Val Hazan WW

**Sophie Scott** 00:10

Welcome to What Works, the UCL PALS podcast, where we're talking to colleagues about life and science and the things that are not just work that but still affect our lives. And I'm really delighted today to be talking to someone who has been a very inspiring colleague and an amazing colleague to be, you know, at UCL with, Professor Valerie Hazan, Val Hazan.

**Val Hazan** 00:39

Hello, very pleased to be here.

**Sophie Scott** 00:41

So, Val, can we... Just to sort of start, could you tell me the first time you can remember thinking about something that you might realise now kind of means, oh, that's why I was interested in science or that's why I ended up studying what I study.

**Val Hazan** 00:56

It was pretty late really. I mean, at University in Salford, I was sharing a house with friends. One of these friends had a baby and in my final year at university, baby Michael was about one, one and a half. So, a really fascinating time for language development. And you know, I was just doing Modern Languages then, it was nothing scientific, but that really got me interested into you know, language development. And in fact, that course did have a very, very good acoustics phonetics course. So, I had done acoustics and I guess, you know, that sort of set me off doing a master's in linguistics and then a PhD.

**Sophie Scott** 01:39

And you have quite a multilingual background, don't you? Were you doing Modern Languages because that was part of your life or?

**Val Hazan** 01:48

It was a kind of accidental career, really. Yes, I grew up in France. My father was one of the first generation of conference interpreters in fact and worked for the military base of NATO.

**Sophie Scott** 02:02

Not the one in SHAPE, my mum worked there.

**Val Hazan** 02:04

I knew there was a connection. I was at SHAPE for baby and SHAPE was in France and then General [UNCLEAR] through SHAPE out when we were eight or nine. So, the whole community, a very large number of people moved to this little mining town in Belgium. And it was really like living in a bubble. You know, there was a SHAPE village. And you know, with the hospitals and schools and cinemas, and everything was cheap or free and, and, you know, you shared this village with people from many different nationalities.

**Sophie Scott** 02:40

It was very international, wasn't it?

**Val Hazan** 02:42

Yeah, yeah. So, for the time, you know, it was quite an unusual upbringing. So, we grew up bilingually, all our studies were done in French but at home we spoke English with my mother. French with my twin sister, French with my father, English with my brothers. Yeah, so I suppose, yeah.

**Sophie Scott** 03:04

So, you've kind of come into science via languages?

**Val Hazan** 03:10

Yeah, there was never again, a conscious decision, you know. We finished school very early. We were two years ahead. So, you know, we had to make decisions about the future based on, you know, knowing very little about what we really wanted to do. And being bilingual, and, you know, there was a very good interpreter school, at the university in Mons, the local town. So, it was just the default. You know, a very default decision, really. So, I guess I never... I mean, I did sciences, of course at school, but I was never particularly good or particularly bad at anything. So that made it very difficult to really think, okay, what do I want to do with my life, you know. So, yeah, translator, you know, the common market in Brussels was the kind of pretty default condition.

**Sophie Scott** 04:02

It would be an obvious way to go. So, where did you do your masters?

**Val Hazan** 04:05

I did my masters in reading and I think I went there because I think Paul Fletcher was there. And you know, I'd been reading about language development work they were doing. And at the time, you got personal PhD scholarships, so it wasn't attached to a department. And I think I'd been inspired by a paper of Adrian Fourcin's. Simon and Fourcin, or Fourcin and Simon on the development of categorical perception in children.

**Sophie Scott** 04:32

Just to say, so was Adrian Fourcin there, was he the head of the Phonetics Department at UCL.

**Val Hazan** 04:38

He was the head of the experimental phonetics part, so then decided to come to UCL.

**Sophie Scott** 04:44

And just very briefly, could you just very briefly mention what the significance of categorical research is?

**Val Hazan** 04:49

So, you know, okay, so basically, speech is made up of acoustic patterns. There's a lot of variability in speech, so from one person to the other and within different speaking styles that we use, and yet we have to, I guess, give a label to the sound that we hear. And we use these acoustic patterns and how to categorise them, so make a decision about which sound we've heard. And we tend to do this in a very binary way, in some way, we associate particular acoustic patterns to particular sounds and have to do so even when the sounds are ambiguous. So, we tend to, in a way not focus on the detail of the sound and the difference between the sound but focus on what makes them similar.

**Sophie Scott** 05:47

And it was a big, big development in sort of...

**Val Hazan** 05:50

It was a big thing in the, let's say early 80s. Let's go back to where we're talking about now. Yes, because there was a whole link with motor theory and different theories of speech perception. So, Adrian had done this work on the development of how this ability to categorise develops in children for sounds such as ber and per in the voice in contrast, differences in voicing, and I was interested, I don't know why, in fricatives. So, sounds like f, ss, sh, and how categorization developed for fricatives. So that's what I came to UCL to do.

**Sophie Scott** 06:03

So, you come to UCL for a PhD, or did you ever really leave? Terrible tyranny, isn't it? Well, you know, it's a blessing and a curse indeed because it's that yes, it's a later stage in my long story here. You know, I got a lectureship very, very young, you know, I hadn't even finished my PhD. And here you were with a permanent position in the best university in the country, nay the world, for the work that I was doing. You know, how could you ever leave? It is very, very hard. It makes it very hard to leave. What did you do? Was Adrian your PhD supervisor?

**Val Hazan** 07:10

He was yes. And in fact, I worked on fricatives for about a year and a half. And at the time, we were doing very manually intensive syntheses. So, you know, created artificial versions of words. And it was really just very difficult to do that for fricatives. So, you know, the idea was to try and sound like a natural word but ended up sounding like 'sh-oo'.So then I had the opportunity to switch gears somewhere. And Adrian was starting a project on the development of speech in deaf children in collaboration with a school in Southport. And, yeah, so I got involved from the beginning of the project and ended up really finishing my PhD on that topic.

**Sophie Scott** 07:59

What kind of things were you looking at?

**Val Hazan** 08:02

Well, it was a fascinating project, which I don't think has been replicated since. This was a school which had a very oral sort of tradition, so very much emphasis on listening, on hearing aid fitting, with a very inspirational headmistress, Maria Clark. And we decided to follow an unselected group of children over a three/four year period and see how their ability to categorise sounds developed over a period between the age of about nine and 13. So, we would go up to the school every three months and collected longitudinal data. Evelyn Abberton was looking at their speech production, I was doing the work on speech perception, and Adrian would do all sorts of work on their hearing. So, we found that, you know, they were developing obviously, with a delay and the stages they followed in their development of categorical perception was similar to that of children with typical hearing. But just delayed, but also coloured by the hearing loss, so certain acoustic patterns, which would be very much what kids with normal hearing would be using, would not be accessible to these children. So, patterns that were less important for a normal development became, you know, the key patterns. So, yes, it was a fascinating time.

**Sophie Scott** 09:34

Very, very interesting. And so, you get towards the end of your PhD, and you've already mentioned you started a lectureship.

**Val Hazan** 09:41

Yes, yes, yes. So, that was crazy. That was the other accidental event really. We'd started this new degree, a BSc in Speech Sciences. And a lecturer had been recruited to teach speech perception, and she left at a month's notice. Just before the course was due to begin. So, I was brought in, first of all on a temporary lectureship to quickly.... And then, you know, they advertised a permanent position, and I got it. So, this would never happen now, as we know. So, here was I with no publications and not even a PhD.

**Sophie Scott** 09:42

And how did you find that as a new lecturer? So, it's, I know, things have changed, but you have always been expected to publish? Did you find... What was it like kind of starting to develop your own research profile while teaching?

**Val Hazan** 10:37

There was I mean, I think there was less pressure, then to be fair. You know, I did publish. We published, you know, the PhD work and quite early on, started getting grants very regularly. So, I've been continuously funded for 30 years, actually. But, you know, there wasn't the emphasis on quantity that there is now. There was really not that much pressure to publish. I mean, there was obviously for promotions, but I don't think we were really advised that much about promotions. Or, you know, maybe some people were more targeted than I was. But yeah, it wasn't really a focus of my work at the time. Yeah, you know, in the early years, I was finishing my PhD, teaching new courses, you know, without teacher training and then publishing and I think my first paper probably was in 83. But yeah, you know, somehow you made it work.

**Sophie Scott** 11:44

And how did you find kind of navigating, well there's many different strands to life but you've got your job at UCL, which is a lectureship and so there's a requirement to do teaching, how... If we think about that separately from the research and I know it doesn't really work that way, but you were at a university that expects our lecturers to be research active, there will be the two. How have you found kind of navigating a career that's always had this, you know, like a central role for teaching as part of it, I suppose if you haven't run yourself in a different condition, it might be harder to say, but in as much as you have ever overtly thought about it, what do you think about it?

**Val Hazan** 12:27

I've always done all three, you know, because I was always active even before being head of department, I was always active at university in committees. I was, I think, the non-professorial representative on the Promotions Committee, which was university wide. It was the provost, the deans and little me when I was, you know, probably in my mid 20s, you know, so I've always done in a way teaching research administration with, you know, a fairly even distribution in all three.

**Sophie Scott** 12:31

Have you found it useful to have that kind of arm getting involved in the admin, because admin always gets a bad rap? And it's what we always complain about. But actually, there are some real advantages to kind of being part of the world where you're seeing some things discussed that you then might experience at the front end of things with, in terms of student contact, but it's sometimes very helpful to have seen how these things, where the ideas are coming from, what the pressures are on higher up in the system.

**Val Hazan** 13:26

Yeah, and I think, you know, that was the great thing. Obviously, UCL was a smaller institution at the time and, you know, you got to meet people from you know, all different faculties and I was on the equal ops committee, a number of these kinds of things and yeah, I think it was an interesting part. It didn't feel like admin as such. It was an interesting part of the job. You get to find out how UCL works, you know, who the main players were.

**Sophie Scott** 13:54

It is very easy to be in a sort of... because of the physical way that we're set up at university, you can just spend your entire job never really meeting anybody from any other part of UCL, even necessarily part of your own division. So, it's actually really, really helpful to have these experiences and kind of make these contacts, isn't it?

**Val Hazan** 14:16

Yeah, totally. And as heads of departments, I think, again, one of the joys that you might discover, you know, is interacting with people from outside your department, working with other heads of departments and sharing experiences.

**Sophie Scott** 14:17

And how did you find moving into a head of department role?

**Val Hazan** 14:38

Well, that was... I mean, it was challenging. So, I became head of department for the first time in 2000. So, it was in my I guess, early 40s. I'd been in the department for 20 years already, right. But some of my colleagues were professors when I was a student there. So, there was a lot of navigating, you know, diplomacy and working together and you know, it was a big department really, well, relatively. I mean, bigger than the current research departments. So no, I mean, it was exciting having been at UCL for so long, and in the department for so long, to, you know, have an opportunity to make changes, to work with people.

**Sophie Scott** 15:24

I'd certainly say that's the part of the job I hadn't quite expected to enjoy as much. It's actually really satisfying to be able to do positive things. Yeah, kind of contribute to the working life in a way that is not you know, you don't quite realise but of course, someone has to do that, otherwise lots of things don't work. I thought it was a sort of, maybe a slightly gruelling experience, but you get your reward in heaven as my father used to say, actually.

**Val Hazan** 15:49

There are gruelling aspects as well. You know, working with people I mean, I guess you have to like working with people. I was very loyal to UCL. It felt a natural thing to do.

**Sophie Scott** 16:17

Were you the first woman who was head of department?

**Val Hazan** 16:20

Yeah, I was and probably the youngest, I think.

**Sophie Scott** 16:24

No pressure then.

**Val Hazan** 16:26

It was a time of big change because you know, there was a lot of restructuring going on at university. So, when I started as head, we were in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Then we switched to Life Sciences. And then towards the end, you know, there was a major restructuring where the Faculty of Brain Sciences was formed. And we joined with Psychology to form the division of Psychology and Language Science. And that was a big, big change because that was the end of the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, which, you know, had a very proud history. And a lot of people had worked there in that department for many years, were very attached to the name, to the history of it, and having to navigate, you know, and so was I to be fair. So, having to, you know, manage all those changes. So, that was a decade that was really heavy for me, because on the home front, you know, we had kids very late as well. So, the kids were very young at that point. And I had several research grants, so it was all happening. I was getting involved in international committees and all that. So yeah, that was really a very stressful decade.

**Sophie Scott** 17:40

Would you have any, doesn't have to be advice, but kind of, you know, ideas for some of the ways that you found for coping with that stress?

**Val Hazan** 17:50

I don't think I coped well really. Yeah, it's hard. Yeah, it's difficult. I mean, I think obviously there are many challenges for.... If we think about the link between family life and work for women who, in the early parts of their career, if you like, you know, have children, are still establishing their career. And I suppose this is a situation where I was mid-career, had already quite a lot of responsibility, and then, you know, we had to fit in, you know, a family life and children at a point where I was used to working many, many hours. I carried on, to be fair.

**Sophie Scott** 18:34

I think the thing that changed for me and I really took this quite hard, was being, I used to write, I had a very kind of like, formal approach to writing where I would come into work, I still can't quite believe I used to routinely be arriving at work around 10 o'clock in the morning, but I'd get in around ten, sort of fiddle faddle around and get things done, probably go to the gym at lunchtime, and then after lunch, I'd start writing and then I would spend as long as I needed to writing. That was how, if I had something to write, that would be the shape of the day. I would write well into the evening if I needed to, and I had the time. And that just goes, that's gone. I can't do that anymore. My day starts much earlier and ends much earlier. And I could go back and do work in the evenings, but I don't. I like to not to. I have had to learn that if you've got 20 minutes when you could be writing you, you have no long run-up, you've got to do the writing, then. That's the time. That's the time you have.

**Val Hazan** 19:28

I mean, my situation was rather different, I have to admit that. I mean, my partner's a woman and we were both mums at home. And she took really the primary role, you know. And so, I was in a situation where obviously, I was not fully responsible for, you know, having to rush off to pick up children and whatever. But in a way, even though I had less of the childcare responsibility, there was always that immense feeling of guilt. So, you know, as a Head of Department, I was in the department a lot, I would work long hours but yeah, I would still feel that guilt you know? I was not returning home till seven or... yeah, you know. So, either you look after your children or you're guilty if you don't.

**Sophie Scott** 20:15

It's hard being a working parent, full stop. And I suppose one of the things that is true that I think is something that is a real benefit of academic life, is there is a little bit more flexibility around that then, in many jobs so I've, you know, kind of encountered other mums, because I live and work around the same bit of London, women, you had babies, when I had my son who were working for jobs that had simply no flexibility, they had to go back to work then. A lot of them just lost their jobs because they went back to work and just immediately, a reason was found to fire them. And then they were kind of running around trying to find new jobs or there were times when they had no choice about how they manage things. They had to get a nanny, then all their money is going to pay for a nanny. And I thought, you know, I have some, I've got some wiggle room. It's not easy. It's never gonna be easy. But no one ever looks at a paper and says, well, it was written at the weekend, it doesn't count. You know, there was there was some more flexibility. You have more say, I think over you how your day goes as an academic than many jobs do. Just because there's many jobs where... But it doesn't make it easy. None of it is easy and you do feel rotten.

**Val Hazan** 21:36

And also, I was an invisible parent in a way because legally, you know, I mean, my partner was the biological mum and, you know, we’re talking the period before civil partnerships. So, in the eyes of UCL, I was not a parent.

**Sophie Scott** 21:50

So, has that changed at all? Has there been improvements?

**Val Hazan** 21:54

Yes, yes, because I got really involved, both with UCL, obviously as part of a group, but you know, with others at UCL and with a union, the what was at the time, the AUT, in terms of, you know, really making sure that the definition of parenthood was inclusive.

**Sophie Scott** 22:13

Yeah. Because that's a massive deal.

**Val Hazan** 22:15

It is. And, you know, yeah, of course. And UCL were flexible, to be fair, you know, I had access to the UCL nursery, and, I put my son there and I got very involved in the issue of pensions, because that again, was a very...

**Sophie Scott** 22:32

Can we just explain that a bit because again, there was a big thing that you did here, this was a big achievement? So, the pension system used to be that if you were married...

**Val Hazan** 22:42

Yeah, you would get an automatic...

**Sophie Scott** 22:44

Your partner was part of your pension. So, if you expired, the pension would go to them, am I right?

**Val Hazan** 22:49

Yeah, yeah, that's right.

**Sophie Scott** 22:50

But if you weren't married?

**Val Hazan** 22:51

Then you could leave your... You could declare if you like who you wanted to be the beneficiary, but it was the trustees of the pension scheme who had the ultimate decision. So, yeah, you know, this was just an indicative, you know.

**Sophie Scott** 23:10

So, it didn't oblige them to do anything.

**Val Hazan** 23:11

No. And I think even though, even after the changes, I think it was still formally, you know, the trustee's decision, but there was a much stronger indication that, you know, if you declared a same sex partner, that that would be taken as an equivalent.

**Sophie Scott** 23:33

So, pre-civil partnerships, or marriage being possible, everybody who was in a gay relationship at UCL was in a situation where you didn't necessarily have any possibility of knowing.

**Val Hazan** 23:44

We had no guarantee. That's right. You know, and if you're the main wage earner, it's a very important consideration.

**Sophie Scott** 23:52

So, how did you go about changing that? What did you do? I can see that you can't just march in and say, well, we think you should do this differently.

**Val Hazan** 23:59

No, obviously, both UCL and the AUT were very receptive at the time, there was quite a lot of work on equal opportunities. Within the union, and again, you know, I'm not at all the natural activist, but somehow, you know, I got involved with the LGBT community committee in the union, and, you know, we just looked at what seemed to be priorities. That was one of them really.

**Sophie Scott** 24:28

So that's, I mean, that's, that's a huge thing that you've achieved in UCL. Is it something that's rolled out across the UK?

**Val Hazan** 24:34

Yes, it was. It was what was previous to the USS pension scheme. So, it was a national pension scheme. Yeah. UCL, just... So, it wasn't UCL based. At UCL, we were working more towards, you know, equal opportunities and the terminology used in various regulations for parental leave. But again, I didn't formally qualify for parental leave. Well, there wasn't parental leave. We just had maternity leave at the time. So yeah, so these are things also that were happening in that mad decade.

**Sophie Scott** 25:10

So, you were head of department, lots of research going on, you're doing your teaching and also leading sort of national changes.

**Val Hazan** 25:16

Not leading, but you know, being part of at least, yeah.

**Sophie Scott** 25:19

That's brilliant. Did you find time... Is there something else that you like spending your time doing? I know you ran away to sea; can you tell us about that?

**Val Hazan** 25:44

Yeah, so again, I have this incredibly, incredibly patient partner who realises that you know, I had this very, very stressful job and has always said, listen, you know, feel free to go off, do what you need to do. I'll be here looking after the kids, so that's really very much a blessing as well to be fair and I got involved in crewing on tall ships.

**Sophie Scott** 26:11

Hang on, that's crewing on tall ships. Can you define tall ships?

**Val Hazan** 26:14

Tall ships are like these pirate ships. Big, lots of sails, and you can actually go and sign up as crew as volunteer crew. So, you're actually running the ship in effect, obviously there's some professional crew around as well but you know, you do watches and you're putting sails up and down, you're steering the ship, etc. Cleaning, a lot of cleaning.

**Sophie Scott** 26:39

Where have the tall shops taken you?

**Val Hazan** 26:42

The most exciting trip really and that was the longest trip. It was before I took over for the second time as Head of Department, so it was a bit of a to have a bit of time off for that. I went from Brazil from Recife, all the way up to northern Canada to Halifax. It was at the time of the Football World Cup in Brazil actually, so we started off there, crossing the equator, crossing the Caribbean, Bermuda, through the triangle. It's amazing to be at sea. Again, when you have a very stressful job, you know, to be at sea when you don't see land for weeks and there's no real communication. It was just amazing really.

**Sophie Scott** 27:30

Do you find that? I don't know. There are so many different reasons to do things that take you out of your normal sitting at a desk or doing things at home. Sometimes I find that it's as much kind of meditative as it is good for your body to be doing exercise sessions. Does it fulfil that role for you?

**Val Hazan** 27:52

Imagine being at sea, it's totally meditative. You're spending hours you know, when you're not on watch literally staring at waves and at nothingness. You're up in the middle of the night, you know, from midnight to four in the morning in the pitch dark.

**Sophie Scott** 28:06

Someone's got to be doing it.

**Val Hazan** 28:08

So, there's a lot of time to think and did I think about work? Probably.

**Sophie Scott** 28:14

You're allowed to, I think it's forgivable. Did you see anything like interesting at sea, is there lots of stuff going on out there, does wildlife appear?

**Val Hazan** 28:23

Yeah, you do see whales and dolphins, but sometimes remarkably little, you know, for weeks. I think there was a period of two weeks where we really saw nothing, you know, and then we arrived in a small bay in the Grenadines, swam to the coast and there was a rum shack. It felt like we'd discovered land. It was a really amazing experience. I'm very, very lucky. I love travelling and being an academic, one of the great things is also you travel.

**Sophie Scott** 29:06

Yeah, I think I enjoy going about the business of travelling just as a thing to be on course for doing. I find it pleasing to be setting off on a journey, even if it's like getting on a train. I like going to airports, I like being en route.

**Val Hazan** 29:36

So, I have been doing some work with collaborators in Sydney. I absolutely love Sydney. But I managed to sail from Fiji to Sydney to spend three weeks working on spontaneous speech interaction. It was a great entrance to Sydney really.

**Sophie Scott** 29:58

Have your research interest kind of evolved as you've been... over your academic career?

**Val Hazan** 30:05

They have evolved a lot actually especially, you know, there was a real break about 10/11 years ago where I really switched direction. So I did this kind of very analytic work for many, many years, you know, looking at these very precise acoustic patterns, you know, and did work with children, children with hearing loss, children with dyslexia, bilinguals, you know, but always very much an analytic approach. And I had a real shock when I was working with a colleague from Spain, actually, and I was visiting the lab in Barcelona, and one of his PhD students was looking at spontaneous speech. And this was, I don't know, 20 years ago or something, and I've never actually looked at spontaneous speech. And it was a total revelation because all these little acoustic patterns I'd been so carefully analysing and looking at, they weren't even there. Half of them, you know, syllables missing, sounds missing. And really that was the beginning of, I suppose I could have given up all together, 20 years of my life, you know.

**Sophie Scott** 31:15

It didn't take away from what you can learn from the highly performed speech.

**Val Hazan** 31:20

But more and more, I really felt we must be looking, you know, at really speech and communication and at real speech. And you know, it's the same thing when we do studies with children with dyslexia, because, you know, we were finding that there was the whole question of whether they had perceptual deficits and whether that contributed to difficulties in learning to read. And, you know, we were finding it first of all, that it was really only a subset of children. You know, even if you got group effects. You know, when you looked at individual children, it was only a few who were below normal. But also, there was a very strong link with attention. So, we interspersed kind of easy sounds within the tests that we were doing. And we found that, you know, all the children who were fine, identified these without any difficulty at the beginning of the test, but by presentation number 40, the kids with dyslexia, you know, were having much greater, were making more errors in identifying these really easy stimuli, right. So clearly, you know, you start wondering, well, is the test actually telling me something about the reality of these difficulties or is it that some of these difficulties are tasks related or attention related? So, I guess, you know, gradually I really felt it was much, you know, it was really important to be looking at speech and communication. The communicative aspect of speech is important. And that means not only looking perception, but also production. So, you know, my work veered more towards production.

**Sophie Scott** 33:01

Yes, I'm the same, via a slightly different route, I have ended up in a very similar position because... When I do talks on laughter, I'm always like you're 30 times more likely to laugh when there's someone else with you. The same is true for talking, isn't it? It doesn't really happen outside of interactions. If you were to look at humans, like we look at songbirds, you'd say, these are the situations when they sing, they sing when they're around others.

**Val Hazan** 33:29

And, you know, speech is so incredibly dynamic, right? The way that we speak is totally determined by the person we're speaking to, the situation so reading a sentence in a booth is not representative of what we do in real life, really.

**Sophie Scott** 33:44

I gave a talk in a speech production conference around the CNS, so for cognitive neuroscientists, who... There's many fewer people who look at speech production in that world, but they were all there. I just gave an example of a BKB sentence being like that. The clown had a funny face. That was me, and then me saying, recorded from in the anechoic chamber when I'm talking to someone in between things happening. I was like, I'm gonna have someone come in here with me or something. Yeah, there's nothing. Everything's different, the whole generation the way things are articulated, just the inclusion of loads of sounds has simply gone. And whatever is happening here and as well, and actually I was saying in that context, because they were all very interested in error correction. I said, look at the spontaneous speech. There's almost nothing right. None of it is being corrected. And it's all being understood. We are asking the questions incorrectly here, I think.

**Val Hazan** 34:41

Acoustic patterns are probably in a way the least, not maybe as important as context and whatever.

**Sophie Scott** 34:51

Oh, yes, definitely. Definitely. I think yeah, it's sort of... It's very interesting when you look at the brain response to speech, and it took me ages to realise what this meant, but you get as much if not more activation in the brain associated with all the stuff that's got nothing to do with the intelligibility of the speech, right? And I spent many years trying to control all that away, till I realised actually, that's probably telling you something about the intelligibility of the speech, but it also cares about all the other stuff, about who's talking, and all this sort of dynamic element and all the things that feed into that from identity to emotion and the social aspects of who you're talking to. Absolutely. If you were starting again, now, would you do anything differently?

**Val Hazan** 35:41

I think I would have more of a game plan. Everything's happened to me is pretty much accidental. I think nowadays, you think much more from the beginning of your career, okay, you know, I'm working towards this promotion, this, that and the other. What do I need to do for this initial promotion and whatever? I think, you know, at the time that was really not a factor really. And also, I think I've flitted from one thing to another quite a lot in my career. I think it makes life more interesting, in a way, career wise, maybe being the big fish. I don't know.

**Sophie Scott** 36:24

There was a study that they looked at people who had changed research topics, particularly earlier in their career. They pay, there's a cost at the time. But they tend to be more productive when they further in their career, because they have a wider range of things that they've built their research on. And that's certainly me. I was quite a long time getting to the stage where I could say I was reasonably successful, but I did a lot of different things. And at the time, I remember people saying you're making horrible mistake. You've got to focus in on one thing and stop changing so often, I guess, but I have no regrets. But at the time, I suppose you could never really plan to do that, like I'll find different things interesting, therefore I'll do it. You know, it's not really a game plan. And I think again, it's a blessing and a curse of academic careers, there isn't, we're not like the police force or something with a really clear hierarchy, you know, this is how you navigate a career within this service. It is much more ad hominem and ad feminem in terms of what you bring to it and the things that you start enjoying, things that you get good at, and things that someone else thinks you would be good at. And you can't necessarily have a game plan for that, I think.

**Val Hazan** 37:39

No, but I think I mean, I don't regret this kind of balance between, I suppose research, teaching and being involved in other things, administration, international networks or whatever. Yeah, I think you know, some people are much more research focused and that works very well for them. But I think for me, that's matched my skills probably better really.

**Sophie Scott** 38:00

You seem to have done really well across the board on that. You've left UCL in a much better way.

**Val Hazan** 38:06

I haven't quite left yet.

**Sophie Scott** 38:10

I realised even as I was saying that, that suggested you've gone. [INAUDIBLE]

**Val Hazan** 38:16

I did go half-time.

**Sophie Scott** 38:17

How are you finding that?

**Val Hazan** 38:19

Yeah, that's a challenge, you know, because, again, if you've been used to working, you know, long hours or whatever, and suddenly, you know, the number of responsibilities you have, and the work that you're doing is not necessarily halved suddenly. It effects quite a lot. Because I don't expect to exactly work, you know, half time because as a full time academic, you work many more hours than you do anyway. But you know, there has to still be a difference. So, you have to find ways of not drifting to your office at home, you know, because you can't think of anything better to do. that's a very easy thing to do really.

**Sophie Scott** 39:01

I'm hoping that this will be something we can pick up in a future podcast, with somebody starting. There's a lot of different reasons why people do part-time work. But someone who's been taking this from an early point in their careers is something I'll be very interested in kind of getting to grips with and getting some ideas about, but is there anything else that you'd like to tell me because I think we're probably getting towards the end?

**Val Hazan** 39:23

No, I still think UCL is a great place to be. You know, I've enjoyed working with so many great colleagues. And, you know, and I suppose I wish I'd made better use of the flexibility that we're supposed to have.

**Sophie Scott** 39:37

You probably helped us get the flexibility.

**Val Hazan** 39:38

I somehow never quite managed myself to be flexible, and I think maybe that goes back from very early in my career where, you know, we were expected to be in the lab every day all day and you know, I never quite got away from that mould. So, I would encourage people to make full use of...

**Sophie Scott** 39:58

Definitely, and there's a lot of support for it really.

**Val Hazan** 40:01

Yeah, and I think work-life balance, the whole idea is much more acceptable now and accepted. And I think it is important because you probably do better research when you're less stressed.

**Sophie Scott** 40:13

It's critical, I think. I saw Sue [UNCLEAR] give a really good talk about the kind of the myth that doing incredibly long hours and work somehow leads to better work and it doesn't. You've got to be able to do... Now I think the only thing I've got wise about with age is I'm quite strict about kind of guarding bits of the day where I do things that are nothing to do with work and will be you know, either just pure family time or exercise or something that I know will make me feel better. I've structured the day that way.

**Val Hazan** 40:45

Thank you very, very much. It’s been an absolute delight talking to you. Thank you so much.

**Sophie Scott** 40:55

Thanks for listening. This has been What Works. My name is Sophie Scott.