identified as the most effective mode, with demonstrations, gestures, and diagrams enhancing understanding. Productivity pressure limited communication to brief and directive exchanges. Informal safety and translation networks were the two of the most important resources of the workers, while communication-related risks were often normalised as routine site conditions. Finally, an illusion of understanding was evident, whereby apparent comprehension masked incomplete cognitive clarity (Pretty, 2026). Themes discussed above provide a conceptual base for the thematic structure covered in the next section.

4.5 THEME STRUCTURE

Based on the data, the identified themes were categorised into three hierarchical levels: primary, secondary, and latent themes. The primary themes represent the dominant patterns, the secondary themes act as the main supporting processes, and the latent themes are the underlying mechanisms.

4.5.1 Primary Themes

The primary themes represent the main patterns that emerged from participant narratives around communication and safety understanding. They comprise of the differentiation between functional and deep safety understanding, the complex nature of language barriers, and safety communication as a social process. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that procedural compliance can often happen without full cognitive understanding. Communication problems are not only due to language proficiency, but interpersonal interaction, observation, and informal learning are very crucial in shaping safety behaviour on the site. In summary, these primary themes embody the fundamental factors influencing the day-to-day safety communication practices of a multicultural construction environment.

4.5.2 Secondary Themes

Secondary themes offer corroboration and elaboration for the main patterns. They encompass casual speech as an unconcealed obstacle, power hierarchy and silence behaviour, the predominance of visual communication, work overload as a limitation on communication and informal safety and translation networks. The themes reflect the impact of the choice of the linguistic style, power relations, time pressure, and informal support mechanisms on the effectiveness of communication. This directly affects how safety messages are communicated, understood, and put into practice in worksite everyday operations.

4.5.3 Latent Themes

Latent themes uncover the core factors that determine safety communication and understanding. Among these are the illusion of understanding, which suggests that people may think they agree when in fact they do not. Next is safety as observed practice versus understood system, in which employees imitate behaviours without really understanding the reasons behind them. Finally, it discusses communication risk compliance, where the continual presence of ambiguity is accepted as something normal.

4.6 THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM DATA

4.6.1 List of Themes

Theme Code	Theme
Primary Themes	
PT1	Functional vs Deep Understanding
PT2	Multi-layered Language Barriers
PT3	Safety as Social Process
Secondary Themes	
ST1	Colloquial Language Barrier
ST2	Authority & Silence
ST3	Visual Communication
ST4	Productivity Pressure
ST5	Informal Networks
Latent Themes	
LT1	Illusion of Understanding
LT2	Observed vs Understood Safety
LT3	Communication Risk Compliance

4.6.2 Theme-Responding Mapping

Theme Code	Theme	Respondents																	
		MW1	MW2	MW3	MW4	MW5	MW6	MW7	MW8	MW9	MW10	SM1	SM2	SM3	SM4	SM5	SM6	SM7	SM8
Primary Themes																			
PT1	Functional vs Deep Understanding	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2
PT2	Multi-layered Language Barriers	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2
PT3	Safety as Social Process	1	3	1	3	3	1	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	1	2	3	2
Secondary Themes																			
ST1	Colloquial Language Barrier	0	1	0	1	2	0	2	3	3	1	0	2	1	2	0	1	1	1
ST2	Authority & Silence	2	3	1	3	3	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	2
ST3	Visual Communication	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	2
ST4	Productivity Pressure	1	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	3
ST5	Informal Networks	1	2	0	0	3	1	3	1	1	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	3	1
Latent Themes																			
LT1	Illusion of Understanding	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2
LT2	Observed vs Understood Safety	3	2	1	3	3	1	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	2
LT3	Communication Risk Compliance	1	3	0	2	3	0	3	2	2	2	0	1	2	3	1	2	2	2

Scoring Legend:

0 - Not mentioned- Dark Green, 1 - Brief / indirect mention- Light Green, 2 - Moderate discussion - Yellow, 3 - Strong / repeated emphasis- Red

As can be seen in the heatmap, there is a significant degree of heterogeneity in the intensity of the themes between respondents, with certain themes, namely multi-layered language barriers (PT2) and illusion of understanding (LT1) showing higher levels of intensity uniformly across the migrant worker cohort. On the other hand, selective concentration is shown by themes like colloquial language (ST1) and informal networks (ST5). These low or zero-intensity scores serve once again to remind us that these themes are not universal, thus once more reinforcing a statement made previously that safety communication challenges are inherently situational and context-specific.

4.7 REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTES ILLUSTRATING KEY THEMES

To make the research clearer, a few quotes from the participants have been shared here (refer to Appendix D for complete quotes). These serve as direct proof of themes and reflect participants' modes of expression when talking about safety communication in multicultural construction settings.

Table 4.6.1 – Primary Theme: Functional vs Deep Safety Understanding

Respondent	Illustrative Quote
MW2	“I follow the steps because others do, not because I fully understand the rule.”
MW7	“I work safely, but I could not explain the regulation behind it.”
SM4	“Visible safety does not guarantee cognitive understanding.”

Table 4.6.2 – Primary Theme: Language Barriers as Multi-Layered Phenomena

Respondent	Illustrative Quote
MW1	“Accents change everything — familiar words sound unfamiliar.”
MW10	“It is not just language; it is the environment too.”
SM5	“Language issues are rarely just about vocabulary.”

Table 4.6.3 – Secondary Theme: Visual Communication Dominance

Respondent	Illustrative Quote
MW6	“Seeing the task clarifies everything quickly.”
MW10	“Showing works better than telling.”
SM6	“Demonstrations bypass linguistic variability.”

Table 4.6.4 – Latent Theme: Illusion of Understanding

Respondent	Illustrative Quote
MW7	“Continuing work doesn’t always mean full understanding.”
MW8	“Sometimes I act confident while uncertain.”
SM1	“Behavioural signals can be misleading.”

Table 4.6.5 – Latent Theme: Communication Risk Normalisation

Respondent	Illustrative Quote
MW5	“Minor confusion becomes normal.”
SM6	“Drift into tolerance is common.”

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the results of the research which are presented in the previous chapter. The aim of the research was to investigate how language diversity affects safety communication and understanding on multicultural construction sites in the UK. The themes identified are that communication problems cannot be accounted for only by the lack of English language skills. Safety communication, on the other hand, is revealed as a complex, socially negotiated, and operationally limited process influenced by cognitive, linguistic, and organisational factors.

The analysis is structured around the major and minor themes identified in the data. Major themes denote the main patterns that largely determine the way safety communication takes place, whereas minor themes serve as the explanatory elements that influence such patterns. The chapter has been structured around the main and secondary themes that emerged from the data.

5.2 ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY THEMES

5.2.1 Functional vs Deep Safety Understanding

The results show that procedural compliance and conceptual safety understanding are two different things that migrant workers seem to keep separate. On many occasions, participants managed to demonstrate proper safety behaviours merely by observing, imitating, and repeating, however, they showed little understanding of the regulatory frameworks and hazard rationales that were behind the practices. Such a behaviour pattern is indicative of a certain degree of functional competence whereby workers perform tasks in a safe manner without necessarily internalising the principles that constitute safe working methods. In fact, such a corrective behaviour can be explained by safety culture theory which distinguishes between safety compliance, as the mere adherence to rules, and safety participation, as the voluntary

engagement in risk management and hazard identification (Reason, 1998). Though procedural compliance is a factor that helps in establishing core safety performance, lack of conceptual understanding limits workers at least in many ways such as identifying new hazards, adjusting to new situations and reporting of new risks.

Also, these findings justify the behaviour-based safety models which argue that safe behaviours can develop through observation and reinforcement even when formal knowledge is lacking. But dependence on imitation creates hidden weaknesses, especially in fast-changing or high-risk situations where preset routines might not work (Rafindadi et al., 2023). If there is no profound knowledge, the workers might find it difficult to understand the unusual situations and thus, they may get more exposed to the hazards which they would not have anticipated. This discrepancy pinpoints that along with the behavioural training, it is also important to encourage mind training. Improving the workers' conceptual knowledge may increase their skills for self-judging risks.

5.2.2 Language Barriers as Multi-Layered Phenomena

The research reveals that linguistic obstacles in multicultural construction settings are far from being simple matters of vocabulary or grammar knowledge, but rather, they are complex, multi-layered phenomena influenced by situational and mental aspects. Among other things, participants pointed out that different accents, how fast people speak, noise, stress from work, and being mentally overloaded are some of the main causes of misunderstanding. These results are in line with the theory of cognitive load which explains that a person can only process a limited amount of information and the presence of multiple cognitive demands reduces the attention that one can give to understanding language.

A worker in construction workplaces has to absorb a set of instruction, look out and manage their actions and deal with others, therefore, misunderstanding is almost unavoidable. This complexity transforms the language barriers into an interaction issue of a system. Rather than

attributing the lack of understanding to the poor language proficiency by the workers, the study reveals that the working environment makes the situation only worse. Noise, time shortage, and hurry in doing different job tasks, makes it even harder to comprehend, particularly to foreign language speakers. The current study is based on the earlier one since it reveals communication risk on the organisational and situational points of view. It suggests that the safety within a factory cannot be achieved without altering the communication mode at the level of the entire organisation rather than merely offering the individual courses in language (Yang et al., 2024). Therefore, workplace strategies like using plain messages, clear and structured speech, communication using various mediums and noise control in the workplace may be crucial in reducing the mental load and enhancing comprehension in the potentially hazardous construction scenarios.

5.2.3 Safety Communication as a Social Process

The evidence is overwhelming in indicating that safety knowledge within a multi-cultural construction setting is a social construct and not merely a formalised teaching. The participants used peer networks, observational learning, informal translation, and mutual work practises to acquire and renew safety knowledge. This trend is consonant with theory of communities of practise, where learning is a social process that is entrenched in day-to-day social interaction. Safety competence was acquired not through formal training sessions but through work togetherness, observation of senior co-workers, and informal communications.

Not only do such social learning processes make accessibility easier particularly to language challenged workers by affording them experience-based means of comprehending, but they also introduce the aspect of variant interpretations as knowledge is transmitted through the prism of personal experience and peer mediation. Thus, this reliance on informal groups may lead to the inconsistent practise of safety measures and the unfair interpretation of them in various teams (Brennecke et al., 2025).

The managers' reliance on communication through peers as a medium reflects their pragmatic approach to a diversified workforce, but at the same time, it reveals the organisation's reliance on unofficial systems. Although these social mechanisms can lead to the achievement of safety at a functional level, they may result in the reinforcement of only partial understanding or localised practices which may be at variance with formal standards. The research, thus, highlights the necessity of the integration of formal and informal communication methods so that relational learning can be a complement to rather than a substitute for institutional safety systems.

5.3 ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY THEMES

5.3.1 Colloquial Language as a Hidden Barrier

The prevalence of colloquial speech as a major factor in confusion underscores the crucial role that pragmatic language use plays in safety communication. Throughout the studies, the participants maintained that casual talk, idiomatic expressions and local slang were the major factors causing confusion more than technical terms. This result is consistent with sociolinguistic theory which points out that the meaning derived from pragmatic use of language is highly dependent on the context and culture (Grieve et al., 2025). Technical vocabulary can be learned through a systematic process, but colloquial expressions are usually based on the shared cultural background, thus being unpredictable and difficult to get by people who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, using informal speech in safety critical contexts introduces communication risks that are not easily noticeable. Employees might recognise words without understanding the meaning which could result in confusion or delayed understanding. The latter kind of obstacle is very difficult to detect, and it might go unnoticed by the supervisors who usually think that simpler language is more accessible. The research results are at variance with the latter assumption, as they show that informal language causes more confusion than technical

language. Hence, in such situations, maintaining linguistic purity becomes a matter of necessity. Stressing the use of standardised language, clear structures of sentences, and elimination of idiomatic expressions can go a long way to the improvement of the level of understanding. After identifying colloquial language as a hidden barrier, organisations can more effectively plan their communication initiatives to lessen ambiguity, strengthen stakeholders' common understanding, and lower the potential safety risks that come with language misunderstanding.

5.3.2 Authority Gradients and Silence Behaviour

The results strongly uphold the power-distance theory and show how power relations between people at work influence their communication behaviour (Dai et al., 2022). A lot of migrant workers pointed out that they would not feel free to question their supervisors because it is against their cultural norms, they would be afraid of getting embarrassed, or they would be worried about what the others might think of them. Very often this kind of reluctance was followed by silence, a nod, or a passive agreement although the person did not really understand. These behaviours create the impression of mutual understanding. But in reality, substantial misunderstanding persists, thereby increasing exposure to safety risks.

These dynamics degrade psychological safety, which is understood as the belief that one can raise their voice without the risk of getting a negative reaction. Employees hiding it when they do not know, makes it very likely their mistakes go unnoticed, and dangerous situations stay unreported. Recognition of such behaviours by supervisors acts as a signal that they are aware of the problem, however, it is typical for them to be bound by organisational limitations thus leaving almost no room for open conversations. When the working environment is underpinned by constant stress and pressure, lack of time can be considered as an additional reason that perpetuates directive communication styles, thereby deepening the hierarchical gap.

The results serve to stress the importance of leadership styles that deliberately work towards minimising authority gradients and promoting interactive relationships. The use of inclusive communication training and direct the use of asking questions as a method of encouragement are some of the tools that can be used to enhance psychological safety and lead to better safety performance.

5.3.3 Visual Communication Dominance

The dominance of visual communication shows how well multimodal strategies can overcome language barriers and limitations of our brain. Demonstrations, gestures, diagrams, and physical modelling were always seen as more effective than verbal explanations, especially when the tasks were complicated or dangerous. It corresponds to the dual-coding theory that says we understand and remember better if the information is given to us through both visuals and words (Li et al., 2022). Visual communication lessens the dependence on language skills. Thus, workers can understand what is expected of them more quickly and correctly.

Simply speaking, pictorial methods help reduce mental strain as they depict information thus, the workers can understand the orders more naturally. It is particularly valuable in a noisy or fast-moving environment where the clarity of the voice is deceived. Learning through observation also makes it possible to copy the behaviour instantaneously which in turn helps to follow the procedure even if there is not a complete understanding made of the concepts. Nevertheless, depending on visuals too much might unintentionally lead to a situation where a person only sees the function of the thing and does not get a deeper understanding. The data suggests that although visual methods are very important and necessary, they should be brought in with verbal explanations that are well ordered. Combining visual demonstrations with clear and simplified verbal instructions can enhance both procedural accuracy and conceptual understanding.

5.3.4 Productivity Pressure as a Communication Constraint

Time pressure and productivity demands were at the top of the list of constraints that limited safety communication between workers. Employees shared that operational priorities do not allow for lengthy communication, so the exchange is often a short one where a command is given and the main point is to execute the task rather than a thorough understanding. Even though organisational policies call for thorough communication and a zeal for a participatory safety culture, production imperatives are still limiting communication depth.

Wherever production is under tight control, operational and unplanned situations become the pretext for neglecting communication, hence the workers are being left with no option but to be guided by the leader. On top of that, workers with limited language skills are the most affected since they need more time to process and understand the instructions which must be interpreted. Therefore, by forcing communication that is too brief, there will be misunderstanding and trust, to a greater extent, will be put in the hands of the imitation and peer mediation. It is the case that supervisors see this problem, but they have to deal with the fact that they are held responsible for meeting the scheduling demands and performance targets. The above results strongly point to the fact that safety communication practices need to be in line with the operational realities (Zulkarnain et al., 2025). Hence, the strategies at the organisational level should be planned in such a way as to first identify connectivity issues due to a lack of sufficient office time to do necessary tasks. At the same time, it is important to embed communication flexibility in the workflow design whereby safety is not sacrificed for the sake of efficiency.

5.4 ANALYSIS OF LATENT THEMES

5.4.1 Illusion of Understanding

The illusion of understanding is a major hidden risk that can lead to accidents in multicultural construction sites. The interviewees gave examples of how people show outward signs of understanding by simply nodding or continuing to work, when in fact they do not understand

at all. This is consistent with sensemaking theory according to which people create meaning through observing cues and receiving social signals rather than checking explicitly (Turner et al., 2023). In a hierarchical context, the subordinates' obedience keeps substituting for clarifying their doubts, which results in false assumptions of mutual understanding. Such delusions are very dangerous especially in dynamic and complicated work settings where the mistake is so big that it cannot be ignored. Supervisors who judge their employees' understanding only by their actions further increase the risk since silent agreement is very often taken as understanding. Dealing with this theme means that one should have a set of ways to find out if the person really understands rather than just looking at what he does. Methods like interactive questioning, going through the tasks and explaining to friends may expose one's lack of understanding and thus avoid miscommunication. When organisations pinpoint and challenge false assumptions of a shared understanding, they not only improve communication effectiveness but also decrease the risks that were not recognised before, thus enhancing the overall safety management efficiency.

5.4.2 Safety: Observed Practice vs Understood System

The distinction between observed safety practice and safety as an understood system is a reflection of different stages of safety culture maturity. People who took part in the study were frequently able to correctly demonstrate safety behaviour according to procedures, however, most of them did not quite understand the regulatory logic or the hazard rationale which were behind those practices. This is in line with safety maturity models by Trinh & Feng (2022). It indicates that early-stage safety cultures focus on rule-following and supervision, whereas mature systems focus on cognitive engagement, risk awareness, and proactive participation. In skill-based sectors like the construction industry, learning the procedure through repetition and imitation comes first before understanding the concept. Although this allows for quick operational proficiency, it puts a limit on workers' ability to safely adapt to situations that are

new to them. If safety behaviour is not based on deeper understanding, it will be dependent on the context, thus the individuals will be at greater risk when faced with unfamiliar and complicated scenarios. The results imply that conceptualising safety is a necessary step on the way to higher safety culture maturity. Safety behaviour that is more adaptive and resilient can be better supported by cognitive engagement if training is done in a way that integrates reflective learning, contextual explanation, and participatory dialogue.

5.4.3 Communication Risk Normalisation

Communication risk normalisation was a hidden way that people became so unsure for so long that they just accepted the ambiguity without really trying to fix it. Participants explained that when the communication problems were always there, they just got used to it and made up their own ways of coping, like depending on peers and learning from observation instead of trying to get to the root of the problem. This is consistent with the theory of normalisation of deviance, where the continuous exposure to a certain level of risk that can be managed gradually makes the practice accepted (Williams et al., 2023).

Gradually, communication problems get so wrapped up in the day-to-day activities that the need for taking any corrective measure totally disappears. Both workers and supervisors talked about language barriers as if they were just one of the things in construction that made people tolerate them rather than do something about them. On one hand, this kind of adjustment makes it possible to go on working, but on the other hand, it also sets up dangerous situations that are not immediately visible. Small mistakes in communication build up and the chances of making a wrong move when under the strain will be greater. To deal with risk normalisation, the organisation should be focused on making continual progress, not on allowing the situation to limit them. Regular checks on communication, one-on-one safety talks that reflect on what happens, and interventions that are at the initiative of the leadership could be ways that lessen complacency and make communication safer.

5.5 ALIGNMENT OF ANALYSIS WITH RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: How does effective communication contribute to improving safety performance in the construction industry?

Communication assists safety performance by harmonisation of shared meaning of the workers about risks, procedures, and coordination requirements. The study demonstrates that safety practises can effectively become at work only under the condition that the instructions are interpreted with the same level of understanding among the workers, particularly in the case of multilingual conditions. Safety-based communication may result in an ability to achieve a shared situational awareness, reduction in the risk of task execution errors, and behaviour that is more consistent with safety expectations. This study contributes to the literature by discovering that the success of communication is not only the delivery of the message but also the interpretative validity of the message given the cognitive and environmental limitations. When the communication is clear, multimodal, and socially backed, workers have the chance of safely organising even under the condition that the conditions of operations are quite complicated. Thus, the enhancement in safety performance can be attributed to communication that reduces interpretive variability and, therefore, makes it easier to have a consistent understanding by culturally and linguistically diverse teams.

Research Question 2: What cultural and linguistic challenges hinder effective safety communication on multicultural construction sites?

The research suggests that communication barriers are complex and result from the interplay of language, culture, and environment. Some of the language-related issues are differences in local dialects, variations in the speed of speech, use of colloquial expressions, and limited proficiency in functional English. On top of that, different cultures influence people's ways of communicating, for example, showing respect to people in authority, perceived power differences, and unwillingness to ask for clarifications. Besides that, factors such as noise, time

pressure, and complexity of the task increase the mental load, thus resulting in less reliable understanding. Besides technical jargon, informal speech and colloquial workplace language create additional interpretative uncertainties. Hence, these obstacles are more than just linguistic in nature since they reflect human factors that are part of the organisational way of doing things. Safety communication breaks down in situations where employees must understand the instructions while experiencing cognitive overload, having social anxieties, and being under pressure to perform tasks.

Research Question 3: How do communication challenges affect site operations, safety behaviour, and regulatory compliance?

Communication problems bring about interpretive variability thus affecting how site operations shall be conducted, task coordination and decision-making. For instance, workers will depend on imitation, assumption, or informal clarification when the instructions are completely unclear leading to an increase in the variability of procedure execution. Safety behaviour depends on cognitive load and communication trust, and these factors in turn have an impact on hazard perception, reporting, and safety related activities. The research shows that people can comply with regulations even if they do not fully understand the concept which means that there is a gap between the visible performance and the cognitive understanding of the person. Therefore, through procedural repetition, regulatory compliance is attained. Half-truths also render feedback mechanisms weak by discouraging clarification and reporting. In general, challenges in communication affect safety reliability by influencing the interpretation, behaviour, and learning processes of the organisation.

Research Question 4: What strategies can improve communication effectiveness and safety performance in multicultural construction environments?

The research reveals that to enhance safety communication, it is necessary to employ strategies that increase the ability to correctly interpret messages in real operational conditions.

Multimodal communication techniques, especially the use of visual demonstrations and task modelling, make the messages less dependent on language and reduce the demand on memory and cognitive processing. Using simple and standardised language can help workers from different backgrounds to understand each other. In addition, properly organised peer support and bilingual mediation can ensure the continuity of understanding in situations of great linguistic diversity. The communication systems should be developed to consider the pressure of working time and the limitations of the environment. Hence, the focus of effective methods is on lessening the mental load, facilitating the use of different modalities for the interpretation of the message, and reinforcing the social environment that enables workers to confidently check their understanding.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate the implications of language and cultural diversity on the issue of safety communication on multicultural construction sites within the United Kingdom. Specifically, the research proposed to comprehend the effect of communication barriers on everyday operations, safety behaviours, and adherence to the regulations and find applicable solutions that potentially could increase communication efficiency and overall safety performance.

The results reveal that the process of multicultural safety communication in multicultural construction setting does not entirely rely on the technical transmission of instructions but a multifaceted social, cognitive and organisational process. It was found that language barriers were complex multi-layered phenomena that do not involve only vocabulary. Factors like accents, speed in speech, surrounding noise, colloquialism, productivity pressures, tiers of authority, cognitive overload lead to misunderstanding. All these interact dynamically in the construction environment.

One of the most important findings of this research is the draw between the compliance of functional safety and the insight of deep safety. Migrant workers could usually pursue correct procedures by succession and imitation, but they had no in-depth knowledge of the regulatory or conceptual justification of such practices. Although this nominal compliance can make the operations safe in the short term, it inhibits the capacity of the workers to adapt to the new risks and discover new hazards. This disconnect between observed practice and formal system reflects different levels of safety culture maturity among construction organisations.

Another theme in the study that is brought to light is that social nature of safety communication. The so-called informal translation networks, peer learning, and observational modelling are relevant in helping bridge the gap of communication. These mechanisms are very useful

especially to workers who have low skills in English. Also, informal systems can weaken adherence to regulations, including CDM 2015, by decentralising safety knowledge within groups rather than institutionalising it.

The study also determines productivity pressure as one of the structural factors limiting the quality of communication (Al-aloosy et al., 2024). The problem of time usually leads to short and direct interaction instead of dialogue. In this situation, employees that have limited language competence are more misfortunate since they take additional time to comprehend and seek clarification of instructions. As communicative clarity is lost to the prevailing production priorities due to production priorities, the practice of misunderstanding becomes normalised as a typical site operating process.

Thus, this research shows that language barriers are not just individual deficiencies. But they are systematic risks shaped by organisational structure, leadership, and environment. The research by looking at the lived experiences of both the migrant workers and supervisors offers a subtle interpretation of how communication works in the multicultural construction environment and how safety performance can be improved.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, there are practical and organisational recommendations that are made to enhance safety communication in multicultural construction settings.

1. Standardisation of Safety Language

Organisations need to be focused on standardisation of safety language. It was found out that colloquial expressions and informal speech are so confusing. Supervisors, hence, should be trained on the use of explicit and standard language when it comes to safety briefing (Malyuga, 2024). Misunderstanding can be greatly reduced by avoiding the use of idiomatic expressions, slang, and vague expressions. Creating communication principles on the site could help to achieve uniformity between the teams.

2. Use of Visual Communication Techniques

The use of visual communication techniques ought to be incorporated into safety management activities in a systematic manner. The use of demonstrations, diagrams, pictorial risk assessment and task modelling was always found to be highly successful (Dikmen et al., 2024). Construction organisations are advised to invest in visual multilingual materials, task cards with pictures and interactive demonstrations in toolbox talks. A combination of visual and simplified verbal explanations facilitates procedural accuracy and a better insight.

3. Building Psychological Safety at Work

Organisations are advised to engage in building psychological safety at work. Leadership educational programmes must cover the aspects of authority gradients and promote non-discriminatory communication styles (Anyamesem-Poku & Parmar, 2024). Supervisors can be trained on the methods of open-ended questioning which include asking workers to explain something they have done. This could be achieved through teach-back approach which could help to decrease the illusion of understanding and give cognitive clarity.

4. Integrating Communication with Productivity

The communication design should take into consideration the aspect of productivity pressures. Rather than using the method of giving long safety briefings, the process of communication should be integrated into the working process. Short, interactive micro-briefings with visual aids can be used at high-risk work sites (Sultan, 2024). Also, pauses for clarification can be included without major disruption to productivity. The inclusion of communication checkpoints in everyday life will make sure that the concept of efficiency does not come at the expense of safety.

5. Formalisation of Informal Translation Networks

Formalisation of current informal translation networks can be made by peer-based safety champions or bilingual facilitators. Peer support is already a fact among the workers, and

therefore, organisations can identify a few individuals and develop them as communication leaders (Jonathan R. Kroll, 2023). These facilitators can promote inductions, interpretation of complicated directives and enforce safety norms while being consistent with official regulatory provisions.

6. Balancing Observational Learning with Conceptual Training

Observational based learning should be balanced by conceptual safety training. Although observational learning is appropriate in performing tasks, the workers must also be assisted to appreciate the logic behind safety rules. Risk assessment based on its principles and regulatory frameworks can be conducted in simplified workshops (Bęś & Strzałkowski, 2024). This can enhance cognitive engagement. Moreover, this can in the long run reinforce active hazard identification and reporting.

7. Regular Communication Audits

Regular communication audit should be done in organisations. Instead of measuring safety performance based on the number of incidences only, measurements of safety performance should involve a review of the clarity of communication as well as feedback systems within the workers and language availability (Bivol, 2022). Anonymous surveys and site observations can be used to reveal the continued risks of communication that would lead to accidents.

8. Guidelines for Multilingual Safety Communication

Regulatory agencies and policy makers can contemplate working on the creation of guidelines, specifically those covering multilingual safety communication within the context of CDM 2015 framework (Chen, 2024). Regulations focus on open communication. But clear instructions on how to handle the linguistic diversity might be beneficial to the uniformity across the industry.

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APPENDIX A: RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

 UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH		UNIVERSITY RISK ASSESSMENT FORM		HIGH MEDIUM LOW		Calculate: Probability multiplied by Severity for No/Post control scores. NB: For scores of 12 (High), or more contact the Health & Safety Office for further advice. Due to the seriousness of the 'Permanent Disability / Sight Loss and Fatal / Fatalities' factors this has been given a medium rating on the 'Unlikely' probability.													
Site/Department: School of Civil Engineering and Surveying				Severity →		Minor injury 1		Lost time/ Ill Health 2		Major / >7 days 3		Perm. Disability/ Sight Loss 4		Fatality/ Multiple fatality 5					
Task/Activity/Area: Online platforms used for interviews, such as Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet				Probability ↓		Highly Unlikely 1		Unlikely 2		Possible 3		Probable 4		Certain 5					
Notes: N/A (Including details of previous accidents/incidents)						1		2		3		4		5					
						2		4		6		8		10					
						3		6		9		12		15					
						4		8		12		16		20					
						5		10		15		20		25					
Risk Assessment Team: Muzammil Rafi (People completing the risk assessment)				Risk assessment start date:															
Highly unlikely: Slight chance of an accident happening				Unlikely: An unusual combination of factors would be required for an accident to happen				Possible: Not certain to happen but multiple additional unforeseen factors may result in an accident happening				Probable: Not certain to happen but one additional unforeseen factor may result in an accident happening				Certain: A high probability of an accident happening			
Minor injury: Injury requiring basic first aid i.e. Plaster or cold compress				Lost time / Ill health: Injury that requires medical treatment at hospital or GP				Moderate/ > 7 days off work: An injury or work related illness reportable under The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013				Perm Disability / Eye Sight loss: Likely permanent disability Acute/ Chronic health effects				Fatality / Multiple fatality: An injury/ Ill health that results in a fatality or fatalities			
Dept. Manager (Print Name):				Signature:				<i>Muzammil Rafi</i>											
Review Date:				Dec 22, 2025				Reviewed by:											
Reason for review: Primary data collection for the purpose of an academic dissertation.																			
Dept. Manager (Print Name):				Signature:															

Ref No	Identified hazards / risks	People at risk	Score – No controls (P×S)	Controls / Procedures / Key Behaviours	Score – Post controls (P×S)	Further action required (Y/N)	Action Priority (H/M/L)
1	A dispute or fight or violence between the researcher and participant in the discussions of the interviews.	Researcher, participant	4 (Probable × Minor)	Researcher employs non-judgemental, neutral techniques of questioning; does not argue or debate, explains to the supervisor at the beginning that there are no correct or incorrect answers; can be briefed on the management of difficult conversations; the interview may be stopped or resumed at any time.	2 (Unlikely × Minor)	N	L
2	Pain at time of remembering accidents, near misses, discrimination or unsafe circumstances.	Participant	6 (Possible × Moderate)	Participant Information Sheet: Pre-empt topics; reminds participants of their right to skip any question or leave the interview any time; researcher observes distress and halts and terminates interview on notice; no coercion to reveal detailed or traumatic information.	3 (Unlikely × Moderate)	N	M
3	Data loss/disclosure of participants/companies during interviews or reporting.	Participants, employers, third parties	9 (Possible × Major)	Name companies/specific site locations, pseudonyms/codes, delete identifying information in transcription, store audio transcripts on password protected, University approved systems, restricted access to researcher and supervisor, anonymised quotes only in dissertation/publications, adhere to University data protection policy, adhere to University ethics approval policy.	3 (Unlikely × Major)	N	M
4	Non-compliance with data protection / GDPR (loss, unauthorised access or over retention of personal data).	Participants	9 (Possible × Major)	Storing consent forms/contact details and anonymised data separately; password protected and/or encrypted computerised storage; personal email or unsecured devices are not used; identifiable data is not kept longer than stated in the ethics approval; anonymised data is retained and destroyed in line with the University policy.	3 (Unlikely × Major)	N	M
5	The participants are compelled to participate or to do so again (particularly when targeted through managers/ gatekeepers).	Participants	6 (Possible × Moderate)	Explicit verbal and written description that the involvement is voluntary and will not have an impact on employment or relations; the ability to pull out until the mentioned date without explanation; the recruitment through invitation, not command by the line managers; managers do not speak at the worker interviews; the withdrawal process is simple and explained on the Information Sheet/Consent Form.	2 (Unlikely × Moderate)	N	L–M
6	The quality of data or lack of it (participants do not have the appropriate experience or are not able to communicate enough to participate in the study).	Researcher (project quality, deadline)	6 (Possible × Moderate)	Use rigid inclusion criteria (minimum UK experience and role); short pre-screening in case of recruiting; over recruit somewhat to allow dropouts; provide time in schedule to replace non-complete interviews; consult with supervisor on sampling/recruitment progress; where language restriction, modify interview questions to make them clearly articulated, but do not alter the aims of the study.	3 (Unlikely × Moderate)	N	M
7	Delays in access, recruiting, transcription, or analysis of data resulted in failure to complete project within deadline.	Researcher	9 (Possible × Major)	Observing accepted project schedule; commence ethics, recruitment and scheduling beforehand; build contingency into project plan; realistic number of interviews transcribing during interview completion, not at project completion; create regular progress reports with supervisor; shrink scope as needed in consultation with supervisor, not unilaterally.	4 (Unlikely × Major)	Y (monitor schedule)	M
8	Recording issues or corruption of audio data (equipment malfunctions, unintentional loss) which causes loss of data or warrants reworking.	Researcher	6 (Possible × Moderate)	Test recording equipment before each interview; there must be a backup system (i.e. backup device or detailed notes); immediately transfer records to secure University storage and to make a copy; verify files open properly following each interview; maintain minimal recording log.	2 (Unlikely × Moderate)	N	L

Signed and Dated:

Supervisor: Dr An Le

APPENDIX B: CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS REVIEW



Certificate of Ethics Review

Project title: Lost in Translation: Language Barriers and Safety Communication in Multicultural Construction Sites in the UK

Name:	Muzammil Rafi	User ID:	up22413 29	Application date:	12/01/2026 17:23:53	ER Number:	TETHIC-2026-112657
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You must download your referral certificate, print a copy and keep it as a record of this review.

The FEC representative(s) for the **School of Civil Engineering & Surveying** is/are [Brett Martinson, Sepehr Abrishami, Ann Coats](#)

It is your responsibility to follow the University Code of Practice on Ethical Standards and any Department/School or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study including relevant guidelines regarding health and safety of researchers including the following:

- [University Policy](#)
- [Safety on Geological Fieldwork](#)

It is also your responsibility to follow University guidance on Data Protection Policy:

- [General guidance for all data protection issues](#)
- [University Data Protection Policy](#)

Which school/department do you belong to?: **School of Civil Engineering & Surveying**

What is your primary role at the University?: **Postgraduate Student**

What is the name of the member of staff who is responsible for supervising your project?: **Ann Lee**

Is the study likely to involve human subjects (observation) or participants?: Yes

Will you gather data about people (e.g. socio-economic, clinical, psychological, biological)?: Yes

Will your data collection be strictly limited to gathering anonymous insights about a particular artefact or research question (e.g. opinions, feedback)?: Yes

Confirm whether and explain how you will use participant information sheets and apply informed consent.: The participant information sheet will be provided to all participants and they will be welcome to ask any questions they have. Once they are willing to participate, they will be provided informed consent form, and only when they sign it, the interviews will begin.

Confirm whether and explain how you will maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality of data collected: No personally identifiable data will be collected like name, ID number, phone number, address, etc. All responses will be recorded only using their first names.

Will the study involve National Health Service patients or staff?: No

Do human participants/subjects take part in studies without their knowledge/consent at the time, or will deception of any sort be involved? (e.g. covert observation of people, especially if in a non-public place): No

Will you collect or analyse personally identifiable information about anyone or monitor their communications or on-line activities without their explicit consent?: No

Does the study involve participants who are unable to give informed consent or are in a dependent position (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, unconscious patients, Portsmouth University students)?: No

Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants?: No

Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants?: No

Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?: No

Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety in participants or third parties?: No

Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?: No

Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?: No

Are there risks of significant damage to physical and/or ecological environmental features?: No

Are there risks of significant damage to features of historical or cultural heritage (e.g. impacts of study

Contd. on the next page

techniques, taking of samples)?: No
Does the project involve animals in any way?: No
Could the research outputs potentially be harmful to third parties?: No
Could your research/artefact be adapted and be misused?: No
Will your project or project deliverables be relevant to defence, the military, police or other security organisations and/or in addition, could it be used by others to threaten UK security?: No
Please read and confirm that you agree with the following statements: I confirm that I have considered the implications for data collection and use, taking into consideration legal requirements (UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 etc.), I confirm that I have considered the impact of this work and and taken any reasonable action to mitigate potential misuse of the project outputs, I confirm that I will act ethically and honestly throughout this project

Supervisor Review

As supervisor, I will ensure that this work will be conducted in an ethical manner in line with the University Ethics Policy.

Supervisor comments:

Supervisor's Digital Signature: **an.le@port.ac.uk** Date: 13/01/2026

Faculty Ethics Committee Review

Ethics Rep comments:

Faculty Ethics Committee Member's Digital Signature(s): **brett.martinson@port.ac.uk** Date: 22/01/2026

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE A: MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS (NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS)

Q1. Can you describe your current role on construction sites and how long you have been working in the UK construction industry?

Probes (if needed):

- Type of construction site (e.g., residential, commercial)
- Main tasks or responsibilities
- Experience on different sites

Q2. What is your first language, and how comfortable do you feel understanding spoken and written English used at work, especially for safety instructions?

Probes (if needed):

- Comfort with spoken English
- Comfort with written English (signs, notices, manuals)
- Situations where understanding is most difficult

Q3. Can you describe a typical safety briefing or toolbox talk on your site and how safety instructions are usually explained?

Probes (if needed):

- Who delivers the briefing
- Use of verbal explanations, visuals, or demonstrations
- Opportunity to ask questions

Q4. Can you describe a situation where language made it difficult for you to understand a safety instruction or warning?

Probes (if needed):

- What the instruction was about
- What you understood at the time
- What happened as a result
- Whether the situation was resolved

Q5. What factors make safety messages difficult to understand on construction sites?

Probes (if needed):

- Accents or speed of speech
- Technical or safety-related jargon
- Noise or time pressure
- Examples of confusion

Q6. Do cultural differences influence how comfortable you feel responding to or questioning safety instructions from supervisors?

Probes (if needed):

- Comfort in asking questions
- Attitudes toward authority
- Fear of negative consequences
- Impact on safety behaviour

Q7. How comfortable do you feel asking a supervisor or colleague to repeat or explain a safety instruction you do not understand?

Probes (if needed):

- Reasons for comfort or discomfort
- Past experiences asking for clarification
- Support from supervisors or colleagues

Q8. What methods or tools are used on your site to help workers understand safety instructions despite language differences?

Probes (if needed):

- Visual aids or demonstrations
- Bilingual workers or supervisors
- Technology or translation tools
- What works well and what does not

Q9. Have you seen or experienced unsafe actions or near-misses caused by communication problems?

Probes (if needed):

- Description of the incident
- How communication played a role
- How it could have been prevented

Q10. What changes would most improve safety communication for workers who do not speak English as a first language?

Probes (if needed):

- Training improvements
- Better communication tools
- Changes in supervision or site practices
- Any additional comments

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE B: SITE MANAGERS / SUPERVISORS (NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS)

Q1. Can you describe your role and how long you have supervised or managed construction sites with migrant or non-native English-speaking workers?

Probes (if needed):

- Safety responsibilities
- Size and type of teams

Q2. Approximately what proportion of your workforce are non-native English speakers, and which language groups are most common?

Probes (if needed):

- Variation across subcontractors
- Changes over time

Q3. How do you deliver safety briefings or instructions to workers with limited English proficiency?

Probes (if needed):

- Adaptations made
- Visual aids or demonstrations
- Methods used to check understanding

Q4. From your perspective, how well do migrant workers understand key safety rules and legal requirements such as CDM 2015?

Probes (if needed):

- Behavioural indicators
- Differences between new and experienced workers
- Observed challenges

Q5. Can you describe a situation where language or cultural differences caused a safety-related communication issue?

Probes (if needed):

- What went wrong

- Consequences for safety
- Lessons learned

Q6. What are the main challenges in ensuring consistent safety compliance across different language and cultural groups?

Probes (if needed):

- Technical language or jargon
- Time constraints
- Worker confidence in speaking up

Q7. What strategies have you used to overcome language barriers, and which have been most effective?

Probes (if needed):

- Formal vs informal methods
- Resource constraints
- Examples of success or failure

Q8. How does your organisation support you in managing language and communication barriers?

Probes (if needed):

- Training or guidance
- Availability of resources
- Gaps in organisational support

Q9. To what extent have language issues contributed to near-misses, unsafe acts, or incidents on your sites?

Probes (if needed):

- Frequency or patterns

- High-risk activities
- Preventative measures

Q10. What practical changes would you recommend to improve safety communication on multicultural construction sites?

Probes (if needed):

- Training design
- Technology or tools
- Policy or regulatory changes
- Final reflections

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

RESPONDENT 1 (MW1)

Romanian | 24 | General Labourer | 10 months in UK

Personality: anxious, careful, fearful of making mistakes

Q1. Role and experience

At this time, I am a general labourer in construction sites, where I mostly do residential construction work such as apartment blocks and new housing estates. I have been in the construction business in the UK in the neighbourhood of ten months and I am normally on the agencies so I am literally jumping around the sites. I am carrying stuff around every day, cleaning up work places, assisting the bricklayers or carpenters and every now and then I do some small odd jobs that they request. Since I am a relative newbie on every place, I never feel settled or confident as the rules and safety procedures are shifting about every place I visit. The first few days on any new site are not that pleasant to me.

Q2. Language background

I speak Romanian as my first language and my English is of basic level. I can receive the simple form of spoken English when it is spoken slowly and clearly but it becomes difficult when a person speaks it quickly or has a strong accent. The hardest instructions to swallow are the ones about safety and they are full of technical words that I do not normally use in my conversations. It is even more difficult with reading English long safety signs or documents become a complete headache, and I cannot get them on my own. Due to this, I am also always afraid that I may overlook something crucial with regard to safety.

Q3. Safety briefings

In the majority of sites safety briefings or toolbox talks are preceded in the early morning when no work is going on. The supervisor usually discusses with everyone as a group, usually outside or close to noisy places, and thus difficult to hear properly. The majority of the information is

delivered orally, with a drawing or demonstration on equipment, but not necessarily. I tend to understand the general meaning of what is being talked about, yet easily lose the specifics such as particulars of dangers or particular regulations. There is often not time to pose any questions and I am not very comfortable halting the briefing to seek clarification.

Q4. Language difficulty incident

On one occasion, a language hiccup made me get into a severe misunderstanding. One of the supervisors was telling us that a lifting operation was to occur and that everyone should leave the vicinity but I was not able to hear properly which this or that area was in fact dangerous. I figured it was only applicable to machines, but not workers, so I went nearer to figure out what was happening. My supervisor screamed at me to step aside and it was only then that I noticed that I had been in a risky position. Then, he indicated it with hand movements and pointing and I knew. It is then that I understood the extent of harm minimal misunderstandings can have.

Q5. Difficult factors

The speed at which people talk is one of the principal factors that make safety messages difficult to comprehend particularly when one is in a hurry. The issue of accents is also a problem, as various supervisors use English in quite different ways. Another problem is the application of technical safety jargon, which I cannot understand even when the sentence is not fast. There are also noise of machines and the stress of need to get started with work and this makes it difficult to concentrate on what is being said. Once all these accumulate, then it is very easy to overlook crucial safety details.

Q6. Cultural differences

In my culture, particularly when one is young or new, then he or she must listen to his or her supervisor and not to question him or her. I also take that attitude to work in the UK. Although I may not completely understand, I feel that I should not be too much of an interruptor or too many questions. I fear that people may believe that I am dumb or unqualified to work at the

place. This occasionally has an impact on my security since I remain silent and do not speak out.

Q7. Asking for clarification

I do not feel free to approach supervisors and ask them to repeat or clarify safety instructions, particularly when they appear in a hurry or stressed. Previously, I had encountered supervisors who became impatient whenever employees had questions and this makes me more reserved. I tend to be more comfortable in requesting the other worker to inquire after the briefing in a low-key manner. When supervisors pause to explain in a calm manner and ensure everyone has understood I am much more convinced and relaxed. This is not the case in every site unfortunately.

Q8. Support tools

Visual aids and demonstrations are the most beneficial to me. I understand it much better when that person demonstrates me just where to stand, what to wear or how to do something safely. Clear pictures on signs also come in handy regardless of the difficulty in the English text. In some cases, bilingual employees assist with translating, but that is by the person available on the site at the time. I believe that the additional protests would reduce significant safety issues on the part of people like me.

Q9. Unsafe actions

I have witnessed a number of unsafe behaviours as a result of issues in communication, particularly with new employees. At times individuals enter restricted zones or operate tools improperly since they had not adequately understood the instructions. It is in most cases noticed by another worker and prevented before any tragedy occurs. Such occurrences are quite frequent and they demonstrate how communication breakdowns can result in accidents so easily provided that nobody interferes.

Q10. Improvements

I believe that safety communication would be much better when the supervisors talk slower and with less complex words. Additional demonstrations and illustrations would assist and particularly to the new or migrant workers. It would be nice when supervisors made sure that people have gotten it rather than simply thinking we have. That would help individuals like me feel better and more secure on scene.

RESPONDENT 2 (MW2)

Bulgarian | 31 | Groundworks Operative | 1 year 2 months

Personality: experienced, confident, critical of rushed safety culture

Q1. Role and experience

I work as a groundworks operator on large commercial developments and primarily foundations and drainage. I am just a little older than a year in the UK construction scene, however, I have no shortage of construction gigs prior to that period. It is all about lifting heavy stuff, being close to machines, and digging in trenches – it is dangerous when you do not obey the rules. I find the physical hard work, however, the safety systems and paperwork in the UK was new and required time before acquisition. I soon understood that communication is a massive aspect that determines the level of safety of the job.

Q2. Language background

I speak Bulgarian and my English is mediocre at most. I do not mind regular working conversations, but safety guidelines are difficult since they are full of technical terminologies and wordy expressions. It is a nightmare to read method statements or risk assessments. I tend to be dependent on the supervisors or mates to interpret what is meant by the docs. That is dangerous as explanations may be hasty or not complete.

Q3. Safety briefings

Toolbox talks occur in a manner of a quick-fast pre-work talk in the presence of many people who are already at work. The supervisor reads some sheet or checklist that seems more of a legal compulsion than actual conversation. Good old talk is hard to come by and interrogatives are generally silenced. It does not fit well with people like me who require clear explanations. Treatment of safety is like taking a formality rather than taking it seriously.

Q4. Language difficulty Incident

Once I confused a statement of trench method. The supervisor described it using technical language and I believed that it was okay to get into the trench without the supports. Then some elderly fellow came up and told me in simple English the danger. The issue was the manner in which it was communicated rather than the rule. Had that mate not intervened, things would have gone out of hand.

Q5. Difficult factors

The most serious problem is technical safety jargon which is not explained. The supervisors expect that you will automatically get the terms notwithstanding the fact that you have been experiencing it. The effect of noise, weather, and a need to complete quickly also interfere with the ability of people to listen well. In cases of rushed briefings important information is overlooked.

Q6. Cultural differences

In my culture we respect authority and any questioning of an instruction may appear to be challenging the authority of someone. I still believe it happens in the UK, particularly in cases where the supervisors are older and senior. Such a disposition complicates the process of making a statement when something is not clear. I understand that it is detrimental to safety, but it is challenging to alter such an attitude.

Q7. Asking for clarification

I have a greater comfort seeking clarification with mates than bosses. Other managers respond negatively to any questions and this impairs open dialogue. The job is less stressful when the bosses are accommodative and clarify things directly. Regrettably, that is highly reliant on the supervisor.

Q8. Support tools

I prefer practical demonstrations. It is much more obvious to watch how to do a work in a safe way than to read the papers. Materials that are translated would be of help, but these are not often found. It is also of assistance to repeat the main safety messages in time.

Q9. Unsafe actions

I have witnessed a number of close call incidents due to miscommunication or a hurried message. In the vast majority of cases, the work is not the issue, but the way of the safety info distribution. Such scenarios would have been prevented through better communication and less pressure of rush.

Q10. Improvements

The communication of the safety would improve, as the supervisors would take it slow and ensure that it is understood by everyone rather than in a hurry. Taking time to answer questions and speaking in simple practical terms would enable everyone of us, not just migrant workers. The improved communication would reduce accidents and stress at the site.

RESPONDENT 3 (MW3)

Lithuanian | 27 | Steel Fixer | 8 months in UK

Personality: quiet, observant, avoids attention, learns by watching

Q1. Role and experience

I am a steel fixer and mostly on large commercial projects such as office towers and multi-storeys. I have worked in the construction industry of the UK approximately eight months. I do the standard stuff which includes the insertion of the steel reinforcement, tying it, handling heavy equipment, and cutting edges and moving equipment. It is a physically demanding job and it can be rather dangerous unless we follow the safety guidelines. Being a newcomer in the UK, I am yet to know how safety is managed here relative to my home country.

Q2. Language background

My native language is Lithuanian, and my English is not so advanced. I can pick up some common words on the spot, but complete sentences are difficult, particularly when the people are in a hurry. When the safety briefings are in English it is difficult to understand, when in written form such as signs or manuals it is even more difficult. I tend to pick up when it is about the safety, but not necessarily the risk. And thus I find myself observing other people to know what is safe and what is not.

Q3. Safety briefings

Through briefings, the supervisor tends to discuss with the crew with a piece of paper or referring to drawings. I hear, but in another minute or two I tend to drop what is being said. Sometimes there are picture or diagrams which are more or less explanatory but not always made clear. On few occasions I ask questions as I feel embarrassed and fear of holding everyone back. I instead attempt to memorise some key words and watch the more experienced guys at work.

Q4. Language difficulty incident

Once I had a language mix-up which caused me to overlook a safety warning, which was about sharp edges of steel. I did not realise that the steel was recently cut and was extremely sharp and I was not using the right gloves. As I tied up steel I cut my hand. It was not such a big injury but it might have been worse. Then, one of my colleagues demonstrated me the right gloves and described it using the gestures and simple words. This was the time when I understood that you can assume that you know when you really do not.

Q5. Difficult factors

The greatest difficulty to me is rapid speech and technical safety language. It is even more difficult with accents since various supervisors have a very different sound. The same rule is sometimes explained differently by different people and this will only add to the confusion. It is further complicated by the sound of machine work which makes listening to instructions difficult. All this contributes to safety communication being a large source of stress to me.

Q6. Cultural differences

At home, people tend to remain silent at the workplace and remain obedient. I would not be comfortable raising my voice in a group, much more so in a foreign language. I fear that by asking questions I may appear to be weak or inexperienced. Then I will take direction at times when I do not have 100% confidence of the direction. This may also pose a threat to my safety but it is hard to change that.

Q7. Asking for clarification

I tend not to repeat instructions to the supervisors. I feel better to ask a colleague in a low tone particularly when they are slow in speaking or using gestures. Still, there are situations when I fake an understanding when I do not in order not to attract any attention to myself. I feel safer and more confident when an individual spends time to demonstrate to me what to do. That is unfortunate because it is in the hands of those around me.

Q8. Support tools

The most helpful is the demonstrations. When a person demonstrates as to how to perform a task in a safe way physically everything becomes evident in a moment. Colour signs and pictorials are more beneficial than text. The visual training would really increase the level of safety amongst employees such as me who find it difficult to cope with English.

Q9. Unsafe actions

I have observed minor accidents and close calls due to miscommunication particularly when dealing with new employees. Individuals are not usually messy, they simply do not comprehend the instructions given to them. These scenarios are normally resolved in a short period of time but they demonstrate the ease at which accidents can occur. Language has a significant role in such accidents.

Q10. Improvements

I believe that the level of safety would be better in case there are more demonstrations and fewer verbal explanations. People would understand risks with the help of visual training and repetition. It would also be of great help that supervisors make sure the people understand, rather than assuming that they would.

RESPONDENT 4 (MW4)

Albanian | 35 | Formwork Labourer | 1 year 6 months in the UK

Personality: reflective, cautious, experienced, openly critical of superficial safety practices

Q1. Role and experience

I work as a formwork labourer on major construction projects which are predominantly commercial projects such as office buildings and mixed-use developments. I have around a year and a half in the UK construction world but prior to that I spent almost ten years constructing in Albania and other neighbouring countries. The nature of my everyday work is assistance to carpenters, transportation, and assembly of formwork panels, their removal after each concrete pour, and the preparation of the workspace.

I have been working on a number of sites since I got to the UK and I realised that safety standards can make the pendulum balance. Others are well organised, with well-defined rules, helpful bosses, whereas others consider safety as an appendix to the job. Being a migrant worker, you are forced to figure out how every locale operates off the cuff, even when the regulations are not front and centre. That puts a lot of strain on top of having to operate on a language barrier.

Q2. Language background

I speak Albanian as my first language and I have poor English. I find it easy to obtain simple instructions on how to perform daily tasks, however, in situations where safety briefing is needed, risk assessment, or method statements, I find it a challenge. The safety talk is also quite formal and technical, hence making it difficult to understand compared to ordinary English. English especially written is very difficult particularly long notices or documents which give procedures in detail.

At times I also believe that safety communication is in English by the native speakers and we have to learn by ourselves. It leaves me feeling left out and unable to know what to do especially when it comes to situations where you have to get it right to remain safe.

Q3. Safety briefings

Toolbox talks or safety briefing tend to be conducted in the morning. These briefings in my case are rather hasty and monotonous. Supervisors can repeat on the same generic safety messages daily with the use of PPE or being cautious around machinery without having the ability to make it specific to the risks of the day. This may cause individuals to be distracted.

In my view, it puts minimal effort to determine whether the workers are comprehending what information is being communicated to them. It is not a serious communication but a box-ticking exercise that the briefing is often taken. This is a big issue to the migrant workers since we may nod or say yes when we are not understanding simply as a way of avoiding embarrassment and confrontation.

Q4. Language difficulty incidents

An experience that I consider notable was regarding the access to scaffolds. On one location scaffolding was colour marked to indicate that it could be used or not. I was not used to the particular colour system and the induction explanation was very concise and vague to me. I thought that since the scaffold was already constructed, and it was safe to climb.

It was another worker who intervened and prevented me from stepping on it before I did and told me that the scaffold was not ready yet. Had he not intervened I might have broken my neck or been killed. It was made of crystal clear later when a person explained the system in a slow way and provided examples. That incident demonstrated that the issue was not my attitude to safety but the manner of communication of information.

Q5. Difficult factors

Time pressure is one of the largest causes that make safety messages difficult to comprehend. Bosses are also stressed to meet time lines and stress carries down to the employees. Safety briefings are cut off and explanations hurried on. The other cause is assumption- most of the supervisors believe that after a few weeks when one is on the ground, he/she knows everything. Noise is also a major issue. Briefings are usually conducted close to work areas and it is difficult to hear. This, in conjunction with the language barriers, makes the possibility of misunderstanding high. Another level of difficulty is provided by safety jargon.

Q6. Cultural differences

The cultural background has a significant influence on my comfort in questioning instructions. Questioning authority is not the norm in my culture particularly at work place. You should take instructions and act on them not question them. I bring that attitude to UK.

It does not always feel as real even when the supervisors say that it is fine to ask questions.

Tone and body language can be an indication of impatience.

Q7. Asking for clarification

I usually get nervous when I am requesting supervisors to repeat or clarify the safety instructions. I am afraid that they will assume that I am not listening or that I am making the work slowdown. I have encountered such reactions of supervisors towards questions in the past, and therefore I have become more hesitant.

My comfort level increases when I am asking questions of another worker, particularly one that has been in the site longer. Nevertheless, it is not always the case, as such a worker can have misinterpreted something as well. The entire site can be made to seem secure and more welcoming when supervisors are not in a rush, patient, and ready to clarify.

Q8. Support tools

The best support aids are in the form of visual presentations and clear labels. Confusion is cleared when physical demonstration by supervisors on how to perform a task safely is done.

Illustrations, colour coded and practical demonstrations are much more effective than protracted explanations.

Certain websites succeed at this, whereas others use nearly nothing but talking. There is no uniformity among sites and this makes it more difficult to the migrant workers who cross over projects.

Q9. Unsafe actions

I have witnessed unsafe practises that are caused by the pretence of the workers who are not supposed to know. This comes as a result of fear, fear of losing a job, feeling judged or even being considered inept. The unsafe behaviour in most of the instances is unintentional and arises as a result of poor communication.

Such cases can be prevented, though it is possible only under the condition that safety communication is considered a serious matter and adjusted to the workforce.

Q10. Improvements

Supervisors should be trained on communicating with different teams as this would enhance safety communication. Sites would be safer with more visual based training, more inductions and real cheques of understanding. Compliance should not be the only way to view safety.

RESPONDENT 5 (MW5)

Ukrainian | 29 | General Labourer | 11 months in the UK

Personality: cooperative, reflective, safety-conscious, emotionally aware

Q1. Role and experience

I am only an ordinary labourer on a domestic and commercial job. I have eleven months of trading in the UK construction arena. My day-to-day material varies according to the location, most of the time it is moving bags of bricks, wiping down of working areas, giving a hand to the competent workers and occasionally a basic manual work when requested to do so. I tend to browse through the agencies hence I switch like a switch blade. It only implies that I constantly encounter new individuals in new settings, and each location has its safety regulations.

Since I am rather new to the UK, I feel that I am never learning. It is not that difficult, however, it requires time to learn how each site keeps the people safe. I am attentive and attempt to be cautious, as a single mistake may prove expensive. Newness also implies that I am not necessarily comfortable to speak up even when I have some concerns.

Q2. Language background

My native language is Ukrainian, and English is elementary at the moment. I am able to lead simple conversations and receive ordinary instructions but safety talks present me with a whole new vocabulary of lingo. The instructions are loaded with the technical language that I am not accustomed to. I can hardly follow when they are screaming among the noisy machines, or when the high tones in the chatter are so loud.

Writing isn't easier either. Pictorial signs come in handy a lot, whereas long written notices or documents are my nightmare. That causes safety briefings to be stressful as I fear that I may not get something important. I would like to have everything clear, but I am not always comfortable to acknowledge that I do not.

Q3. Safety briefings

Toolbox talks or briskie stuff are normally done in the morning before the shift begins. I've had a mix of experiences. Other foremen take time to clarify, make gestures, provide illustrations, and talk in a plain language. Once that occurs, I feel more secure and as a member of the team. Others simply talk in a hurry, they think we know what they are talking, and that puts me in a doubt.

The briefings are sometimes in a hurry particularly where the line goes we must get on. When it occurs, the attention ceases. That would be an issue to someone like me who requires a little longer to process. I normally come away with something vague but not clear cut.

Q4. Language difficulty incident

Among many others, one of such occasions occurred during a site induction. The fore man went through the emergency procedures, such as the location in case of fire. I believed that I was entirely aware at the time, but in reality I was not completely certain where exactly the assembly point was. He was fast and I did not want to wait until everybody stood in full sight. Later I approached one of my mates, and he took me out to the assembly, and explained it to me in simple terms. That cleared things up for me. All that taught me that it is a very unwise practise to misjudge in an emergency, when you have no time to ask questions or think. It also demonstrated the importance of proper communication in regard to safety.

Q5. Difficult factors

Among the most challenging obstacles to me is the selection of safety instructions in the case of emergencies or urgent cases. When it comes to such times, people talk faster and louder and you are in a hurry. The noise of machines and alarm bells only add to the difficulty of hearing the spoken English.

Technical language is another determinant. The words in themselves can be a riddle even when individuals go at a slow pace. I could understand the sentence structure, and with the most important stuff which are the key safety terms, I would regularly miss the terms.

Q6. Cultural differences

The aspects of culture do influence my perception towards responding to safety instructions. I do not want to make trouble or appear to be a pain, not to mention as an immigrant worker. I am also concerned that I may ask too many questions which will leave a leader thinking that I am not very competent or that I am not making things too slow.

Confrontation is not common in my culture and respect is given to authority. Such an attitude is reflected at work, although I understand that safety must be first. That is why I find it difficult to speak up when I do not know even though I am aware that it may have its toll on my own safety.

Q7. Asking for clarification

The foreman is a great factor in my comfort level of seeking clarification. I feel much more comfortable posing questions when they are friendly, patient and approachable. During such times I get the impression that the safety is of high concern to them.

When the boss appears to be stressed, in a hurry, or impatient I draw back and do not ask. I am afraid of judgement and delays. In such instances I only attempt to recount or seek the opinion of a colleague later, which is not always ideal.

Q8. Support tools

I am a saviour of visual tools. Safety instructions are much easier to obtain through clear signs and diagrams, as well as practical illustrations. When a person physically demonstrates me on how to perform a job in a safe way, it always remains in my memory much better than by hearing.

Restarting the training is also beneficial. The repetition of the same ideas in different forms makes me feel confident. Technology might be of use but not everything can be done on-site using phones, thereby limiting its usefulness.

Q9. Unsafe actions

I have observed a number of near-misses which were due to miscommunication and this was mostly with new employees. They are usually not irresponsible, they just did not understand fully the instructions. Someone or a foreman normally intervenes promptly, but at such instances the reality of how weak safety is becomes apparent.

These incidences continue to remind me of the speed with which a serious occurrence might take place in case there is a breakdown of communication when it is not appropriate.

Q10. Improvements

I believe that the level of safety communication might be improved significantly in case more attention is paid to visual training and emergency drills. Consistent exercise, demonstrations and inspections by foremen would assist them all particularly the non-native English speakers. Even the development of an atmosphere in which questions are actually embraced would be enormous.

RESPONDENT 6 (MW6)

Pakistani | 42 | Site Cleaner / Labourer | 1 year 4 months in the UK

Personality: polite, deferential, vulnerable, highly dependent on peer support

Q1. Role and experience

I work as a site cleaner and a general labourer in construction sites. I have been in the UK construction business, four months and 2 years. My work has made me clean working spots, dumping garbage, carrying materials and even pitching in the place of other employees. It is easy to say, however, there is a lot of risk involved, particularly when you are close to heavy equipment, dangerous substances, and crowded areas.

Most of the people on the site are younger than I, and I have a huge burden to be cautious and not to get into trouble. It is also a new position in the UK and I do not know all the safety systems, which puts additional stress. I would like to work well, but it is not so easy due to the language barrier.

Q2. Language background

I speak Punjabi as my native language and have poor English. I am able to hear very easy spoken English, but instructions concerning safety that have technical words are difficult. I hate writing in English, I am unable to comprehend the safety documents or signs without assistance.

Due to that, I tend to depend on the other workers to tell me about the safety information. It is not comfortable because I would like to be independent but I do not always have this opportunity. The largest confidence blocker in the workplace is language.

Q3. Safety briefings

Safety briefings were the most severe. I pay attention, yet I do not grasp all words. The boss speaks in a rush and words that I am not familiar with. There is hardly time to discuss anything and I am ashamed of raising my voice and talking to others.

I then have another worker normally clarify the core issues. It assists and sometimes, but important details might go by. This fills me with apprehension when performing dangerous tasks.

Q4. Language difficulty incident

I recall an evident experience with cleaning chemicals. I was instructed to apply a particular product, but I combined two chemicals against each other since I did not get a warning about mixing the two. One of my colleagues happened to notice what I was up to and prevented a disaster before it took place.

He elaborated the danger later using simple words and gestures. The event taught me that misconceptions with chemicals are very risky and I mostly depend on others as sources of safety information.

Q5. Difficult factors

Safety instructions are really difficult to obtain because they are explained fast, and are in technical language. It is exacerbated by loud site noise. Supervisors are usually assuming that the workers know even when they are not checking.

I also experience the stress of not posing questions as I do not want to put a hold on work or be considered a problem. That pressure impacts my capacity to speak up with regards to safety.

Q6. Cultural differences

Respect to authority is enormous in my culture. You are supposed to take orders and comply.

I take such an attitude to the workplace in the UK. I also feel awkward even when the supervisors indicate that it is okay to ask questions.

I am afraid of some adverse outcomes such as job loss or discrimination. That fear causes me to stay silent even when I do not comprehend the directions on safety.

Q7. Asking for clarification

I would feel much freer seeking clarification of co-workers as opposed to managers. In case the colleague is slow-talking or with a similar background, I can ask him/her. Colleague support is important to my safety.

However, depending on others is not always a good idea. They may be distracted or also misinterpret. That leaves me feeling weak.

Q8. Support tools

The most useful assistance is bilingual employees who can simplify the safety guidelines. Pictures are excellent as they do not need words. Colour coded signs and clear images are more understandable as opposed to the written word.

Translated material would be of immense assistance, particularly in the case of simple safety guidelines and handling of chemicals.

Q9. Unsafe actions

I have witnessed little accidents and near-misses due to misunderstanding of instructions. These normally deal with cleaning work, garbage work, or transportation work. There is no doubt that, most of the time one intervenes before some serious event arises, but the risk is always present.

That is when I am nervous as I want to avoid situations when something may go wrong.

Q10. Improvements

The process of safety communication would also receive an immense boost in case more effort was done to accommodate workers who have little English. It would be nice to have translated materials, additional demos, and monitoring patients. Developing a culture in which employees are not afraid to ask questions would enhance the safety of all people.

RESPONDENT 7 (MW7)

Indian | 22 | Drylining Labourer| 7 months in the UK

Personality: cautious, observant, hierarchy-sensitive

Q1. Role & Experience

I have a little under seven months experience in the UK construction scene. My trade is mostly drylining labourer, mainly working on residential projects, such as apartment blocks. I am not an expert; I support the professional dryliners and fixers. I carry plasterboards every single day, move metal studs, prepare material, clean up and even assist in hanging or holding boards as they are being fitted.

Although the jobs are not more complicated, the site looks rather complex to me. Construction was arranged in a different way back in India. It was not so structured, there were fewer formal safety measures and the instructions were more relaxed and continuous. In this place all things seem divided into bits like briefings, inductions, method statements, yet the work proceeds quickly.

What really surprised me is the extent to which you are supposed to know even doing manual labour. You are not only picking things up, you are always looking at moving areas, other trades involved in the mixture and alteration of instructions. I waste a lot of time simply observing the experienced people since I am new. At times I think I am learning how to survive a construction site as opposed to doing my job.

I have so far been on two sites. They all had their rhythm, bosses, and expectations. That difference in itself implies that you have to continue to amend, particularly when you are still learning the ropes to the lingo and processes involved.

Q2. Language Background

Gujarati is my native language. I studied English in school, and the English I receive there is absolutely different than the one on construction sites. In the workplace, individuals

communicate in a rush, slang, and massive accents. I still do not always get the whole picture even when I see the words.

The reason is that spoken English is difficult mainly due to the pace and their pronunciation. There are supervisors who are actually fast, particularly when there is a rush. Before the first word comes, the rest are lost. And on top of it all construction sites are loud, machines, tools, chatter, which only makes it even harder to hear.

Another monster is written English. Notices, docs, safety signs contain technical jargon with which I am unfamiliar. Terms such as restricted access, hazardous zone, or compliance requirement are not intuitively understood. I catch the point, but not the teaching.

And there are moments when I know better than to stop, and to know enough not to feel entirely confident.

Safety briefings and technical risk chats are the most difficult to comprehend. Context is useful in colloquial speech. But vocab in safety talk is blocking you.

Q3. Safety Briefings

Regular on site, Toolbox talks normally occur at the beginning of the day or prior to a job. They are kicked off by the supervisor or site manager. They all gather and the supervisor explains the hazards, safe procedures, or notifications.

In my case, the effectiveness of such talks differs significantly. When the bosses include gestures, demonstrations or referring to real objects, they are much easier to understand. When somebody literally tells you where to store materials or to properly manage gear, it resonates. However, in most instances, the negotiations are mere verbal. The supervisors speak quickly and the meetings are hasty. It is like they are simply passing the box instead of ensuring you get it.

Nobody disagrees, and I question how many of them capture all of it.

You can ask questions technically but it is awkward. I fear putting people at a slow pace or appearing lost. That indecisiveness prevents me asking.

Q4. Safety difficulty caused by language.

There was one incident with material placement, yes. My supervisor instructed me to stack plasterboards in a safe place by a corridor. I misjudged its place and placed them in such a way that they sort of blocked a path. The manager had it serviced, and I was nervous.

The only thing that caught my eye was that it was misunderstanding, not disobedience.

I was not skimming safety; I really believed I was using the instructions.

Events such as these cause you to question yourself. You begin to doubt your understanding even of familiar things.

Q5. Interpretation of Safety Messages.

I believe it is not something only, but the combination of things simultaneously. The largest headache is the speed of the talk of people, particularly, at the toolbox talks or as they pass out combining instructions. Managers presume that the jargon and context are shared by all. I do not always get the meaning even when I see the words.

Accents matter too. Different supervisors and workers are different- some are straight, others slang or talk fast with heavy regional accents. Then there are the sounds of machines or tools, and it becomes much more difficult to understand.

The other obstacle is the technical language. Safety talk also tends to introduce new words into my vocabulary. The expressions such as preserve segregation, keep everyone on track, or follow procedures are not part of my daily use of English. The message is unclear without the inclusion of those terms.

I feel like I do not know what to do sometimes I hear the words are so big.

It is worsened by noise and crunch time. There are orders falling as we work or when people are impatient to begin. In such scenarios, I divide my brain into listening and doing the hands-on work.

Q6. Cultural & Hierarchical Influences

Indeed, my background defines my behaviour. We were instructed as young people to not question authority be it teachers, old people, bosses and so on and instead we were supposed to listen and obey the order without pushing or contributing especially. Although I am aware of the rules in the workplace that may vary, there are still those habits.

When the boss instructs me to do something, I simply follow him or her even when I am not certain that I understand. Seeking clarifications is also embarrassing, particularly when it appears that other people understand. This is the silent fear that I have that people might believe I am a slow person.

At times it is always safer to hold my tongue in cheque even though this may leave me in a dilemma of what to do. I have also experienced variations in the talking of folks. Supervisors tend to encourage people to open up, yet, as a person with my background, getting yourself out to request is a huge challenge. That may play with safety since in case we remain silent, misunderstandings remain undetected.

Q7. Confidence in Seeking Clarification

The extent of my comfort will also depend on who I am requesting. I am quite relaxed with my teammates, particularly those who are friendly or have the same background. Peer chats are not so formal and risky. But in the case of supervisors, it is another energy. Bosses tend to be inquisitive, stressed, and have a large number of people under their care. I am afraid of interruption or appearing powerless.

I want to seek clarification sometimes but I do not do so as the orders are delivered fast and everyone disperses at once. During such times, the time to ask is small.

You are able to sense that inquiring questions may slow down the pace or attract unwanted attention. It is also the past experiences that determine your confidence. By answering in a patient manner, the supervisor is asking to be questioned more. However, when they appear to be in a hurry or a bit irritated, even when it is not intentional, it drives the hesitation.

Q8. Communication Support Mechanisms

Visual and hands-on are the most useful ones. Being able to see someone do or use some gestures, being able to see experienced people do the job, brings up some clarity that sometimes cannot be obtained by the simple act of talking. The safety in doing a job is an instant way of dismantling the uncertainty.

Pictorial signs with symbols are awesome. Signs that are pure texts are more difficult to me to read fast.

It is good to get assistance of bilingual colleagues or experienced colleagues. Workmates tend to interfere by offering clarification of what the boss is talking about.

However, relying on peer assistance may cause varied interpretation in case individuals interpret it in different ways.

Something that one of the teammates says may not reflect the intention of the boss.

There are seldom instances when I go to formal papers in an attempt to comprehend due to colloquial language.

Q9. Communication & Safety Incidents

Well, I have witnessed instances when breaks between communication led to confusion or indecision. They are not necessarily dramatic but real.

Similarly, there are times when workers stop or glance at one another to give signals when the instructions are hazy particularly when they are working at a fast pace.

I recall an incident when a person responded to a verbal warning too slowly due to the reason that they had not immediately picked up what was being screamed at them. There was no accident, and the lag demonstrated the impact of the speed of understanding on safety.

Even several seconds of misunderstanding might be felt crucial during a busy site.

These cases are usually made up of noises, intermingling between conversations and coming out with quick-tempered instructions as opposed to intentional negligence.

Q10. Recommendations & Improvements

I believe visual communication is something that should occupy a larger portion. Language gap 80 good Demos, diagrams, and clear physical examples bridge language gaps. It would also help in speaking slower during briefings and reducing the use of too much jargon.

It is important to ensure that people are comfortable asking questions without apprehension of being judged.

When you can bring yourself to confess that you is confused then you will be more likely to ask in order to get things wrong before you do.

Practical, collaborative enforcement of safety concepts as opposed to intensive paperwork would assist the newer such as myself to feel more assured.

RESPONDENT 8 (MW8)

Nigerian | 38 | Painter & Decorator | 1 year in the UK

Personality: experienced, reflective, confident in technical skill, articulate, analytical, socially aware

Q1. Role & Experience

I have been in the UK construction industry slightly more than one year now and I work mostly as a painter and decorator. My job usually entails surface preparation, finishes application, and occasionally the use of spray equipment, depending on the project. I have mostly worked on commercial refurbishment works and residential finishing works. In contrast to the labouring jobs, the painting work may involve working alongside other professions, schedule coordination and environmental factors like ventilation, dust and lighting.

I am not new to the trade itself though I am relatively new to the UK. Before migrating, I spent most of my life working as a painter in Nigeria. Sensible skills were transferred without difficulty, but the working conditions here are very different. Sites are more controlled, records are more eminent and more accent on formal safety systems.

One thing that I immediately observed is the fact that everything is structured. It has briefings every day, permits, risk reviews - more layers of procedure than I ever encountered. This was initially overwhelming, however, not because I did not agree with the concept of safety, but because I had to adapt to the new processes, as well as negotiating the language barriers.

