

# लपतौलिंग्वा MANCHESTER

**Report 2012**

The University  
of Manchester

MANCHESTER  
1824

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# **Language use in business on the Curry Mile in Manchester**

Shuk Ching Law

Sea Lim

Yumi Omori

Simon Stafford

Michael Wendel

## **Introduction**

Our aim in this study is to identify language use and maintenance in the local business areas of the 'Curry Mile' in Manchester. Our intention in this study is to investigate the languages spoken by the participants, in which domains and look into the possible factors affecting the phenomenon.

Statistics show that around 140,000 members of the population in the Manchester metropolitan area are South Asian and over half of these members from Pakistan (Kaplan and Li, 2006:193-194). Considering the statistics mentioned above, our study is focused on the South Asian populations and their language use.

The 'Curry Mile' in Rusholme is a prominent area of Manchester, of cultural diversity and ethnicities. Moreover, this is the key factor of carrying out our investigation in this specific multi-cultural area. This area has been a major retail and consumer services centre for South Asian population since the late nineteenth century. Therefore, this specific area is replete with many businesses, such as restaurants, shops, etc. Since the 'Curry Mile' is an area with such diversity, we believe that the participants of our study are bilingual/multilingual speakers or in direct language contact with other languages than their native ones due to language exposure with other ethnicities.

## **Methodology**

To achieve our goal, we collected data by carrying out questionnaires on the 'Curry Mile'. The questionnaire included questions on seven topics: length of stay in the UK, place of birth, language learned as a child, other languages they speak, the nature of their customer-base, languages spoken at business, and languages spoken at home. In the last two topics, we further asked to whom they speak in order to see how their language-use changes depending on addressees. Casual conversations were also conducted alongside the questionnaire for additional information into a more thorough understanding of their language use, for example, reasons for the language use. This research method can reduce the participants' alertness to answering a research question and therefore increase the authenticity of their answer. We focused on people in the business area because of the various difficulties one might anticipated of stopping people walking on the street to assist in a survey and because we believe that focusing on local businesses will enable us to investigate how people accommodate their languages depending on whether they are in or outside of a business context. No set restrictions were imposed on the types of stores we visited, in order to have a greater variety of range of participants. Therefore, we surveyed workers in various kinds of business such as restaurants, grocery stores, electric appliances stores, stationers, and real estate dealers.

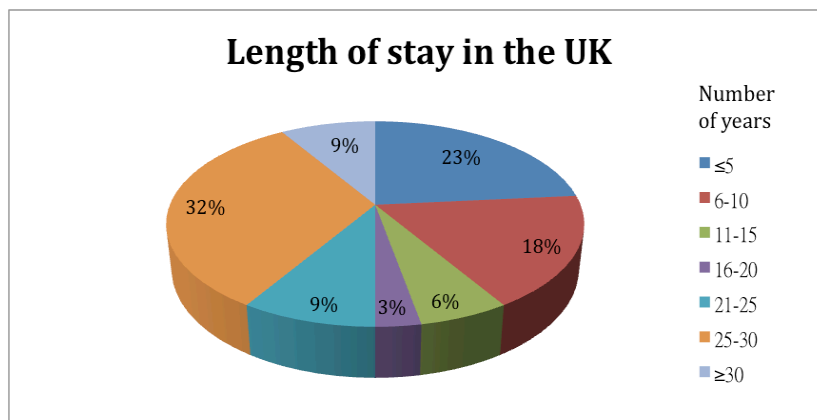
We covered 35 people working on the Curry Mile. Their age varied approximately twenties to sixties, and most of the participants were males. Their length of stay in the UK also differed from two years at the bottom to 45 years at most. As for their birthplace, Pakistan was the largest majority with 26 answers. Two people answered they were born in the UK, and the others consist of two from Iraq and one each from India, Jordan, Kenya, Russia and Rhatumo state. 15 people answered only Urdu as the language they learned as a child, and 7 people answered Urdu and Punjabi. Also there were two people who learned Urdu and English as a child, and three people Urdu, Punjabi, and English. Another one even answered English, Urdu, Punjabi, and Arabic. The others answered Kurdish (2 people), Arabic, Gujarati, Swahili, Russian and Latvian, and Punjabi. Their customer-base was in most cases (27 answers) multi-national, and four people answered their customers were mainly English and the other four answered that middle-eastern people are the main customers. 14 people answered they lived with their children, and in that case we asked them to specify what language they speak to their children to see if there is any tendency in them when they talk to young generation.

All surveys were conducted in person, and we did not record the interviews to any electric devices. We chose to do questionnaires during comparatively free hours for stores, such as between lunchtime and dinnertime for the restaurants. When doing the interview, firstly we introduced ourselves as students of University of Manchester and asked shopkeepers if they mind filling out the questionnaire sheet. We passed them information sheets before starting the interview and made sure they have agreed in participating in our research. When they preferred, we asked the questions orally and wrote down the answers, or they simply filled in the questionnaire on their own. We analyzed the collected data by putting these questionnaires together into an Excel spreadsheet. In addition we complemented the analysis by referring to other related studies.

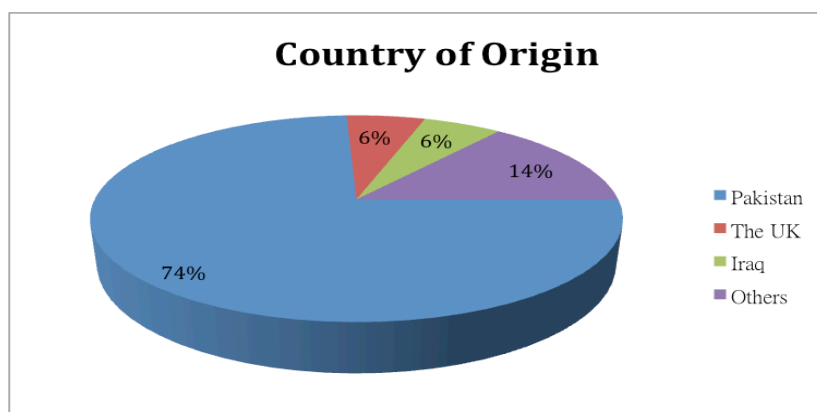
### **Findings and Discussion**

In this study we attempted to explore the concept of language maintenance in terms of how frequently the native languages of multilingual speakers were used, and in which domains. The area of study has rather vivid immigration. As shown in Graph 1.1, there is wide range and quite equal distribution in the length of stay by the participants, with 25-30 years being the largest group and less than 5 years being the second. As what can be seen in Graph 1.2, the majority of participants working in businesses on and around the Curry Mile were originally from Pakistan. One of the participants was Russian, another from Jordan, another Kenyan, and another Indian – one was also from Rhatamo State. Two of the participants listed Britain as their place of birth, and another two: Iraq. This indicates that most participants that we interviewed are classified as first generation immigrants to the UK. We intended to look specifically at speakers of South Asian languages, and found that those participants from Pakistan predominantly spoke Urdu as one of their first languages.

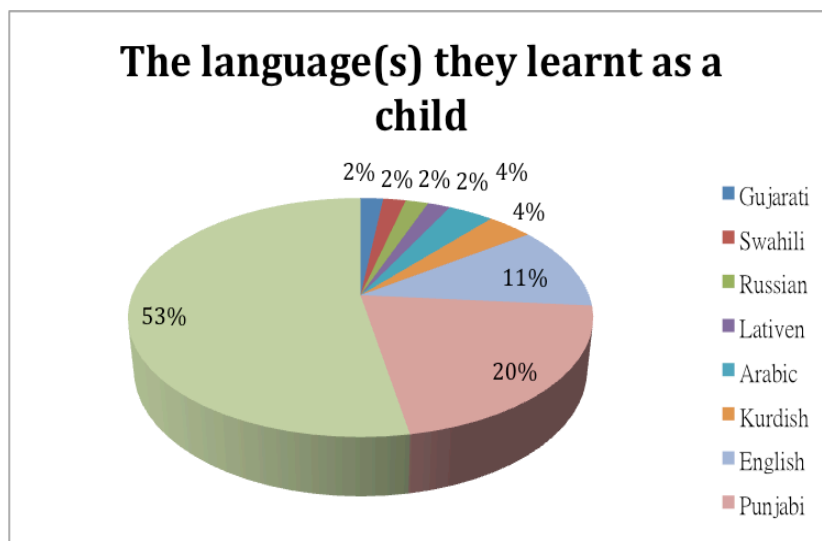
This represents one of the official languages of Pakistan, along with English, which was learnt as a child by 6 of the participants, as shown in the Graph 1.3.



Graph 1.1 Length of stay in the UK



Graph 1.2 The country of origin

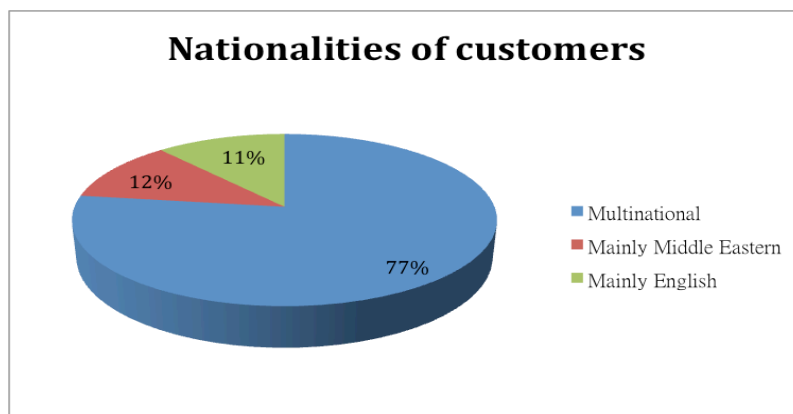


Graph 1.3 The language(s) the participants as a child

Due to the fact that these participants spoke English as what could be considered a native language (or one that they have become fluent in from an early age), means that we are unable to assess their use of English as Language Maintenance.

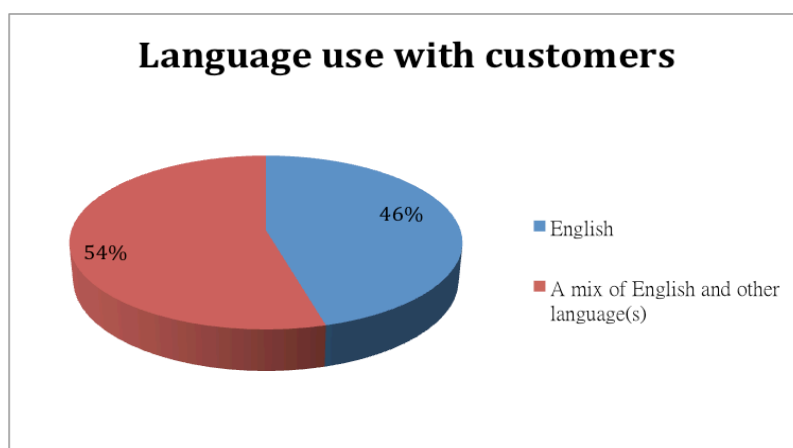
Another common first language amongst Pakistani was Punjabi, which is recognized as a regional language, also acquired by an Indian participant. Since we decided to focus only on speakers of South Asian languages, it seems we may disregard the participants who were not from either of these two countries or born in Britain and learnt Urdu and/or Punjabi as a first language. Since the participants who have not learnt South Asian languages as children, do not meet these categories, they must be disregarded as suitable to the analysis of the data.

In order to interpret the relevant data as an indication of how often and where speakers used their native languages (predominantly Urdu and in less cases Punjabi), it may be useful to observe the customer bases of the businesses of the participants. It was seen that the majority of participants listed their customer base as 'multi-national', presumably these being made up of the different nationalities of people on the Curry Mile such as: Pakistani, Indian, Middle-Eastern, Caribbean, African, English etc. Other's listed the customer base as 'mainly English' (4 participants) and others 'mainly middle eastern' or 'middle eastern' (4 participants).



Graph 1.4 Nationalities of customers

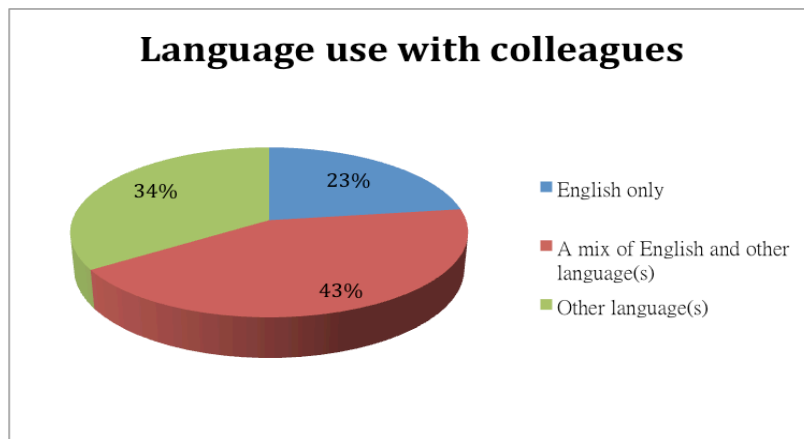
It was shown in Graph 1.5 that English was used extensively in the domain of work while interacting with customers. As Fishman proposes, speakers may change language in different domains, also, as the National and dominant language is English, it is expected that the bilingual speaker would change from their L1 to English L2 in this Interaction setting with a monolingual English speaking addressee. Several other languages were reported in the questionnaire as being used in this context, such as Urdu and/or Punjabi in 16 participants. This could also be seen as the natural, unmarked choice for the speaker in question. Few participants spoke Arabic with customers. Although other languages are used frequently, English is consistently found to be spoken with customers; and it could be suggested that due to the multi-nationality of the customers themselves, it is possible for English to be used as a lingua franca between speakers who do not share a common language.



Graph 1.5 Language use with customers

While this may be the case, the data are inconclusive as such to identify when, or whether or not this is occurring in order to facilitate mutual intelligibility. For

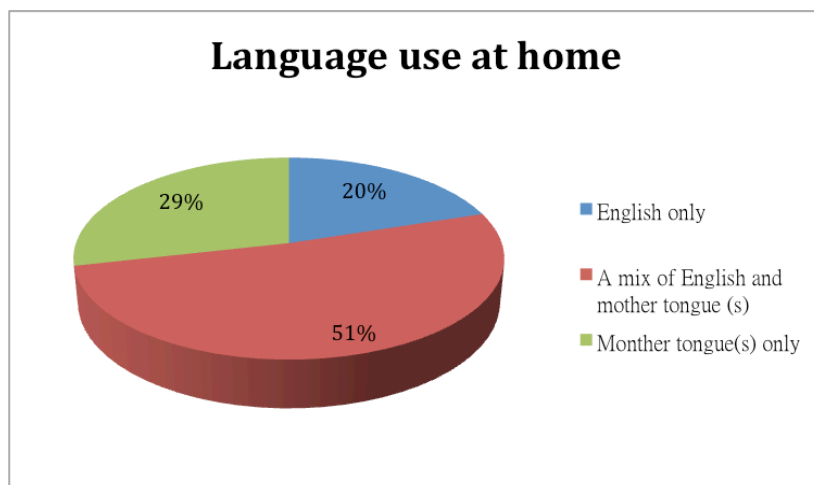
instance, English is likely to be used interchangeably with the other native languages of participants and customers; and therefore could be said to have something of a double status in terms of its usage. It is also used simply as an alternative to such languages even where speakers may share a language or more. This is supported by the data through the way in which English was also spoken relatively consistently with the staff working in businesses, as shown in graph 1.6. It is similarly shown that participants spoke a variety of languages with their colleagues (commonly a combination of Urdu and English – although Arabic was used both instead of and as well as English, and sometimes only Urdu and/or Punjabi was used). It is again illustrated that these may be alternated between, where a mutually understood language is not necessitated.



Graph 1.6 Language use with colleagues

As shown in Graph 1.7, It was expressed by certain participants that the main patterns of language use at home involved the use of the unmarked choice of Urdu and/or Punjabi between adults – for example with spouses and other family members; while speaking English on a more widespread basis with the children (though still using Urdu and to a lesser extent: Punjabi). Many participants specified that English was the only language with which they address children at home, and it was less common to not speak any English at home (for example, only Urdu and/or Punjabi).





Graph 1.7 Language use at home (including to spouse, children, and other family members)

It seems then, that the data show the concept of language maintenance to be present to some extent, in that it was generally rare for speakers with native languages other than English to stop using these in order to favour English in all or a high number of contexts. It appears that native languages are maintained both in business and home domains; however it can also be seen that there is a potential of language shift. As mentioned, a vast majority of the participants are immigrants, nonetheless, half of the people asked use a mix of English and their mother tongues at home and one-fifth use English solely.

As English is the language being used by parents at home with their children and parents are speaking in their marked choice, the implication that the process of language shift seems to be occurring much faster than what Fishman (1964) predicted can be made. As second generation of speakers are growing up in Britain, they will be constantly exposed to English, via media and institutions, mainly school and other social activities; and therefore the dominant language use of English will lead to rapid intergenerational language shift, with the complete abandonment of the immigrant language occurring in the third generation.

In addition to this, one interviewee explained that she uses English at home when she finds it difficult to express her emotion using her mother tongue. In other words, English is used in a functional way. One of the interviewees stated that “Children need to learn English” reflecting an asymmetrical relationship in the multilingualism present, as English is deemed the more ‘useful’ and dominant language

Another sign to possible language shift is that English is largely used by those participants who did not learn it as child. The attitudes surrounding the native languages of speakers of Urdu and Punjabi for instance, seem, from this study, to be either indifferent or inconclusive as to whether or not a strong feeling is held that these languages must be preserved or are in danger. While it was initially proposed

that a level of covert prestige might encourage the use of native South Asian languages in such speakers to promote a positive sense of identity and/or solidarity within a specific community; it appeared more evident that this was not the case – English being used naturally between speakers where it was not a necessary lingua franca.

Similarly, the opposite can be suggested that a level of overt prestige could possibly be shown through the way in which children were addressed and spoken to by their parents in English in most cases. This in itself may reflect certain domain based or contextual factors that the next generation of speakers are exposed to growing up in Britain, and that language maintenance is not prevalent for these reasons. The concept of identity can be expressed through language but is similarly problematic in that many participants (particularly those who have lived in Britain for a long time or all their life) may consider themselves to have adopted the British identity and are therefore unthreatened by the use of the language for social purposes. Furthermore, a sense of identity is likely to be influenced by both a speaker's country of origin and current residence and this could be seen to be reflected in the mixed and seemingly interchangeable use of language on the Curry Mile.

Though there is abundant evidence showing the possible failure of immigrant language maintenance in the successive generation, the future for it is not doomed at all. For instance, the continual absorption of newly-arrived immigrants into Curry Mile as indicated in the data “provide both opportunities and incentives for the British-born generation to maintain the language of their parents beyond the domestic field” (Marta, 2009: 50). In addition to this, Curry Mile has “the largest concentration of Asian restaurants in the UK” (which makes it a famous center of food in Manchester and therefore encourages the shop owners to retain their community languages at least in some aspects of the business, for instance, the menus and the signposts. This opens a new domain for these languages apart from the oral transition that has already occupied by English.

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