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Report 2012

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A Comparison of the Written Media Preferences of Multilingual Speakers in the Rusholme Area

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1.1: Introduction

The following study was carried out in the Rusholme area of south Manchester. The research aimed to find out the language preferences of multilingual speakers when reading written media. As stated in the research plan, the Rusholme area was well suited for our study given the high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity. It is home to the widely renowned 'Curry Mile' on Wilmslow Road, which provided us with a readymade focal point for our research. The statistics mentioned in the first part of our research, found on www.manchester.gov.uk, provided us with proof of the particularly high density of non-white ethnic groups in the Rusholme community, further reinforcing the suitability of the area to our study.

As stated in our Fieldwork Plan, we carried out the research using a verbal questionnaire. We collected answers to the questionnaire from 30 local residents, equally split by gender and age group, outside newsagents and barber shops along the 'Curry Mile'. These precise areas were selected because we found both newsagents and barber shops in the area to supply customers with written media in both English and various other South Asian languages, so the topic was likely to be fresh in our participants' minds as we questioned them.

Our hypothesis before conducting the research stated that age would be a key factor in the written preferences of speakers in the community. It was our expectation that speakers of the younger age bracket in our study would more often choose to neglect their native tongue, (where English was not a native language for the participant) when choosing their preferred written media. Based largely upon intuition and previous published work, we predicted that the older generations of a speech community would present stronger ties to their native language, and in turn, we would see a greater number of participants choosing written media in a language other than English. This would in turn display a stronger tie to the native roots of each speech community from the older generations. The results of our research, on the whole, proved this to be true. However, there were slight differences to the initial predictions.

As stated in our initial fieldwork plan, our means of data collection was to be a questionnaire (see appendix for example questionnaire). The questions that we planned to ask are also outlined in the fieldwork research plan. However, when conducting our research on the 'Curry Mile' it became evident that participant responses were sometimes more vague than our questions allowed them to be. If we were to ignore this fact, then our data could be said to be invalid. Consequently, we chose to add an extra section entitled 'further comments'. In many cases, this extra section allowed our questionnaire to produce more informative responses. The comments that were made give us a greater insight as to why or why not a participant chooses to use written media in a specific language. For instance, one participant remarked in

this section; “...there aren’t any decent magazines in my language.” A comment like this is extremely important to our research as it gives a direct response as to why they do not choose written media in their native language. Although it would be inaccurate to make a straightforward assumption that this is the only reason this participant chooses not to read media in their native language, it is more reliable than the broad generalisations that our original questionnaire may have elicited.

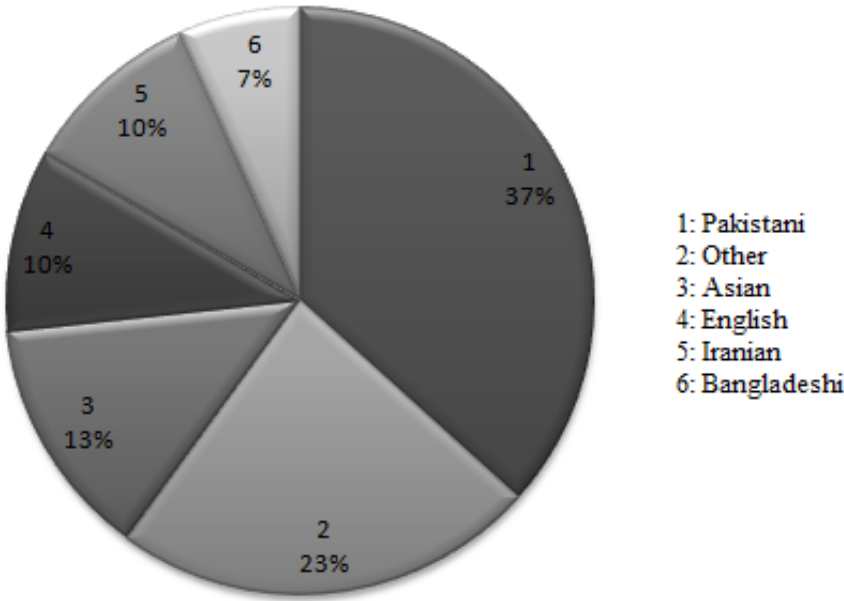
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2.1: Numerical Results