The job is familiar, but the system surrounding the job is totally different.

Every location also has a rhythm. Certain supervisors are very actively involved whereas others are more remote. The difference influences the ease with which workers assimilate and decode expectations.

Q2. Language Background

My first language is Yoruba. I can communicate in the conversational English fairly well, but the construction-site English is a different kind of thing. Safety communication and everyday conversation are quite different spheres. Language tends to be abbreviated, technical and compression-packed on site. Meaning may be ambiguous even when it is grammatically clear, e.g. when using unknown terminology.

Generally, I can easily cope with Spoken English, but the person speaking to me will determine how I can understand. Clarity is affected by accents, speed, and tone. There are supervisors who are very effective in communication - they talk in a straightforward way, they give examples and make sure that they are involved. Others talk fast, and they are certain that they are on the same page.

The English written is more difficult. The documentation of safety is usually formal. Risk assessment and methodology statements are usually full of terminology which seems abstract unless you know the operational context.

Language fluency in English does not necessarily imply language fluency in safety language. There are also times when I perceive the general point but do not know about the particular implications. The difference matters, especially in life-threatening scenarios.

Q3. Safety Briefings

Toolbox talks tend to take place at the beginning of the day. Employees meet in a short group, and a manager lists dangers, operational concerns, or job-related hazards. The format is the same, yet the styles of delivery are diverse.

My most successful briefings have been practical in nature. Supervisors that situate risks, such as why ventilation is important when painting, or how safe equipment works, are more engaging. Pictorials benefit a lot in comprehension particularly to the employees who may have little knowledge in English.

Most briefings, however, are procedural and not communicative. They may turn into memorizations of regulations instead of risk conversation.

It is sometimes like imparting information but not necessarily taking it in. Nodding is common among workers but it is not clear whether everybody comprehends. There are possibilities of posing questions, which are theoretically possible, but time pressure can deter in-depth conversation.

Q4. Language-Related Safety Concern.

Yes, I remember a case where there was spray painting and ventilation. The supervisor provided information about airflow considerations in terms that did not make sense immediately to me. I understood the overall safety issue, but the actual changes that were needed were not clear at first.

Instead of stopping right away, I monitored how other employees prepared the workspace. It was not until later, when I confirmed my understanding by informal discussion.

It was not lack of interest, but inability to understand the words.

Such circumstances demonstrate that even moderate cases of language difference can affect the decision-making speed.

Q5. Obstacles to Interpreting Safety Messages.

As I have found out, language is rarely the cause of difficulties in understanding safety messages. It is rather the relationship of communication with the working environment. Construction sites are demanding, time-bound and very dynamic and this implies that clear language may not be effective under different circumstances.

Technical vocabulary is one of the greatest obstacles. The language of safety communication is often formal or procedural and it assumes that it is already familiar. Such phrases like make sure to comply, keep segregating, follow exclusion guidelines, or obey follow-through phrasing might be quite right, but to a large number of workers (including conversational English

speakers) they do not necessarily have an intuitive meaning. The words are to be interpreted separately, but the implications of their operations might not be obvious at that.

You can sometimes know what is being said, but are not sure what the specific behaviour is being asked.

The rate of speech is also a significant factor. Supervisors are often in a hurry and thus, orders are given hastily. Frequent delivery saves time processing, especially in concurrence with environmental distractions. During painting work, e.g., this can be when preparing a surface or working with a material and doing it divided.

The situation is complicated by accents and pronunciation differences. Construction sites unite individuals representing numerous areas and groups. Even English natives differ greatly in sound and delivery style. Then add background noise to that situation and understanding is something situational and not guaranteed.

Cognitive overload is another hindrance. Workers have the tendency of being given numerous instructions, procedural reminders and safety notices in a brief duration. This information takes mental effort that cannot always be recognised to retain and prioritise.

Productivity is competing with the need of safety communication.

Q6. Cultural Influences & Hierarchy.

Communication behaviour is unquestionably influenced by cultural background on the field of work, but this is not necessarily evident. In most other work cultures not in the UK, authority relations are more hierarchical. The bosses are supposed to command, and the employees are supposed to follow. A challenge to instructions is also understood as a sign of disrespect instead of responsible interaction.

Though personally, I do not feel shy asking questions, I have noticed that most migrant workers, especially the ones who are new within the UK, are shy. Such reluctance does not

have to be fear, but it is a habit, social norms. Employees might fear emerging as contentious, incompetent, and disruptive.

Silence is also very cultural and may portray politeness as opposed to understanding.

And there is the issue of perceived consequences. Even when the supervisors can stimulate open conversation, the workers can still not be confident how far their questions would go in practise. When the culture at the site adopts speed and efficiency, the workers might understand questioning as a slowing down of the progress.

Safety itself also is interpreted through cultural influences. Employees in a setting where the procedural safety construction is weaker will perceive some of the rules not as absolute but as dependent on the situation. Such disparity in perception determines the way instructions are received and internalised.

Q7. Trust in Seeking Clarification.

My level of comfort is fairly low, yet, even at that, the context counts. Clarification is promoted or inconvenienced by timing, tone and the attitude of the supervisor. Patient communication also builds confidence when the supervisors communicate patiently and without manifested frustration. On the other hand, prompt answers, although interpretable, may deter any repetition of inquiries.

It is usually the response to a question that is more important than the question itself.

Fellow workers tend to be more amenable. Interactions in peers are less formal and perceived with less judgement. Nevertheless, the use of colleagues to nullify confusion may lead to inconsistencies particularly when there is a difference in meanings.

An internal calculation is also done by the workers because it is a question whether the confusion is great enough to warrant work disruption. Such computation can at times postpone clarification required.

Q8. Mechanisms of Communication Support.

By far the best mechanisms that I have come across are visual communication tools. Examples, diagrams, gestures, and demonstrations are more direct and meaningful as compared to verbal explanations only. When it comes to painting, whatever is expected is immediately clear by the way a workspace or a protective mechanism should be ventilated or how.

Even the use of signage instead of text is helpful. Paperwork, as much as needed, is hardly the leading way of knowing to most workers. There are informal peer instruction and learning through observation.

The majority of what is learned practically on site is obtained by seeing and doing as opposed to reading.

However, it can occasionally misrepresent subtlety especially when dealing with complicated safety ideas depending on informal translation or explanation.

Q9. The Incidents of Communication and Safety.

Yes, but such incidences are usually subtle and not dramatic. Safety risks associated with communication are often characterised by indecisiveness, sluggish reaction, or unstable interpretation as opposed to the open errors. An example of this is that workers can stop when they are not sure about the instructions given, or take an extended time to respond to warning signs because they have not clearly understood them.

I remember that there have been incidences where employees have gained access to half restricted zones just because they did not realise the boundaries. These are not very common instances of deliberate negligence but a confusion of situations.

Near-misses tend to reveal non-understanding in sharing, as opposed to violating rules.

Q10. Recommendations/Improvements.

It would go a long way to simplify language but not dilute meaning so as to enhance understanding. The communication of safety must give priority to behavioural clarity as opposed to the formality of the procedure. Better understanding by using more visual

demonstrations, examples that are scenario-based, slower presentation during briefings should be used.

It is also necessary to create a culture of normalising clarification. The employees are expected to feel that pursuing of understanding is considered as a responsibility and not as a burden.

Restricting safety communication to what is said implies that it is not about how safe people are conceptualising being confused.

RESPONDENT 9 (MW9)

Syrian | 26 | MEP Assistant / Helper | 9 months in the UK

Personality: thoughtful, cautious, introspective, highly aware of misunderstanding risks, analytically observant

Q1. Role & Experience

I am working in the UK construction industry and I have been there approximately nine months. I work as an assistant to mechanical and electrical departments -a helper or mate as it is sometimes called. I assist tradespersons in transporting goods, setting up the work place and washing the workspace, as well as assisting installations. It is also a diverse work since it relies on the project stage. There are cable management or pipe preparation days, other days there is equipment relocation or helping in restricted areas.

The physical aspect is not the only difficulty with this role but also the coordination that is necessary. Mechanical and electrical work takes place frequently in places where hazards cannot always be seen - live services, limited access areas, shared work areas with other trades. The guidelines thus have safety consequences which might not be noticeable without complete knowledge.

As a relatively newcomer in the UK and in the industry as well, I believe that a lot of my knowledge is gathered through observation. I will attempt to learn expectations through observing the behaviour and reaction of experienced workers in relation to supervisors.

I always have in place the realisation that failure to decipher instructions might have far reaching implications other than merely doing a job wrong.

Such awareness will make me cautious in the way I communicate and make decisions.

Q2. Language Background

My first language is Arabic. I have a low level of English. I would be able to deal with the simplest conversation, however, it becomes hard to understand when the speech is rapid, informal, or contains some expressions that are not used by me.

Interestingly, written English is also easier to me than spoken English is. Whereas technical language is complicated, it can be read at a slow pace. I am able to stop, seek meaning, or ask somebody to clarify certain words. The spoken English spoken colloquial, however, is unpredictable. Individuals introduce phrases, slang, or expressions, which I find quite difficult to interpret, though I comprehend the separate words.

One may learn technical language, there is need to decipher colloquial language in real time.

An example is when a person makes an utterance, such as, keep an eye on that, sort it out, watch yourself, it can be understood in its literal interpretation but one may not understand the intention. The vagueness is pressurising in a safety sensitive environment.

Q3. Toolbox Talks Safety Briefings.

Safety briefings normally occur at the beginning of shifts or when a particular task is about to be performed. A manager or a supervisor addresses the group with the hazards, procedures, or reminders. The format is uniform, however, interpretation differs with the mode of delivery.

I can follow quite well when the supervisors speak in clear, deliberate language. Understanding is more difficult when informal words or shortcuts in conversation are applied. Supervisors at times confuse formal safety terms with informal language and this may lead to lack of emphasis and priorities.

The use of visual explanations is very beneficial. Practises or movements lessen the use of language interpretation. Nevertheless, a number of briefings is mainly oral.

I even feel that I have the subject but lose some significant points that lurk behind the wording.

Q4. Safety Difficulty, Language.

These were the only two situations which I recall quite vividly as I felt disturbed after them. We were engaged in a field where several trades were on the go such as electricians, ducting installers and general labourers. It was a noisy environment with instructions being mostly verbal. One of the supervisors by who I soon came by said something, as I think, like, “keep an eye on that cable run, it is a bit dodgy.”

This was not made easy by the individual words. I was aware of the meaning of cable, and I knew what was meant by keep an eye on. However, the term dodgy puzzled me. I did not know whether it was damaged, unsafe, temporary, or it was just about untidy. The phrase felt vague. I was not aware of whether it was an urgent thing or it was just an observation.

There was something significant in the teaching, which however, the sense was unclear.

I was indecisive because I was uncertain. I observed how others did things as opposed to taking initiative on actions. At length, one of my colleagues explained that the cable was not firmly fixed and may become tripping. The danger was direct but indirectly it was described.

What remained in my mind was the fact that colloquial terms bring about ambiguity in a case where clarity is needed.

Had he said of a loose one or a loose thing that was not fastened, I should have understood. Dodgy had to be interpreted.

That moment explained the delay of comprehension of the informal speech, even in the case of familiar vocabulary.

Q5. Obstacles to Interpretation of Safety Messages.

In my case, informal or conversational English is the biggest beginning. Technical language is very complicated but predictable. Such terms as hazard, permit, isolation or restricted access can be acquired and identified. They are indicated in documents and signage. Informal expressions, though, vary and occur depending on circumstances.

Technical language is fixed; colloquial language is mobile.

When the supervisor employs words such as watch yourself, mind that, sort this out or that is not great, the literal meaning will not be adequate. I have to be able to read between the lines and interpret intention based on body language, tone and situation. This is a slow process that brings about uncertainty.

The accents and the speed of speech should be considered as well but they are not as important as the phrasing style. A rapid and literal teaching is simpler than slow but idiomatic teaching. These challenges are exacerbated by noise on site. Cognitive load is worsened when there is already difficulty in deciphering phrasing, and there are environmental distractions.

In noisy places I occasionally get bits of speech and have to put it together in my mind.

The process of such reconstruction is unsafe in safety critical situations.

Q6. Cultural & Hierarchical Influences.

Yes, very much. The way people deal with authority is based on the cultural background. In my past places of employment, I was not always encouraged to ask supervisors questions. That is a practise that is subconsciously perpetuated.

I find myself reluctant to seek clarification now when I am not understood in a complete way particularly in case the language occurs to be non-formal.

The desire to be understood is accompanied by the desire not to disturb and seem weak.

This is aggravated by hierarchy. Supervisors tend to be on the move, fast and handling numerous problems. It seems like intrusion on their time to interrupt them. I can also follow other people or wait until I get more indicators.

Such reluctance is not connected to reluctance, but the social risk perceived.

Your main concern is that you might be judged based on the skill of language and competence.

Q7. Trust in Seeking Clarification.

I am more comfortable asking colleagues as opposed to asking supervisors. The interaction with peers is less formal and less binding. Fear of adverse assessment is reduced.

In supervisors, comfort is based on personality and situations. Other managers are patient and they welcome inquiries. Others seem to be in a hurry or impatient and this puts off an interruption.

The emotional atmosphere of communication is more important than the language itself.

I pretentiously claim to have known something, and then indirectly confirm meaning by watching, sometimes. This strategy can be effective in case of regular tasks; however, it does not suit safety instructions.

When people do not ask right away it is usually a coping strategy, not a choice.

Positive responses in repeated instances raise the confidence; negative reactions in repeated instances bring confidence down drastically.

Q8. Mechanisms of Communication Support.

The best support mechanism to me is visual communication. Illustrations, gestures, graphs, and physical illustrations diminish the need to interpret things through words. In scenarios when one demonstrates and does not just walk the talk, comprehension is quicker and more precise.

Written documents are also easy to use since they permit slower processing. I can read at my pace, re-read words I do not understand and be able to translate information in my mind.

The written language provides time; the colloquial speech is required to be deciphered immediately.

Another important mechanism is peer support. Being a bilingual or more experienced worker, I tend to be an informal translator of meaning and not the literal language. They read between the lines, and this is highly appreciated.

There is a minimal role of technology. The translation applications are useful in single words but not in idioms and colloquial language.

Q9. Communication Incidents and Safety Incidents.

Yes, but not spectacular accidents. In a larger number of cases, communication issues appear in the form of hesitation, slow response, or deviation in the process. Indicatively, I have observed employees who hesitated in delivering instructions in an informal manner when it was delivered in a hurry.

Almost accidents can occur when assumptions take the place of knowledge. An employee can continue operating under incomplete understanding and think that he had understood the training properly.

The language problems can hardly stand on their own and they interact with noise, time pressure and task complexity.

Miscommunication is not a one-factor problem but most of the time a contributing factor. Nevertheless, even minor misunderstandings may predispose the risk.

Q10. Recommendations/Improvements.

The most notable enhancement would be increased application of direct literal language in the process of conducting safety communication. Ambiguity would be reduced by reducing idiomatic or colloquial utterances. Symmetry is helpful not only to non-native speakers.

Simple language is not safety in a simplified version, but the improvement of the sense of clarity.

There should also be increased visual communication. Semantics can be effectively transmitted between the language barriers by use of demonstrations, diagrams, and physical examples.

It is also important to promote a culture of clarifying things. Employees must not feel demanding repetition to be inconveniencing. Another thing that would make a difference in creating familiarity and confidence in the long run is uniformity in wording and use of terms.

RESPONDENT 10 (MW10)

Ghanaian | 31 | General Labourer / Groundworks Support | 10 months in the UK

Personality: pragmatic, resilient, work-oriented, confident in physical ability, adaptive, values efficiency and experiential learning

Q1. Role & Experience

I have been working in UK construction of approximately ten months. My job is general labouring, although I assist in groundwork activities most of the time. This is extremely physical and in a state of flux. On certain days I will be assisting in the preparation of trenches, movements of goods, clearance, and also in the assistance of machine operators or working with tools and equipment. Other days I have to do deliveries, set barriers up or assist with the arrangement of the working place.

Groundworks is not the type of work where everything is described in details before one starts. It's very practical. You come, observe what should be done and begin working. Much of the learning occurs through repetition and observation and not through teaching.

It is in the groundworks that you learn the work by doing it in the work, not by talking about it so long.

Each location is a little bit different, not only the work, but the employees, managers, and speed. I did not choose construction as a career choice. My migration was mainly economical. Construction was merely the quickest way of getting into a job without UK qualifications and prolonged approvals.

It was not a long-term planning but rather an opportunity and survival.

Q2. Language Experience and English Chafe.

I speak Twi as my first language and have basic knowledge of English. I am able to cope with the easy talks and general site instructions, but when explanations are lengthy, technical, or

rapid, the comprehension is more difficult. Spoken English is more challenging than written English as there is no time to take a break or take some thoughts.

Nonetheless, the construction world can be described as very visual. Individuals do not simply trust words. They gesture, point, demonstrate and give examples. That alleviates some of the stress due to lack of language prowess.

I will tend to know what is going on through observation even without understanding every sentence.

It can also have periods of uncertainty particularly where instructions are abstract or extremely verbal. Adaptation is also promoted by site work. You get to know how to read situations, study behaviour and read between the lines.

Language is of essence but so is action and context on site.

Q3. Safety Briefings

Daily safety briefs are a normal practise. Others are understandable and practical, particularly in cases where they are concise, specific and illustrated by examples. Otherwise, they may become very long and hard to follow especially when so many things are discussed in a short period of time.

Extended written explanations can be a problem to workers who have low English. The message can be easily forgotten or information passed across can be forgotten or lost easily because it is passed at the same time. When excess is involved then the main points may be lost.

Illustrated allusions matter a lot. When the supervisors identify the hazards, demonstrate the steps, or make gestures, the understanding becomes much better. Safety communication is more tangible and understandable.

Construction sites are chaotic, high paced. Employees are contemplating work, machinery and time line. Very long discussions can be very detached to the unfolding of the work. This is

because briefings which are based on site realities are more effective compared to long speeches.

Q4. Safety Difficulty of a Language Nature.

And there have been instances when language did create confusion. One time I recall a situation when my supervisor was explaining a task with many unknown words as it was to be performed. Rather than interrupting on several occasions, I observed senior colleagues and observed their behaviour.

Observing others on site is a quickest method of understanding.

This style is effective as most of the tasks are observable and structural. You observe a way of doing something and imitate it. However I also understand that this strategy is not all-encompassing, particularly with the safety critical instructions where a possible misunderstanding may be dangerous.

Nevertheless, it is not always reasonable in a busy setting to interrupt the supervisors to ask them to explain something.

When you take a break with each language ambiguity, then the flow of work becomes a challenge. This forms a trade off between efficiency and certainty.

Q5. Obstacles to Interpretation of Safety Messages.

Safety messages are often hard to comprehend but in my case the greatest burden is not necessarily language but the nature of communication in the work place. The construction business is a very rapid one. Supervisors are travelling, machines are working, people are working under pressure. Instructions may be given in haste and may be administered whilst passing by, may be spoken far away, and may be accompanied by some background noise.

Although you may know English, it is not necessarily the case that you can hear well on site.

Speed of speech is a significant problem. This is because when individuals talk fast, particularly on attached sentences, or informal language, I only understand sections of the conversations.

The absence of one word may alter the meaning of a command. That leaves you in some doubt, but the site does not give you a chance to digest language.

Another obstacle that individuals do not take seriously is noise. Groundworks conditions include construction machinery, back and forward, cutting, and movement. Listening takes concentration, yet the surroundings go against speech.

Other times you are attempting to decode some language and at the same time monitor hazards. Accents also play a role. Various managers and employees do not talk the same way. It is tough at first, but with time you get used to it. Nevertheless, the hardest thing is when explanations are long or abstract and thus very difficult to grasp.

Excessive talking may, in fact, make it less understandable rather than more understandable.

When a lot of information is delivered orally, particularly among employees who have little English knowledge then it is even difficult to remember the main message. Experience is usually a better teacher of lessons than protracted exposition.

Q6. Hierarchical & Cultural Influences.

The position of workers in terms of their cultural background is a factor that influences the extent of comfort when dealing with supervisors. A large number of migrant workers are used to a situation where they do not ask questions. Such an attitude does not instantly fade away on entering a new country/ industry.

In my case, there is the awareness of hierarchy at all times. Supervisors seem to be busy, with numerous tasks, and pressured. The constant interruptions to seek clarification may seem like creating inconvenience.

You do not want to appear as slowing down a job or being incompetent.

This does not imply that workers are not concerned with safety. It implies that communication has social risks. The workers will be scared of being judged, misunderstood or labelled to be

problematic. Consequently, there are individuals who would choose to adapt silently instead of questioning.

Learning style is another cultural factor. Most employees, myself included, are accustomed to observe and apply things more than being taught verbally over a long time.

On the job, experience seems like the best educator.

Where work conditions are extremely pragmatic such as in groundwork, you are expected to observe, trail and ultimately learn. Such an expectation influences behaviour more than the hierarchical way of communicating.

Q7. Verbal Trust in Clarification.

I am not afraid to seek clarification in case something seems truly ambiguous or dangerous. Nevertheless, questioning is not always a viable practise. The construction activities change rapidly. Employees are also supposed to be productive and rhythmical.

It is not always feasible to spend some time explaining things again and again in the dynamic work environment.

It can oftentimes be quicker to notice other people, interpret their behaviour, and conform to it. This is not aversion, it is a form of adaptation to site speed. Questions are costly in both time and emphasis and also, workflow disturbance.

The communication style of the supervisor is also a big determinant of confidence. There are also supervisors who promote clarification and patient responses. There are those that seem to be in a hurry or impatient and thus do not encourage an interruption.

Employees are always trying to assess whether being clarified or not will be accepted or scorned. Communication behaviour is more determined through that calculation rather than the formal policies.

Q8. Mechanisms of Communication Support.

The most useful support mechanism is visual communication. Rather than using language interpretation, demonstrations, gestures, pointing to hazards, demonstrating safe distances, physically indicating actions, etc. can be used.

It is more often said that seeing is clearer than hearing. It is also important in observational learning. Observing the practised workers offers direct behaviour models. You know not only what is told but what happens to be what you should do where, how, what not to do.

The role of the peer support is crucial. Informally, colleagues can translate meaning; thus, making explanations simple or giving examples. This form of help is comfortable and less embarrassing compared to constant interruptions by the supervisor.

The usefulness of technology is limited. Translation applications are incapable of real-time demand of sites. Construction work does not provide the opportunity to interact with the device very often.

Q9. Communication Incidents Safety Incidents.

Yes, there are occasions that I have observed the communication gaps as a contributor of risk. These are not necessarily dramatic accidents. In greater number, they include uncertainties, misunderstanding, or latent action.

Indicatively, an employee can make a stop and start because he/she did not comprehend an order well. Such indecisiveness may confuse in the dynamic worlds. Instead, an employee can operate on a partial knowledge, and he or she thinks that he/she understood it.

Miscommunication can be very concealed on the basis of assumptions and not blatant mistakes. The problems related to the language are not often independent. They are added to noise and pressure and fatigue and complexity of tasks. Even minor consequences might result in safety implications, though a small misunderstanding is enough.

Q10. Improvements and Recommendations.

The communication about safety must have the way construction works in it, which is practical, direct, visual and brief. Verbal explanations can also be too long and could be ineffective with workers who are required to work in a fast and high-noise setting.

Communication is supposed to be in line with rhythm of work. Better comprehension would be achieved with increased demonstrations, visual effects, and less complicated language. It is also significant to promote the culture of clarification that is not stigmatised.

Employees should not think that questions are a nuisance and embarrassment.

There would also be cognitive load on consistency of terminology and the way of instruction.

Comprehension is quicker and more dependable when the workers realise common patterns.

SM1 – Site Manager (Commercial Construction Project, London)

Experience: 11 years in UK construction

Role: Site Manager with full CDM responsibility

Managerial personality: Procedural, compliance-oriented, risk-focused, pragmatic

“If safety communication is treated as optional, language barriers will continue to create risk.”

1. Role and supervisory experience.

I have work experience in a commercial construction site in London where I am working as a site manager, mainly dealing with office remodelling and commercial residential developments. I am currently employed in the UK construction sector and have worked in the industry through a period of about eleven years, out of which eight years have been of direct responsibility in managing the safety of the site and supervising the work of a diversified work force.

In my career, I have always had to work on the sites where migrant workers and non-native English speakers constitute a significant percentage of the labour force. I do not find this abnormal or extraordinary, it is just the way of life in the contemporary construction sector within the UK. My role entails general responsibility in health and safety as per CDM 2015, coordination of subcontractors, site inductions, providing and managing site inductions, and monitoring adherence to risk assessment and method statements, and intervening in the case of unsafe practises being identified.

I have a substantial role of making sure that safety systems are not only assured on the paper, but they are practically known and implemented in practise. In the case of language barriers, the task will be more complicated and will demand more thoughtfulness.

2. Labour force and linguistic variations.

In my present location, I would say that approximately 60-65 percent of the employees are non-English speakers. This percentage will vary according to what subcontractors are on-site at a

certain time but in any case, migrant labour has always formed over half of the workforce in the site.

The most prevalent language groups that I come across are Romanian, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian employees. These employees mostly work in the labouring, demolition, drylining and some of the finishing trades. The degree of English proficiency within these groups is highly diverse with a few workers being at ease using simple spoken English, and others unable to grasp much more than very simplistic instructions.

What I have noticed over the years is that the industry has been largely dependent on the premise that basic English is good enough but it is not always the case when it comes to safety-sensitive information.

3. Strategy towards safety briefings and directions.

In my site, safety briefings are provided in both the form of daily toolbox talks, task focused briefings, and formal inductions. I make a deliberate effort to change my style of communication when approaching the workers with low proficiency in English. I reduce the pace of my speech, I do not use any unnecessary technical terminology, and I concentrate on the major risks instead of attempting to pass as much information as possible simultaneously. I depend so much on visual representation like diagrams, photographs and labelled drawings. I also apply physical demonstrations wherever they are possible such that an exclusion zone is to be established; I demonstrate how it is to be established instead of explaining it verbally. I have discovered that words alone cannot be effective as compared to visual and practical communication.

To monitor comprehension, I do not enquire about employees on whether they comprehend. I rather monitor their behaviour as they perform the task or I request them to show me what they are about to do. In my experience behaviour is the best indicator of comprehension.

4. Knowledge on safety regulations and CDM regulations.

Majority of the migrant workers comprehend site regulations at practical level. They are aware that they have to wear PPE, obey their supervisors, and avoid restricted places. Nevertheless, few of them have even the slightest idea of what CDM 2015 is as a legal framework, and, frankly speaking, numerous UK workers do not, either.

It is not a question of legal knowledge, but rather a matter of in-depth understanding. Other employees will follow regulations without necessarily knowing the risks that they are meant to regulate. It may give rise to the scenario where workers end up being mechanistic in the way that they are instructed to follow instructions and which makes them unwary to adapt safely in the event of changes in the conditions.

New employees and especially the newcomers to the UK will tend to copy others instead of asking about the instructions. That poses a danger particularly when they engage in high risk activities.

5. Language and cultural communication problems.

An example of such incident was the lifting operation during which a worker got into an exclusion zone without any prior warning. The lifting plan was discussed orally at a briefing, but the worker did not receive a clear picture of the extent of the exclusion area, and he assumed that it was limited to the movement of machinery, but not to human beings.

Luckily, the problem was spotted early enough and led to a near miss as opposed to an accident. On the occasion we went through the incident, it was evident that the teaching had not been reinforced either visually or physically on ground.

This experience further supported my opinion that in the case of language barriers, verbal communication is not enough.

6. Difficulties with a steady level of compliance with regards to safety.

The greatest problem is time pressure. Project timetables are extremely close, and construction communication must most of the time compete against the productivity requirements. The time

to make sure there is an understanding is not always given priority which, nevertheless, should be given.

The other difficulty is that of worker confidence. Most employees are not willing to say that they do not understand instructions especially when they are afraid of the repercussions or being perceived to be incompetent. The reluctance is enhanced by language barriers.

7. Mistakes made in order to overcome language barriers.

Visual communication, repetition and direct supervision have been the best strategies. Physical controls through demonstrations and physical signs minimise the use of language.

Informally, the use of bilingual workers has assisted but I know that this is not formal or proven solution and may cause more misunderstandings in case not handled with care.

8. Organisational support and constraints.

The organisation will have translated induction support and basic guidance, however, there is little formal training on how to manage language barriers amongst managers. The individual site managers are left with much work to do in addressing the problem as they occur.

The support is usually reactive and not active.

9. Incidents and near miss involving language.

Language problems have also led to near misses on my sites, especially in lifting activities, working at heights and multi trade activities. Such incidences are usually spotted in the line of supervision but they bring out the inherent weaknesses in communication.

10. Safety communication suggestions.

I would suggest increased use of standardised visual material on the industry in respect of visual safety as well as realistic time-allowances in respect of inductions and more supervisor training on communication and human factors.

SM2 – Senior Site Supervisor (Residential High-Rise Project, Birmingham)

Experience: 8 years in UK construction

Role: Senior Site Supervisor overseeing multiple subcontractors

Managerial personality: People-oriented, reflective, experience-led, quietly critical of industry norms

“You can’t manage safety properly if workers are afraid to admit they don’t understand.”

1. Role and supervisory experience.

My actual work is as a senior site supervisor on a large residential high-rise development in Birmingham where I mainly supervise structural and internal works on multiple subcontractor teams. I have approximately eight years in the UK construction sector, and during the majority of that period I have not been in the strictly operational position, but in the supervisory position. Since my early years, I have been overseeing teams that contained migrant labour force especially South Asians who are Indians, Pakistani and Bangladesh and the Eastern European workers. In other locations, the South Asian has constituted the largest labour force in the construction of groundworks, bricklaying, and general labour. This is not something I was taught in school but rather something you learn when you are at work and most of the time through trial and error, near accidents.

Managing a diverse work force in a language context takes much more than knowledge. It takes time, sensitivity and understanding of the reaction of people to authority, pressure and uncertainty.

2. Diversity in the workforce and language.

In my current site, I would say that approximately 70 percent of the employees are not native English speakers. Among them, a sizeable percentage constitutes South Asian workers, specifically, the Pakistani workers who speak Punjabi and the Indian and Bengali workers speaking Hindi or Bengali. The level of English proficiency in this group is very different.

The conversational English of some of the workers in the South Asia is quite good and can be followed as well, however, there is problem of technical or language that is occupation specific. Others have very low levels of English and can only learn through observation or through gestures by associating or people around them instead of listening to sounds.

The point is that most of these workers have a lot of experience in construction in their home countries, and it may give them a false impression that they are confident in what they are doing, as well as give the impression to the supervisors that they know what they are doing, when UK safety standards are much different.

3. Attitude to safety briefing and instructions.

The safety briefings within my site are provided in the form of toolbox talks, task-related briefs and site inductions. I also make the conscious decision to switch my communication style when I am dealing with a crowd of people who are not proficient in English.

I make reasons brief and simplified, discussing each risk separately instead of attempting to amass all across the board. I resort to drawing, hand-signalling and bodily demonstrations as much as possible. As an illustration, in describing an edge protection or exclusion zone, I physically walk into the area and show things as opposed to visually describing them.

In the case of the South Asian workers especially, I have observed nodding frequently employed as a gesture of respect, and not of comprehension. Due to this fact, I never accept nodding and verbal agreement as an indication of understanding. Rather, I request that workers demonstrate how they are going to perform the task, or I follow closely workers in the initial section of the activity.

4. Knowledge on safety regulations and CDM.

In my case, the majority of migrant workers including those of South Asian workers possess little knowledge about formal UK safety laws like the CDM 2015. They are aware of site rules superficially only but hardly aware of the rationale behind the rules.

As an illustration, employees can adhere to PPE protocols when managers are around and take off protective gear when they believe nobody is monitoring their actions. This is not always rebellion; in most cases this may be a lack of internalised awareness of risk. This is majorly affecting the newer workers especially those who have no experience in UK enforcement culture.

The older South Asian workers are also opposed to some safety practises due to conflicting with their home country approach to working. That will be a source of tension where managers demand obedience and fail to provide a justifiable reason.

5. Language and culture communication problems.

An incident that I cannot forget was when one of the South Asian labourers went into a restricted bypass during concrete pouring. The exclusion zone was described verbally in a toolbox talk, but the worker had acknowledged that he believed the restriction was only applied to vehicles, and not on people.

The problem was further aggravated by the fact that the worker was reluctant to seek clarification and was afraid of being disrespectful and incompetent. Luckily, the situation was detected early enough, however, it showed the ways in which cultural attitudes to authority can combine with language barriers in a hazardous manner.

This accident made me rethink the safety communication pattern, as I understood that silence is not understanding.

6. Problems with ensuring steady safety standards.

The greatest obstacle is the ability to make workers speak. The culture of South Asian workers discourages confronting supervisors, particularly in an environment where the job security is not a certain thing.

Another problem is time pressure. It is not uncommon to be under pressure to proceed with the job; this does not encourage lengthy explanations or enquiries to comprehension. This poses a scenario in which the compliance to safety is performed and not realistic.

The difficulty of lack of uniformity in support among subcontractors is also present. There are those subcontractors who make investments on translation and training, and there are those who make the bare minimum.

7. Tactics applied to overcome language barrier.

The best technique that I have employed is repetition with a physical demonstration. I also rely on regular routines, I repeat the same things each day about safety to build up on the knowledge. Recruiting bilingual employees has worked in certain instances especially when dealing with South Asian teams, but it does not offer the best solution. Information is sometimes simplified or distorted in the process of translation and this may create new risks.

I have also learnt to take a slow onset of work with increased risky tasks. The additional time usually averts accidents in the future.

8. Organisational facilitation and constraints.

The organisation has translated induction resources and general advice, but actual training of supervisors about cross-cultural communication is minimal. Learning occurs mainly informally through learning and trial and error.

I also tend to think that the duty of dealing with language barriers is laid on the supervisors with insufficient attention or acknowledgment of the complexity of the task.

9. Incidents and nearly missed cases related to language.

Language problems have caused a number of near misses on my sites especially when lifting or work at height. The events are seldom captured directly as language-related, even in cases where communication is evident as one of the factors.

This is underreporting and this conceals the magnitude of the problem.

10. Suggestions on how to enhance safety communication.

In my opinion, the industry should get past paperwork done through translation and invest in practical, visual safety training. Training should not only be technical compliance but should consist of communication and cultural awareness in supervisors.

SM3 – Site Manager (Commercial Fit-Out & Office Refurbishment, London)

Experience: 11 years in UK construction

Role: Site Manager responsible for programme delivery, safety compliance, and subcontractor coordination

Managerial personality: Process-driven, compliance-focused, pragmatic, quietly frustrated by systemic gaps

“We treat language like a soft issue, but the consequences are very real.”

1. Role and managerial history.

I am now employed on a commercial office refurbishment of a high office in London as a site manager. My time with the UK construction industry is slightly more than eleven years; however, during the past six years, I have been in the site management position instead of the supervisory position that involves working on the ground.

My duties include programme management and making sure that subcontractors are coordinated and also the health and safety standards of CDM 2015. My responsibility is to make certain that safety systems are available, and used but I am not always the one who will provide toolbox talks directly but in most cases that will be the supervisors or foremen of the subcontractors. Communication problems usually occur in that gap that exists between policy and practise.

I have always dealt with a diverse workforce in my career. In London works, in particular, it is not so common to have a site where most of the workers are using the English language as their first language.

2. Labour structure and patterns of language.

In my current project, I would determine that approximately 60-65 percent of the workers are not native English speakers. The most frequent language groups that I know are Romanian,

Polish, Portuguese and an ever-increasing population of South Asian workers especially those of India and Pakistan.

The one thing that I have observed about South Asian employees is that the level of English proficiency may be very different in the same team. Other employees are confident in their English language skills, and they have difficulties with technical vocabulary, whereas the others depend on observation and mimicking. This sets an unequal ground of knowledge that is hard to maintain at all times.

The composition of subcontractors is also a factor. Some subcontractors discriminate to hire nearly entirely members of a single ethnic or language group which may be productive but difficult in terms of communication over the whole site.

3. Safety instructional delivery.

On my sites, there is safety communication provided in a layered system: formal inductions, daily briefings, method statements, and ad-hoc instructions when working. Paper-wise, this system looks sound. Its ability to work in practise will largely be determined by the quality of information communication at the frontline.

In the case of workers who do not speak English very much, we mostly have to use visual indicators, pictograms, and demonstrations. Nevertheless, I know that signage cannot ensure the comprehension. An indication may be known without a full understanding of the risk that is involved by the worker.

Among the strategies that I will not compromise on is applying the use of show me cheques which entails supervisors demonstrating how they have explained a task to their teams and how it has been understood. This is especially significant in the case of South Asian workers who might be unwilling to put up with orders.

