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Case Study on Multilingualism in Cheetham Hill

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Research

As previously explained, the area of study: Cheetham Hill, is considered as one, if not the most, diverse and multilingual area of Manchester. The fieldwork and research's first purpose was to propose more literature and content about the studied area. As previously established, only little information was known until now, especially about local shop owners' viewpoints on multilingualism. This study also allowed us to document the University of Manchester's application LinguaSnapp. Secondly, we chose to study the reasons and motivations for an area to promote multilingualism focusing on two points of view: the shop owners' and the clients'. We hypothesised that multilingual signs, being a very important feature of that area, create an important sense of community as well as identity, meaning the different populations feel included in the area. Some time was also dedicated to the content of those signs as previous studies lacked this aspect meaning it is difficult to understand the local businesses owners' motivation to display multilingual sign. We consider it to be a real marketing asset as we believe the clients' feeling of belonging to a community are likely to encourage them to become a client of these shops. In summary, the whole purpose of this micro level study was to question the locals' perceptions about multilingualism and those signs in the area in order to paint an accurate picture of the linguistic landscape of Cheetham Hill.

Reviewed Methodology:

We intended to use the newly launched application LinguaSnapp created by the University of Manchester in order to collect as much information as possible about the studied area: Cheetham Hill. However, only very few photos had been taken meaning it only gave us limited information. We also realised that Cheetham Hill centre was essentially one main street so we decided to conduct our research on our first visit rather than planning a second visit with the shop owners as was previously planned. This also ensured that the time scale was respected and that the different shop owners did not change their minds about answering our questionnaires. As the number of visits went from two originally planned to one, the group separated into two groups: the first one taking photos of multilingual signs across the area and the second one interviewing the shop owners, staff and clients.

Due to the timescale required by this report, it was impossible for us to leave the surveys with pens and boxes in the different shops for a week. We also received a very mixed welcome from the locals resulting in a change of strategy. Rather than counting on them to promote and fill out questionnaires, we decided to stay in the area until enough tokens were collected. For the same

reason, as we previously planned to leave an online survey, we decided not to do so as the locals looked very busy and were not always cooperative.

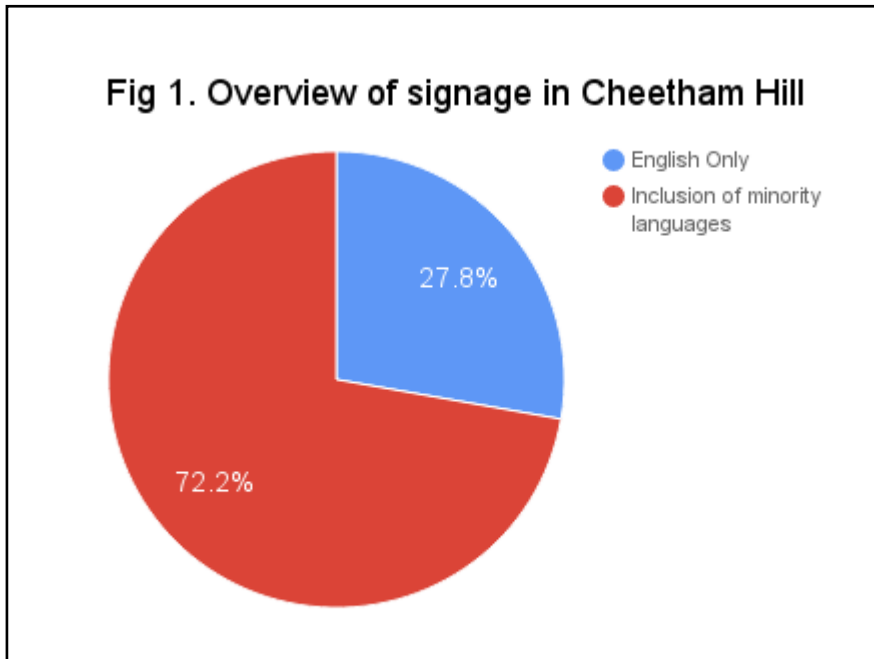
We also had to extend our target subjects as we previously planned on only interviewing shop owners and their clients. However, we encountered some difficulties in making contact with them and people did not always agree to answer to our questions. They also were not native speakers of English and some had very little knowledge of it resulting in a language barrier being very present meaning it was difficult to understand each other. On that basis, we took the decision to include people who were on the main street as potential clients of these shops and we made sure we asked whether they lived nearby or not.

This reserved behaviour from locals also meant that unlike what we originally planned, we could not ensure a certain parity between genders and generations. Indeed, our aim of a representative number of tokens was defeated due to most parents forbidding their children to take part into our surveys. Moreover, women were not very present on that day and most of them did not accept to answer our questions.

The last point that we slightly modified was the nationalities of the subjects who answered our surveys. We decided to keep interviewing native speakers of English who live there or who own a shop as we thought it was important to understand everyone's point of view, not solely the foreigners' viewpoints. The initial idea of two questionnaires: one for the shop owners and one for the clients was maintained. The two different surveys can be seen on Appendix A and B.

Findings

Subsequent to the completion of our fieldwork within the area of Cheetham Hill, we were able to compile our quantitative and qualitative data, providing a base for the analysis of the linguistic landscape within this area. Following this, we could conclude whether our results corresponded with those of our aims and hypotheses. An overview of our investigation findings is provided below.

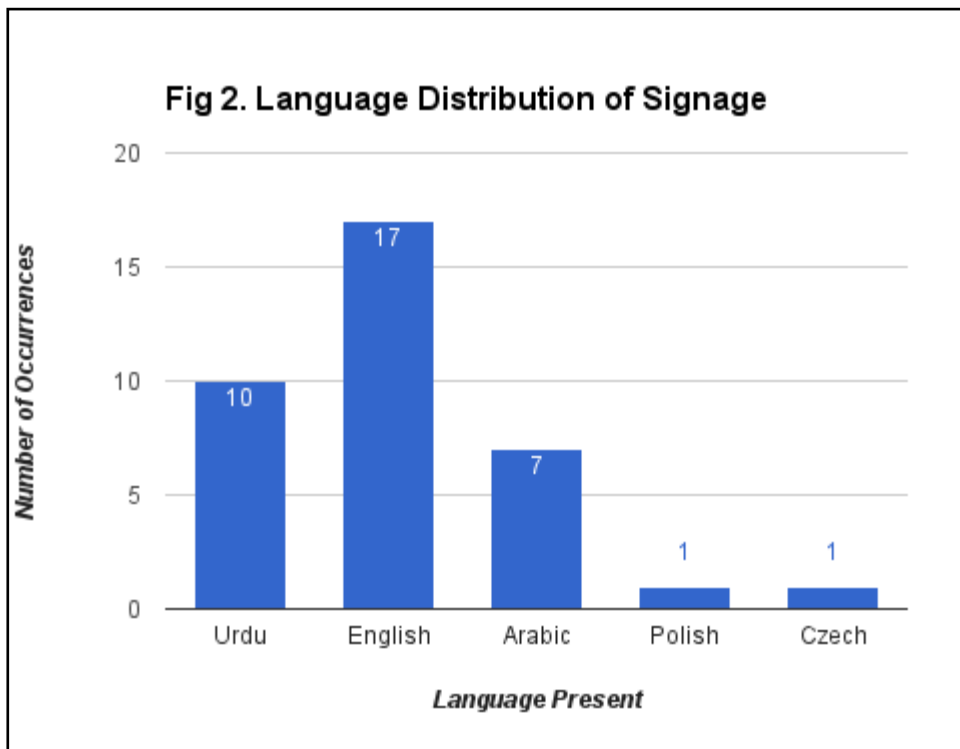


Quantitative overview of signage throughout Cheetham Hill

Concerning the production of our quantitative data, we recorded the number of businesses and their featuring of languages on their signage within Cheetham Hill by means of a tally system in order to compare the use of English and other languages within signage, through which the above results were obtained (see Figure 1). Overall, the percentage of monolingual English signs within signs in the public space accounted for 27.8%, however, English was usually present with at least one other language, and as we can see from (Figure 1.) meaning that 72.2% of our sample included at least one other language alongside English.

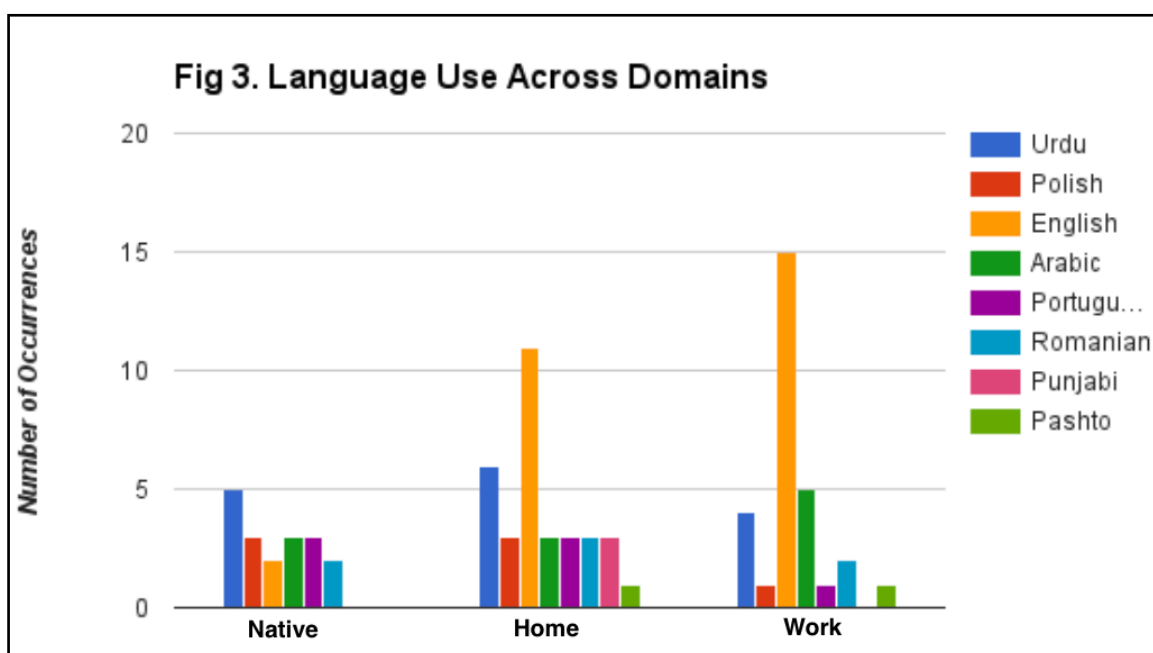
Language distribution of signage

The following data was compiled from a smaller sample of 36 respondents whose businesses displayed minority languages, and who were willing to participate in our research. This reduced sample size is due to the fact that we were often unable to identify languages featured on signs without the help of local employers and employees. We were able to identify key languages through this communication such as Urdu, Arabic, Czech and Polish, which accounted for our sample of the Cheetham Hill linguistic landscape.

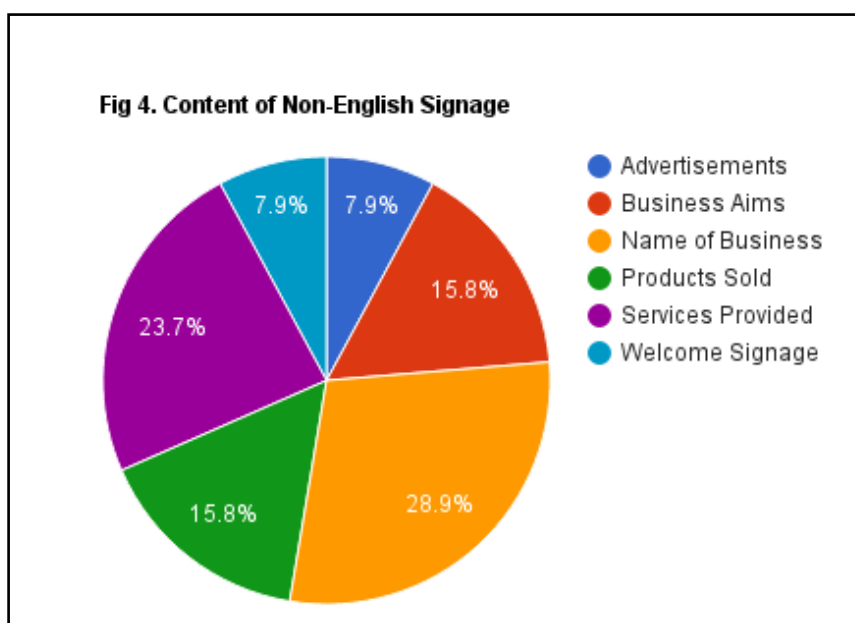


The results from our investigation into language distribution in Cheetham hill revealed that although English was indeed the most dominant language, featuring in 17 of the 36 multilingual signs analysed, Urdu was also widely adopted, namely in 10 signs. Arabic was also present on 7 signs, demonstrating that this language is also of importance within the Cheetham Hill area. Polish and Czech also appeared a respected 1 time each within our sample. (see Figure 2.)

Language use across domains



Our research into language use across domains among residents of Cheetham Hill substantiated that English was dominant in all three areas; that is to say that it was the principal daily use language of our informants, and the majority additionally employed this language in their home environment as well as at work. On the topic of native languages, 3 business owners were native speakers of Urdu, 2 of Arabic, and 1 of Pashto. In the home setting, both English and Urdu were prominent as 11 respondents used English and 6 used Urdu, however, we have found that English is widely spoken throughout the home setting, but it not always used as the sole language within this setting, as the majority of our sample use this alongside at least one other language. Regarding the use of languages in the work environment, English is by far the most used in this setting, however as with the home setting, we can see that this is used alongside at least one other language, which tends to be either Urdu or Arabic (see Figure 3).



Content of non-English signage

We collected data concerning the type of information displayed on the signs throughout Cheetham Hill featuring languages other than English. According to our findings, the main use of the majority of languages featured was to exhibit the name of their business with 28.9% doing this. Featuring close behind this was the type of services the business offered with 23.7% demonstrating this within their signage. An equal amount of 15.8% provided an explanation of products sold and their specific business aims. With the rest of our data analysed being that of 7.8% promoting advertisements, and welcome signage aimed specifically at their clients.

Discussion

When examining our data, it is clear that the main languages found on the signs we analysed are Urdu (and Arabic to a slightly lesser degree). This correlates with the fact that various people we interviewed for our questionnaires stated that they were originally from Pakistan. These findings agree with Brown (2013) in that they state ‘Manchester’s most widely spoken non-English language remains Urdu’. Map A below shows the number of signs with Urdu on whilst map B shows the whole of Cheetham. When comparing them both, it is easy to see how popular Urdu is in the area as they are very similar. With this evidence, we can thus agree with the statement of Kasanga (2012) as he believes that ‘the languages used in public signs indicate what languages are locally relevant, or give evidence of what languages are becoming locally relevant’. Consequently, due to the high rates of Urdu speakers in the Cheetham Hill area, lots of local business signs are found to be in this language. Other languages found on the signs include; Polish, Czech, Persian and Pashto. These also coincide with the origins of people we interviewed.

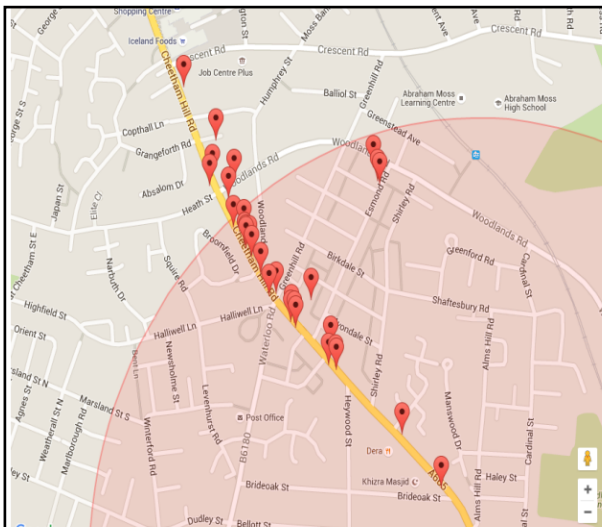


Fig 5. Map of shop signs in Urdu

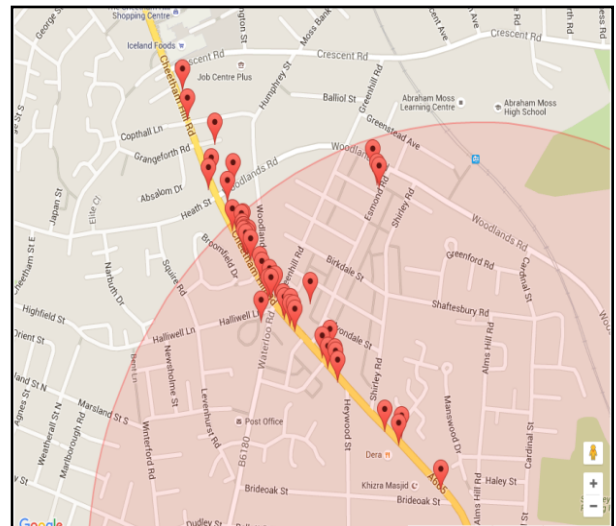


Fig 6. Map of all Cheetham Hill's shop signs

Now we have an idea of the languages spoken in the area, what do we know about the actual content of the signs? What pieces of information do the shop owners deem important enough to translate? According to our data analysis, most of the translations are communicative. The words which have been translated are those which provide content information about the shop and its products or services. For example, the butcher shop ‘PAK’ displays the bigger text in Urdu with the translation ‘Fresh halal meat’, whilst the smaller text in Arabic is translated to ‘Halal meat’.



As halal meat is an important part of a Muslim's life, having this translated into these two languages for them to be able to read is crucial. We also found four other restaurants and takeaway establishments which translated the word 'Halal' into either Urdu or Arabic. Another example of communicative translations is from the corner shop 'Euro market' illustrated in image 1 above. They included Polish, 'Polish products/Polskie produkty' and Czech, 'Czech products/Ceski produkty'; this is simply stating the product information so that customers know what is sold in their shop.

However, there was one interesting sign found outside the clothes shop 'Bhatti House'. Instead of simply translating something about the content of their shop, they were emblematic in their choice of words. The writing is in Arabic and its full translation is 'In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful, God has willed'. This phrase is generally an expression of joy, praise or thankfulness and Muslims view their accomplishments as achieved through the will of Allah (God) 'Masha Allah'. Displaying this on their shop demonstrates their desire to include and welcome other speakers of this language through their shared beliefs, and through this, attract more customers to their shop. This inclusivity of minority languages confirms Matras and Robertson's (2015) theory that private organisations' use of signs is primarily aimed at the audience they are targeting and usage of more than one language within a business allows for a larger audience base. Thus, becoming inclusive of these languages provides better economic benefits for Manchester (Matras and Robertson, 2015), and this can be seen in Cheetham Hill according to our data.

There were divided opinions on the use of multilingual signs in the community of Cheetham Hill. For example, the majority of shop owners who were not native speakers of English reacted positively and told us that by including minority languages on their signs, they were likely to 'attract more customers' through making them feel comfortable and included. One particular owner

from shop number 3 believed it was 'his duty' to accommodate everyone they could through their signs. Another business owner - number 6 - states 'It is very important for the well-being of my business', therefore, taking a more marketing approach to multilingualism. A more personal view was shown through the fourth shop owner claiming that he enjoys Cheetham Hill as it is a fantastic mixture of cultures. This suggests a feeling of pride and comfort in his way of seeing his area. Overall, the seven shop owners that figured in our questionnaire agreed on one point: that multiculturalism and multilingualism in an important feature of their community. Only the reasons as to why this was the case were very different from one another.

Many customers were also supportive of the inclusion of minorities through their signage with one speaker who identified as native English and did not speak any other languages even declaring 'I love it'. Shop owner 4's sense of pride also echoed certain clients' that were questioned. For example, clients 1, 2 and 6 explained that those signs made them feel included and welcome contributing to a sense of community.

These opinions agree with the views of Aronin and Singleton (2008) as they believe that we must 'accept multilingualism' for a city such as Manchester to thrive and survive in this modern world which encompasses so many different cultures. Despite this, those who were from different countries yet are native speakers of English disagreed with the use of signs to promote multilingualism. They thought that it was wrong to encourage young speakers to ignore speaking English through using multilingual signs and they should be keeping it to a minimum. This is the case of shop owner 1 who was against the idea of promotion of non-English languages in Cheetham Hill stating 'It should not really be promoted as anyone living in England should speak English. It is only really crucial in hospitals or religious institutions but it should not be used on a daily basis'. This could be because those who have originated from a different country feel obliged to respect the English language if they are residing in England.

This statement is explained through some of our subjects' answers. Indeed, some clients reported that they do not use English on a daily basis and that, in fact, they do not even use in within their family or at work. For instance, client 2 only speaks Polish in his family, Client 3 uses Urdu as well as a local dialect and client 18 only speaks Portuguese with her family. However, when client 2, 3 and 18 are in their workplaces, they all speak English which suggests that they are able to communicate in English but choose not to in their family. An only possible exception to this would be when they converse with their children as most of the second generation knows English. Another explanation could be that children have to use English when outside their family homes (school, hobbies, etc.) resulting in them acquiring English through other means that their parents.

In summary, the opinions and results from the questionnaires of the shop owners and clients prove that the majority of both shop owners and clients see the large array of multiculturalism and

multilingualism in Cheetham Hill to be a positive for themselves and the community. However, there are some differing opinions into the reasons as to why it is important and where its benefits lie. Cheetham Hill Road remains 'Britain's most diverse street' as it 'boasts the largest number of nationalities in the UK' (Crossley 2013).

If we were to study this particular field again, we could make various changes to improve the methodology. Firstly, our main goal was to discover the linguistic landscape of Cheetham Hill. However, we could have compared Cheetham Hill to other areas in Manchester (e.g. Chinatown, Curry mile, etc.); this would have enabled us to evaluate both areas in the same way, obtaining a larger sample which could have helped explain the linguistic landscape of Manchester as a whole. Likewise, collecting more tokens on which to base our analysis would have provided a more representative picture. As was explained before, people were not always cooperative when we asked them if they were able to answer a few questions for us. Going back to the area several times would have helped with this setback as there would be more time to collect as much data as possible. Also, on the day we went to visit Cheetham Hill there were surprisingly low numbers of women in the area. If we were to do this study again, multiple visits to the area would hopefully allow us to collect more views of women on the multilingualism in the area, and in turn, gain a more illustrative depiction of people's views on it. A lot of our speakers were in the 25-50 years old category; gathering more data from younger speakers would help represent a more accurate picture of Cheetham Hill's linguistic landscape. The results we did collect could have also been inaccurate due to some people not quite understanding the questions we were asking them. Thus, collecting a larger body of data would have helped acquire a more accurate sample.

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