

# The Role of English Communication in Shaping Interpersonal Relationships in Multicultural Settings

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**Abstract:** We are living in the time of such globalization that has never been like before and multicultural relationships are the part and parcel of professional, educational, and social life. The use of English as a lingua franca can be said to be the most important tool in connecting people of different cultures and languages through the communication process. The paper will be an analysis of how the English communication determines the nature of interpersonal relationships within the multicultural environment in terms of its effects on the establishment of trust, getting out of conflicts and social cohesion. In the intent to follow the mixed-method research design, the data were obtained with 150 participants consisting of the 18 nationalities of the research within the corporate and academic collaboration platforms as well as online platforms. In both the quantitative analysis and qualitative thematic analysis, there was positive correlation between the English language level and the perceived relationship quality, empathetic listening, cultural adaptability and common linguistic norms. It is important to note that the paper listed the issues such as communication anxiety that is associated with the development of uneasy feelings when communicating with the representatives of another country, accent bias or misconceptions based on cultural differences that may hinder the development of a relationship even when the partners speak the same language. Findings further illustrate how English communication in multicultural contexts becomes a distinguishing binocular phenomenon in two senses: as a connector through which a stronger bond can be achieved and as a wall where English language proficiency or cultural awareness is not sufficient. The study has a contribution to make to the sphere of intercultural communication and applied linguistics, as, within its framework, it presents practical knowledge that can be used by educators, policymakers, and organizational leaders and help them create conditions in which the interactions between different cultures are friendly and inclusive.

**Keywords:** English communication, multicultural settings, interpersonal relationships, intercultural competence, language proficiency, trust-building.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal relations between people who have different cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds have become unavoidable segments of working and studying life, not to mention life itself, in the modern environment of globalization. The prevalence of multicultural interactions has considerably grown due to international mobility, transnational and multinational corporations, migration, and platforms on the internet that facilitate cooperation among people. In that respect, communication skills are prioritized as the main factor of establishing mutual understanding, creating trust, and maintaining valuable relationships on interpersonal levels. English being the highly spread lingua franca in the communication world, becomes the general language shared by those people whose mother tongues differ enormously. It has, therefore, a prominent and complex role in defining interpersonal relations within the multicultural environment. Communication in multicultural environments is not a language-competence issue, but

domain that requires finding its way through cultural specifics, inter-personal expectations, and various communicative values and models. Such interpersonal contacts as the work relationship of a professional or academic relationship, friendship are dependent on the ability to convey meaning, interpret it successfully, follow through with appropriate actions on verbal and non-verbal communication. The effort to use idiomatic expressions that the non-native speaker may not be familiar with or render cultural related confirmations can encourage misinterpretation and misunderstanding, confrontation, and in some cases, ostracizing whereas successful communication facilitates by use of English as a means of creating an exclusive, respectful and homogenous barricade amongst the culturally diverse individuals. English is important as an intercultural communication language which can be seen through practicing it as a governing or working language in numerous global organizations, multinational companies and universities of higher learning. To illustrate, major companies of the world like Airbus and Samsung have incorporated the usage of English as language of operation within the company to make communication uniform across its branches in various countries. On the same note, in academic circles, English predominates on scholarly publications, international conferences, and exchange programs and allows international scholars to conduct joint research regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the necessity of adopting a common language does not necessarily make interpersonal relations successful. Even when using English as a common language, cultural differences in styles of communication (whether direct or indirect communication styles, high or low-context communication styles or differences in strategies to be polite) may affect the perceived interpretation of messages. Trust-building is one of the key dynamics in the multicultural English communication, and it is the essential element of the interpersonal relationships. Trust is built and over a period of time it builds on this using respectful ways where the dialogue is normal and the same. Effective communication in English in multicultural environments has the potential of breaking down barriers and fostering empathy, whereas poor communication (either caused by limited word range, strong accent, or the lack of knowledge about the cultural norms) can lead to misunderstanding, which, in turn, destroys trust. The other important aspect of interpersonal relations to multicultural settings is conflict resolution. Conflicts are bound to arise when people engage in joint work, and the quality of subsequent relationships depends on the way they are dealt with. The common language of the language in question, English, helps in expressing the views and mediating resolutions. But unless you are aware of cultural differences in the culturally acceptable behaviour to disagree, or criticize, even the best of intentions may come across as confrontational, or offensive. The common practice of language is also a crucial factor that causes social cohesion among multicultural groups. They could increase their participation and mutual respect through the use of inclusive language, and avoiding jargon, and adapting to diverse proficiency levels. Nevertheless, linguistic hierarchies usually occur when the speakers (who tend to be native or near-native users of the English language) take over the conversations and without their intention of doing so, they marginalize the group that is less fluid in interpreting the language. Such imbalance may become an obstacle to formation of fair and reciprocal interpersonal relationship. Regardless of the increasing significance of English communication in multicultural settings, empirical research pertaining to the particular effects of this aspect on the quality of interpersonal relationships is also not numerous. The provided literature has mainly concentrated on the issue of English as a means of business dealings, whether academic or cultural exposure, as opposed to the issue of influencing trust, empathy, and commitment to long-term interpersonal relationships. Although the concept about language barriers exists in a multicultural environment, adequate effort is lacking in terms of suggesting measures to overcome these differences and using languages to develop a high level of inter cultural competence. The given research fills this gap by discussing the importance of the English communication as a factor that influences interpersonal relations in the environment of multicultural settings such as workplace, academic institutions, or collaborative online venues. It explores the degree to which proficiency in English communicating can affect the quality of relationships and what common practices tend to build trust and resolve conflicts and contribute to social cohesion, and what obstacles are related to differences in language and culture. This study will be able to offer a deep and detailed explanation of how language defines and influences human relationships amidst multicultural settings, proposing viable solutions to embrace inclusive and effective communication across cultures, by combining both the quantitative aspect of language

proficiency with fastidious details of the experience of relationships. In conclusion, understanding English communication as the gateway and the possible sound barrier should influence the understanding that the applicable strategies have to combine the linguistic precision with the cultural sensibility, flexibility, and respect towards one another.

## II. RELEATED WORKS

The study of English communications in multicultural environments fell within the scope of various disciplines and intercultural communication sociolinguistics, organizational behavior, and applied linguistics being some of these disciplines. One of the leitmotifs that are visible throughout the literature, is the aspect of the English language being the global lingua franca, which allows people to communicate even despite the difference in the cultural and linguistic backgrounds. According to Jenkins [1], the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a functional communication system that places itself on the principle of intelligibility over native-like exactness. Such a view is especially valid in any multicultural setting where success in communication lies not in the compliance with the norms of a nativity but with the personal understanding. House [2] also contends that the primary focus of ELF interactions involves bringing about pragmatic clarity and negotiating of meaning, usually resulting in the generation of mixed or hybrid communication styles whereby languages spoken by speakers form a part of them. Numerous studies are based on the particular correlation of English proficiency and quality in interpersonal relations in the context of multicultural environment. Kim and McKay-Semmler [3] focused on the extent of social network formation among international students and the relationship between general social network and second language competence, which also concluded that social connectedness increased with stronger second language competence in international students. Likewise, Wang and Fang [4] reported that workers in a multinational firm having a stronger command of English had a high trust and collaboration degree with other workers of diverse cultural backgrounds. These findings parallel the theoretical framework of anxiety/uncertainty management theory [5] developed by Gudykunst, which states that successful communication during the inter-cultural communication process will also lead to less uncertainty and hence lead to desirable relations. Nevertheless, linguistic ability is not enough to create successful relationships. Byram [6] advocates that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is extremely necessary and comprises skills in languages together with cultural awareness, empathy, and flexibility. This point is further validated by another study conducted by Arasaratnam and Doerfel [7], which has shown that the closeness of the relationship in intercultural friendship is not only likely to depend on the linguistic skills of individuals, but also on the willingness of a person to interact with the community of a foreign culture and his or her adaptive levels of communication. Divergent cultural norms as exhibited by politeness strategies, turn-taking, and indirectness have been observed to be the agents behind many communication breakdowns in English when multinational team members use English with one another in organizational settings [8]. Multicultural areas of conflict resolution have also been discussed in English-speaking communication. According to the face-negotiation theory developed by Ting-Toomey [14], when communicating in the context of conflicts, cultural values do affect the style of communication with English being the neutral medium that can be utilized to achieve resolution or hindering it in case of inappropriate use. Take the example of direct confrontation in English, which would be considered good in the low-context cultures whereas considered negative and disrespectful in high-context cultures, straining the relationship. The latter study of Croucher et al. [15], which was done empirically, discovered that intercultural conflict competence, which is the capability to deal with the conflict in a manner that can sustain the relational harmony, is related positively to both intercultural sensitivity and English proficiency. The dimensions of the role of English communication in the interpersonal relationships have been provided by the introduction of digital and online multicultural environment. On virtual collaboration tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, English is commonly the default and the team members have to work not only through lingual and cultural diversities but also through technological limitations. Studies on the topic of corporate English in multinational corporations by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen [9] confirm that while asynchronous email and chat messages in English can ease immediate pressure on non-native speakers giving them more time to formulate messages, it may also rob the texts of certain non-verbal cues that are necessary in bonding with

the other party. The result can be paralleled with the findings of Derks et al. [10], according to which text-based communication in English lacks the richness of emotion and may result in the impairment of trust and rapport. The use of English in academic multi-cultural context has not been left behind especially within higher education institutions that have huge international student enrolment population. Sawir et al. [12] cited language barrier among the key factors that cause isolation among international students with most groups at the international level segregating things to such extremes that they might form groups of culturally diverse relations thus reducing intercultural relationship development. Nonetheless, there is higher evidence to demonstrate that integration programs consisting of language support matched with intercultural training is beneficial on performance in academics and interpersonal connectivity [13]. The proposed research can be summed up in the following way: the available source of knowledge accepts the theory that English is both a bridge and barrier to multicultural interpersonal relationships. As long as proficiency increases trust, collaboration, and inclusion, linguistic ability, and cultural styles of communication differences can result in misunderstanding, discord, and marginalization. The reviewed studies highlight the essentiality of viewing English communication, not only as a linguistic ability but as a part of a wider intercultural competence. This point of view contributes to the purpose of the current study, which is to explore the interaction between English communication, cultural sensitivity, and the quality of relationships in multicultural contexts, and thus bringing the contribution at both theoretical and practical levels of strategies in multicultural contexts to raise interpersonal effectiveness.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method design that integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights to investigate how English communication influences interpersonal relationships in multicultural settings. The quantitative component measures participants' English language proficiency, self-perceived intercultural competence, and quality of interpersonal relationships. The qualitative component explores communication practices, trust-building strategies, and challenges experienced in multicultural interactions. This combination ensures both statistical generalizability and rich contextual understanding [16].

#### 3.2 Study Area and Participants

The research was conducted across three distinct multicultural environments: (1) international corporate workplaces, (2) universities with diverse student populations, and (3) online collaboration platforms with multinational teams. A total of 150 participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring representation from at least 15 different nationalities. Participants were required to have engaged in English-based communication in multicultural settings for at least six months. Table 1 summarizes participant demographics.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male (48%), Female (50%), Other (2%)	
Age Group	18-25 (32%), 26-35 (40%), 36-50 (22%), 51+ (6%)	
Primary Context	Corporate (42%), Academic (38%), Online Collaboration (20%)	
Nationality	15+ represented (Asia, Europe, Africa, Americas)	

#### 3.3 Data Collection Procedures

**Survey Instrument:** A structured questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data on English proficiency (self-rated and test-based), relationship quality, and intercultural sensitivity. The questionnaire incorporated validated scales such as the Intercultural Communication Competence Scale (ICCS) and the Relationship Closeness Inventory (RCI) [17].

**Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants selected from the survey group to gain deeper insights into their experiences. Questions addressed themes such as communication barriers, strategies for building trust, and handling misunderstandings in multicultural contexts. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent.