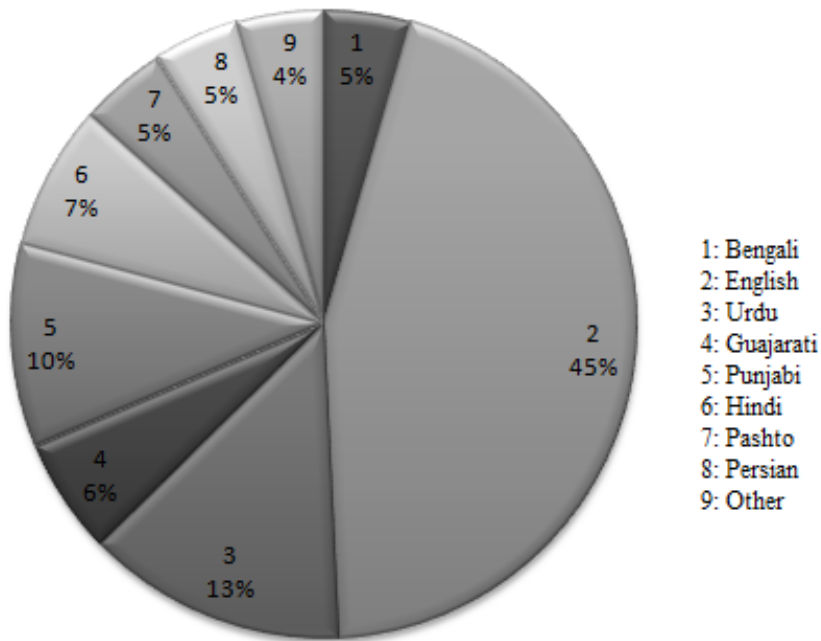
The following are quantitative data collated from the information given on each questionnaire.

Age Group	Percentage %
18 – 25	90%
26 – 49	90%
50 +	100%
Overall	93.3%

(fig.1: A table to show the percentages of participants that are multilingual speakers)



(fig.2: A pie chart to illustrate the distribution of ethnicities within our target sample)



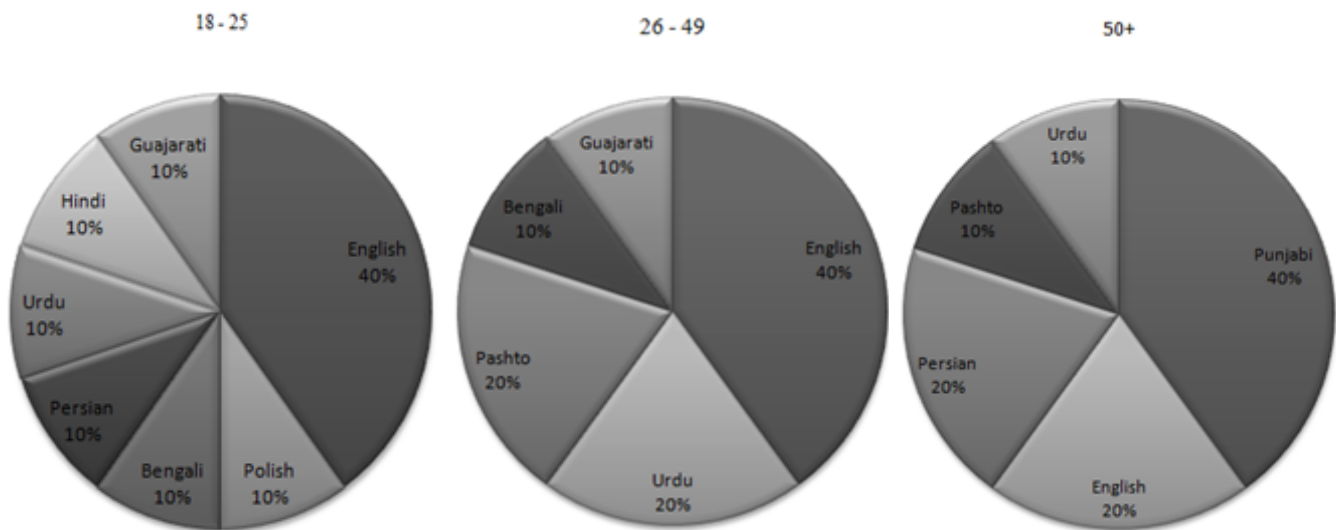
(fig. 3: A pie chart to illustrate the distribution of languages spoken, alongside the participants native language, within our target sample)

