



## Report 2015



The University of Manchester

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# **Linguistic Landscapes in Manchester City Centre**

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## **1. Introduction**

Manchester's City Centre shows a 'multilingual landscape.' The city embraces linguistic diversity in a number of different ways, one of which is through multilingual signage, which could be a reflection of community identity. With various cultures interacting on a daily basis for business, economic and social purposes, language contact is inevitable. It is for these reasons that multilingualism is prominent in many speech communities and has had an impact on the production and usage of signs. We have documented the use of signs in Manchester's City Centre and our intention is to explore what information they project, in terms of the existence of multilingualism. Against the backdrop of the National Census, conducted in 2011, we will compare our findings in order to see if they illustrate the current conclusions drawn on multilingualism and in particular, in Manchester. The motivations behind signage are of particular importance to our study, as it will provide us with an insight into the attitudes and views that exist towards language and cultural diversity.

Our initial proposal presented the juxtaposition between multilingualism as a means of authenticity in contrast to society's need for it. Authentic findings of signage included restaurants with the aim of enhancing the experience that the services provide. In contrast, language diversity as a necessity, showed to have more functional purposes such as targeting multilingual audiences. This report will begin with a demographic of the area, historical background and statistics from the 2011 National Census. We present our methodology and question elicitations followed by our findings. We conclude with a discussion and address the potential for further research.

## **2. Demographics**

Manchester's City Centre is two hundred and seventy hectares according to government statistics published in 2013. Over 150 languages are spoken in the Greater Manchester area, with instances of language contact in the community. Its linguistic mosaic derives from early settlement patterns that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when immigration in Manchester was at its peak. The city continues to attract people from various speech communities who have brought with them an array of linguistic idiolects and identities. Over the past decade, Manchester's population has increased by 19%, which is the highest growth rate compared to other cities in the country.

The 2011 National Census included questions on language use. The fact that questions about the subject of multilingualism were included shows how the issue of multilingualism was not prominent up until 2011.

Questions that were asked included:

1. What is your main language?
2. How well can you speak English?

The results showed that the top languages other than English in England and Wales in order from the most frequently spoken to the less frequently spoken are as follows:

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Polish         | 2. Panjabi              |
| 3. Urdu           | 4. Bengali              |
| 5. Gujarati       | 6. Arabic               |
| 7. French         | 8. Chinese              |
| 9. Portuguese     | 10. Spanish             |
| 11. Tamil         | 12. Turkish             |
| 13. Talian        | 14. Somali              |
| 15. Lithuanian    | 16. German              |
| 17. Persian/Farsi | 18. Tagalog/Filipino    |
| 19. Romanian      | 20. Russian and Nepali. |

*Figure 1*

The results show that Polish is the most frequently spoken language in England and Wales, with 546174 people claiming to speak it as their main language. Panjabi and Urdu follow, as the most frequently spoken languages. It is important to note that there are some anomalies such as the results for Romani. These speakers may not have wanted to declare that they speak Romani due to the discrimination that exists towards their language. This shows that factors can influence how we declare our languages. Only 29 people declared Romani as their language perhaps as they did not want to be discriminated against. Overleaf we have produced a graph presenting the results. The Census reported proficiency in English by age group for Manchester City. Overall, of the 79,852 people in Manchester reporting that their main language is not English, 39.02% report that they speak English “very well”, 40.22% commented that they spoke English “well”. 17.40% said they cannot speak English well and 3.36% said they cannot speak English. The 2011 census shows that the majority of the population is multilingual.

