

# लुप्तौलिंगुवा MANCHESTER

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**Language Proficiency across different Linguistic  
Domains amongst students in Heald Place  
Primary School**

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## Introduction

This study is part of an on-going project focused on schools in Greater Manchester. As multilingualism is increasing in the UK due to immigration, it is important to maintain an accurate understanding of the growth of multilingualism in urban areas. As Clyne and Kipp (2006) have shown in their research in Australia, the government need to constantly change and update language policy in order to match the shifting levels of migration and language use of the population. Therefore, this paper provides a useful addition to the Multilingual Manchester project by outlining the current levels of multilingualism amongst pupils in a South Manchester primary school (hereon referred to as the case study school).

Our original aim was to elicit quantifiable data regarding the domains of language use, the language competency and the language preference of pupils. However, we encountered numerous problems which we had not anticipated. Primarily, we did not receive permission to conduct our surveys from the high school we had originally planned and secondly the number of questionnaires we were able to elicit was significantly reduced.

Initially, we planned to carry out our research at a North Manchester high school. However, this was not possible due to issues with the school's schedule. We were later allocated to our case study school which is situated in the area of southern Manchester called Rusholme. This school serves a diverse population in an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Skills in English communication, language and literacy remain particularly low. Therefore, many pupils are still in the early stage of learning English as a second language. According to the OFSTED report of 2007, the main first languages spoken by pupils are Somali, Urdu and Bengali. The Department of Education (2013) have stated that 94% of pupils at this institution do not have English as a first language. The school are evidently aware of this language learning difficulty and have worked to improve their teaching methods. This has led them to achieve the Leading Aspect Award for the school's English as an additional language teaching provision.

## Methodology

In order to elicit a large quantity of data in a very restricted time period, we used highly structured interviews with closed questions. This method is advantageous as it allowed us to pick out any subtleties from the participants more effectively than when using questionnaires. For example, we were able to identify a child who was answering questions in an untruthful manner during the survey. This method was useful as it allowed us to gather quantifiable data in a small period of time, which unstructured interviews or ethnographic observation would not have allowed.

Although we attempted to gather quantifiable data regarding the language preference of pupils, unfortunately, this was not possible as we had a restricted time period within the school. We were consequently only able to gather qualitative data with a small number of students regarding the issue of language preference.

Finally, the techniques we used to test the proficiency of pupils in their native languages are also of importance. Following Cronbach and Meehl (1955), we avoided some of the potential problems regarding developing consistent criteria for judging unknown languages by using language testing procedures which measured the rates of pauses and hesitations made by the speaker. This allowed us to test language competency without a prior knowledge of the language in question. Firstly, we looked at the fluency rates of pupils for individual tasks such as counting from 1-10. Next, we calculated an average fluency for certain groups of pupils in order to see if there is a correlation between language domain and language proficiency overall. Although calculating the average fluency score has revealed some interesting findings in our study, this method is somewhat problematic for a number of reasons. Significantly, any inconsistencies or individual variation amongst pupils would not be reflected in the average score. Furthermore, measuring the fluency of pupils is problematic as different researchers may have interpreted the fluency of the child in different ways. Despite the overall constraints we encountered, we were able to share our data with another research group and in a combined effort we conducted a total of 102 interviews.

## Findings and Discussion

In contrast with the Department of Education report (2013) we found that 98% of the pupils we interviewed do not have English as a first language. In relation to our case study school there is a significant lack of data regarding the levels of language use amongst pupils since 2007. The chart below provides up to date information regarding the distribution of ethnic minority (or community) languages in the school.

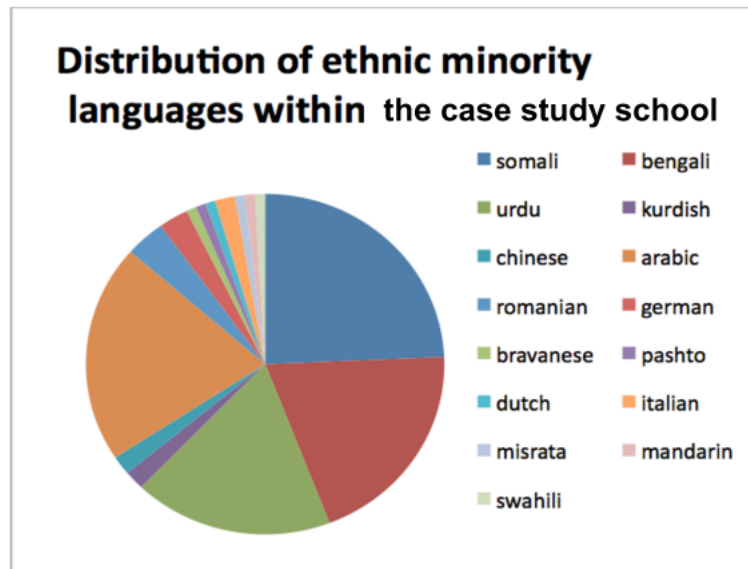


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates that the 4 most common community languages spoken in the case study school are Somali (24%), Arabic (21%), Bengali (20%) and Urdu (18%). This chart shows that since the last available OFSTED report of 2007, there has been an increase in Arabic-speaking students attending the school. Arabic has now overtaken Bengali as the second most widely spoken language, which may have consequences for the language policy of the school in general. As this may be evidence of a general increase in Arabic speakers in this area, this data potentially has consequences for updating the language policy in the Rusholme area of South Manchester as a whole.

Overall, our results portray a high level of multilingualism in the case study school. There are a total of 15 different languages spoken amongst the 102 pupils we interviewed, whilst 20 of these students additionally could speak a small amount of a

third language. We next outline the data regarding the use of languages other than English in different linguistic domains. Our findings have thus been particularly influenced by the work of Joshua Fishman.

As Fishman (1965) highlights, we need to make an important distinction between multilingual comprehension and multilingual production. The chart below therefore measures pupils' comprehension of their native language across several different domains. We further measured students' production of their native language across the same range of domains in order to test Fishman's hypothesis (Figure 4).

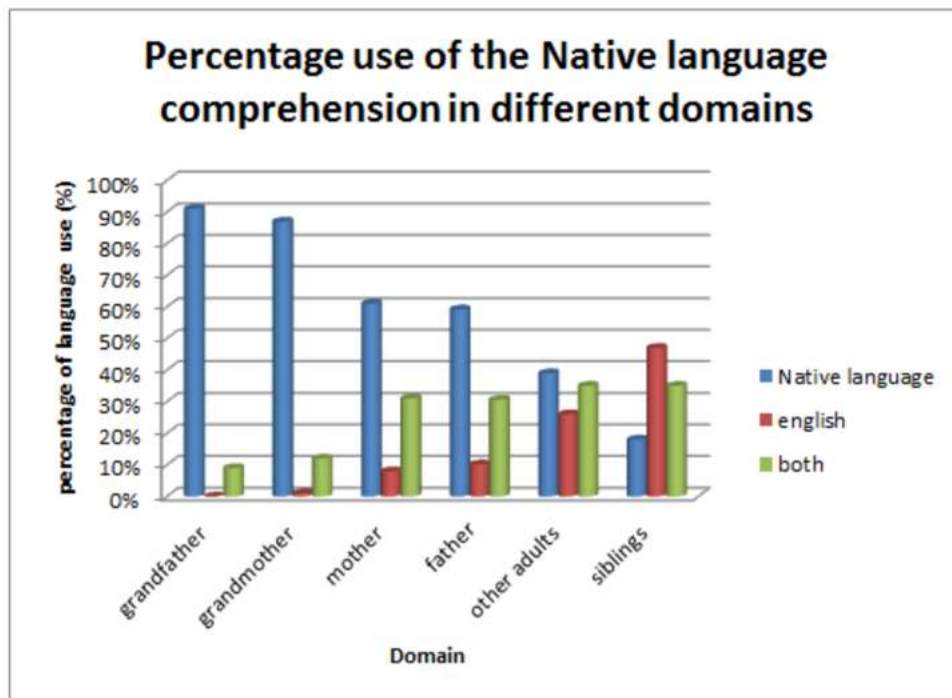


Figure 2

Percentage use of the languages spoken to the child across different domains

	Native language	English	Both
Grandfather	91%	0%	9%
Grandmother	87%	1%	12%
Mother	61%	8%	31%
Father	59%	10%	31%
Other adults	39%	26%	35%
Siblings	18%	47%	35%

Figure 3

Figure 2 and 3 clearly support the work of both Braunshausen (1928) and Fishman (1965) who specifically distinguished between individual family members in their exploration of language use within certain domains. We found that certain language behaviour is expected of particular individuals rather than just particular spatial environments.

Thus, the grandparents of pupils in our study are most likely to exclusively use the native language when addressing the child. 61% of the pupils we interviewed said that their mother does not, or very rarely speaks to them in English. We suggest this is evidence of the native language being used as a marker of shared identity amongst close family members. Furthermore, our findings support Fishman who recognises that language behaviour may be more than merely a matter of individual preference or facility but also a matter of role relations.

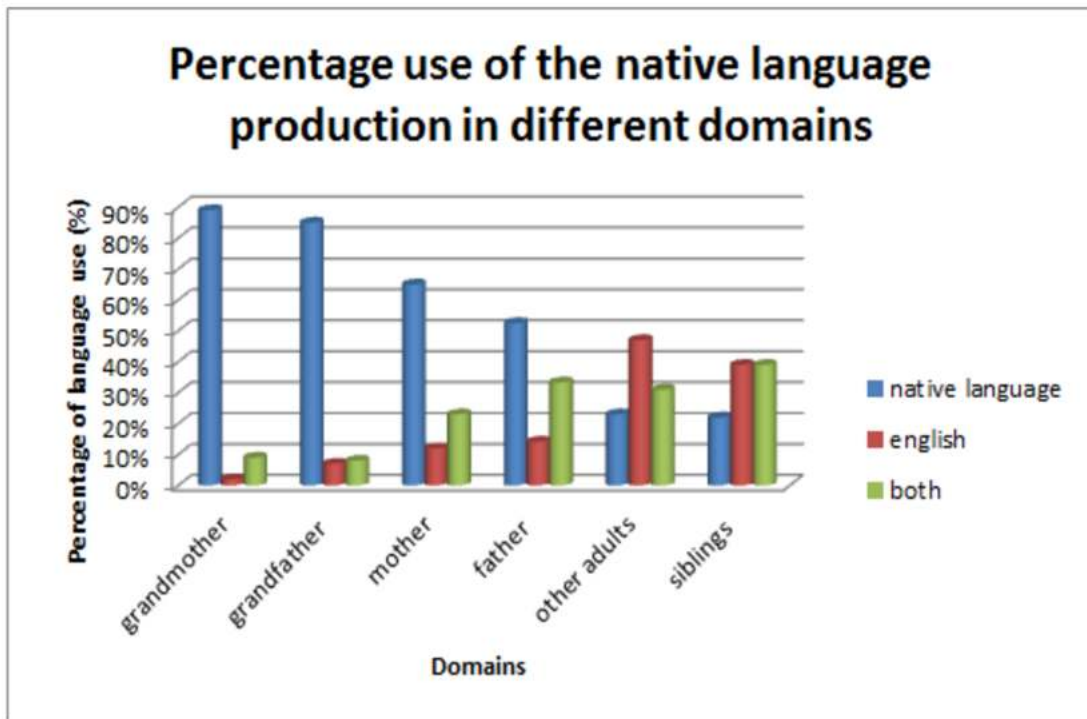
A clear example of this process is shown by a number of children in our study who reported that their parents use English most frequently when telling them off. We argue this could be due to the more formal status of English in comparison to the native tongue. Therefore, the parents are fulfilling a particular role of dominance and superiority during these interactions and switching to English helps them to momentarily emphasise this more serious and powerful social role. Indeed, in such situations of code switching, Gal (1979:116) has noted that the more prestigious variety apparently has greater force because it sounds more distant and harsh.

Overall, it is evident from the graph that 47% of children were addressed by their siblings in English compared to a mere 1% of grandmothers who utilise only English when addressing the children. This is supported by the data in Figure 4, and shows that in the case study school, pupils use their native language most frequently with the older generation. Fishman argues that the language choice of people across linguistic domains can give a clear understanding of the progress of language maintenance and language shift. Our data suggests that children are at the third stage of Fishman's analysis of language shift (1965:66).

As Figure 4 shows, both languages now function independently of each other, English is most frequently used overall and the use of the native language has decreased into the most private domains.

	Native language	English	Other
Grandmother	89%	2%	9%
Grandfather	85%	7%	8%
Mother	65%	12%	23%
Father	53%	14%	33%
Other adults	23%	47%	31%
Siblings	22%	39%	39%

Figure 4



Percentage use of the languages spoken by the child in different domains

Figure 5



In comparison with the data regarding language comprehension, a higher percentage of pupils are addressed by 'other adults' in their native tongue, whilst a higher percentage of children reply in English when speaking to 'other adults' (e.g. teachers, uncles, aunts). This could be another clear example of the importance of role-relations in linguistic domain analysis.

We suggest that English is viewed as the more prestigious and more formal language, due to its connotations with the school environment. Thus, pupils may use English in more formal situations when speaking to adults who they feel less comfortable around, even if these adults speak to the pupil in their native tongue. These adults may be appropriating the pupils' native language when addressing the child in order to reduce the social distance between them and to convey a shared identity (Gal 1979). However, the pupils' language choice significantly changes when addressing both the mother and father. When interacting with their parents, the pupils appear to speak their native tongue most of the time, whilst code-switching is most likely to take place when interacting with siblings.

Gal's study (1979) is of particular relevance here. He analysed the use of German and Hungarian diachronically in the area of Oberwarters. Gal found the trend in language choice over time had changed for young adolescents. Whilst Hungarian had previously been the preferred language in all domains, the use of German was gradually increasing over time especially amongst the younger generation. This was attributed to a change in the domain in which the language was used. Hungarian was used mostly with parents, grandparents and close family, whilst in school, German was significantly more dominant. This was partly because the German language was seen as necessary for progression in work and higher education at this time.

Our findings show that English is increasingly being used amongst younger generations including siblings and close friends inside the private domains for similar reasons to those highlighted by Gal. Pupils explained that firstly, it is seen as normative that English is the language in which they should be taught at school. Secondly, children consider themselves more proficient in the English language overall. Thus, following the work of Fishman (1965) and Gal (1979), our findings suggest that a language shift may be in process towards English in all public domains. This has consequences for the

language policy of the school, and calls for the introduction of further measures to ensure that community languages are maintained amongst the younger generation. We next attempt to calculate how the use of language in certain domains is influencing the fluency of pupils in community languages.

Percentage of Pupils language fluency score in their native language

	Body parts	Count 1-10	Description of family members	Daily routine
Not at all	11%	3%	21%	14%
Hesitantly	14%	14%	16%	14%
Immediately	71%	83%	63%	72%

Figure 6

Figure 6 shows the level of competency of the children in their native language (not English). It is apparent that in all four questions, there are a considerable number of children who were able to translate immediately in their native tongue. Thus, the overall level of competency for community languages in the case study school was relatively high. It is also important to note that many of the pupils were too shy and embarrassed to speak their native tongue in the interview environment and were subsequently recorded as having a low fluency level. Despite this, a mere 3% were unable to count from 1 to 10 in their native language, compared to 83% of the children who could do this immediately. In comparison, out of the 102 children that were interviewed, 98 pupils scored two out of two for fluency in all four questions in regards to their English language skill. This suggests that firstly, the school may have improved their teaching English as a second language since the last available OFSTED report of 2007 was published. Secondly, our data suggests knowledge of a native language other than English may not actually be detrimental for English language development overall.

Next, due to the relatively small discrepancies between the resulting scores for the different questions in the fluency data of Figure 5, we calculated the average fluency rating of individual pupils for the four competency questions overall. This gave us an

average fluency value for each pupil. We then compared this value with the pupils' use of language across different domains.

Overall, we found a number of interesting results. Firstly, the pupils who used of their native language most frequently amongst family members had a higher average level of competency overall. Furthermore, the lowest average fluency rating in the pupils' native language was found to be amongst the 12 students who did not speak their native language to their mother. In comparison to the average fluency score of the group as a whole which was 1.6 out of 2, such students had an average fluency score of just 1.18.

In contrast, one of the highest average fluency scores we recorded was 1.76 which was found amongst the 37 students who were addressed in both English and their native tongue by their siblings. This is perhaps the most interesting and original finding of our project, suggesting pupils who conversed in both their native language and English with family members had the highest fluency levels in both English and the native tongue. This suggests that code-switching and knowledge of more than one language does not have any negative effects on language competency in either English or the native language.

We also found that pupils who speak a small amount of a third language in addition to English and their native tongue were firstly all completely fluent in English. Secondly, they achieved the highest average fluency score for their native language with 1.86. Our data therefore shows that the pupils, who had the highest levels of language competency in their native language actually engaged in the most code-switching, spoke the highest number of languages and were still entirely fluent in English. Thus, our findings support the work of Extra and Yagmur (2011) and show that the use of non-mainstream languages does not have a negative effect on the pupils competency in the mainstream variety, it may actually be beneficial for linguistic development overall.

Average fluency level in comparison to the language spoken to the mother

Mother	Average Fluency Level	Number of Pupils
Native language	1.6	65
English	1.18	12
Both	1.66	23

Figure 6

Average fluency level in comparison to the language pupils are addressed in by their siblings

Siblings	Average Fluency Level	Number of Pupils
Native language	1.68	15
English	1.4	43
Both	1.76	37

Figure 7

We also found an interesting correlation between pupils' average fluency and their use of language in the linguistic domains of cinema and television. The 51 pupils who only ever watched TV in English had an average fluency value of 1.5, whilst the 40 pupils who watched TV in both English and their native language had a higher fluency value of 1.7 overall. This correlation was also evident in relation to the language used when watching films. We found that the 54 pupils who only ever watched films in English had a relatively low fluency average of 1.5, whilst the 25 pupils who watched films in both their native tongue and in English had an average fluency rating of 1.6. This shows again that English is increasingly infiltrating the private domain and this is influencing pupils overall fluency in community languages. Such data highlights important questions regarding the impact of other new forms of media for influencing the competency of children in community languages, suggesting that possible methods for language maintenance could utilise new forms of media within the private domain.

Furthermore, another correlation was revealed in relation to the reading capabilities of students. The 70 pupils who could only read in English had an average fluency value for their native language of 1.51, whilst those students who could also read in their native

language had a much higher average fluency of 1.81. This correlation was even more evident in relation to being read to by family members. With the 30 pupils who had only ever been read to in English scoring one of the lowest fluency averages of all of the groups we interviewed of just 1.3. In contrast, the 26 pupils who were read to in both English and the native language achieved the highest average fluency score we recorded of 1.83. This shows the importance of being read to as a child and its dramatic influence on language development overall. This also supports the work of Fishman (1965) and his distinction between multilingual comprehension and multilingual production. Suggesting that further linguistic research is needed regarding the importance of multilingual comprehension for linguistic development overall.

Finally, the qualitative data we elicited regarding the language preference of students is of interest. We found that most of the students we interviewed only spoke their native language at school to a select few close friends generally only when they didn't want anyone else to understand what they were saying. Interestingly, all of the students who said they spoke their native language occasionally inside the school to friends scored full marks for fluency in both their native language and in English. Furthermore, one Libyan pupil said that she would speak Arabic to another Libyan student if they were new to the school. We follow Gal and suggest this is evidence of language use as a symbol of solidarity and shared identity. Overall however, most students informed us that they hardly ever spoke their native tongue outside of home especially to people of their own generation. Generally pupils preferred the English language because they were taught in English, and were consequently generally better at speaking English.

## Conclusion

In conclusion we hypothesise that the popularity of a language will influence the domain in which the language is spoken and therefore have an impact on the proficiency of students. With a larger time period and more access to the school, we would attempt to collect quantifiable data regarding the popularity of languages in order to prove this hypothesis. We suggest there will be an interesting correlation between these three factors which could have consequences for future research in schools.

Overall we found that English is infiltrating every domain outside of the school, and is now used when interacting in many private domains. English may have been introduced into these domains by the younger generation due to its connotations with work, education and media. Forms of media such as television and film are clearly having an important impact on the language competency of children, suggesting that further analysis is required into the influence of newer forms of social media and communication via Internet for the language competency of pupils. Our findings suggest that a language shift is in gradual progress as community languages are being spoken less regularly by the younger generation.

Furthermore, we propose that children who use both languages in different domains show a higher fluency average in their native language than children who use just the native language and not English. Furthermore, those pupils who spoke three languages achieved a higher fluency average for their native language than any of the other groups we examined. These results are surprising and suggest that knowing more than one language is not detrimental for language competency, it may actually be beneficial for fluency in both languages and for linguistic development overall. We suggest that further more detailed research should be conducted regarding the cognitive consequences of learning more than one language from an early age. Such research could potentially reveal that this process actually helps the fluency of children in both languages and as Extra and Yagmur (2011) argue, does not decrease overall competency in either language.

Overall, our findings have ramifications for language policy in our case study school and possibly in Manchester as a whole. It is clear that a flexible language policy for the whole of the United Kingdom is required in order to maintain such community languages and to improve their social status (Lamb 2001). Furthermore, as Clyne and Kipp's study (2006) has revealed, even in countries like Australia with an excellent multilingual language policy, the number of community languages is still in decline. This raises questions regarding the rate of decline of such languages in the UK. Our study can thus be used in future years to measure the maintenance of community languages in the southern region of Manchester.

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