Age Group	Percentage %
18 – 25	50 %
26 – 49	70%
50+	40%
Overall	53.3%

(fig. 4: A table to show the percentage of speakers that choose to use written media in their native language, within our sample)

Age Group	Percentage %
18 – 25	50%
26 -49	30%
50+	60%
Overall	46.7%

(fig. 5: A table to show the percentage of speakers that choose not to use written media in their native language, within our sample)



(fig.6: Three pie charts to show the distribution of native languages amongst each age set of our target sample)

2.2: Qualitative Data

Some of the participants made extra comments about the topic whilst being questioned. We decided to record these comments; unrestricted, qualitative data like this provided us with rich source material as the participant has had an opportunity to be truly open ended in their responses. The comments provided us with more information than we had expected from the questionnaires. For example, one participant in the younger age group said that they preferred to read English magazines “because there wasn’t enough choice in Urdu”. This gave us another point of view on the issue that was not covered in our questionnaire. Insights such as this allowed us to take more things into account when analysing our quantitative data in order to better explain the results we acquired.

2.3: General Trends

The data gathered from the questionnaires illustrates that of the 30 participants interviewed, an overwhelming majority considered themselves as multilingual. Interestingly, the eldest of the three age groups we interviewed were all multilingual; with nine out of ten of the youngest and middle bands of participants also able to speak at least two languages. Furthermore, roughly half of those asked chose to read media in their native language. At first glance, this perhaps seems a relatively low amount but we hope that by adding the final question to the original questionnaire – asking for any further comments, there may be some clues in order suggest why this may be the case. The middle (26-49) age category led in terms of reading written media in their native language whilst the percentage of the oldest (50+) age category was considerably lower than this and in fact, the lowest of all three age ranges. It is important to note at this stage that the native language of 33.3% of those interviewed was indeed English. This was by far the most common native language of those interviewed which was to be expected with a random stratified sample.

3.1: General Discussion

At face value, fig.1 suggests that the percentage of people we interviewed were almost entirely all 'multilingual', with 93.3% claiming they could use two or more languages. This statistic is one that we were somewhat surprised by, but after analysing the qualitative data in the final question, there is perhaps a pertinent explanation. The problem is perhaps entwined in how 'multilingual' is defined. We found that during the interview questionnaires, a significant number of participants added that despite being able to use another language other than their native one to some extent, the degree to which they were able to do so appears to vary. There were comments revealing that a considerable number of participants (9 in total) could only read or write the language they had previously stated but still considered themselves as 'multilingual'.

Our data would seem to suggest that it is not the eldest age ranges that choose more often to read media in their native language, contrary to what our hypothesis predicted. However, these figures can be misleading. As stated in our fieldwork plan, natives of Pakistan, for instance, may speak many different languages. Yet it is often the case that within the communities Urdu is commonly seen as the lingua franca. Given that the largest percentage of our participants (37%) belonged to the Pakistani ethnicity, and the second most common language spoken among our sample was Urdu (13%) it would seem appropriate to suggest that whilst many of the oldest participants choose not to read in media of their own language, they choose instead to read in what could perhaps be said to be the lingua franca of the community. Out of the 60% that didn't read in their native 50% read in Urdu. Of this 50% every participant stated that they were able to understand three different languages. These figures would seem to suggest that although 60% of the older age bracket chooses not to read in their native language, many do however choose a language affiliated to their native language. Despite the fact that this does not display complete language maintenance, it could be argued that it does show a degree of preservation for the language and culture. It is a possibility that the choice to read in Urdu is born out of the fact that the quality of media available in Urdu surpasses that of many other languages, a comment frequently made in our 'further comments' section of the questionnaire.

Something to consider when analysing our results is the relative lack of foreign language written media sources in Rusholme compared to English. All newsagents and barber shops we inspected had most of the popular English newspapers and a wide range of English magazines catering to many different interests. Foreign language written media was much sparser. Fewer places stocked such media, and the places that did had a much smaller range of foreign written media than English. To exacerbate this, the vast majority of foreign language written media found was written in Urdu – this lack of variety makes it even more difficult for people of certain ethnic groups to access written media from their own language. This is consistent with some of the comments made by our participants, who stated the poor choice of foreign language written media, and must be considered when our results are analysed. With less choice, ethnic groups in Rusholme may be forced to read English written media regardless of their preferences.

3.2: Relevant Literature

A previous study relevant to our fieldwork can be found in Milroy (1995), specifically her research into the Bilingual Speech of migrants. She states that social networks and a belonging to ethnic groups can be a significant factor in the geographic distribution of migrants (1995:21). An example of this was highlighted by Saifullah-Khan (1987), who observed that Indo-Pakistanis in Bradford, Yorkshire originate principally from the Punjab region. This in turn will reflect in the distribution of language spoken. Within our own

study, we found large numbers of older Punjabi speakers within the Rusholme area; 40% of those over the age of 50 surveyed were speakers. In contrast, we found a greater diversity in the languages spoken among younger participants, with languages from the wider Asia area such as Urdu, Bengali, Hindi and Gujarati spoken in more or less an equal distribution by those aged 26-49. This may suggest that, in a similar manner Saifullah-Khan's study, initial migrants can be traced to a specific region within the subcontinent, with people from the wider South-East Asia area moving to the vicinity subsequently, taking advantage of established social networks and similar communities. However further and much more detailed research beyond the scope of this report would be needed to validate this.

Milroy (1995:27) also studied the Iberian and Algerian communities in Grenoble, France. She presented the idea that the children of immigrant parents developed a form of bilingualism that is based on a functional distribution of the codes available to them. Her studies led to two notable conclusions. On one hand, the observed first generation speakers employed a type of code-switching that is relatively basic; they used only what was necessary to show their intentions to communicate. Conversely, second generation speakers employ code-switching which is variable dependant on their command of the languages involved. A good knowledge will lead to more balanced bilingual speech, whereas weaker speakers use a more basic type of code-switching, which is more symbolic rather than linguistically important (1995:39). Concerning our own fieldwork, parallels can be found to this with regards to the consumption of written media, particularly in relation to younger members of the community. Half of the youngest participants preferred to use written media in their native language, while half used their non-native language. This could indicate that the younger generations of the Asian community in Rusholme may be more adept at switching between languages they read in.

Possible reasons for this have been discussed by Saviile-Troike (1989), who covered a wide range of communication issues applicable to multilingual societies. According to Saviile-Troike (1989:51), topic is a key determining factor in language choice for multilingual speakers; different topics and subject areas are often associated with different languages, and this – alongside the setting and participants – is crucial. This is applicable to our study because some events and topics will be discussed by some written forms of media that are not discussed by others. For instance, if a member of Rusholme's Asian community wishes to be informed on events occurring in the locality, reading a local English paper such as the Manchester Evening News would fulfil this. In the same way, if they are interested in Pakistani politics, a Pakistani national newspaper such as The Dawn would be informative.