**Observation:** For online collaboration groups, interaction logs (e.g., chat transcripts, meeting recordings) were analyzed to observe language patterns, turn-taking behaviors, and instances of miscommunication [18].

### 3.4 Measurement of Key Variables

- **English Proficiency:** Assessed through a combination of self-reports and a short online language test measuring vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, and listening comprehension.
- **Interpersonal Relationship Quality:** Measured using the adapted RCI, which evaluates trust, emotional closeness, and perceived cooperation.
- **Intercultural Sensitivity:** Measured using the ICCS, focusing on respect for cultural differences, interaction engagement, and empathy [19].

**Table 2: Variables and Measurement Instruments**

Variable	Measurement Tool	Scale
English Proficiency	Online test + self-rating	CEFR A1-C2
Relationship Quality	Relationship Closeness Inventory	1-7 Likert
Intercultural Sensitivity	ICCS	1-5 Likert

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using SPSS 28.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic profiles, while Pearson's correlation was applied to examine relationships between English proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, and relationship quality [20]. One-way ANOVA tested differences in relational outcomes across contexts (corporate, academic, online).

Qualitative interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach [21]. This process included coding transcripts, identifying recurring themes, and synthesizing findings with quantitative results for triangulation. NVivo software was used to manage and code interview data systematically.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of the lead research institution. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data and removing personally identifiable information from transcripts. Participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty [22].

### 3.7 Limitations and Assumptions

The study assumes that self-reported data on communication experiences accurately reflect participants' actual interactions. Although efforts were made to diversify the sample, results may not fully represent all multicultural environments, particularly informal or community-based settings. Moreover, while English was the medium of communication in all studied contexts, the influence of participants' native languages and cultural backgrounds on communication patterns could not be entirely isolated [23].

## IV. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Overview of English Proficiency and Relationship Quality

Analysis of survey responses from the 150 participants indicated notable variation in English proficiency levels across the three study contexts—corporate workplaces, academic institutions, and online collaboration platforms. Corporate participants reported the highest average proficiency (mean CEFR equivalent: C1), while online collaboration participants exhibited greater diversity, with some scoring as low as B1. Relationship quality scores, as measured by the Relationship Closeness Inventory, showed a positive correlation with English proficiency levels.

**Table 3: Mean English Proficiency and Relationship Quality by Context**

Context	Avg. English Proficiency (CEFR)	Avg. Relationship Quality (1-7)
Corporate	C1	6.1
Academic	B2	5.7
Online Collaboration	B2-C1 mixed	5.4

These results suggest that higher English proficiency is generally associated with better self-reported interpersonal relationships in multicultural contexts, though proficiency alone does not fully account for variations in relationship quality.

#### 4.2 Correlation Between Key Variables

Pearson’s correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between English proficiency and relationship quality ( $r = 0.68, p < 0.01$ ), as well as between intercultural sensitivity and relationship quality ( $r = 0.73, p < 0.01$ ). Interestingly, intercultural sensitivity was also strongly correlated with English proficiency ( $r = 0.65, p < 0.01$ ), indicating that individuals with higher language skills tend to report greater awareness and adaptability in multicultural interactions.

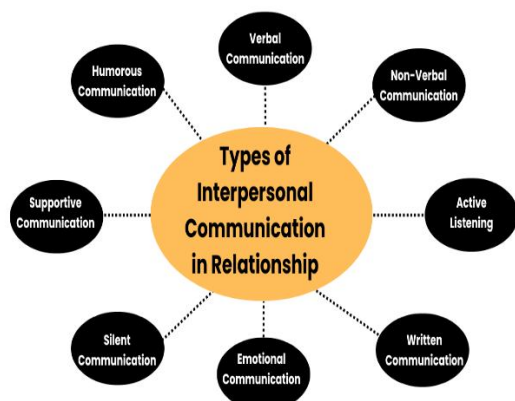


Figure 1: Types of Interpersonal Communication [25]

Table 4: Correlation Matrix Between Key Variables

Variable	English Proficiency	Relationship Quality	Intercultural Sensitivity
English Proficiency	1.00	0.68**	0.65**
Relationship Quality	0.68**	1.00	0.73**
Intercultural Sensitivity	0.65**	0.73**	1.00

Note:  $p < 0.01$

#### 4.3 Themes from Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of interview data generated three major themes:

1. **Trust-Building Through Clarity and Inclusivity** - Participants highlighted that clear and inclusive English communication, such as avoiding slang or culturally specific idioms, was critical to building trust. Corporate respondents often described deliberate use of “plain English” to ensure mutual understanding in meetings.
2. **Challenges of Accent and Pronunciation Bias** - Several participants reported experiencing or observing subtle discrimination based on accent. This bias affected both confidence and willingness to contribute in group discussions, particularly in academic seminar settings and virtual meetings.
3. **Conflict Resolution Styles and Cultural Interpretation** - Cultural norms influenced the interpretation of English communication in conflict situations. Direct feedback was appreciated by some participants (often from low-context cultures) but perceived as confrontational by others from high-context cultures, leading to occasional relational strain.

Table 5: Summary of Identified Themes and Representative Quotes

Theme	Description	Example Quote
Trust-Building Through Clarity	Use of simple, inclusive English promotes trust	“When everyone uses plain English, I feel respected and included.” (Academic participant)
Accent and Pronunciation Bias	Negative judgments based on accent reduce participation	“Sometimes people ignore my point because my accent is strong.” (Corporate participant)

Conflict Resolution Styles	Cultural norms shape perception of disagreement in English	“Direct comments in English feel aggressive to me, but others see them as normal.” (Online participant)
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#### 4.4 Contextual Differences

Context-specific analysis revealed that corporate participants benefitted from formalized English communication policies, such as standardized email templates and presentation guidelines, which reduced misunderstandings. Academic participants often formed close relationships within smaller cultural groups, with English functioning primarily as a bridge between these groups during collaborative tasks. In online collaboration contexts, asynchronous communication tools (e.g., email, Slack) allowed more time for message formulation but reduced the immediacy and emotional nuance of interactions.



Figure 2: Interpersonal Communication [24]

#### 4.5 Implications of Findings

The findings indicate that while English serves as a functional bridge in multicultural environments, its effectiveness in fostering strong interpersonal relationships depends on both proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. High proficiency enhances clarity and reduces misinterpretation, but the ability to adapt language use to diverse cultural expectations plays an equally crucial role. Furthermore, accent bias remains a persistent challenge, highlighting the need for awareness and training initiatives aimed at fostering equitable participation in multicultural communication.

### V. CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at how English communication contributes to the formation of interpersonal relationships in multi-cultural environments basing on both quantitative and qualitative survey information about corporate work environments, academic institutions, and online working platforms. The combination of quantitative data analysis and thematic expectations enables the study to offer a tri-level appreciation of the overall role of English proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, and communicative practices in building trust, solving conflicts, and ensuring social cohesion among different people with diverse cultures during interactions. According to the results, it is seen that there is a strong, positive correlation between proficiency in English and perceived quality of interpersonal relations. Those who showed higher levels of proficiency stated that earlier they found it much easier to communicate their ideas, learn about others and establish trust across cultural barriers. In line with these past findings, these findings are in line with other findings that argue that linguistic competence helps create a mutual understanding and minimizes uncertainty in intercultural communication [16] beyond others. Nevertheless, the data also point out the fact that expertise is not enough by itself. Intercultural sensitivity also proved an important concept and its correlation with the quality of the relationship proved high due to which it can be assumed that being flexible to various communicative norms is a vital trait in multicultural environments. The qualitative findings provide an insight into the subtle mechanisms of English as the crossroads and the chasm. On the one hand, there was again and again mentioned clear explanatory and comprehensive adherence to English which helped build trust and respect. Such thoughtful omission of slang, idioms or any culturally exclusive term can serve as an important inclusion measure, both in general terms and among non-speakers. Conversely, factors like bias against accents and pronunciation based judgments raised unnoticeable, but durable boundaries. Such biases were demonstrated to affect the levels of participation, confidence as well as perceived credibility hence having an effect on the interpersonal relationships overall dynamics. Another arena in which English was critical

to conflict resolution was in cultural interpretation with enormous influence being determined by cultural interpretation. Whereas participants belonging to some cultures valued direct and explicit feedbacks in English as they indicated transparency, others considered it confrontational. This disparity has increased the need to employ culturally responsive approaches to communication that are neither confined to the patterning of linguistic accuracy but necessitate an understanding of how well received messages are within the different cultural contexts. High level contextual diversity is also observed in the study. Corporate settings could be at an advantage because of the availability of organized rules of communication, workplace conventions helping to smooth over possible miscommunications, whereas academic settings showed the propensity of participants to find tight networks of relationships within groups of individuals with similar culture, and use English as a means of cross-group effective interaction. Asynchronous communication in an online collaboration context caused time pressure to decrease and enabled care with the communication message but at the cost of immediacy and emotional sensitivity that is sought after extensively in establishing relationships. Practically, the findings imply a number of things. To teachers, the findings indicate that teaching of English language in a multicultural environment should also involve intercultural communication training that will not only ensure the development of grammatical expertise but also pragmatic ability, understanding, and negotiating tactics. Organizational organizations must adopt practices to correct policy and training policies to deal with accent bias, including any effort to be more inclusive of communication and participation rates in meetings and other group projects equally. The use of language education as part of social integration may contribute greatly to the social cohesion in more diverse societies especially in nations where English is a lingua franca. Furthermore, the accent prejudice and the influence of cultural variations on the conflict management also demonstrate the necessity to alter the focus on the bias towards the so-called native speaker norms and shift toward intelligibility and accommodative processes. By promoting the increased acceptance of the variation of English, one may deconstruct the linguistic hierarchies and establish more equal communication situations. This is consistent with the worldwide developments in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) Studies to place more emphasis on effectiveness of communication than native-like in the use of the language [19]redixiy considering the elementary levels of language useability among the general population as the base point [20] and/or [21] or the fact taken into consideration by many of the researchers including Robert Chambers who rightly considers the elementary levels in duty of language useability amongst the general population as the starting point [20] or [21] or the fact that maximum levels of linguistic. Although this research fits the emerging literature base in the area of English communication among the multicultural setting, this study is aware of some limitations. Although the sample is quite varied in terms of nationality and context, it does not necessarily represent all possible environments in terms of dimensions of multiculturalism; in this case it is rather formal or institutionalized type of environment. Proficiency levels and quality of relationship can be self-reported which is prone to individual bias and the role of first languages in first languages would affect the practice of English communication was not studied in details. Also, the data is a cross section and could not be used to relate changes in communication practices and relationship dynamics in the elapsed time. The researchers in the future should take into account the longitudinal study designs to monitor the way in which English communication repertoires change as people increase their time in the multicultural context. Looking into how the non-verbal cues used, emotional expression and communication using technology influences relationship formation may enhance the knowledge about the interpersonal effects of English on the global arena. It may be instructive as well to conduct comparative analyses of the role of English and other lingua francas including French, Spanish or Arabic and see how language choice also affects multicultural relationships between other regions. On the final note, this study concludes that English in multicultural context is a complex phenomenon. It is a great way of bridging the gap between people separated by culture and language but the potential of the tool becomes complete when it is used together with intercultural sensitivity and inclusive communication patterns. Increased multicultural encounters within the workplace, in schools, and online, it will be important that not only linguistic competency but cultural flexibility be promoted so as to establish trust, successfully address conflict, and maintain meaningful person-to-person relationships. The results invite us to accept the need to change the foci of our interest away from language proficiency alone to a more comprehensive perception of

communication in terms of the workings of language, culture, and relational intent. With conscious efforts at the personal, institutional, and policy levels, English communication can transcend function as a means of exchange to become a means to personal, sincere engagement and cooperation around the world.

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