



Report

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The University of Manchester

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**The factors influencing the language choices
of users of an online multilingual group and
their relation to the image of Manchester**

Jasmine Colquitt

1 Introduction and Findings

In this report, observations were made regarding the language choices of group members on the Manchester Language Exchange group, including how the users chose to communicate in their posts and within comment sections, there is also a discussion of the many factors that motivate these decisions. Instances of code-switching and code-mixing were noted quite frequently, common phenomena in multilingual contexts, representing the ways that users tend to incorporate elements of their repertoire into their language use on the group for different purposes. A variety of posts were analysed and compared to the findings discussed previously, a smaller sample was then chosen for more specific analysis. Certain features were noted such as the general context of the post; the range languages used; whether the languages used by individuals differ depending on who is involved in the conversations and the ways in which individuals combined elements of their repertoire within the multilingual online space.

In terms of the scope of languages observed in the data, alongside the very high frequency of English, many instances of the Romance languages were noted, specifically Spanish, French and Italian to a slightly lesser extent. Other languages that also appeared include Romanian; German; Arabic; Swedish; Thai; Mandarin and several others, these languages also appeared in combination with one another. A large amount of activity in the group consisted of posts constructed by users in the process of learning a second language or wishing to further develop their linguistic abilities with native speakers, in most cases individuals tended to display at least some basic abilities in the particular languages they were interested, in order to engage with the language, to connect and identify with speakers as well improving their fluency through real-life conversational practise.

User D for example, a native English speaker, code mixes English with Thai as a display of his bilingual abilities and users B, C, E and G all post entirely in their second languages, it appeared that there was a large mix of abilities within the group, users new to a language tended to display instances of code-mixing due to their lack of fluency, for instance one of the replies on user B's post begins with a few basic French sentences but then continues in English when he begins to discuss more complex topics, it is obvious that users are limited to their own individual second language abilities when expanding their connections with individuals who do not share the same first language as them.

Other instances of Code switching were also found, one native Spanish speaker comments on User A's post: 'café y conversation sounds nice', it is unclear whether the code switch from English to Spanish is intentional or not, it may have been triggered by the user not knowing the equivalent word in English, or it may have been used as a deliberate symbol of his Spanish identity, as this is relevant in the context of the post.

Despite these findings, users were not always found to exercise their second-language abilities, user H and G, native English speakers, post entirely in English to request exchanges in Thai and Italian respectively: it appears that a user's level of fluency plays a large role in whether they practise their second languages on the group at all, whether this be due to their actual written competence or simply how confident they are in their abilities.

2 Discussion

The majority of the findings in the data clearly reflect the conclusions that were discussed in the literature review, 'Multilingualism on the web' as defined by Androutsopoulos (2013), Ivkovic and Lotherington (2009) provides a general overview of the way users combine repertoires in online spaces, the 'multilingual configuration of modules' and the discussion of 'identity recognition and inclusion' are particularly relevant to the general trends of how languages are used alongside and in combination with another in the group.

The various trends identified by Solmaz (2018) did also appear in the data, speakers with a shared first language did tend to primarily communicate through these means in order to maintain their local identities, user B for instance, a French first language speaker, shares his post in English but also receives a few responses from other French natives, he and the other French speakers in the conversation are with the phrase 'Bonsoir gars' but then the user continues in English, this way the users are able to display their native identities while also making affiliations with English speakers, this is a clear example of users creating and maintaining both local and global ties through their use of language. Solmaz (2018). Another example of identity formation can be seen in the data of User A, she is seen to mix codes within her post in order to accommodate to the relevant audiences while also maintaining her identity, her main post is in English with a small integration of Spanish in the expression 'el saludo', translating to 'greetings' in English. This insertion of Spanish allows her to signal her Spanish abilities to other users, this shows to be effective as she received a reply from a native Spanish speaker and exercises her Spanish abilities in a full conversation, she can be seen to make use of her second language abilities as a communicative tool to be understood by wider audiences. Although it can only be assumed that she possesses this degree of fluency and did not instead make use of a translation service, which would serve as a useful shortcut to communicate with individuals of different first languages.

Identity maintenance and formation do continue to appear as important themes within the group, user C, who is a first language French speaker, chooses English likely due to the contextual and audience based factors regarding the nature of the group, however the user is still able to maintain his local identity through an instance of code mixing in the last line of his post 'au plaisir de vous lire', similarly user D's mix of English and Thai allows him to maintain his English identity while also being able to signal a different type of identification through his use of Thai. Although there were no instances of bilingual user names to signal user's multicultural backgrounds and identity portrayal, as seen in the research by Lee (2016) as this form is less suited to Facebook, a similar instance of 'tension between the local and global' can be observed in terms of the representation of himself as a multilingual individual.

As discussed previously, the findings of Solmaz (2016,18) are also relevant to the work by Androutsopoulos (2013) in his discussion of 'networked multilingualism' (p.185) regarding how individuals use their "wide and stratified repertoire" to communicate in the most precise and understandable way, user E for instance, a polylingual speaker of Mandarin, English and Spanish, chooses to use English in her post due to the relevance to the situation, she is able to be understood by proficient speakers of English, it is likely that she would receive much fewer replies if she made an alternative choice of language. Likewise, the majority of users that commented on user A's post chose

English, ensuring that they are communicating efficiently and with clarity, the user stated that she wishes to “practise Spanish with a native speaker”, the responses she received were primarily in English and so it seems that the users made an effort to make use of their English abilities, allowing everyone to engage, she does not state her level of fluency in Spanish and so it is understandable that the majority of users responded in English, despite the fact that their usage is not always perfect second language speakers. These are just a few examples of group members integrating and allocating aspects of their repertoires to different styles of conversation based on ideas around context, audience and identity, