



# Report

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**LinguaSnapp survey of  
Greater Manchester Boroughs  
Fieldwork report: Rochdale**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. General summary**

This report will review the field investigation conducted in the borough of Rochdale. At its core, this survey's objective is to contribute to the study and in-depth understanding of multilingual landscapes, by submitting to the application LinguaSnapp new data on the presence of multilingual hubs in the district of Rochdale. However, it is not yet evident whether the individuals interacting with this environment have noted the presence of multilingual spots in the area and if it has impacted them.

A methodology, inspired by Rebecca Garvin's walking tours (Garvin, 2011), was developed from the research questions that were raised by an interest taken in this project's social implications. Has the Rochdale population noted the presence of multilingual signage in the area? If so, does the population possess its own "mental mapping" of the area's linguistic landscape? If Rochdale individuals have developed their own mapping of the area, how can it methodologically be used in the search of data for LinguaSnapp? To summarise, this project aim is to see, from the methodology developed, if the local population possesses its own "mental map" of the district's linguistic landscape and if it can accurately be linked to the physical presence of language hotspots in the area.

### **1.2. Literature review**

A report of Manchester's linguistic landscape (Gaiser & Matras, 2016) cites three factors related to multilingual signage: ownership of space, audience inclusiveness and exclusiveness, and community resilience. These influence communities' behaviour and perception of multilingual landscapes. In a landscape, the dominance of one language in a signage can suggest the ownership of space by the community that speaks it. It can also strengthen the members' conception of the community as a network of mutual support (community resilience). This network can be inclusive (open to both the community and outsiders) or exclusive (closed to outsiders).

Rebecca Garvin's study (Garvin, 2011) of multilingual landscapes uses a relatively new methodology, referred to as the "walking tours", which examines the impact of multilingual signage in the streets on locals' conceptualisation of the setting. The "walking tours" are little-structured, conversational interviews in which the interviewer walks around with the interviewee and asks about their impression of the multilingual signs they encounter. The conversation is built to a point where the interviewee leads the interviewer to places they associate with the presence of multilingualism. In our methodology, the interviewee is directly asked to be the guide to multilingual spots.

Garvin names some factors to take in consideration that can affect the interpretation of the study's results. The main factor being the cultural background of the interviewees (which should be diverse). The amount of landscape investigated in Garvin's report was not very extensive, and therefore it only provides a partial, though still useful, representation of the impact of multilingual landscapes on individuals.

Matras' third chapter in *Language Contact* (Matras, 2009) was the source of the project's focus on the social implications of multilingualism and inspired the term "mental mapping", which means an individual's own representation of multilingual areas in the region they interact with. Matras establishes that at the micro-level, a multilingual individual classifies language use according to various contexts (the addressee, the interaction settings and discussion topics, etc.). These contexts underscore the social aspect of multilingualism. Macro-level mapping of language refers to the physical mapping of language use in a region and the institutional classification of language: the "dominant language" receives institutional backing and has to be mastered in social and institutional interactions. In the United Kingdom's case, the dominant language is English. A minority language is a property of a numerical minority within a state, generally associated with the migration of a population into an existing state. Matras takes a social approach to multilingualism by bringing into question the effects of multilingualism on structural change, and multilingual user's individual and institutional actions to influence mapping patterns of language in a region. Matras' description of macro-level and micro level mapping inspired this project in the understanding of an individual's personal mapping of the presence of linguistic areas within an zone where an institutional dominant language is established. Moreover, leveraging Garvin's walking tours and Matras' generational approach to migrant communities, it seemed essential to approach a younger profile of migrant people, as their impression of multilingualism may differ from their predecessors, less likely to have been raised in the UK and more likely to associate with their heritage language than their successors.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Methodology Recap**

The fundamental aim of our fieldwork was to investigate Rochdale in search of the area's multilingual hotspots, as there is little documentation of the district's linguistic landscape so far. The research methodology was developed in respect with the local population's involvement as guides to the area's multilingual landscape, drawing from the "walking tours" (Garvin, 2011). This method counted on the interactions with a portion of individuals who could testify on the impact of the presence of multilingual signage on their lives, and whether they have developed a "mental map" of the district's multilingual landscape, that is, if they had come to associate certain areas of the district to multilingual spots mentally.

Depending on the results, the methodology could then be taken into consideration as a new approach to the contribution of data for the documentation of multilingual landscapes. Our initial project assumed that future interviewees would indeed possess a "mental map", but there was no information to support the claim; thus the project's methodology had to be changed according to a more objective stance.

This project was carried out by interviewing the people encountered in Rochdale, with Garvin's "walking tours" (Garvin, 2011) as the source for inspiration.

The questions were carefully structured to avoid a biased point of view that might influence the interviewee's answers.

0. Do you speak any language other than English?

1. Have you observed in Rochdale the presence of signs or posters written in languages other than English?

1.1. If so, have you always noted their presence since you've been here, or would you consider their presence a recent phenomenon?

1.2. If not, what would you think if signs of different languages started to appear in your neighbourhood?

2. Do you know if the places you go shopping advertise their products in any language other than English?

2.1. Do you (would you) feel comfortable shopping in a place that displays languages other than English?

2.2. Do you tend to go to places because they advertise in your language? Why or why not?

3. Where in Rochdale would you recommend us to go if we would like to encounter communities where other languages apart from English are spoken?

3.1. Would you consider these places to be representative of language diversity today in Rochdale?

**Figure 1:** The fieldwork set of questions

The question order follows a structure designed to help us better analyse the results. The first question sets a profile of the linguistic repertoire of the interviewee. The first set of questions focuses on the respondent's perception of Rochdale's multilingual landscape; the second set looks at respondents' personal interactions with this linguistic amalgam and private establishments in particular. The third set of questions relates to the respondent's potential mental mapping of the district.

## **2.2. Methodology Execution**

The fieldwork investigation was carried out in two days, during which we interviewed 11 people ranging from ages 16 to 50 years old, and submitted 47 photographs worth of multilingual signs, obtained in majority thanks to the indications of the participants. The title of all the pictures on LinguaSnapp contains "AA", facilitates their identification. The interviewees were a middle-aged Asian man, who directed us to Tweedale Street, a place he described populated by the "Asian community"; a Bengali young man, who talked us about community centres as places frequented by migrant communities; an Englishman, who associated mosques with immigrant communities and multilingual zones; an English middle-aged couple, who provided us with two more streets where multilingual signage was present (Milkstone Road and Spotland Road); a young girl of Romanian descent; a young French girl student living in Rochdale; one boy and one man, both Chinese employees of a Chinese

restaurant; and two young adults of Middle-Eastern descent (who pointed out that the Bengali community was very active at the local football club) . All their answers to our questions were written down, not recorded, and each of them was previously informed of our project and the anonymity of their participation.

Here are the main points that will be discussed in the next section: Firstly, three informants named specific places where we could find useful information (Tweedale Street, Spotland Road and Milkstone Road) with one associating a place with a specific community (Tweedale Street, the Asian community). Most of the pictures taken were collected in these streets.

Secondly, two informants guided us to places or environments with a social connotation: mosques, community centres and football clubs. Thirdly, almost half of the interviewees declared having observed the presence of multilingual signs in Rochdale, while the rest admitted not having paid attention to it or noticed it altogether. Finally, the respondent of Romanian descent spontaneously made use of the expression “included” to describe how she would feel more included by the presence of signs in Romanian. The rest of interviewees who declared indifference or ignorance regarding the presence of foreign languages in the borough did not manifest concern for the notion of inclusiveness and exclusiveness.

### **2.3 Difficulties**

We encountered a few difficulties while conducting the investigation, of which some were already predicted in the initial plan. The major problem that needed apprehension was the reluctance of many people to participate, which complicated data collection and resulted in a second trip to Rochdale. Moreover, the low number of interviewees implies that the portion of information gathered is not sufficient to be representative of the whole borough. One final unexpected difficulty was the lack of a feature in LinguaSnapp to upload photographs taken outside the application. Therefore, the path established in the first trip had to be retraced to take pictures from LinguaSnapp camera.

## **3. Findings**

As stated in the previous section, the interviews were divided into three basic sections, which allowed to determine whether this sample of Rochdale’s population had traces of a “mental map” of the borough and to query how they interact with multilingualism.

The answers to the first section demonstrated that the majority has a concept of Rochdale’s multilingual landscape, with almost all of them agreeing that it is not a recent phenomenon. For instance, the British couple stated that they had observed the presence of multilingual signage since their arrival (four to five years ago). The second set of questions, however, revealed that the majority of the informants do not know if the establishments they frequent display any language other than English and declared not being concerned with that matter should the situation change. One interviewee, however, stated they would

feel “more included”. Still, indifference seems to be the prevailing attitude. Finally, in the third section, concerned with the notion of a “mental map”, half of the interviewees mentioned specific places (three of them street names and two of them social gatherings in clubs and public institutions), the rest were unsure as to where to direct us to. Traces of a mental map were found for half of the people we interviewed. It must be noted that the ones which do not apparently have a mental map of Rochdale are also those who feel more indifferent and unknowing about the presence of languages other than English in the landscape.



**Figure 2:** mental map of Rochdale according to the interviewees’ perceptions

From this point, a good way to determine if the mental map of our informants is reliable is to compare it with the map that includes all the pictures uploaded on LinguaSnapp, as follows:



**Figure 3:** map of the pictures we took in Rochdale

Comparing both maps, we can appreciate that the sites indicated by the respondents do correspond with places where multilingual signage was found, although there are many more signs in foreign languages spread throughout other parts of the borough, such as the centre. Nevertheless, the vast majority of them are located between Spotland Road (north-west), Tweedale Street and Milkstone Road (south), which establishes the physical boundaries of this linguistic amalgam.

The Romanian interviewee's comments on inclusiveness are evocative to the factor of audience inclusiveness and exclusiveness (Gaiser & Matras, 2016, p. 20), as her perception of multilingualism is influenced by the presence of more Romanian signs in shops or public spaces. Nobody besides her addressed this notion, and similarly, no one mentioned a feeling of exclusion from the prominence of any given language on a public sign. All participants expressed their approval of the presence of languages other than English on public signage, but the informant of Bengalese descent emphasised the condition that foreign language should always be preceded or accompanied with English, as, according to him: *"we are in the UK"*. This supports the notion of English taking dominance in use for younger generations of migrants, with the minority language being pushed back to domestic settings. (Matras, 2009, p. 50).

In line with this general, tolerant opinion towards multilingualism, and including the Bengalese informant remarks about the prevalence of English, many inclusive, bilingual signs were found in various parts of the borough, most of them using English in combination with another language (see appendix, Figure 4). However, some examples of audience-exclusive signs (see appendix, Figure 5) were found.



Some informants related certain parts of the borough with certain communities due to the presence of their respective language in public signage, reinforcing the notion of their “ownership of space” (Gaiser & Matras, 2016, p. 4). The first person interviewed (a man of Southern Indian descent) designed Tweedale Street, as a meeting point for the “Asian community” (verbatim). His indications seemed accurate. Many shops there displayed Asian languages (see appendix, Figure 6), the main ones being Urdu and Arabic (used mostly in religious and health contexts: the term “halal” appears for religious reasons, and its display is a health requirement for restaurants)

The British couple of the interviewees associated two sites in Rochdale with the presence of multilingual signage: Milkstone Road (from which we came) and Spotland Road, where multilingualism was encountered as well (see appendix, Figures 7, 8). The conversation with this couple was an interesting contrast to the rest: on the one hand, they made no mention of a specific migrant community as frequenters of the indicated sites. On the other hand, they named Spotland Road, which is on the north side of the borough (Tweedale Street and Milkstone Road being in the south). Therefore, we could establish two main focus of multilingualism in Rochdale: the south and the north, with some dispersed points in between.

None of the interviewees expressed their preference for shops displaying their products in languages other than English, even if it was in their mother tongue, which shows that the respondent doesn't feel a sense of community resilience (Gaiser & Matras, 2016, p. 77). While four respondents declared that the places where they shop solely advertise in English, the rest confess not having paid attention to the matter and being unsure of the presence of other languages. These two attitudes reflect that the presence of foreign languages has little impact on informants; community resilience might not imply. Two participants associated the Rochdale's football club with the Bengali community, one participant (white, English monolingual) tied multilingualism in general with mosques (underlying their association of multilingualism and Islamic religious sites; see appendix, Figure 9), The Bengali respondent linked multilingualism with Rochdale's community centres (see appendix, Figure 10).

#### **4. Conclusions**

This investigation had two objectives. On the one hand, the collection of multilingual material in Rochdale and the subsequent submission of such data to *LinguaSnapp*, in contribution to the documentation of the multilingual landscapes around the area. On the other hand, the development of a methodology that would take into account individuals' relations with multilingualism to find out if they possess a “mental mapping” of the region, and in such a case, if it can be exploited to collect actual, physical data on the region's multilingual hotspots.

Looking at the report results, we can say that the methodology has been successful in answering these two goals. Nearly half of the informants have directed us towards places

they associated with the presence of multilingualism, thus manifesting in them the presence of a notion close to our definition of a “mental map”. The substantial data collected in the places indicated by the informants also proves that this “mental map” matches the physical settings of Rochdale’s language hotspots. Moreover, the perceptions of the interviewees regarding multilingual landscapes can also be analysed based on the findings of Gaiser and Matras’s report (2016), as shown in the previous section of this project.

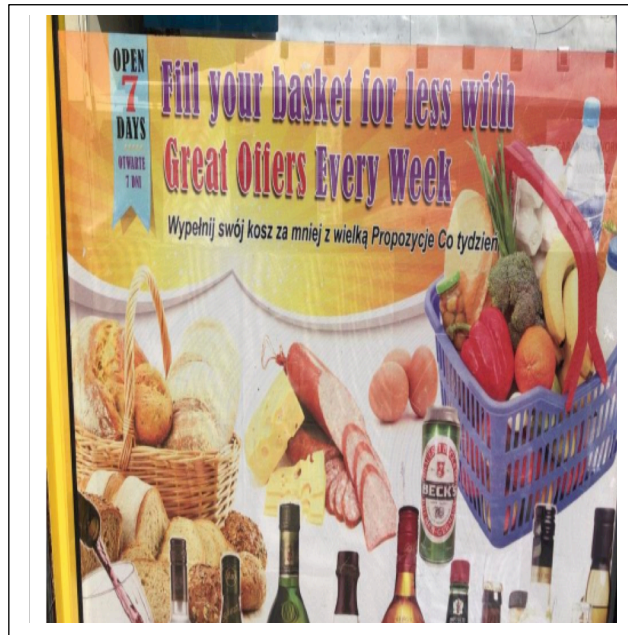
The collection of new data for LinguaSnapp was successful, using a methodology that has produced the desired results; consequently, it can be declared that the overall investigation has been conducted effectively. Forty-seven new pictures have been uploaded to LinguaSnapp.

Nevertheless, it should be reminded that the sample interviewed is hardly representative of a general mindset in the region; therefore, the project does not serve as evidence that the population, in general, possesses a “mental map” of the region’s linguistic landscape. Time constraints and people’s reluctance to participate did not allow for the collection of a more substantial number of interviews. This methodology would, therefore, need to be developed. Finally, it should be said that, although not all the translations for signs in foreign languages are included on LinguaSnapp, we did try to incorporate one for all, using the help of native speakers or online translators.

## 5. Bibliography

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- Matras, Y. (2009). Societal multilingualism. In *Language Contact* (pp. pp. 41-60). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## 6. Appendix



**Figure 4:** example of audience inclusiveness (bilingual poster from Europejski Wschod in Oldham Road)



**Figure 5:** example of audience exclusiveness (interior sign in Polish from Polish Delicatessen in Spotland Road that reads: Ziaja - timeless care - for 25 years we have been looking after you and your family - try the jubilee products inspired by olives, which give great care...").



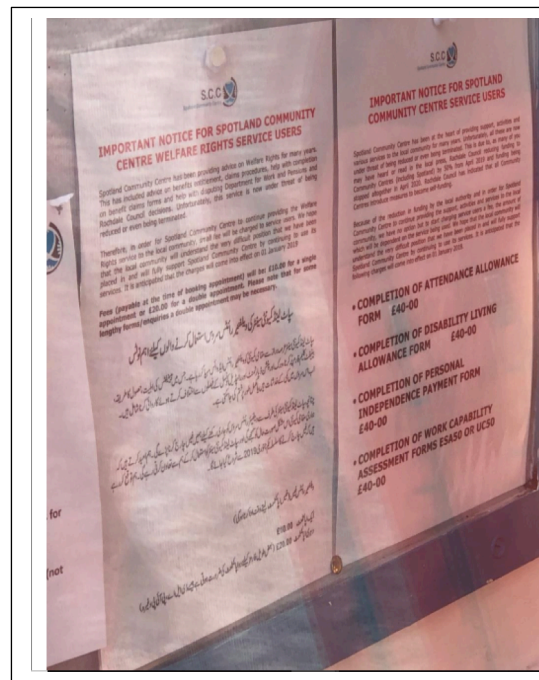
**Figure 6:** example of the presence of Arabic (“Halal” meaning “permissible”) in signs for religious purposes in Shish café (Tweedale Street)



**Figure 7, 8:** signs of Abaseen takeaway (Milkstone Road): English (left) and Urdu (right)



**Figure 9** : main sign in Chashtiah Munir-ul-Islam mosque in Milkstone Road containing Arabic in Persian-Arabic alphabet (up, from right to left: “Oh Allah”; “In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful”; “Oh Messenger of God”), Urdu in both Persian-Arabic and Latin alphabets (“Jamia Masjid Chashtiah Munir-ul-Islam”, which stands for “Gathering Mosque Chashtiah Light of Islam”) and English at the bottom to the right of the white part



**Figure 10**: Informative leaflets, one of which in English and Urdu, in Spotland & Falinge Community Centre (Spotland Road)