

लघुतौल्युवा MANCHESTER

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Multilingual use, and provision, in restaurants within Manchester

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Introduction

This project investigates the multilingual language use in two communities within Manchester: Rusholme and Chinatown. More specifically, we will be looking at multilingualism within the context of the restaurant business, which is prominent in both Rusholme and Chinatown due to the highly concentrated populations of Asian and Chinese people in these respective areas. In fact, recent statistics show that Asian residents make up 9.2% of the total population of Manchester, whereas Chinese residents make up 2.5% (Office for National Statistics; cited in Manchester City Council 2011). More tellingly, Rusholme has a range of different Asian ethnic groups, including Pakistani residents, who make up around 12% of the Rusholme population, and Bangladeshi residents who account for 7.7% of the local population (Office for National Statistics; cited in Manchester City Council 2009). Furthermore, Chinatown is situated in the City Centre, where 17% of the residents are Chinese (Office for National Statistics; cited in Manchester City Council 2009).

The influx of languages other than English is due to the migration to cities like Manchester, which means that these migrants speak both English and a minimum of one other language from their native country (Matras 2009: 49). As the

aforementioned statistics show, a large number of Asian migrants alone will introduce many new languages to the area. These facts give us a good enough basis to presume that both Rusholme and Chinatown are suitable places to base the investigation.

Methodology

Restaurants were the context of this project. More specifically, we were investigating restaurants whereby a large percentage of customers are of an ethnic group other than English. This is because restaurants in Rusholme and Chinatown are particularly popular with the largest ethnic groups in these respective areas. It offered an easy way to access the use of multilingualism because we presume both English and other languages will be used in these restaurants. Furthermore, as restaurants are businesses who hope to attract customers, and because these restaurants are in England, we were able to investigate areas of multilingualism in Manchester that are driven to use English in order to attract customers, despite the fact that the vast majority of customers in the restaurants are of an ethnic group other than English.

Our research questions were: What languages are used in these restaurants? What provision is made for these languages? Are these provisions simply for business purposes? This will include investigating the language in exchanges between different customers and staff, the language used for the menus, and any other factor in the establishment that could give an insight into the ethnic groups that they cater for, and the languages used, for example the television channels they chose to show.

We visited four restaurants in Manchester; two restaurants on the Rusholme Curry Mile and two in Chinatown. By visiting multilingual restaurants in two different areas, we were able to establish a set of findings that were on a slightly broader spectrum and were able to compare how two different cultures adjusted their language use to suit their customers. The two restaurants in Rusholme were *Beirut* and *Falafel*, both

primarily serving Arabic food, and *The New Emperor* and *Middle Kingdom* in Chinatown. Originally, we planned to visit four different restaurants. However, research revealed that the majority of customers were English, and would provide little useful evidence. This in itself proves a point about the wider multilingual provision, which we will comment on later.

In each of the restaurants, we used a combination of observation, participant observation and questionnaire elicitation. We began as participants, greeting the waiter/waitress, and placing an order. We observed the language used to communicate with us and to take our order. We observed the language used by fellow customers and language used between the staff. Afterwards, we asked the waiter/waitress some questions, altered slightly from our original plan, and containing a scalar question (4) to make the question simpler, especially for the staff whose English was not fluent. We noted down paraphrased versions of their responses. The questions were as follows:

1. Where were you born?
2. What language do you speak?
3. How long have you been living in Manchester?
4. How often do you use English when speaking to the customers (never/almost never/sometimes/often/almost always/always)?
5. Do you tend to greet every customer in English first?
6. Do you find that Non-English speaking customers prefer ordering and talking to you in a language other than English?

We also took note of, and photographed, the menus and receipt on which they had written our order. Any other features of the environment were noted, such as the background music or television channel.

Findings

This section will be divided by restaurant, and we will present some comparative findings in the discussion.

Restaurant 1 - Beirut

1. Observations

The waitress greeted us in English, and continued to speak in English when taking orders. Her English was not that competent, and when one member of the team asked a question requiring a response other than that perhaps necessary for a standard discourse with English-speaking customers, she noticeably struggled with what to say. She wrote our order in Arabic.

We observed that discourse between staff members was solely in Arabic, which was later confirmed by the questionnaire responses. The staff, when communicating with other Arabic speaking customers, also used Arabic. Although the restaurant wasn't busy, we were the only white-British people present. One group of customers spoke some English but tended to speak in Arabic amongst themselves. They ordered their meals in Arabic.

At one point, a police officer entered *Beirut* to ask the waiter a question. Just as with the interaction we had when first arriving, the waiter spoke in slightly broken English. Once the policeman had gone, the waiter spoke about the event to another waitress in Arabic. It was worth noting that an Arabic television channel was being shown in the restaurant, playing traditional Arabic music, with Arabic script scrolling across the screen. This could be a way of making *Beirut* more authentic, in order to attract English customers interested in experiencing a different culture. However, the Arabic-speaking majority in *Beirut* suggests that the choice of TV channel was simply for their benefit.

The menu was written in both English and Arabic, although the English translation came before the Arabic. This could just be an arbitrary choice. One difference was that Arabic was only used for non-English meals. Despite the restaurant primarily serving the Arabic community, traditionally English items like chips were included in a separate section written in English. This suggests, as hypothesised, a mentality of providing English simply for business purposes. In order to attract as many customers as possible, a few English dishes are included and a few prepared English phrases are used. The lack of Arabic translation for these items, when so many of the customers are Arabic speakers, suggests they are simply present for the custom of the odd English customer.

2. Questionnaire

We asked the waitress who had served us the following questions. Her responses are indicated in bold.

- Where were you born? **Palestine.**
- What language do you speak? **Arabic.**
- How long have you been living in Manchester? **9 years.**
- How often do you use English when talking to customers? (Never/almost never/ sometimes/ often/ almost always/ always) Does this depend on the customer? **Often, perhaps 70%. Yes, it depends on the customer. If they're Arabic speaking then all conversation is in Arabic, if English, all English.**
- Do you tend to greet every customer in English first? **No, if they are Arabic I greet them in Arabic, if they are not (English, or other) I greet them in English. (It is worth noting that the interviewee gave no indication as to how this fact is established.)**
- Do you find that non-English speaking customers prefer ordering and talking to you in a language other than English? **No, most people actually prefer to speak English.**

These results will be compared to other restaurants later. One interesting response was that she finds that most customers prefer to speak English. To some extent, this suggests that a fair amount of the Arabic-speaking population is competent enough in English to choose to speak it in restaurants. This could be an indication that an environment such as *Beirut*, where provision for the Arabic language is good, allows customers to feel like they can test their non-native English.

Restaurant 2 - Falafel

1. Observations

Once again, we were greeted in English upon arrival. He continued to ask for our order in fairly competent English; understanding and responding to more complex requests for information.

In contrast to *Beirut*, there were a fairly equal number of English and Arabic-speaking customers present. The staff communicated with one another solely in Arabic, and spoke some English to English-speaking customers. When an English-speaking customer approached the till, one member of staff always stepped in to take the order, suggesting that his English was the most competent. Again, this points to the notion that English is used in these restaurants for purely business purposes and staff knowledge of English is limited to phrases required to deal briefly with English customers, but not to hold lengthy conversations.

Signs for the toilet were printed in Arabic and English, both of which were in the same sized font and, similarly to *Beirut*, traditional Arabic music was playing. One difference to *Beirut* was that the menu (Figure 1, Appendix) was written entirely in English. This was surprising and suggested that this restaurant, although providing for the Arabic speaking community, is aware of the fact that a large percentage of their clientele are English speakers, such as students and local residents.

2. Questionnaire

- Where were you born? **Jordan, Palestine.**
- What language do you speak? **Arabic.**
- How long have you been living in Manchester? **6 years.**
- How often do you use English when talking to customers? (Never/almost never/ sometimes/ often/ almost always/ always) Does this depend on the customer? **Often, about 50%. Depends on customer, if they're English, I speak English to them.**
- Do you tend to greet every customer in English first? **It is dependent on what language they speak.** (*The waiter is possibly inferring here that he waits for the customer to speak first before establishing which language to speak to them in.*)
- Do you find that non-English speaking customers prefer ordering and talking to you in a language other than English? **Yes, they tend to speak their own language, if it's Arabic; otherwise they speak English to us.**

The waiter's response to the final question is the exact opposite to the response given by the waiter in Beirut. This is unexpected. The restaurants are quite next-door to one another and yet have completely different multilingual tendencies. This could simply be due to the fact that *Falafel* is more popular with English speakers, which could have subsequent effects on the language use by other non-English speaking customers. Perhaps non-English-speaking customers, in the light of the multicultural situation in the restaurant, see their language as a symbol of uniqueness.

The comparisons between the Arabic restaurants show, as was hypothesised, that English is used to increase business. Both restaurants attract a large percentage of Arabic speakers, especially *Beirut*. However, the fact that the restaurants are situated in England means that staff speak a basic amount of English.

Restaurant 3 - New Emperor

1. Observations

In the first of the two restaurants we visited in Chinatown, we were greeted in English. Similarly, as in *Falafel*, our arrival prompted a seemingly specific waitress to serve us. Presumably her English was superior to the other staff, who although standing closer to us, beckoned her over to greet us. This is merely an assumption, as the other waiters/waitresses could have all been busy, as the restaurant was fairly full. The majority of the customers were either White-British, or Chinese, in a ratio of roughly 1:1. We observed that waiters/waitresses tended to communicate a great deal more with the Chinese customers, as it was easier for them to do so.

The menu (Figure 2, Appendix) was written in English and Cantonese. However the Cantonese preceded the English translation, but in equal sized font. The waitress took our order in English. It became apparent that her English was not very strong, as when we placed our order she had to ask us to point out the item on the menu. After the meal, we asked for the bill (Figures 3 & 4, Appendix) and discovered that she had written the Cantonese translations of the items we had ordered. This suggests that she did not fully understand the English translations of the menu and instead relied upon the customer pointing out their preference in order that she could understand in Cantonese what they were ordering. She had however written some of the order in English, such as the time the order was placed and the beverages ordered. It is possible that because the drinks we ordered (Coke and water) are such popular items, the waitress was familiar enough with the English translations to write these items down in English.

English music was playing in the restaurant, suggesting a desire to appeal to English customers. Again, this shows the usage of English in such establishments is often for business.

2. Questionnaire

- Where were you born? **China**
- What language do you speak? **Chinese**
- How long have you been living in Manchester? **6 years.**
- How often do you use English when talking to customers? (Never/almost never/ sometimes/ often/ almost always/ always) Does this depend on the customer? **Sometimes. It depends on the customer. I can't speak much English, so if they're English, I speak as much English as I need to in order to take their order.**
- Do you tend to greet every customer in English first? **Yes, but if they are Chinese, I then speak to them in Chinese.**
- Do you find that non-English speaking customers prefer ordering and talking to you in a language other than English? **Yes, we get lots of Chinese speakers, and they like to speak in Chinese.**

Interestingly, the responses given by the waitress in this restaurant mention that her English is not very good, and in fact go on to mention something we had postulated may be the case in the previous restaurants; she only speaks as much English as she needs to in order to take the order.

Restaurant 4 – Middle Kingdom

1. Observations

Similarly, we were greeted by the waiter in English. Nevertheless, his greeting was the limit of the discourse. He showed us to our table without speaking, and was obviously reluctant to use English. This could be due to the fact that noticeably all of the customers, except us, were Chinese, and conversed in Cantonese. The fact that there were no knives and forks, only chopsticks, and the noticeably high percentage of Chinese customers gave the impression that we, as English customers, were an exception.

Despite this, the Cantonese menu (Figure 5, Appendix) also contained English translations of all the items and the banquet section was only written in English. For a restaurant that appeared to draw custom from Chinese clientele alone, this was a great surprise and another piece of evidence to suggest that English was used to attract extra business.

The waiter took our order in English. Similarly to the situation in *New Emperor*, he asked us to point out which item we wished to order from the menu. Door signs and toilet signs were all written solely in Cantonese.

2. Questionnaire

With some difficulty in communication, we asked the waiter the questions from our questionnaire. The responses were as follows:

- Where were you born? **China**
 - What language do you speak? **Chinese**
 - How long have you been living in Manchester? **5 years.**
 - How often do you use English when talking to customers? (Never/almost never/ sometimes/ often/ almost always/ always) Does this depend on the customer? **Almost never, maybe 20%. Everyone who comes here is Chinese and speaks Chinese.**
1. Do you tend to greet every customer in English first? **No, not really, I tend to greet people in Chinese, as most people who come here are Chinese.**
 2. Do you find that non-English speaking customers prefer ordering and talking to you in a language other than English? **Yes, everyone who comes here just uses Chinese.**

Contrary to all the other restaurants, the waiter in *Middle Kingdom* stated, 'Everyone who comes here is Chinese and speaks Chinese.' Although our presence rendered this false, it is interesting to observe his belief that only Chinese people go to that restaurant. It is clear from this result, coupled with the results from the other

restaurants, that English is not always required, but simply there in the event that an English speaker should come in.

Discussion

The main point that has emerged from the results is the varied amount of English usage in restaurants that seemingly have little need of the language, except for a small increase in business. Staff at all four restaurants showed a limited knowledge of English that was sufficient to take customers' orders. However, as all of the staff questioned were first-generation immigrants, and judging by their responses to the questions about their own language use, it is clear that the only time they use English is in the public domain – the restaurant.

The explanation for this could be, as Fishman theorises, that, 'in certain societies particular behaviors (including language behaviors) are expected (if not required) of particular individuals vis-a-vis each other.' (Fishman, 1965: 76) In all four restaurants, the presence of English on the menus and the use of basic English by the staff points to there being an unwritten requirement that because the restaurant is situated in England, it is expected of the staff and the restaurant, that English be provided, even if the vast majority of customers are not English speakers.

We did some initial research into language requirements for restaurants in England, which seemingly proved that restaurants simply have their own policy about whether or not the staff must speak English, and that there is no specific law that stipulates that staff must speak English. Despite this, the use of basic English in a restaurant in England is seemingly required by virtue of its location.

Along similar lines, one waiter in the Arabic restaurant, *Falafel*, reported that he was born in China, and learnt Arabic behind the counter in order to work there. He is now fluent in Arabic, but not English. This is startling, and proves that the requirement for working in the restaurant was evidently a good knowledge of Arabic, not English!

As mentioned initially, we altered our plan slightly and visited four completely different restaurants, as the restaurants we had planned to visit quite obviously catered for English speakers primarily. The waiters spoke good English and the menus were written solely in English, and looking through the windows, it was apparent that only White-British speakers chose to dine there. It is thus evident that establishments, such as the four that we investigated, have a specific clientele that is catered for linguistically by the use of their own native language. This can also be confirmed by the use of menus by some restaurants in Chinatown, such as in Figure 6 (Appendix).

Conclusion

In light of our research questions, we discovered that all the staff that we interviewed and observed in these four multicultural restaurants tended to speak their own native language to the customers, as most customers preferred to speak that language. Evidently, language provision in these establishments is for the native language primarily, with English present simply for business.

In future, it would be interesting to gather data from more restaurants in both these areas of Manchester, in order to establish more facts about the specific purpose and usage of English in these complex language domains. It would also be useful to determine what the individual restaurants' policies are regarding language provision and staff employment.

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Appendix



Figure 1 – Falafel menu



Figure 2 – New Emperor menu

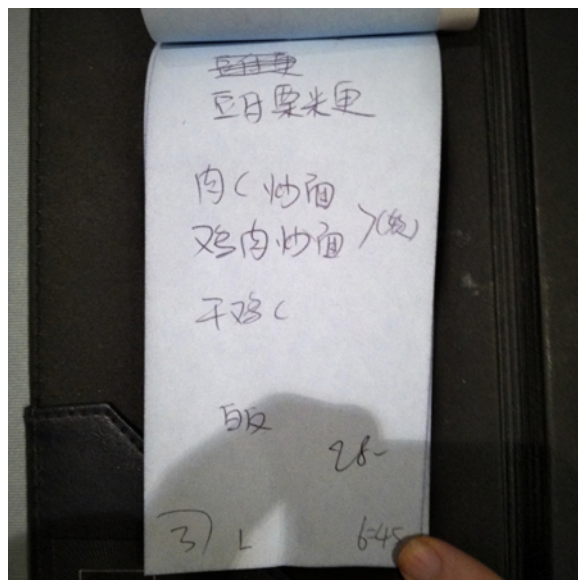


Figure 3 – New Emperor bill

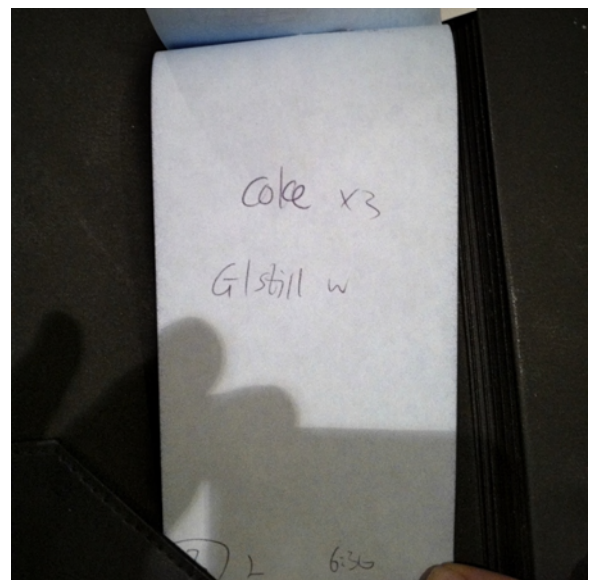


Figure 4 – New Emperor bill 2



Figure 5 – Middle Kingdom Menu



Figure 6 – Street Menu in Chinatown