4. Knowledge of safety regulations and laws.

In my opinion, the general understanding about formal legal frameworks among migrant workers (including CDM 2015) is limited. They know rules practically, such as, wear PPE, and, do not enter this area, but not the legal rationale of the rule.

This is not specific to South Asian workers, but this applies to most of the migrant groups. But, cultural attitudes have the ability to affect interpretation of rules. This seems to be the case of some South Asian workers particularly the new ones to the UK because they seem to perceive safety rules as not a requirement that they are required to follow to the letter.

Experienced employees will always become better with time, although in most cases it is through experience and sanctions not through formal training.

5. Communication breakages in safety.

An accident that is notable is a miscommunication during hot works. One of the South Asian agents felt that an authorization on the whole floor was applicable the whole day but actually it was restricted to a certain area and time. The conditions in the permit had been verbally explained, and not visually reinforced.

The problem was found on a regular walk around inspection, but it was selected to reveal a general tendency: employees can comprehend some of an order and make assumptions about the rest of it according to their previous experience. There was also cultural deference, which in turn was also a factor, the operative had not questioned the explanation because he had thought that the supervisor was in a better position to know.

That accident led to the re-evaluation of the explanation of the permits to non-native speakers of English.

6. Difficulties in ensuring compliance.

Consistency is one of the greatest issues. Although safety communication may be performing fine initially of a project, as the project progresses, the comprehension may decrease because of tiredness, time constraint, or change of workers.

The other problem is excessive dependence on bilingual employees. Although they are capable of assisting in the gap between language barriers, they are not safety communicators trained as such. Informal translation may lose important nuances or over-simplify them.

Another tendency in the industry is to think that long-term migrant workers should already know by now, and this will result in complacency.

7. Strategies that have worked

In my experience, standardisation is the best. The repetition of visual symbols, the same word formation, the same outline of the briefing used on different sites assists in consolidating the learning.

I also discovered that it is more effective to divide tasks into small steps and discuss the risks step by step rather than present large amounts of information at once.

The other effective technique has been to get the supervisors to think more in the coaching mode and less in the directive mode. This assists the workers to be more comfortable in asking questions.

8. Organisational support

The organisation makes available materials that have been translated and online training modules which tend to be generic and not specific to a site. The way to adjust communication styles regarding various cultural groups is hardly advisory.

Supervisors are supposed to handle such matters intuitively, which puts much burden on individuals as opposed to systems.

9. Incidents and near misses related to language.

The language problems have even caused some of my near-misses at my sites especially when carrying out complex operations like lifting and working in confined areas. Such cases are not usually classified as explicit language related, hence it is hard to trace down trends.

10. Suggestions on how it can be improved.

In my opinion, the industry should realise the fact that language is a fundamental safety risk, rather than a fringe matter. Managers and supervisors should be trained on communication skills but not on technical compliance.

SM4 – Construction Manager (Industrial & Infrastructure Projects, Midlands)

Experience: 10 years in UK construction

Role: Construction Manager overseeing multiple sites and subcontractor packages

Managerial personality: Results-driven, pragmatic, mildly cynical, prioritises output and discipline over accommodation

“Safety isn’t about perfect English. It’s about clear rules, strong supervision, and people doing what they’re told.”

1. Role and managing experience

I am employed in the present as a construction manager on a number of industrial and infrastructure projects in the Midlands. I have approximately ten years working in the UK construction industry but this time around my job is more strategic rather than practical. I also manage site managers and supervisors and not the operatives on an everyday basis.

I have a role of ensuring that projects are completed safely, on time and within the budget. That involves both adherence to the requirements of the CDM 2015 and compliance of site management teams to the standards. I have been on multiple sites to notice that the same problems arise time and again and I would say it frankly, the language barrier is often exaggerated as the root cause of safety issues.

2. Staffing and the language blend

In the sites that I operate in, I would say that half of the workforce is not native English speakers. That is quite characteristic of the industry at present. I have already come across the most common ones of Romanian, Polish, and Bulgarian workers. I have also been dealing with the South Asian workers, albeit not as often as some of the projects in London.

In my opinion, it is not about whether they speak English as a native language or not but the desire to work and abide by the site regulations. I have also witnessed employees that are fluent in English disregard safety measures as frequently as those who speak limited English.

This tendency in the industry is to focus on migrant workers as weak or inactive in principle and I do not entirely support that framing.

3. Safety briefings and communication strategy

Our sites have safety briefings that are of regular structure. There is mandatory inductions, toolbox talks on a daily basis and explanation of method statement prior to work commencing. The processes are already set in such a way that they are easy and repetitive.

It is our practise to use visual aids, signage, and demonstrations. In my opinion, when a person is not able to comprehend simple safety instructions, after numerous inductions and daily briefings, it is not only a language problem, but also an attitude or focus.

Supervisors can make reasonable accommodations, however, I do not think it is realistic or productive to redesign the entire system to accommodate the specific language constraints of every person.

4. Safety regulations and legal responsibility

The majority of workers, irrespective of their background, do not comprehend the legal aspect of CDM 2015 - and indeed they do not have to. That is the role of management. Employees should not know the laws that govern it, but what they are able and unable to do on-site.

I have discovered that most migrant workers, some of whom are south Asian workers that I have come across know rules very well when rules are applied fairly. Ineffective enforcement creates problems or making exceptions to satisfying supervisors in order to get the job going.

In my case, transparency and predictability are of greater importance than words.

5. Communication problems

Incidents of misunderstandings have also been experienced but I would not consider most of them as purely language related. One of the instances was when a worker was involved in a restricted zone when lifting was going on. The exclusion zone was an area that had been delimited, briefed and strengthened.

On questioning, the employee replied that he did not understand but that was after the fact. Such a circumstance begs the question of whether we are using language as a scapegoat. It does not imply that language does not come into play at all, but I believe that it is usually just one of the numerous factors, such as complacency and the need to complete the task.

6. Difficulties in guaranteeing compliance

The greatest obstacle is not language it is behaviour. Construction remains a highly stressful setting, and cuts are enticing. Regardless of the backgrounds, workers at times focus on speed at the expense of safety.

The other obstacle is excessively accommodating. In the process of taking language too seriously, safety messages are at times watered down to the extent of losing vital information. Also there is a practical maximum to how much time one can devote to checking the understanding on a live construction site. There is a point, at which people must be responsible of their actions.

7. Strategies and their efficiency

I advocate such on-the-job strategies as proper signage, demonstrations and repetition. These are both effective and efficient. What I would not endorse is the overreliance on informal translation by other workers, which may cause some mistakes and result in lack of accountability.

Personally, I think strong supervision would be the best approach. When supervisors appear, involved, and stable the compliance increases all over the board- irrespective of the language. I also feel that probation terms and performance cheques are under utilised techniques. In case a person always ignores safety procedures, he/she should be dealt with in a formal way.

8. Organisational support

The organisation offers adequate equipment: translations, standard inductions, and safety reports. It is not the absence of resources, but rather the uneven use of resources.

At times it can be expected that organisations can do more but at a certain stage, delegation must revert to the individual and the direct employer.

9. Contribution of language and incidences

Have language problems been causes of nearly-misses? Possibly. However, I would say that they are hardly the main cause. In the vast majority of situations, improper planning, hurry, or absence of control, contribute to a significant extent.

I believe that the sector runs a risk of emphasising on language as a soft issue and overlooking more difficult structural issues.

10. Suggestions for improvement

I believe that safety systems must be well built so that anyone with the simplest awareness of the site can easily comprehend. Otherwise, it is a design rather than a language problem.

It can be harsh to say, but construction is a risk business and sometimes it takes a stern voice to be clear instead of flexible.

SM5 – Project Manager (Large Residential & Mixed-Use Developments, Greater London)

Experience: 12 years in UK construction

Role: Project Manager with direct responsibility for safety performance, subcontractor management, and client reporting

Managerial personality: Reflective, people-centred, risk-aware, quietly critical of “tick-box” safety culture

“If someone feels stupid asking a question, that’s a failure of management, not the worker. If people don’t understand, shouting louder in English isn’t the answer.”

1. Role and managerial experience

My current position is project manager on residential and mixed-use development projects of large scale, in Greater London. My tenure in the UK construction industry is slightly more than twelve years since I started as an assistant site manager and later on managed to rise up the management ladder to senior management positions. One of my responsibilities is to monitor safety performance, and to provide compliance with the CDM 2015 and arrange subcontractors who frequently hire a large number of migrant workers.

I also take time to visit the site unlike other managers who spend most of their time in the office. And it is there you really find how safety systems can be put in actual practise--and it is also there that you find their limitations. I have over the years operated in sites where over 70 percent of the workforce were not native English speakers, not to mention that there were large numbers of South Asian workers of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

The following experiences have conditioned my ways of thinking about safety, communication, and responsibility.

2. Labour structure and linguistic varieties

In the majority of my projects in London, immigrant employees constitute the largest labour force. South Asian employees especially Punjabi speaking Pakistani employees and Hindi speaking Indian employees are particularly common in the trades of groundworks, concreting and finishing works.

There is a good difference in the English proficiency. There are South Asian workers who are confident when talking but cannot write English particularly in the formal safety documents. Others have very little spoken English and they make a lot of use of observation and peer support.

What matters (and is so frequently mismanaged) is that many of such workers are extremely talented and experienced. It is not a matter of intelligence or desire, it is a matter of being able to get information in a manner that they can actually comprehend.

3. Occupational health and safety briefings and communication

My projects include safety briefings, which are conducted according to the standard industry practises: site inductions and daily toolbox talks, task-related briefings and reviews of the method statements. Nevertheless, I have learned that the manner in which they are delivered is much more important than the occurrence of the same.

In case of teams that have low English skills, I will insist on use of visual aid, demonstrations and simplified language. I discourage the act of supervisors reading directly off the method statements, this is likely to make workers, particularly the non-native speakers disengaged.

In the case of the South Asian, I have found that there is a tendency to exhibit an appearance of cooperation and competence. To their work, workers can nod or say yes despite lack of proper comprehension. Due to it, I would suggest supervisors to verify understanding by acting as opposed to verbal agreement.

When a person can demonstrate to you that the job is safe, then that speaks volumes more than yes or no will.

4. Knowledge of the safety regulations and CDM specifications

In practise, in my experience, very few workers, including British ones, are aware of CDM 2015 in any legal sense of the word. And that is not necessarily an issue. The wrong thing is when employees do not know the reason behind some rules.

Often, I have observed South Asian employees in specific cases to be lax or contingent on the safety regulations, particularly when it seems that there lacks consistency in their enforcement. As an example, PPE can be used only when there is an inspection and easy when it comes to the normal work.

This is not intentional non-compliance and is more in most cases a response of past workplaces where safety standards were far more different or applied unequally.

5. Linguistic and cultural communication failure

One accident that is particularly memorable was the case of a South Asian operative who was working on heights when carrying out internal fit-out works. The employee took away edge protection in order to accomplish a task at a faster rate. He justified himself, when questioned, by a colleague, saying that he had done such work several times before in his own country with no protection.

It is not the act itself that caught my attention, but the fact that experience was the sole reason to take risk. The rule, but not the reason why it was so, had been discussed in the original briefing. It is the risk that exists in that gap between teaching and comprehension.

The employee has not been comfortable with asking questions throughout the briefing session, in part because of language, and in part because of cultural attitudes towards authority.

6. Difficulties with guaranteeing safety compliance

The concept of maintaining a balance between productivity and communication is one of the largest challenges. The construction deadlines are very strict and the supervisors are pressurised

to perform. The time in making sure there has been actual understanding is always minimised by that pressure.

The second difficulty is the use of informal translation. The bilingual workers are frequently employed as intermediaries although they are hardly trained to convey the information on the safety critical issues in an accurate manner. Major subtleties may be lost or distorted.

There is also a systemic problem: safety systems are also constructed based on English fluency and literacy. Even in cases where there are translated documents, these are usually generic and ill-fitted into daily practises of the site.

7. Successful strategies

Making it slow at the beginning is the best tactic that I have applied. Spending the extra time in the first briefings particularly with new teams always pays off in the later stages.

I would also push supervisors towards a mentoring style or approach; that is, by assigning less confident English speakers to experienced workers who example good safe behaviour. I am however keen not to establish dependency and informal hierarchies that compromise accountability.

Normalisation of questions has been another strategy. During briefings, I ensure that I clarify to them that seeking clarification is not a weakness and thus a sign of professionalism.

8. Organisational facilitation and lapses.

My organisation has translation of induction materials and general instructions, but this is not enough. Managers do not have much training about cross-cultural and language communication.

A lot of what I have learnt is as a result of experience, introspection, and in some cases embarrassing episodes. In my opinion, organisations do not realise the extent to which we need skills to effectively handle different teams without jeopardising our safety.

9. Incidents and near-misses due to language

A number of near-misses in my projects have been caused by language and communication challenging situations, especially at the time of the complicated work such as lifting processes and in enclosed work areas. Such events are not captured directly as language-related and this is a limitation to organisational learning.

I also believe that we tend to underestimate the extent of the problem since it does not fit into currently used categories of reporting.

10. Recommendations for improvement

In my opinion, the industry should redesign the process of safety communication. The visual training using scenarios should have precedence over text-intensive documentation.

Communication and cultural awareness should be trained to supervisors and managers.

Above all, the culture of safety must no longer be blame-oriented and must shift to the culture of understanding.

SM6 – Site Supervisor (Mid-Scale Commercial & Logistics Projects, North West England)

Experience: 7 years in UK construction

Role: Site Supervisor with day-to-day responsibility for task allocation, on-site safety, and subcontractor coordination

Managerial personality: Pragmatic, efficiency-focused, informal leadership style, believes competence develops through exposure rather than instruction

“People learn faster when they’re working next to someone who knows what they’re doing. Construction isn’t a classroom. You learn it by doing the job, safely, with the right people around you.”

1. Role and supervisory experience

I am a site supervisor and I work primarily on mid scale commercial, logistics work in the North West. I have worked in the UK construction around seven years and throughout this duration, I have worked in supervisory capacities, where I have been managing small to medium-sized teams at live sites.

My role is very hands-on. My duties will include assigning tasks, subcontracting, and ensuring that work is completed safely without making the job go slowly when there is no necessity. I do not subscribe to excessively complicating things. Construction is a hands on sector and individuals can learn better by doing things than by sitting in protracted explanations.

I have managed numerous migrant employees during my years of employment, both South Asian, Pakistan and Indian and Eastern European. Most of them come with minimal knowledge of the English language, but they also come with practical skills. It is my task to insert them into the location within the shortest time possible and without jeopardising their safety.

2. Labour force make-up and language blend

In the majority of my locations, it is approximately 50-60% of the workers who do not speak English. The South Asians are relatively numerous particularly in the labouring and finishing trades. The levels of English are different, and I do not think of it being a significant barrier in the way the work is planned.

In my case, it is not realistic to expect all people to be knowledgeable of the written method statements and legal requirements. The issue is whether or not they can practise safe measures in the real time. It is there that team structure comes in.

3. Safety communication approach

My safety communication is concise, practical and task-oriented. Toolbox talks are short and focused on the risks that are specific to the work of the day. I do not take a lot of explanations unless, it is an issue or because of a high-risk activity.

I strongly use demonstrations as a means of communication among workers whose English language is limited. I will demonstrate to them the desired work method in a safe way and then observe them to perform it. Provided that they can get it right, I know this is all I need to know. I do not like explaining everything and telling the same things differently. It makes the site slow and in my view is not always helpful in enhancing comprehension.

The buddy system is one of the systems that I believe in strongly. When recruiting a new employee on-site; particularly a person who speaks very little English, I assign him/her with a veteran employee who is already familiar with the site rules and expectations.

This is effective especially among the South Asian workers, who tend to be more relaxed learning among themselves as opposed to supervisors being inquisitive. The buddy is not a translator, but rather a role model, who may be examined and imitated by the new worker.

The buddy system also minimises the necessity of having complete supervision and clarification by the management that maintains the productivity.

4. Knowledge on rules of safety and legal matters

I do not anticipate workers to be knowledgeable about the CDM 2015 or the law. That's not their role. I am interested in behaviour: do they wear PPE, adhere to exclusion areas, and put equipment on in place?

With time, the workers learn site expectations via routine. It is better to repeat and observe rather than give some form of formal explanation. I have observed employees who have minimal English speaking skills to be some of the safest individuals on the site merely because they have acquired knowledge in the job.

5. Perceptions towards language and cultural obstacles

I will not deny the fact that language may be the problem, but I do not believe it is the central issue most of the time. The accidents that occur in my experience are based on rushing, getting complacent or taking shortcuts.

The role of cultural differences is also in the level of comfort of people in speaking up. There are some South Asians employees who will be less likely to challenge instructions, particularly during the initial stages. It is yet another reason why the buddy system is functional, as it informally builds a support system without subjecting people to a spot.

6. Communication problems in examples

Cases of near-misses have been experienced where instructions were not taken completely and in most cases, these were with regard to the movement of plants or the act of lifting. In the majority of instances, they were soon collected since they were observed by another member of the group and addressed.

I perceive that it is a functioning system, not a failed one. Construction is a dynamic process, and you cannot remove all risk with the explanation process.

7. Difficulties in compliance assurance

The biggest problem is the necessity to find the balance between safety and efficiency. The excessive time on explaining things may in fact lead to introduction of new risks of slowing down the work flow and frustrating the workers.

The over reliance on the paper work is another challenge. The method statements and risk assessments are significant, but they do not show how work is actually done on site.

8. Organisational support

The organisation advocates the buddy system, although it is not on paper. Supervisors are allowed to exercise their discretion instead of going by the book.

This is important because it is flexible. Each location and each team is unique.

9. Language related accidents

Language has contributed to some of the near-misses, although I do not feel that further elaboration would have helped them. The greatest impact is on better supervision, setting of tasks, and experienced workers around the workplace.

10. Suggestions for improvement

I believe that the industry must be realistic. Not all risks can be trained off, and not all will have a perfect understanding. The best you can do is to form powerful teams where individuals learn the lessons through one another and you watch out to another.

It is the way I have always worked, and in my case, it achieves results without holing up the whole process.

SM7 – Senior Site Supervisor (Large Commercial / Tier 1 Projects)

Experience: 9 Years in UK Construction

Role: Subcontractor supervision, safety coordination, toolbox talks

Managerial personality: structured, systems-driven, pragmatic but disciplined, believes most safety failures are management design failures

“Communication is a safety control mechanism, not merely an information exercise. When diversity is assumed as normal, communication systems improve naturally.”

Q1. Role/Supervisory Experience.

I have a nine-year experience in UK construction, and my job is today Senior Site Supervisor in large commercial developments. My duties lie at the point of operations and safety. I am organisation subcontractors, sequencing works, provision of toolbox talks, ensuring compliance, and intervening where unsafe behaviours or misconceptions arise.

One significant feature of supervision in contemporary society is how to deal with diversity - skill diversity, but also linguistic and cultural diversity. Multinational workforces are normal on most Tier 1 projects.

Conducting large projects in the UK today and supervising migrant labour, this is not a competency you should be doing differently, as it is a prerequisite.

My role is highly entrenched in safety. It is not considered as an addition or a feature. Each choice of sequencing, access, movement of plants, or coordination of tasks has safety repercussions.

Q2. Workforce Composition

The composition of workforce is in perpetual motion. In certain projects, non-native English speakers can be approximately 40 percent of the workforce; in others, it is much more than 70 percent. It relies on the use of subcontractor packages and trade specialisations.

Some occupations have always been characterised by a greater percentage of migrant workers. Most especially diverse are drylining, labouring, steel fixing, and some finishing trades. The South Asian workers, the Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi workers are also well represented, particularly in the finishing work and in the specialty trades.

Subcontracting structures influence patterns of diversity more than the policy of recruitment. Variability is one of the challenges. Teams are not stable. Crews move in and out often and this interferes with continuity of communication. The entry of each new subcontractor restarts the communication ground.

Q3. Methods of Safety Communication.

Safety communication should be strategically planned. Verbal teaching is ineffective, especially in busy, stressful cases. The strategy that I use is multi-layered: brief verbal explanation, visual support, physical presentation and checking of behaviour.

Pictorial messages are very potent. Indicating hazards, illustrating safe distances, diagrams, etc.-- these techniques do not depend on language.

The one and only language that is truly universal on site is often visual communication. Verification is another important component. The presentation of information does not mean understanding. Employees can nod without knowing what they are nodding.

Faking drama is a real danger - a symbolic knowledge with no real knowledge. Observation and questioning are thus needed.

Q4. Knowledge of Safety Rules and CDM 2015.

With the majority of workers, irrespective of their nationality, being familiar with practical safety rules, to a reasonable level, as soon as they are immersed in the routines of the site. Nonetheless, operatives (regulatory frameworks such as CDM 2015) are seldom conceptualised.

Procedural familiarity rules the workers; it does not require regulatory cognition. The new employees, either the British or the migrant, usually find it more difficult due to the lack of situational awareness. The behavioural safety is greatly enhanced by experience.

The disparities among groups are exaggerated. Language is an aspect that affects communication, but the supervision quality and peer norms also affect safety behaviour.

Q5. Breakdown Experience in Communication.

The first thing that experience teaches you is that safety communication failures are hardly dramatic, momentarily. They are normally minor behavioural abnormalities which only emerge with time to expose underlying systemic problems. An example of this is the case of a lifting operation that occurred on a commercial project that I recall. Operatives of a subcontractor package lost their way into prohibited zones despite repeated briefings on the exclusion zones. Some management members were immediate to react with frustration the assumption being the workers are not listening to instructions. However, when we looked at the situation with a closer eye the picture was more complicated. The exclusion zone guidance had been presented by different supervisors with slight variation in phrasing, reference to space and by different visual indicators. Others focused on physical obstacles, others on verbal prompts and others on assumed background knowledge.

Instruction inconsistency was what appeared to be non-compliance by workers. On the side of the workers, the regulations were not always clear and fixed. The same requirement was being divided into pieces and being given to them. The issue of language differences might have contributed, yet the structural failure was more profound, namely, the lack of consistency in transmitting the message through the supervisory channels.

In situations where the communication has failed severally, the management systems ought to be looked into but not the attitude of the workers. This experience reaffirmed my assumption

that it is not possible to attain clarity by repeating instructions. It needs standardisation and coordination between supervisors and subcontractors.

Q6. Adherence Dilemmas among Different populations.

The constant compliance of safety with linguistically and culturally diverse teams is not about personal competency but coping with variability. Construction sites are dynamic systems by their nature - crews come and go, tasks change, hazards involved change. The diversity further introduces more variability in that instructions can be construed differently based on the level of language, previous exposure, and cultural communication rules.

Cognitive overload is one of these challenges. Workers work in an environment where there are competing demands: productivity pressures, physical coordination, hazards to the environment. The understanding is weak when the safety communication is lengthy, abstract and inconsistent.

Safety messages are in conflict with operational requirements. The quality of communication is also distorted by time constraints. Supervisors tend to give order in a hurry, condensing instructions. Employees can seem to have comprehended to prevent procrastination of work.

The other hurdle concerns the issue of confidence asymmetry. Migrant workers are reluctant to ask clarifications especially in the hierarchical setting. Silence is commonly mistaken to be comprehending.

Q7. Tips to address Language Barriers.

With time, I have been able to learn that barrier management is not about linguistic translation but the design of communication. Visual communication plans are basic - drawings, body language, demonstrations, bodily pointing of hazards. These approaches minimise the use of verbal accuracy.

Language differences are stabilised through visual systems. It is also important of standardised phrasing. Workers develop familiarity faster when supervisors utilise predictable terms and

order. Bi-lingual workers helping fellow workers are useful but not dependable as a matter of fact when used as the main controls.

Accidental bilingualism cannot be relied on as a method of safety communication. The repetition can only be helpful when there is consistency. Sending similar messages repeatedly is just increasing the confusion.

Q8. Organisational Support & Constraints.

It is common to find organisations offering safety structures, induction documents and template procedures. But these resources rely on site adaptation in order to be effective. The particular dynamics of communication in one project or another cannot be expected by generic policies. Supervisors define operational reality; policies define intent. Resource allocation is a typical limitation. Pictorial materials, translated documents, and organised training resources cost to invest in. Ideal practises can be squeezed under schedule pressure.

Cultural alignment in itself is another matter in management. Supervisors differ in the way they communicate and level of risk taking. In the absence of effective coordination, discrepancy arises. It is people who make communication systems as stable as they can be.

Q9. Language & Safety Incidents

Language problems are not often considered to be causal factors. They normally operate as amplifiers of risk in interaction with the environmental and organisational pressures. Small misunderstandings are normal not due to lack of ability in the workers, but due to the nature of the conditions communication in the site; noise, speed, fatigue, multitasking.

Incidences can hardly have single causes; they are manifested as a combination of factors. Moving objects like lifting, worked in narrow spaces or at the interface of the collection points are particularly sensitive to the accuracy of communication. The prevention of such is therefore based on the layered controls which are visual cues, physical restraints, behavioural surveillance.

Strong safety systems presuppose communication failures that are sometimes going to be covered.

Q10. Recommendation and Reflections.

Multicultural construction sites ought to be designed to facilitate safety communication as opposed to being delivered in a reactive manner. Normalisation of visual-first communication strategies should be used. Standardised language makes it easier to think by simplifying it.

Instruction delivery should be accompanied by behavioural checking.

The design of the training process is supposed to mirror reality on the site - brief, repetitive, visually supported. Diversity must be seen by organisations as an inseparable operation state and not a temporary inconvenience.

SM8 – Site Manager (Mixed Residential & Mid-Size Developments)

Experience: 11 Years in UK Construction

Role: Overall site accountability, safety, subcontractor management

Managerial personality: relationship-driven, culturally observant, pragmatic, behaviour-focused

“Workers adopt safety behaviours from trusted relationships, not from documents.”

Q1. Role/Supervisory Experience

I have a UK construction experience of approximately eleven years working mainly in site management positions. My duties include but are not limited to programme coordination, subcontractors, safety, inductions, behavioural observation, and incident response. Practically speaking, the role is one of holding the reins on a highly dynamic environment in which more than one trades, risks and pressures are colliding at the same time.

Workforce composition has been one of the most notable changes I have noticed over time. At the beginning of my career, the sites were more linguistically homogeneous. That’s no longer the case.

Having to deal with non-native English speakers is not a temporary situation, but the daily reality of contemporary construction.

I have overseen places where over 50 percent of the labour force did not speak English as their native tongue. That alters your perception of communication, supervision, and even safety enforcement. You begin to understand that safety is not merely about rules but whether the rules are known, interpreted correctly and internalised by workers with an extremely diverse background.

My safety obligations are vast. The site manager is legally and operationally accountable in terms of safe systems of work. However, in the day-to-day, that role is less policing than it is

constant interpretation: the reading behaviours, the noticing of hesitation, the identifying of misunderstanding before it becomes an incident.

Much safety management involves diagnosing in-visible issues - confusion, suppositions, unspoken non-comprehension.

That diagnostic factor is particularly crucial in the presence of language barriers.

Q2. Workforce Composition and Language Groups.

In the majority of my projects, about half to three-quarters of all workforces are non-native English speakers, depending on subcontractor packages. Diversity is not uniformly distributed; some trades are much more global. Drylining, finishing trades and certain labour packages are generally very multinationally oriented.

In most of my sites, South Asian workers stand out, especially Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi workers in various capacities. They are technically competent, though language proficiency tends to be low.

Fluency is a continuum, not a label — there are those who can speak without feeling uncomfortable, and there are those who can get by with working English.

It is interesting how language groups self-organise. Employees tend to flock around people they are more familiar with in terms of language or culture. Humanly speaking, that is fully comprehensible. But in management terms, it determines the circulation of information.

You are not dealing with individuals; you are dealing with communication ecosystems. Orders that are passed down the official lines might be filtered, translated, or reinterpreting by peer networks. That is nice sometimes; sometimes it brings distortion.

The composition of the workforce is also dynamic. Subcontractor turnover implies that communicative stability is uncommon. You might be weeks creating efficient communication patterns before the crew mix shifts.

Q3. Conducting Safety Briefings in Multiple Languages.

Toolbox talks, inductions, formal safety briefings are needed but seldom adequate in themselves. Construction sites are busy, noisy, and also cognitively demanding.

There is a difference between listening and understanding, as there is between attendance and comprehension.

The part of visual communication is significant. Demonstrations, diagrams, gestures, these are usually more effective than words to explain. However, it is also important to find out to whom workers actually listen. The authority of communication vested in crew leaders, esteemed operatives, bilingual intermediaries, can be more practical than formal hierarchy.

Assessment of meaning is not straightforward. The question, does everyone understand? is virtually meaningless. Admission to confusion is discouraged by social pressures. Misunderstanding is never openly announced by workers, you must pick it up between the lines.

The behavioural cues turn into diagnostic instruments: hesitation, imitation, avoidance, uneven compliance. A large part of safety supervision is not declarative but interpretive.

Q4. Awareness of Safety Rules and CDM 2015.

That is a really interesting question as it makes you draw the line between procedural compliance and conceptual understanding which are extremely different things in construction sites.

Most operatives would say, if you inquired of them, that they do not understand CDM 2015 and that is not necessarily to do with unsafe behaviour. Safety is not often communicated by construction workers in legal or regulatory terms. They operate in an experiential, rather than a legislative, manner.

Operatives do not act at the level of regulations, they act at the level of routines, norms, and consequence. That is, they are taught what is acceptable, what is challenged and what is enforced. And with time, that is their definition of safety.

Within the specific group of migrant workers, understanding is heterogeneous. There is also a high level of practical safety awareness exhibited by experienced workers, including those with minimal English. They identify risks, expect risks and observe site procedures. In the meantime, newer employees, irrespective of their nationality, stand a higher chance of misunderstanding expectations.

We tend to think that experience is far more effective in compensating language limitation than we appreciate.

Such challenges do not typically arise in conspicuous safety regulations such as PPE or exclusion areas. They are socially policed and visually reinforced. The issues are more likely to occur with abstract or conditional instructions, such as subtlety of the method statement, sequencing, or risk controls that depend on the task.

As an example, I have come across cases where employees were seemingly compliant yet failed to grasp the logic of some of the controls. They may adhere to an instruction under supervision but may revert to other practises when they are not supervised as the logic is not completely internalised.

It is simple to be superficially compliant; it is far more difficult to be embeddedly so.

That difference is essential. In management terms, there is no given goal but rather cognitive alignment, as workers need to understand why and when controls are in place.

Q5. Language and Cultural Communication Problems.

Among the most effective experiences I have had was one where a team of workers technically spoke English on a functional level but interpreted instructions in an entirely different cultural perspective.

It was not a problem of vocabulary, but an assumption of authority and interrogation.

In certain societies, asking a superior to clarify something may seem like defying the authority instead of creating visuals. On UK premises, we promote employees to voice their concerns,

demand unsafe instructions and seek clarification. Nonetheless, that behavioural norm is not universal. I have been working with South Asian operatives who have shown a visible reluctance to ask questions especially during group sessions.

What I found interesting was the fact that it was so easy to misunderstand silence. Silence is so ambiguous, it may refer to understanding, misunderstanding, courtesy, or uneasiness.

In one, an employee also bobbed his head in agreement to a safety brief, but then performed the job in the wrong manner. On the occasion we spoke about it privately, he acknowledged that he had not understood it fully but could not show his incompetence before colleagues.

That showed a further work: Social pressures are often the root of communication breakdowns, rather than language impairment.

The other recurrent problem is with indiscriminate communication styles. Other workers do not use explicit uncertainty and give partial consent or minimal answers. Unless supervisors are sensitive to behavioural cues, misunderstanding can be overlooked.

Q6. Across Groups Compliance Challenges.

Maintaining a high level of overall safety adherence among a multicultural workforce is not a matter of language mechanics but rather of psychological safety and cognitive load.

Construction environments are stressful in nature. Employees have to balance productivity, physical risk, exhaustion, and coordination. In that case, there is a limitation in comprehension bandwidth.

Even native English speakers find it hard to digest safety details on congested sites.

In the case of non-native speakers, that challenge is even more severe. Cognitive strain is enhanced by the use of technical terms, speech speed, and noise in the environment. However, social factors are also significant: fear of embarrassment, perceived superiority, and peer pressure.

Employees might be more interested in appearing to be competent and not asking questions. The variability of compliance is usually a measure of confidence but not of capability. Employees who are comfortable posing questions will have greater safety alignment.

Q7. Tactics to Use to beat language barriers.

Through the years, I tried out numerous strategies, and one of the biggest things I have realised is that there is no one-fit-all solution. The language barriers are not mere technical challenges; they are hidden in the social relations, the levels of confidence, the nature of power relations and site pressures.

My intuition was procedural at the onset of my career. I thought that the answer was in better documentation, translation, and more thorough briefings. Those tools are useful, but I later realised their constraints.

A document can be translated, but you cannot translate thoughts, confidence, bandwidth.

Construction sites are noisy and distracting environments. Employees tend to be busy with work, timepieces and physical exertions. In such circumstances, even information that is perfectly translated might not result in any meaningful comprehension.

Proceeding to interactional and behavioural approaches proved to be much more effective.

The visual demonstration is one of the most potent techniques. The demonstration of a task, hazard, or a control measure is likely to wipe away strata of ambiguity of interpretation that verbal instructions cannot escape.

When you prove things by show, understanding becomes visual as opposed to verbal.

Employees can be confused by jargon, but hardly ever fail to comprehend a tangible example. This is particularly relevant to safety critical behaviours - exclusion zones, manual handling methods, sequencing limitations.

The other most successful approach is the use of informal communication networks. In multicultural locations, bilingual employees usually arise as a natural communication

intermediary. Instead of formalising this, I have found it useful to pragmatically work with these dynamics.

Trusted peer channels are a far better way to transfer information than forced hierarchies.

Employees would often prefer to be clarified by the person they are comfortable with and usually in their native language. Promoting and facilitating such behaviour can greatly minimise the lack of understanding without bottlenecking communicating.

Establishing relationships is also important. When they feel that supervisors are friendly and not disciplinary, there is a higher probability that the workers will confess to being confused or seek to be repeated.

The linguistic clarity presupposes psychological safety. When employees are afraid of being belittled, impatient, or judged, failures in communication are almost bound to happen.

There are always strategies that perform poorly. Excessively technical briefings, heavy procedural explanations, over-reliance on written communication are likely to fail in the real world.

The adversary of understanding in construction sites is complexity.

Q8. Organisation Support and Constraints.

There is organisational support, which, however, is highly variable in its effectiveness according to the realisation of policies vis-à-vis site conditions.

Most organisations offer template safety materials, induction data, and procedural directions. These systems are critical in terms of regulatory compliance and uniformity. Nonetheless, their usefulness in practise is frequently determined by local adaptation.

Corporate safety systems are created with the aim of being universal whereas construction sites are created with specificity.

As an example, translated documents may be present, but this does not necessarily mean that they will be understood. Effectiveness depends on literacy levels, familiarity with technical terms, and contextual knowledge.

The resources of formal training are useful, but they seldom touch on the situational realities of site communication noise, time stress, fatigue, changing crews.

Time is one such limitation. Construction timelines are inexorable, and safety communication is in competition with manufacturing needs. Operational efficiency and communicative thoroughness are at a permanent conflict.

Organisations focus on safety, but programme pressures tend to define what is realistic. Managerial training is another weakness. Supervisors are commonly very competent technically and might not have been well prepared to communicate cross-culturally.

We educate managers on procedures and not enough on communicative psychology.

Q9. Language Problems and Safety Incidents.

Safety problems that are related to language are seldom expressed in the form of a disastrous misconception. Their impact tends to be incremental, subtle, and contextual.

More often, the language barriers are the cause of hesitation, incomplete understanding, or slow reactions.

Near misses are usually created in moments of uncertainty and not out of complete ignorance.

These vulnerabilities are enhanced by high-risk activities. Activities that involve quick coordination or dynamic risk evaluation are highly sensitive to the clarity of communication.

Overestimation of understanding is another major reason. Employees can look certain with incomplete understanding. The seeming confidence does not necessarily reflect the real knowledge.

Q10. Recommendations & Reflections

To put it in a word, should I generalise my views, it would be so, Safety communication is essentially a human, social process, not an informational one.

To achieve better safety outcomes, it is necessary to go beyond document-driven solutions and focus on behavioural and relational approach.

There should be the emphasis on visual communication, the simplification of language, repetition, and demonstration. However, it is also necessary to develop supervisory behaviours that promote questioning and clarification.

Employees should be allowed and not told to seek an enlightenment. The training design must indicate thinking reality. Verdun conveyed thanksgiving with such heavy safety language that it may meet compliance standards but is ineffective.

In the end, the success of communication is not so much related to the proficiency of the language, but to the quality of the interaction, trust and the clarity of the situation.

The illusion of understanding should not be mistaken with misunderstanding, and it is the worst type of communication failure.