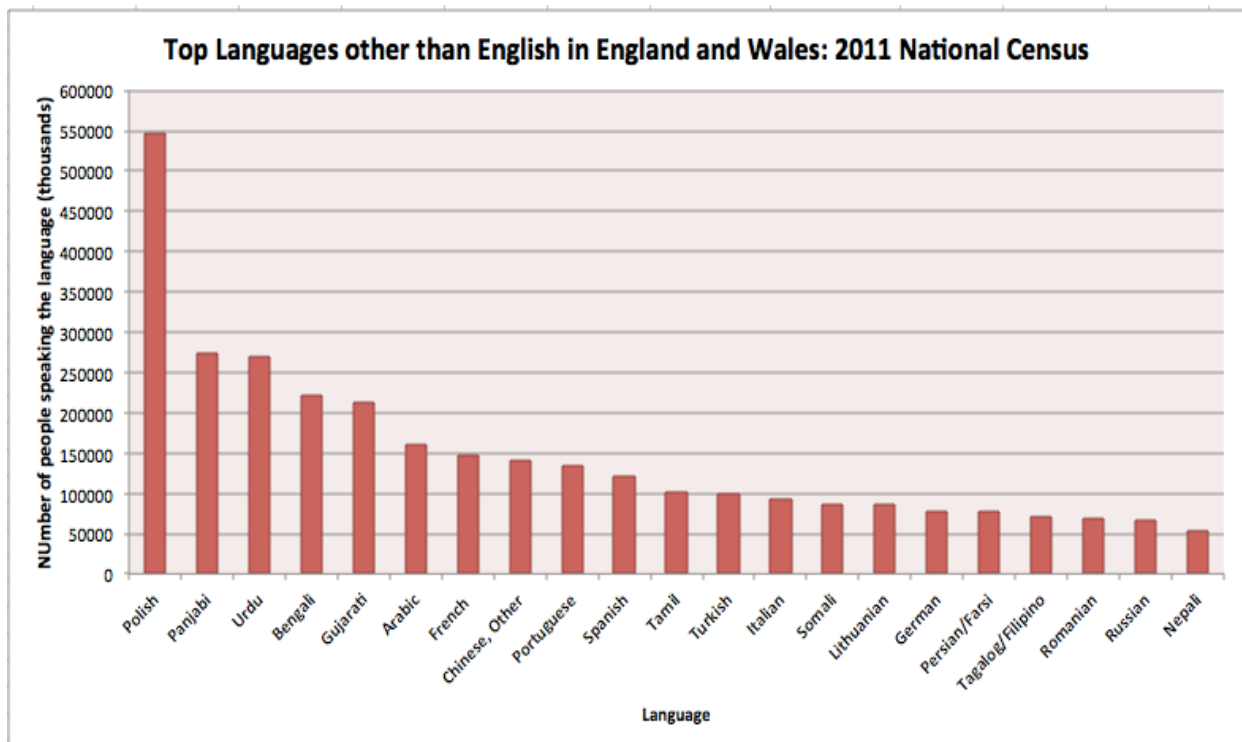


Figure 2

The University of Manchester’s multilingual department, in their research into Manchester determined that the biggest community languages with the largest number of speakers included: Urdu, Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, Polish, Panjabi, and Somali. They also found a large number of speakers of: Gujarati, Potwari/ Mirpuri, Kurdish, Persian, Yiddish, Caribbean Creole English, Pashto, Romani, Yoruba and other West African languages. Additionally, there was a widespread knowledge of French, Portuguese and Russian. Manchester’s department highlights that the languages spoken in the area fall under different categories. For instance they draw attention to ‘global languages’ and identify French and Spanish as languages belonging to such category, as they are spoken internationally and on a mass scale. In contrast there are national languages, which they define as having ‘official status’ in particular countries. These include languages such as Urdu, Polish and Bengali. They categorize regional and minority languages in Manchester as languages that are ‘used in specific areas or by minority groups.’ (Multilingual Manchester, 2015) Although some research has been conducted into the spatial distribution of languages in Manchester and the idea that in particular geographical areas you can expect to find certain languages, research into the City Centre is limited. Our investigation will therefore contribute further to the understanding of the distribution of multilingualism in Manchester.

Our target area, Piccadilly gardens, is a green space in Manchester’s City Centre and is a central hub for the city’s various transport links with several train stations and bus stations at its disposal. Our other area of analysis; the Northern Quarter was part of a

regeneration innovation to make the area more urban and modern. The area is renowned for the alternative and bohemian culture that it offers. Although these areas have existed since the medieval times their use was far different to what it is now, with a focus more on production and manufacturing as opposed to the shift it underwent in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century towards tourism when it was commercialized. The Northern Quarter in particular underwent significant economic change with the Industrial Revolution which brought with it textile manufacturing and cotton works. This attracted people from abroad and in particular from Italy, as a means of improved opportunities. Manchester's City Council recognizes the Northern Quarter as being at the commercial core of the City Centre and stated that it was of great strategic importance to the thriving of the business district and the community itself.

### **3. Research questions and methods**

Our research questions are:

1. What is the utility of multilingual signage?
2. Which audiences are addressed and for what purposes? Is this a reflection of most common ethnicities in the area?
3. Why are these particular audiences addressed and targeted?
4. How are decisions on multilingual signs taken?
5. How are provisions organised?

Upon our investigations into the physical signs, we found that this question posed some difficulties as some of the workers in the businesses and in particular the workers in the restaurants were unsure about the commissioning of the signs, and many of the premises belong to chains which made the answers to these questions difficult to obtain.

6. How do multilingual signs express identities and power relations?

We have developed this research question further to address the fundamental topic what is identity. Is it interactional and does it develop in a given situation? This will include looking at both the type of setting and the interlocutors that use a particular language.

## 7. How are multilingual signs used in the area?

We have expanded this question to the contrast of paucity with density. This is concerned with the nature of the business, which is linked to the audiences and receivers of the signs. For instance, some businesses are more commercial than others which can consequently have an impact on their use and decisions of signage. We will consider whether the business is used for entertainment purposes or alternatively whether the business has more practical purposes and what affects this has on the linguistic choices of the signs.

We will record a physical description of the sign, the language in use and the clientele. The signs of particular interest have been included in our findings section.

Participant observation as a qualitative approach was conducted through informal interviews. This was led by talking to the shopkeepers and business owners and was very conversational. We first returned to the newsagent 'Euronews' to conduct an interview with the owner. The questions we asked the owner are as follows:

1. What language/languages are used in the shop when interacting with the customers?
2. What is your main language?
3. Can you speak any other languages? If yes, do you ever change language in a conversation?
4. What language do you think is more important?
5. Who does your shop attract and what is their primary language?
6. Where are the newspapers produced?
7. Why have these languages been chosen for the languages that the newspapers are written in? Was there a demand for these products?

We asked similar questions to the Muslim Youth foundation about language usage. However the questions differed in regards to choice for signage. We spoke to a worker at the Youth Foundation in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the motivations for signage. We wanted to ask why Arabic is used alongside English for sign writing.

## 4. Findings

- a. **Sign:** Tram ticket machine located in Piccadilly Gardens



*Figure 3*

**Physical Description:** This official signage produced by Metrolink has the option to change the primary language that the instructions appear in, from which there are five options: English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Polish. This signage serves a functional purpose.

**Language in use:** English is the primary language of choice on the machine due to the fact that it is considered a global language with up to 1.8 billion speakers worldwide. The legacy of the British Empire is demonstrated by the fact that English is now the dominant or official language in 75 different territories. It is not surprising that French and Spanish are also found amongst the five language options as they carry global status. It is also not surprising that Polish is an option as according to the National Census in 2011 it is the most frequently spoken language in England and Wales. However we were surprised to see Dutch as an option on the machine as it was not recorded as a frequently spoken language in England and Wales by the National Census statistics. This has led us to query why languages such as Punjabi and Urdu which are frequently spoken languages in Manchester, have not been included. This means that the choice is not directed at Eastern European speakers. Perhaps, this is due to the stressed importance of learning more global languages such as English in a globalising world.



**Clientele:** The audience of this sign is possibly the largest and most vast we have come across amidst our research. This is due to the amount of pedestrianized traffic passing through on a daily basis from business workers to students from different cultural backgrounds. With such diversity, the council have therefore had to take this into consideration when producing the signage as transport is a crucial part of the business industry and our daily lives and therefore the choice for multilingual signage has become necessary. We emailed Metrolink to make an enquiry about our findings. We wanted to find out why these languages are chosen for the ticket machines. In addition we are interested as to why languages such as Chinese and Urdu which have scored high on the 2011 National Census as being majority languages in Manchester have not been chosen as one of the language options. Figure 4 is the email that we sent to Metrolink. Figure 5 is the response that we receive.

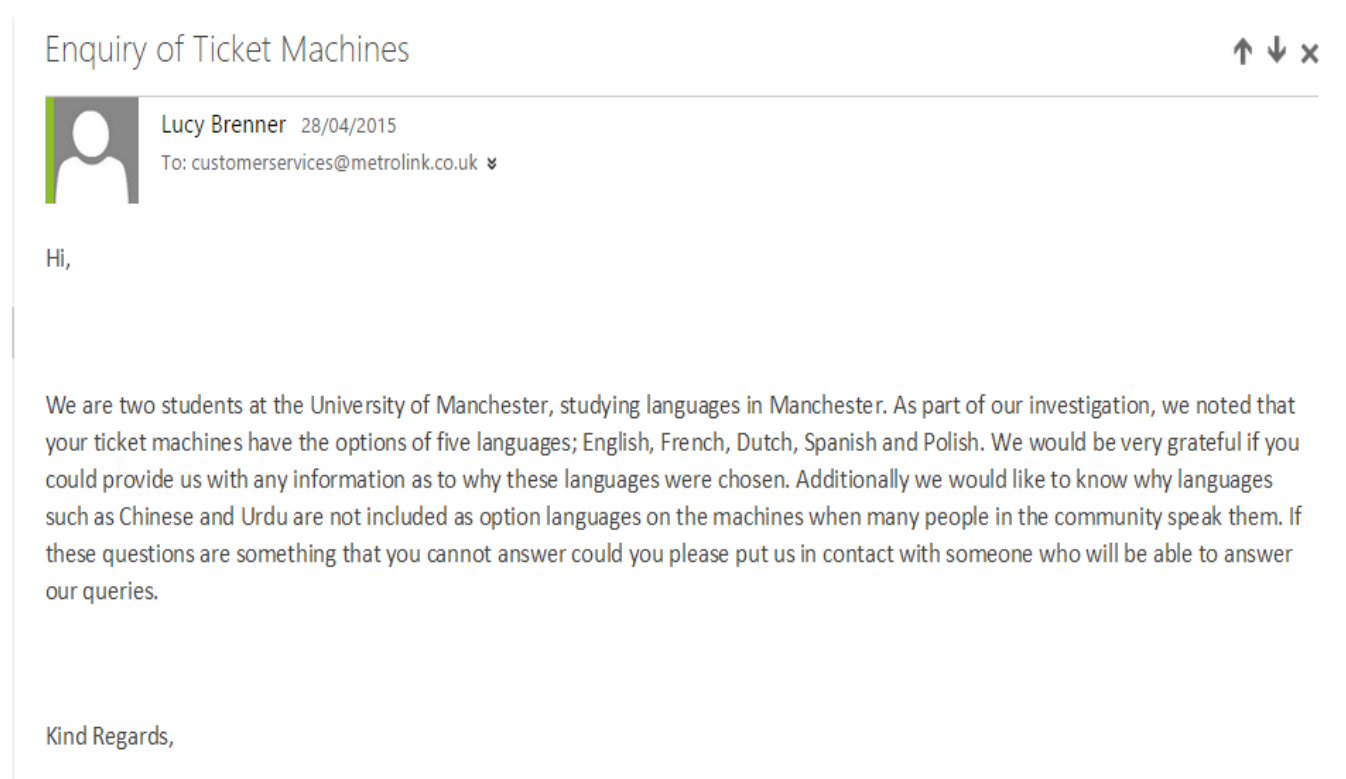


Figure 4



CUSTOMER.RELATIONS@TFGM.COM (CUSTOMER.RELATIONS@TFGM.COM) Add to contacts 16:08 ▶  
To: lucybrenner@hotmail.co.uk ✉

Dear Ms Brenner and Ms Howarth

Thank you for your email enquiring about our Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs).

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) specified in contract documentation for the TVM supply and install contract that TVMs should allow passengers a choice of different languages, with English being the default. The successful bid (awarded in 2008) included a proposal to provide German, Spanish, French and Polish translations in addition to English default.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your email and if you require any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me or a member of our Customer Relations team at [customer.relations@tfgm.com](mailto:customer.relations@tfgm.com).

Yours sincerely

*Figure 5*

Whilst her response indicates why different languages are used (TfGM believe passengers should have a choice), the email fails to explain the motivations as to why these languages in particular were chosen.

**Sign:** Euronews located in Piccadilly close to the train station.



*Figure 6*

**Physical description:** It is a small business, and it is probable that the owner has different business and financial goals compared to larger businesses. This newsagent reflects multilingualism through the products that they sale. The newspaper stand that we have photographed includes Arabic and Chinese. We decided to interview the shopkeeper to find out the motivations for these selections of multilingual products.

Below are some very informative answers that we received from our questionnaire:

1. What language/languages are used in the shop when interacting with the customers? Mainly English.
2. What is your main language? Gujarati.
3. Can you speak any other languages? If yes, do you ever change language in a conversation? Hindi and Urdu. Yes depends on the customer.
4. What language do you think is more important? Not necessarily more important but English is used more.
5. What is the primary language of your customers? English speakers.
6. What languages have been chosen for the languages that the newspapers are written in? Was there a demand for these products? Arabic and Chinese. Yes.

Figure 7

The owner's responses support the view that multilingualism where it appears is in partnership with businesses. The multilingual products that he stocked catered for the Muslim community (with products appearing in Arabic, the original language of Islam) and the Chinese community.

- b. **Sign:** Travel Limited Omega located in Piccadilly near the train station



Figure 8

**Physical Description:** The premise is a travel agency and tour operator service with several other businesses in the UK. They pride themselves on the fact that they are ‘small enough to care for our customers on a personal level big enough to negotiate with the airlines for some of the lowest fares.’ (Omega Travel Limited, 2013)

**Clientele:** People who would like to go abroad, or go on tours. They also sell football tickets. Their business therefore has multiple audiences.

**Languages in use:** We noted that many of their signs are bilingual using both English and Chinese to promote their business and products. English always appears first reflecting power relations and the fact it is the more dominant language of the two. Chinese is ranked as number 8 in the most frequently spoken languages by the 2011 National Census. The Chinese community is very big in Manchester and still increasing particularly with many international exchange students.

Chinese is a global language, and for this reason it is also now being taught across schools in Manchester. Manchester’s multilingual department found that Chinese was one of the most used languages in business advertising in the area. Furthermore they drew correlations between bilingual advertising using community languages in the area to attract more clients. This highlights how advertising can contribute to Manchester’s multilingual landscaping.

c. **Sign:** The Muslim Youth Foundation located on Turner Street

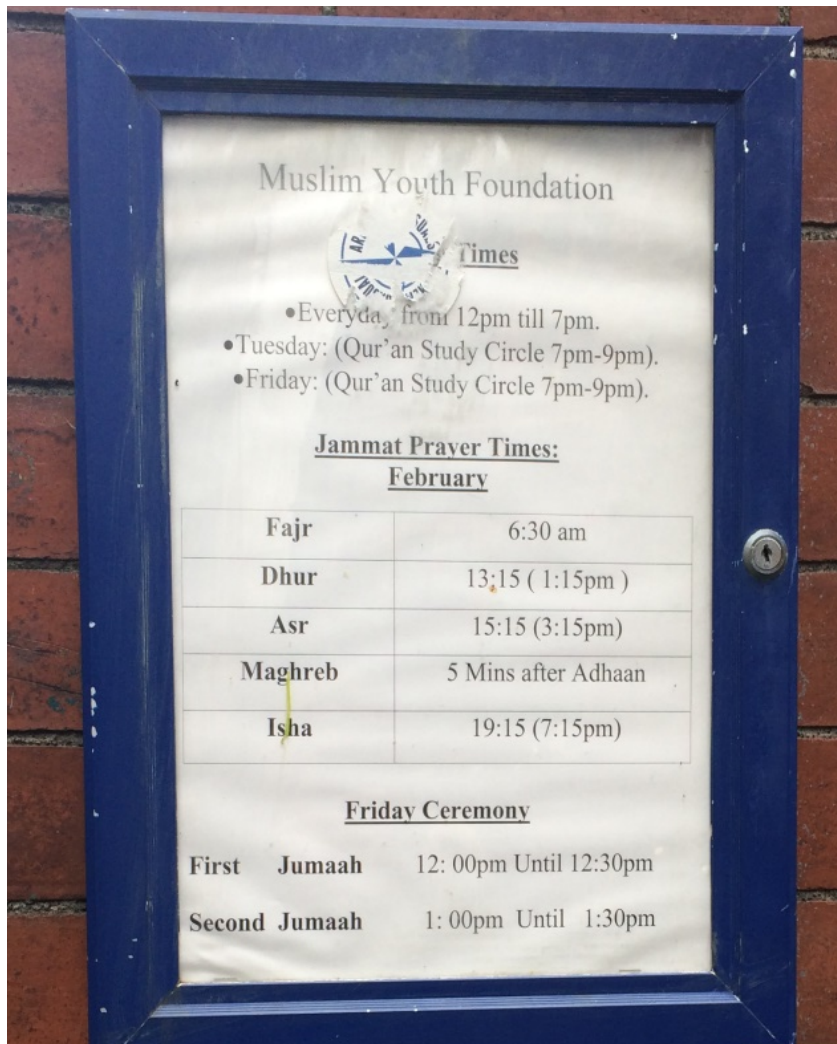


Figure 9

The sign in figure 9 translates as the times of the days. The Arabic writing appears on the left with English next to it on the right. The translation for the Arabic writing is: dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset and evening. We interviewed a worker at the Youth Foundation to question why Arabic and English have been chosen for signage.

1. What language/languages are spoken at the youth foundation? English. Every community has its own mosque. Because this foundation is in the City Centre many different communities come here so English is the main language of use.
2. What is your main language? Main language is English but mother tongue is Urdu.
3. Why are Arabic and English chosen for signs? Arabic is the language of Islam. We therefore use Arabic words in religious contexts. Everyone can identify with Arabic. Because we are located in the City Centre you may have an African man praying next to a white British man. We therefore try to keep communication primarily in English.

Figure 10

The use of multilingualism at the Muslim Youth Foundation is religiously motivated as it is the main language of the Muslim community. It reflects a sense of unity to all members.

## **5. Discussion & Conclusion**

Our investigation into linguistic landscapes in Manchester's City Centre has revealed some interesting findings. The City Centre's landscape demonstrates the coexistence and competition of different languages and how they interact in a given space.

Interestingly, we found that the tram stations showed signs of multilingualism, however at the bus station signs are monolingual. This was fascinating to our research as the new development and investment into the trams show multilingualism whereas something more established, like at the bus station signs appear in only one language; English. This suggests that Manchester's City Centre is not entirely a multilingual community with many signs remaining to predominately function in English.

From our literature review we found that numerous studies which looked at linguistic landscapes investigated how language policy played a role in a linguistic landscape. Backhaus (2006) suggested that language policy can influence the commissioning of signs. Language policy is where linguistics meets policies through legislation. These are set out to protect the rights of individuals and groups and to also promote identification with the state. By conducting our study we have found that although multilingualism is visible in Manchester's City Centre community, it is not static. In addition the government's role in the linguistic landscapes of Manchester is minimal if it even exists at all. Manchester's city council commented on their position on multilingualism and stated that: 'there is no legislation in the UK making the use of one language or another mandatory – this includes foreign languages and English language also.' (Ryan 2011) The council also noted that multilingual signage, 'when it does feature is by partnership with local businesses' (Ryan 2011) which our findings strongly support.

Furthermore, for our initial research we set out to see what multilingual signs meant in terms of power relations and dominant languages. However as Ryan (2011) presented plurilingualism theories suggest how languages although they fulfil certain purposes in a given landscape they can co-exist in harmony and are not necessarily in competition with one another. The view that multilingual variation may bring conflict is not the case in Manchester's City Centre.

The languages that we found were not in competition with one another but rather each language served a particular function and a need for community and individual identification. Manchester's City Centre therefore appears to be growing in multilingual signage usage.

Multilingualism is a huge development in society today. For further research in this field it would be necessary to develop a standard set of tools for looking at the methodological stages for the collection of linguistic landscape data. A concrete set of tool will allow for direct comparisons of linguistic landscape studies from different environments to be made. The identification of some of the universal and local differences in signage worldwide will further contribute to the research of multilingualism in the future. As for Manchester, a revisit to the City Centre in a few years time may provide some interesting innovations to our research as attitudes towards languages are constantly changing. Furthermore, a comparison of our findings against independent variables such as age, occupation and class may provide further insight.

Word Count: 2996

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## 7. Appendix

The entire visual documentation for this project is available at

<https://plus.google.com/113459854944107619313/posts/XaB7KxMX4Zf>