In terms of language maintenance, shift and spread, Saviile-Troike (1989:206) cites the work of Harris (1979), who investigated Judeo-Spanish use in both the USA and Israel. Harris found that older Ladino speakers in New York and Israel strongly maintained their language, while declining to pass it on to younger members of the community. The older speakers acknowledged that the language had served the initial migrants well in terms of sustaining social networks and a sense of community, but now had little purpose. However, it cannot be said that this is necessarily always the case. Saviile-Troike goes on to note the case of Armenian communities in the USA; Armenian has been maintained from the initial migrant population, and is still in widespread use today (1989:207). In comparison to our own study, we found bilingualism to be prevalent throughout the age groups who participated in our study.

In relation to written media consumption, we found that the oldest group of participants read more often (60% of the time) in a non-native language than in their native. In contrast, the mid-range group of participants, aged 26-49, read 70% of the time in their native language. It could be argued the oldest age group read in non-native language in order to attempt to fit in to their environment, while the middle age group reverted back to their native language in order to maintain their linguistic and historical identity. However, other factors suggest that this is not the case. For those aged 50+, reading in a non-native language was often not necessarily English, but rather other, more accessible lingua franca such as Urdu. For those aged 26-49, 40% had English as their native language, suggesting that there is not a widespread movement - inspired by non-linguistic ideals- to read in a language other than English, but rather a desire to

use media in the language they are most competent in. This final point is reflected in the fact that 33.3% of those in the youngest category who were not native English speakers chose not to read in their native language, which supports our hypothesis that younger participants would prefer to use English, but from our work we can conclude that it is difficult to make clear distinctions other than it seems to be down to what is easiest for the individual.

The values and world view of a community can also be a factor in language maintenance. Depending on a community's perception of their situation, their language can either be maintained or disregarded. Saville-Troike (1989:209) highlights the investigation by Hamp (1978) on Albanian speakers in Italy and Greece as an example of this. In Italy, the Albanian community seem to have a strong identity with their language, which has led to the continued use of Albanian localisms. In contrast, Albanian speakers in Greece have embraced the Greek language and culture, and value the use of the local language. Within our study we found no specific evidence to suggest that there has been a pre-conceived movement within the community to neither embrace English nor maintain languages traditionally spoken by migrants. Instead, it appears that members of the community use the language that they are most comfortable with and that they are most knowledgeable. While factors such as topic and subject have played a part in the choices our participants have made, linguistic ability seems to be a determining factor in the choice of written media used. Further study is required in order to determine what levels of prestige may or may not be associated with different languages in the area.

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4.1: Conclusion

It is not straightforward to draw any definite conclusions from the information we have collated. There are many social factors we have looked towards in an attempt to answer why people choose to or choose against using written social media forms in a given language. Although there are some similarities with literature we have looked at, it appears it may be more down to the individual's own thoughts and how highly they regard a certain language they speak, or in fact, the quality of written media available to them. Perhaps a study looking to gain insight on this, and what domains multilingual speakers use different languages in, is an idea for future study.

Despite the results we have collated and any consequential trends we have made from them, it is imperative to consider the shortcomings to the study. First and possibly foremost, the sample size is particularly small; due to time restraints, we could only interview people thirty people in the Rusholme area and even this proved to be a struggle. As with all studies using interview questionnaires, it can often prove difficult to find people willing to take part – for a number of different reasons. It is also important to bear in mind how the observer's paradox could affect the results with participants perhaps not strictly telling the truth or providing answers that they deem desirable.

It is fair to say that this study at the very least provides scope for further work into the topic and provides a background for perhaps a larger-based study in the future.

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Milroy, L. 1995. *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-disciplinary perspectives on code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Appendix:

(Examples of written media in foreign languages, found in newsagents along the Curry Mile)



(The following are two examples of uncompleted/completed questionnaires from our sample)

Gender?		
Male	Female	
Age range?		
18-25	26-49	50+
Occupation?		
Ethnicity (e.g. white British, Black Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Pakistani etc.)?		
What is your native language?		
Do you speak more than one language?		
If so, what languages do you speak?		
How often do you use written media? (magazines, newspapers) Never less than once a month less than once a week more than once a week daily		
Do you use written media in your native language?		
If not, what language do your prefer to use?		

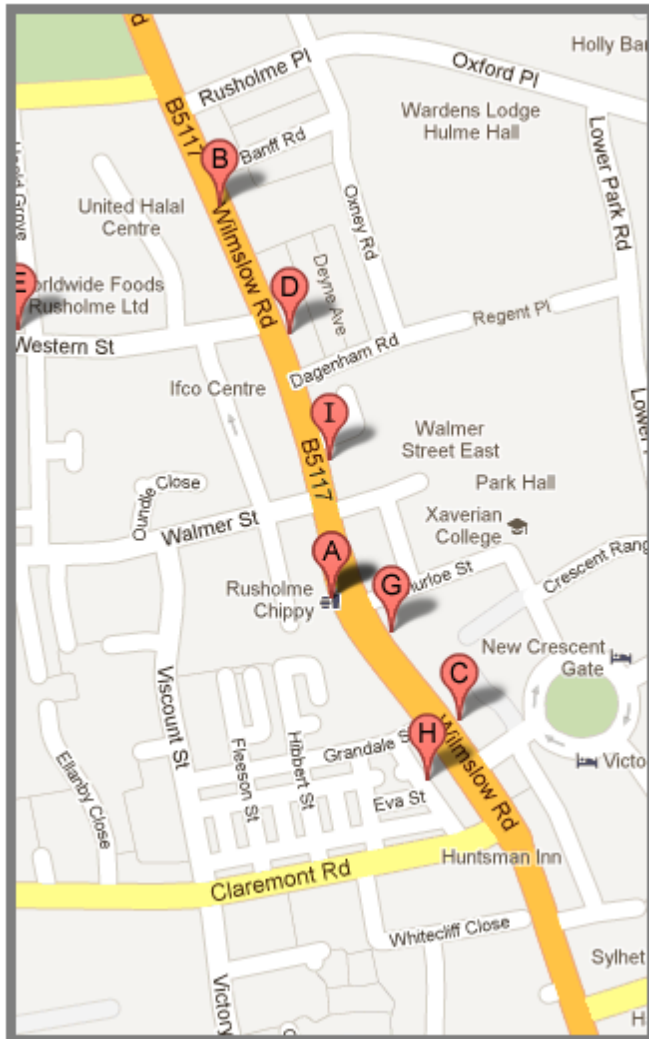
Questionnaire

Gender? Male Female
Age range? 18-25 26-49 50+
Occupation? landlord
Ethnicity (e.g. white British, black African, Bangladeshi, Pakistani)? Pakistani
What is your native language? Urdu
Do you speak more than one language? Yes
If so, what languages do you speak? Urdu + English
How often do you use written media? (magazines, newspapers) Never less than once a month less than once a week more than once a week daily
Do you use written media in your native language? Yes
If not, what language do you prefer to use? -

Extra Comments

Read it often but for sport reads english papers

(A map of the Curry Mile and surrounding area)



(Declaration of confidentiality form to be signed by participants)

University of Manchester Societal Multilingualism Fieldwork Information

A comparison of the written media preferences of multilingual speakers in the Rusholme area.

Hello and thank you for taking part in our research on multilingual speakers' written media preferences in the Rusholme area. The data you provide will be remain anonymous at all times, and please remember you are entitled to opt out of taking part in this study at any given time.

For further information or to answer any queries you may have after completing this questionnaire, please contact us via timothy.emerton@student.manchester.ac.uk or please contact or supervisor Dr. Nick Wilson via nick.wilson@manchester.ac.uk

Thank you again for taking part.

I agree to take part in this study and for the information I provide to be used in analysis.

Signed: