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Linguistic Landscapes: a study into the Urdu speaking community of Cheetham Hill

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Local shopping streets capture the atmosphere of urban communities which are contrasted by rising gentrification. Local streets are the first places you can find diverse, multicultural and multilingual people. These streets are not just shopping streets; they are social spaces where local identity is formed (Zukin, Kasinitz and Chen, 2015).

Introducing the Area

The project is concerned with the effects that linguistic landscapes can have on a community. Our focus in our study of linguistic landscapes is to explore the Urdu language community within a small area in Cheetham Hill, Manchester. Our focus was the main high street in Cheetham Hill which covered an area of 0.7 miles and consists of clothes and fabric shops, butchers, supermarkets, restaurants and takeaways. Many shops on Cheetham Hill road are culturally specific to the Pakistani or Muslim community. Many of the shops on the street are small, independent, family businesses that attract many regular and local people. The most frequently encountered language on signage in Cheetham Hill is Urdu. Some butchers and takeaways had Arabic signs and there are some Eastern European food shops with signs in Polish and Czech. There are a small number of handmade signs on display but the majority of multilingual signs featured English and a community language. Most of the small businesses used community languages on their signs but a noteworthy amount did not. Large commercial businesses did not use any community languages on their signs but Council buildings and pharmacies did.

The most frequently encountered language in public signage in Manchester outside of Chinatown is Urdu, with Arabic growing in particular in Rusholme (Matras and Robertson, p 307, 2015), this does reflect the Urdu speaking population in Manchester that we outlined in our Background Information. Figure 1 shows the 2011 census data on the Ethnicity of residents in Cheetham Ward, there is a high percentage of people who identify as Asian or Asian British in the Ward.

Source: Table KS201

Ward total = 22,562

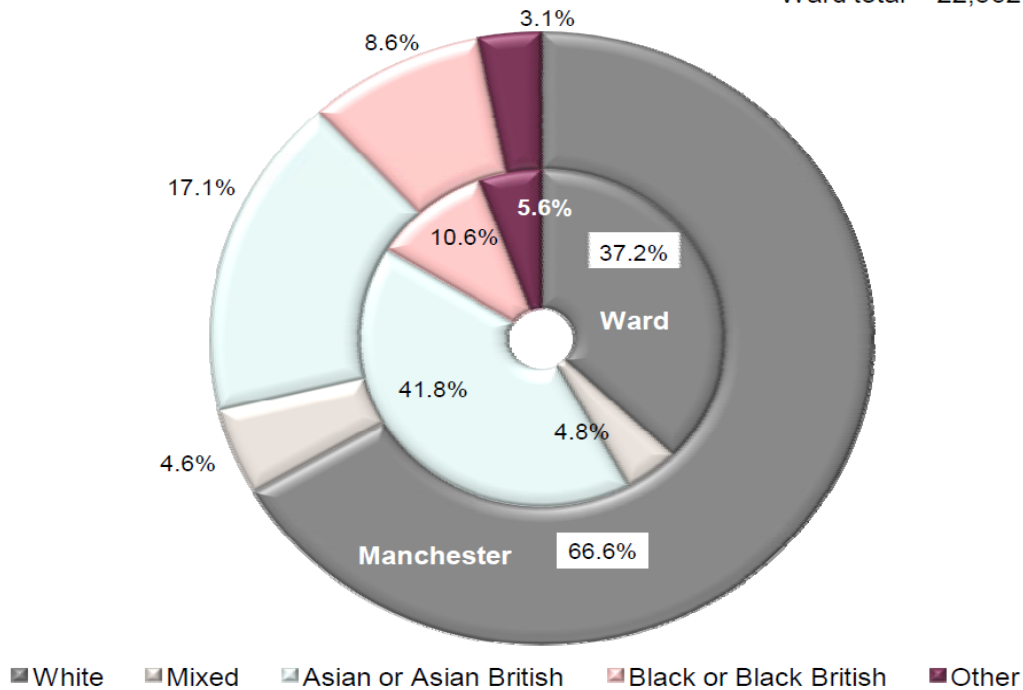


Figure 1 (Office for National Statistics, 2011)

According to the 2011 National Census data, 25.2% of those living in Manchester were born outside of the UK. For Cheetham Ward, this figure increases to 44%. The most recent Cheetham Ward census data shows that 28.2% of people identify as “Asian/Asian British – Pakistani”, but only 13.9% of people were born in Pakistan. (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The 2011 census returned data on respondents “main language”; this term is ambiguous, and we attempt to collect data from our ethnographic interview respondents on domains and attitudes towards their languages in order to collect a better idea on what “main language” means to people. In Cheetham Ward, 14.1% of respondents said their “main language” was Urdu; this was the most popular minority language spoken in the area.

From the 1950s, Manchester began to get significant populations of Afro-Caribbean and Pakistani people; for this reason, the Pakistani community in Manchester are long-established.

Discussion of Research Questions

The aim of this project is to find out if the linguistic landscape of Cheetham Hill road reflects linguistic awareness and attitudes that Urdu speakers have to the language in the community. In order to do this, we will be cataloguing the varied signs in the community. We will then be looking at two research questions:

1. What is the infrastructure? - *Who puts up the signs and who is exposed to them?*

For this, we will be asking shopkeepers their reasons for putting up the signs. There are difficulties with this, as we may not be able to speak to the owner or somebody who knows the reasons the sign was erected or about the difficulties and costs of obtaining the sign in Urdu. Due to this, we can elicit shop workers opinions on these questions and on why the sign was placed in the shop. We will also ask whether the sign had the desired effect, and what the effect was; as in attracting and welcoming more customers or being able to better communicate with customers. We are asking shopkeepers these specific questions as shops in Cheetham Hill are an established part of a diverse community, and we aim to find whether they are aware of the need for diverse languages on signs in the community.

In our aim to find who is exposed to these signs, we will ask proprietors and members of the community questions on their awareness and perception of signs on Cheetham Hill road, which leads to our second set of research questions:

2. What effect do signs have on the community? *Are people aware of the diverse linguistic landscape? What are people's attitudes towards the signs? Do other factors such as identity and ethnic background, language use and domains, and proficiency play a role?*

To answer these questions we aimed to ask customers of shops, people working in shops and the general public of their level of awareness of and level of engagement with Urdu signs in the community; such as whether they noticed Urdu on a specific sign, and what kind of signs in the community they tend to notice. Then we will ask about their attitudes; whether they find Urdu on signs useful, and whether the use of

diverse languages on signs matters to them. It is important to analyse the factors of ethnic identity; here we draw upon Interactional Linguistics, where "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p. 7). We will also use people's responses to analyse language domain and proficiency. We hypothesise that language domain, language proficiency, and generational differences will result in people's awareness of and attitude to signs. We will ask about ethnic background and linguistic domains and aim to see if there is a generational pattern that affects awareness and engagement with signs.

Methods in relation to Literature.

Public signs can be monolingual or multilingual, reflecting the diversity of the languages in the area. The predominance of one language over another can reflect the power and status of competing language groups (Landry and Bourhis, 1997, page 26). In Cheetham Hill, where there is a majority language of English, it is evident that we would find more signs in English than in any minority language. The signs in Cheetham Hill road show that English is the only language used to convey information such as street names and road signs; this both due to the national language policy and in general, is the case where the dominant language on signs is the language of the majority group in the area (Maurais and Monnier, 1996). When studying the linguistic landscape of Cheetham Hill road, we found that signs in Urdu were used to attract customers and to welcome customers who are speakers of Urdu. Ben-Rafael et al. claimed that language use in the linguistic landscape falls into two categories:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Type of item</i>
Top-down	1. Public institutions: religious, governmental, municipal – cultural and educational, medical
	2. Public signs of general interest
	3. Public announcements
	4. Signs of street names
Bottom-up	1. Shop signs: e.g. clothing, food, jewellery
	2. Private business signs: offices, factories, agencies
	3. Private announcements: 'wanted' ads, sale or rentals of flats or cars

Figure 2 (Ben-Rafael et al, 2006, p 14)

We found that the Bottom-up category used the most multilingual signs. We hypothesise that this could be again due to the national language of England being English, and also because there were more signs of the bottom-up category than there were of the top-down category; but we were unable to look at signs in religious and educational institutions.

We aimed to conduct what Blommaert and Maly call an 'ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis', this method of research enables us to both identify the demographics of an area and also the dynamic and complex features of a diverse area. The linguistic landscape turns into a social landscape; features of which are understood through the analysis of signage (Blommaert and Maly, 2014, p 194).

To begin, we had to catalogue the area, as we can't analyse a community's relationship with signs without knowing of the distribution of signs. As explained in the first section of this project, we used LinguaSnapp to take photos of signs in the area and place them on the map. LinguaSnapp is a new and innovative technique of mapping linguistic landscapes that enables us to visualise the area. The mapping feature of the app allows researchers to look at the frequency of signs in particular

languages, which can lead to analyses on the languages spoken in an area, who speaks these languages and how they are reflected in the linguistic landscape.

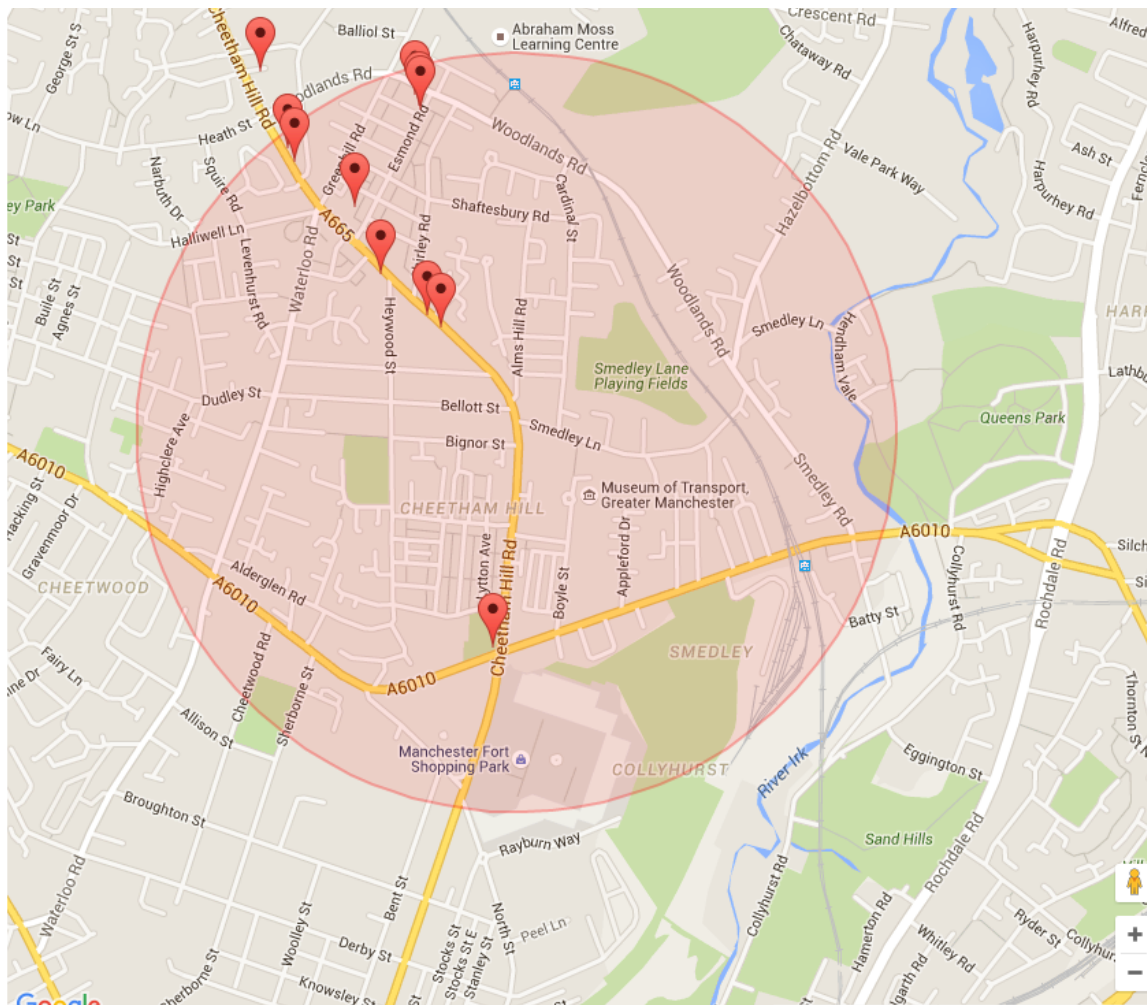


Figure 3 Mapped results in Cheetham Hill (Title contains – NK)

The LinguaSnapp map can be found at: <http://www.linguasnapp.manchester.ac.uk/>.

The LinguaSnapp method of taking photos of signs is new and different; it incites levels of engagement that previous research methods did not. Our main research method was ethnographic interviews, which were more like conversations with people; this enabled engagement with the community, and open ended questions coupled with observation elicited responses which allowed further insight into the community. We found that LinguaSnapp was a surprisingly good conversation starter for our ethnographic interviews; and opened up the conversation about languages in the area and the signs that people notice. We also found that people were more

willing to talk about signs in the area first; rather than their linguistic background, which incited some negative responses.

There is a lack of ethnographic research in the study of linguistic landscapes. Studies on linguistic landscapes have been mainly focused on public visibility of signs (Landry and Bourhis, 1997, p 23). Blommaert claims that earlier studies of linguistic landscapes use “underdeveloped methodologies” (Blommaert, 2013, p 79); and were quantitative, merely listing languages. Blommaert states that comprehension of the socio-cultural meaning of language material requires ethnographic understanding, and signs aren’t just linguistic objects (Blommaert, 2013, p 80). Signs in a space tell us about the users of the signs; their interactions with and influences on the signs. The signs themselves, Blommaert says, tell stories about the cultural, historical, political and social backgrounds of a space (Blommaert, 2013, p 80). Blommaert and Maly claim that all signs can be analysed by looking at three axes: the past, the origins of the sign; the present, their placement; and the future, the intended audience (Blommaert and Maly, 2014, p 193).

Quantitative linguistic landscape studies highlight the existence of languages in a space, this is what we have used LinguaSnapp for; to be able to look at the presence of Urdu in Cheetham Hill. Then we used ethnographic data to answer the research questions to reach our aim: to find out if the linguistic landscape reflects linguistic awareness and attitudes that Urdu speakers have to the language in the community. We had two sets of questions; one set specific to shop owners who put up the sign, and one for general public about signs in the area and their attitudes towards them.

Unfortunately, we found it difficult to interview members of the public by asking them on the street. Therefore, we asked any shopkeeper on Cheetham Hill road, about general signs in the area and their attitudes towards the multilingualism in the area. If the shopkeeper did not have an Urdu sign outside the shop, we did not ask them the set of questions about signs therefore we interviewed them as members of the public.

Discussion of Findings

1. What is the infrastructure?

Who puts up the signs and who is exposed to them?

We were not able to interview every shop keeper in Cheetham Hill, and only a small number of shops had Urdu signs or were willing to speak to us. A study by LSECities found that the highest representation of countries of birth amongst shop proprietors includes: Pakistan (41%); UK (31%); and Iraq (7%). Both the LSECities study and our own research found that the Pakistani community is the longest-established in the area; with a rise in proprietors from Iraq and Afghanistan in the past 10 years (Hall, Finlay and King, 2015). The LSE study also found that 93% of proprietors speak more than one language, while 69% speak three languages or more (Hall, Finlay and King, 2015), and in our ethnographic interviews we found that every shop owner we spoke to was multilingual.

Although we found that Urdu was widely spoken in the area, we found less signs in Urdu than expected. We found that Urdu signs featured mainly in clothes shops and butchers. The reason for this could be due to the nature of the business; one business owner responded that many Urdu speakers come into the shop because they advertise the tailoring of culturally specific clothing, both using images and the Urdu language. The owner said that she put up the sign because she knew she would get a lot of Urdu speaking customers, despite the price tag of £700.



Figure 4 Uzma NK.

There were a number of handwritten or computer printed signs conveying information. A local travel agency informed us that the signs were necessary as many people in the area are not able to speak or read English, and they mainly cater to Middle Eastern and South Asian people. The signs were written in Pashto and Urdu and conveyed information about travelling to these countries, the information was not written in English anywhere as the owner said that “English people don’t buy tickets to Pakistan”. One handwritten sign in an electronics shop advertised money transfers to Pakistan; we were unable to get an image of this sign. Handwritten signs in an area indicate a demand for a specific language or for specific information and the nature of the shop and sign comes into play here; in the travel agency, information is constantly changing so it is cost-effective to print out relevant information as it becomes relevant. The shop which advertised money transfers was not a shop set up solely for this purpose, and therefore this could simply be a new venture in the business.

The privately owned Council House service in Cheetham Hill had translations from English to Urdu on every sign, but no other language was visible in the building. We were told that there was a telephone interpretation service (Language Line) available for speakers of different languages and there were workers able to translate, but no sign provisions for other languages. The person we spoke to did not know the exact reasons for the use of Urdu on the signs, but said that it could be due to the high number of Urdu speakers in the area.

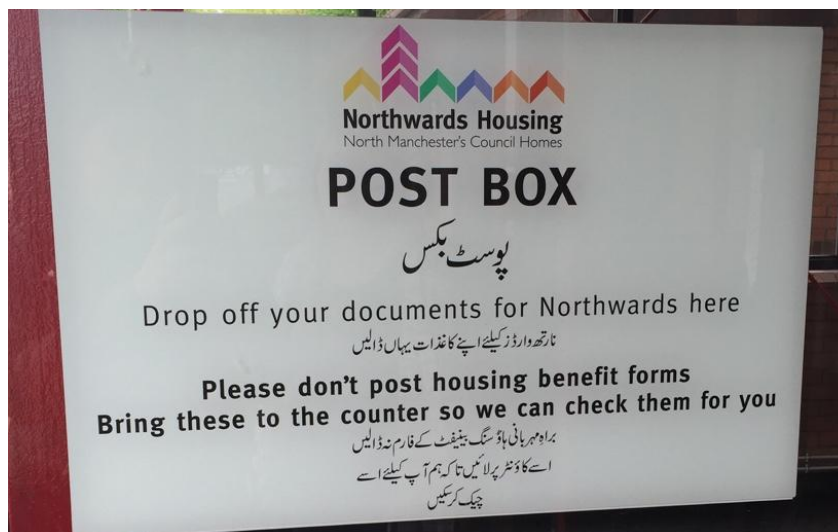


Figure 5 Northwards Housing NK.

The multilingual signs in Cheetham Hill often featured English as the main language, or English and Urdu side by side, as shown in figure 5:



Figure 6 Mushtaq halal meats NK.

The business in figure 5 featured Urdu on their sign, as the owner felt it important to cater to the diverse languages in the area; also it is common for him to interact in Urdu with customers, as he said that many people struggle with English. The use of Urdu on this sign could be to welcome customers and indicate to passers-by that this is an Urdu speaking business, if they need it.

The one pharmacy on Cheetham Hill road conveyed information in both Urdu and English but we were unable to do an interview about the sign. Here, there is evidently a need for this information in Urdu; possibly due to a high number of people who are recent immigrants or unable to speak English due to age or other factors.

The nature of the business is a reason for the need for translation, places which require a lot of provider-customer interaction need to be able to advertise what they are able to provide both in terms of language and services. In the same vein, banks and supermarkets which may also require these kinds of interaction did not have any translated signs; possibly because these interactions are less personal.

We found a generational trend when we studied the shopkeepers; we found that shopkeepers who were older or born in Pakistan were more likely to use Urdu on a sign, but the businesses that did not have multilingual signs were primarily owned by younger generations who were born in the UK.



Figure 7 Wise Pharmacy

We found no public announcements or street signs in Urdu, or any other minority language, as Manchester has no official language policy for such signs. Shop signs, especially clothing and food, were the main users of multilingual signs.

To conclude this section of research by returning to Blommaert and Maly's three axes of analysis (Blommaert and Maly, 2014, p193-4), we can analyse the signs in the area:

1. The past: signs point towards their origins. The history of the sign can lead us to analyse the conditions under which the sign was designed. Through our analysis of Urdu, we found that it was an established community language with many speakers of Urdu using all the different sectors of businesses in Cheetham Hill. Therefore, it is a safe assumption that there are multilingual signs in Urdu due to historic reasons. Our own findings in our ethnographic research led us to understand that there are many generations of Urdu speakers in Cheetham Hill, suggesting that some signs were deployed a while ago, when the Pakistani community was establishing itself. Handwritten signs

counter this, as they often are an indicator of languages used by recent immigrant populations. We did find some hand written in Urdu, but the nature of the shop and sign comes into play here; in the travel agency, information is constantly changing so it is cost-effective to print out relevant information as it becomes relevant. The shop which advertised money transfers was not a shop set up solely for this purpose, and therefore this could simply be a new venture in the business.

2. The future: signs point towards their intended audience, through what they address and who they address specifically. For example, the informative signs in the pharmacy intend to address Urdu speakers in need of medical information. Signs in clothes shops and butchers intend to draw in customers who speak Urdu by advertising their services and products in the language. Culturally specific clothes shops are an indicator of this, as they cater to a niche market.
3. The present: finally, signs point towards the present, specifically through how they are placed. We found that although shops had signs in Urdu outside, the inside of the shop either did not have any signs or the signs were in English. Therefore we can analyse the signs as informative up to a point; once you are inside the shop, you are either able to speak to the workers or you are able to find products on your own.

2. What is the effect of signs on the community?

This section of the interview was conducted separately from the first section; here we aim to find out about individual responses to signs in the linguistic landscape.

Are people aware of the diverse linguistic landscape?

When asked “when you walk down Cheetham Hill road, do you notice the signs in other languages?” many people responded that they definitely do notice the multilingual signs. We found that people tended to notice the signs that were in languages that they spoke, which was mainly Urdu, but some respondents said that there were a small number of Kurdish and Persian signs around the road. People said that there were many speakers of different languages in Cheetham Hill, almost every person we interviewed said that Urdu was a widely used language in the area,

but some people in shops said that they got customers that spoke Urdu, Panjabi, Arabic, Somali, Persian, Pashto and Polish, and many other minority languages were mentioned too.

We did get some respondents that said that there were many Urdu speakers in Cheetham Hill, but this was not reflected in the signage. The general trends in responses seemed to be that people thought that there were not many signs because they were unnecessary in the community, or that people did not notice signs that were not in the language that they said they used the most.

What are people's attitudes towards the signs?

In general, we received positive responses towards multilingual signs. People generally thought that the signs were not needed by themselves specifically, but older speakers or recent immigrants could be in need of signs in Urdu. Many people said that they spoke Urdu with customers and co-workers, so Urdu as a community language was important. Some respondents said that the area was linguistically diverse, and this was reflected in the signage, but signs are generally not needed as the younger generation do not read or write Urdu.

We did receive some negative responses towards the signs. People thought that signs should be in English, as it is the national language. One respondent owned a culturally specific clothing shop, but still maintained the fact that shop signs should be in English. This intolerance towards multilingual signs is usually expected in areas with political and linguistic tension (Raga, 2012), and would be expected with a language of recent immigrants but as Urdu is well established in the area, negative attitudes towards the visibility of the language from speakers of Urdu was unexpected, and also not common amongst our findings.

Do other factors such as identity and ethnic background, language use, domains, and proficiency play a role towards people's attitudes?

We only interviewed people who spoke Urdu and every respondent said they were of Pakistani descent. Many respondents said that knowing Urdu and maintaining the language was important to them, as it is their mother tongue. Some responses focused on the importance of multilingualism, no matter the language learned. We

found positive attitudes towards language maintenance mainly from people who had immigrated to the UK, and who were fluent. However, this was not always the case; one respondent who was born in Pakistan but had a Polish wife said that he would teach his children English, not Polish or Urdu. One Urdu speaker said that Arabic was more important to pass on rather than Urdu, for religious reasons. We claim that this was due to the speaker's individual identity; he had lived in the UK for a very long time, and had maintained his religious identity which was more important to him than his ethnic identity. Again, drawing on the idea that ethnic identity is an important factor in language maintenance; we found that when the respondent did not seem to have an interest in identifying with their Pakistani background, their desire to maintain their heritage language in further generations was not high. This is in contrast to speakers who did identify as Pakistani, which we found to be more enthusiastic about language maintenance. Also, identity is an important part in feelings of belonging to a community; we found that if a respondent has a sense of belonging to a community then they are more enthusiastic about maintaining that community identity.

We found some people who were not fluent in the language or were unable to read and write in Urdu. We found this response from people who were born in the UK, and were second or third generation British Pakistanis. One respondent said that they were fluent in Urdu, but their younger siblings were not, and this could have been to do with schooling as their siblings all attended higher education in the UK. It has been found that competency in the minority language declines from generation to generation, as immigrants move from a natural community of native speakers and have to maintain the heritage language (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2009). The later generations spoke Urdu mainly with parents, or only with one parent. We found that people's linguistic domains correlate with their awareness and attitudes towards signs. We found that people who use Urdu in more domains; home, work, social life and so on, notice Urdu signs on Cheetham Hill road and have a positive attitudes towards the signs. On the other hand, people who used Urdu mainly with parents and older speakers tended to not notice the signs or not care about the use of Urdu on signs.

Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this project was to catalogue the linguistic landscape of Cheetham Hill road and see whether it reflects the linguistic awareness and attitudes of Urdu speakers with regards to Urdu in the community and in their lives. By answering questions about who created the signs, who is exposed to the signs and the reasons for multilingual signs, we have been able to gain an understanding of what factors lead to the creation of a linguistic landscape; such as need and demand for a language, and also welcoming people from your community. By asking questions about people's perception and awareness of multilingual signs in the community and their language use, we were able to gain an insight into how the linguistic landscape reflects the linguistic community. However, we found that the linguistic landscape adapts depending on who is creating the signs and who is using the signs; their social and ethnic identity; and their attitudes towards community languages. We can expect Cheetham Hill road to look very different in fifty years-time; and for it to reflect the multilingualism of younger generations.

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