# Multilingual Manchester

**Report**

**2019**

The University of Manchester

# A study on linguistic landscape in Bolton:
# Patterns of multilingual signs within the community

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# 1      Introduction

Linguistic landscape (LL) refers to the 'written language use on public and private signs, posters or notes' and it demonstrates the complexity and environment within communities (Gaiser & Matras, 2016, p. 4). It is essential to the study of sociolinguistics as it maps the use of languages of a particular region. According to Gorter (2006, as cited in Tufi, 2013), LL not only reflects the power relations among various social communities, it also allows the negotiation of both individual and group identity and manifests the community's attachment to foreign and incoming languages.

In this project, we will study the LL in Bolton, a city under the Greater Manchester. Bolton is chosen as the focus city under Greater Manchester because of its superdiversity and the lack of academic research conducted in the area. According to the census report about language published by the Bolton Council (2013), English was not the first language or the preferred language of approximately 8.5% of the population in Bolton in 2011. It suggests that a significant number of the population in Bolton do not speak English. A number of other foreign languages are used and spoken in Bolton, which means multilingualism can be observed and studied. The most commonly found non-English languages in Bolton include Gujarati, Urdu, Panjabi and Polish, while there are also a substantial number of 'Kurdish, Persian/Farsi, Arabic, Somali and Chinese language speakers' (Bolton Council, 2013, p.2). Interesting linguistic phenomena is expected to be found and collected throughout the study. They will be instrumental to understand multilingualism and the LL of the area. We will also attempt to make comparison with a previous Multilingual Manchester report from 2017 to see if there is any change in the linguistic landscape of Bolton.

Based on the above, we developed one major research question and three sub-questions for this project:

**What are the patterns and functions of the linguistic signs in multilingual community of Bolton?**

1. What languages and scripts are found on the multilingual signs in Bolton?
2. What are the major functions of languages on the multilingual signs?
3. Are there any changes observed in the linguistic landscape of Bolton throughout the years? Does this reflect the area's demographic composition and transformation?

# 2      Literature Review

LL can be studied in many different aspects. An area is usually selected as the studied region and data will be collected about the use of language in that particular area. Then, a theme will be selected and attached to the LL. Tufi's research is among the typical LL study that a region called Trieste is selected to be the focus. In her study, she analysed the minority language signs that are being displayed and how do signs construct communication and the

place. Tufi (2013, p.392) suggested that patterns are often observed when linguistic signs are encoded and inscribed, which then transform a 'space' to a 'place'. Multilingual signs can serve different functions in the neighbourhood, from facilitating communication to constructing language community. In Gaiser and Matras's research (2016), they suggest that residential patterns of migrant communities are often reflected by the use of a certain language and signs. Our study is developed based on the above notions. We recognise the significance of multilingual signs to the facilitation of communication. It is believed that by studying the use of foreign languages in Bolton, we can observe the patterns in the area.

There has also been research which calls for the need to include a comprehensive analysis. Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003, as cited in Tufi, 2013, p. 391) emphasised in their study about the important role of viewer as they are not merely 'passive recipients' but they also help to construct and influence the LL 'as a mediated system of meanings'. The use of multilingual signs may affect how people talk and how they act in their first instinct. For instance, people may expect the shop owner to speak Kurdish when they enter a shop with Kurdish signs and menus. It may affect the way of communication in the context and the effectiveness of communication. Therefore, we argue that multilingual signs serve certain functions in communication. In order to study the functions of these signs, we must look at the languages that are found on the signs and search for patterns among the signs. We must study the locations where multilinguals signs are found, the arrangement of the multilingual signs and their functions within the neighbourhood. A few multilingual signs will be featured and analysed in greater detail.

As mentioned in the introduction, research has previously been done by University of Manchester students in 2017 on the LL of Bolton, as they discussed the multilingual signs of small businesses in Bolton. In the report they questioned what languages were used on their signs, their motivation for using multiple languages and what languages are spoken in the shops.


## 3      Methodology

Our initial study focus was the relationship between multilingual signs and community identity. During the data collection period, we faced difficulties getting instrumental responses. Many local residents in Bolton refused to take part in interviews partly due to their inability to understand or speak correct English. Unfortunately, this meant we could not collect sufficient qualitative data for our research study. As our initial research topic relied heavily on qualitative responses in order to analyse the community identity, it is therefore not feasible for us to continue the study without the relevant interview responses. Modifications have been made to our study focus, including the research question and the methodology of the research. We developed our current study based on data we collected about the multilingual signs in Bolton.

During our field visits, we recorded the multilingual signs using the app 'LinguaSnapp', developed by the Multilingual Manchester research unit at the University of Manchester, and we uploaded the data onto the app. Based on the data we collected, we

shifted the focus of the study from community identity to the patterns and functions of linguistic signs. We will first study the languages used on the multilingual signs, then analyse the patterns of the multilingual linguistic signs and their functions within the neighbourhood. Finally, we will compare the linguistic landscape of Bolton now with a previous study that has been conducted in 2017. This will provide insights into the understanding of Bolton's linguistic landscape.

This research will systematically investigate different multilingual signs established in the area to discover the pattern of using multilingual signs. This method was more likely to help us understand the function of different signs and changes in the multilingual surroundings.

We conducted two fieldwork visits: the first on 24th February 2019, and the second on 30th March 2019, on both occasions we went to the same location in Bolton. We investigated the community along Derby Street, Daubhill and the surrounding streets as we found out that that is where we would find a large community of ethnic minorities.

## 4     Findings

Figure 1: These points can be seen if you enter "LELA" in the search tab on LinguaSnapp.



As you can see in figure 1 above, the majority of our data was collected in the Daubhill region of Bolton with small proportions of data being found on the outskirts of Deane. We did attempt to collect linguistic data in Boltons city centre; however, we were unsuccessful, most likely due to the fact Boltons high street is predominantly filled with well-known, British retailers rather than local ethnic minority traders, leading us to research the area of

Daubhill. This suggests already that there could be a correlation between the multilingual signs and their location in Bolton.

There was a good variety of multilingual signs available to us in the Daubhill neighbourhood, ranging from: restaurants, take-outs, sweet shops, supermarkets/grocers and advertisements with the language striking out to us most being Urdu, however, there were other languages used such as: Arabic, Kurdish and Polish.

Figure 2:



Figure 2 shows the outside of a supermarket located on Derby Street, straight away it was identifiable to us as Polish due to do the Polish national symbol being displayed on the store sign. 'Nasza Biedronka', written in Roman Latin alphabetic script, translates to English as "Our Ladybird" and upon further research we were able to find out this is actually a popular supermarket retailer in Poland which has a number of stores across the UK. As discussed in the Bolton census data (2013) on page 1, a common language found in Bolton is Polish so it would make sense for a large supermarket chain such as 'Nazsa Biedronka' to locate to Bolton as it would provide a trustworthy and authentic Polish shopping experience to the Poles living in the area. The supermarket also provides a number of different flags on the shop front, including Russia, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine, the inclusion of these flags allows for a greater diversity in customers being attracted to the store.

Figure 3:



Figure 3 above shows the outside of sweet/confectionary store called 'Damascus Sweets', again located on Derby Street. Unlike the store in figure 2, this shop has two different alphabets on its sign: Roman Latin, being the dominant alphabet on the sign, and Persian-Arabic. Damascus is a city located in the Middle-Eastern country of Syria, so from this knowledge we were able to identify the language used as Arabic as that is the official national language. The sign translates as "Damascus Sweets", so it's a direct translation from the from the dominant English on the sign. The communicative sign simply has a function of attracting Arabic speakers to the store, again like with figure 2 it creates an authenticity to the potential customer and lets them know that they will find Arabic products in the store.

Figure 4:



The sign shown in figure 4 required readers to have knowledge about English and Kurdish to understand the full message on the poster about postal issues. This is an example of the 'Complementary' arrangement of languages. This is an audience exclusive sign which informs potential customers, who don't know Kurdish, that they have no reason to be interested in using this company.

## 5      Discussion

### 5.1 Language and scripts found on the multilingual signs

In order to look for patterns for the linguistic landscape, we have to study the language and scripts found on the multilingual signs in the area. As mentioned above in the findings, we observe that the most commonly found language on the multilingual signs is Urdu. There are 5 multilingual signs with Urdu, 3 with Kurdish, 3 with Polish, 2 with Arabic, 1 with Chinese, 1 with Somali, and 1 with Pashto. The quantitative results collected match the demographic size of Bolton. According to the Bolton Council (2013), Urdu is the second most spoken language aside from English, with approximately 3,000 people claiming it to be their preferred language. It is likely that the large number of Urdu speakers calls for a higher use of Urdu in communication in Bolton. Therefore, more multilingual signs with Urdu may be used in order to facilitate effective communication within the neighbourhood. Polish is another major language used in Bolton and there are around 1,600 people using it as their

first language, followed by Kurdish and Arabic (Bolton Council, 2013). Based on the data collected, we can speculate that the more speakers of a language, the more multilingual signs are often found in the neighbourhood. A positive correlation is observed between the number of speakers of a particular language and the number of the multilingual signs found of that language.

### 5.2 Major functions of languages on the multilingual signs

Based on the multilinguals signs we found, the non-English languages generally serve two functions: branding and providing practical information. For branding, most of the non-English language found on the multilingual signs are actually the translation of their brand name. An example is illustrated in figure 5 below, where '幸運星' is the direct translation of 'Lucky Star' but in traditional Chinese. The use of foreign language to show the brand name alongside English is common among the multilingual signs we found. They help local residents, especially speakers of that particular language to understand their business.

Figure 5:



Gaiser & Matras (2016) studied the multilingual signs in Manchester and they point out that language choice has a stronger emblematic function compared to communicative function. They suggest that shop owners make their language choice to demonstrate their linguistic identity and these language choices reflects how the business adapt to the neighbourhood and the environment (Gaiser & Matras, 2016) This is applicable to our study as well. Shop owners include their brand name according to the language they speak and the target group of customers. It undoubtedly helps to grab the attention of the speakers of that language and present their perceived identity to attract their target customers. A branding effect can be created. Just as what the Bolton's linguistic landscape report published in 2017

concluded, it is noticeable that almost every multilingual sign found provide authenticity to the store and they serve an emblematic function despite the unawareness of the shop owners (Anderson-Stern et. al, 2017). This echoes the emblematic language purpose which Matras & Robertson (2015, as cited in Gaiser & Matras, 2016) suggest, about primary function of attracting emotional identification.

Another major function of the multilingual signs is the provision of practical information. Some of the multilingual signs we found are not simply about the brand name in translation, but rather sentences and passage of important information. Figure 4 as shown above is a typical example, which shows information about postal services. In addition, the word 'Halal' in Arabic are often outside the stores. They convey important messages and provide practical information about the store to the public. These signs serve a communicative purpose and function. This, again, echoes the communicative language purpose that Matras & Robertson (2015, as cited in Gaiser & Matras, 2016) suggest, which refers the practical need to provide and interpret content and information.

### 5.3 Changes observed in the linguistic landscape of Bolton

The third question in this research was to investigate the changes of the linguistic landscape in Bolton. The past research of Multilingual Manchester (2017) illustrated that multilingual signs were used to increase the authenticity of shopping experience of customers. Shop owners suggested that the signs helped them to attract customers with background related to the languages on the signs. These signs carry out emblematic function rather than communicative functions. This differs from the findings presented here, which suggested many multilingual signs have fulfil communicative purpose and was designed to help speakers who don't know English to get their necessity in the community.

Figure 6:



For instance, the bilingual Polish-English sign in Figure 6 is able to reach out to wider customer base, especially illustrating an inclusiveness to Polish speaker who are not good at English. The sign conveys useful information about the products sell in the shop. Both English and Polish description are the same which represents a 'duplicating' function of

languages, they are helpful for individuals who are not competent is either of the language to receive information from this poster. Even though they may also carry out symbolic functions to attract customers. The practicality of the sign is strong.

On the other hand, this study confirms that bottom-up signs are frequently used by the shop owners. They tend to use a combination of English and the languages from their origin on the signs. They are not limited to shop signs, but also include handwritten notes and posters These shows the habits of using variety of language to communicate in this community have mostly preserved. We can also expect that there are new immigrants moving into the community, and they only speak in their language. These multilingual signs can help them to adapt to the environment in Bolton. This finding is also consistent with that of Gaiser & Matras (2016) who showed that the bottom up signs are more dominant than top -down signs in Manchester.

## 6      Conclusion

We believe that this study should broaden ones understanding of LL and multicultural societies in Bolton. With the increasing number of non-English speakers settling and migrating in the United Kingdom, it is important that people are made aware of different cultures and beliefs by explaining why multilinguistic signs are used and what functions they provide to non-English speakers. We hope that this study can inspire other researchers or students of LL to collect more data, not just in Bolton, but across the United Kingdom in order to better everyone's understanding of LL.

Word Count - 2,760

## 7 Appendix

The following 2 photos below were unable to be recorded on the LinguaSnapp app, so we are using these sections to write down the details of the data. They are both taken on Derby Street

Figure 4 (taken 30/03/2019):



<u>2 Languages and Alphabets in use:</u>
English - Roman (Latin)
Kurdish (Sorani) - Persian-Arabic

Translation - N/A
Type - Printed Poster
Position - Inside a business outlet, but available to see outside
Outlet - Corner Shop
Design - Product/Serving Image
Content - Institution Name
Sector - Public
Audience - Exclusive

Language Purpose - Communicative
Message Function - Information
Arrangement - Complementary


Figure 6 (taken 30/03/2019):



2 Languages and 1 Alphabet in use:
English - Roman (Latin)
Polish - Roman (Latin)

Translation - (*Can be seen on the figure*)
Type - Printed Poster
Position - Inside a business outlet, but can be seen outside
Outlet - Supermarket
Design - Product/Serving Image
Content - Product Information
Sector - Public
Audience - Inclusive
Language Purpose - Communicative
Message Function - Information
Arrangement - Duplication

## 8    Bibliography

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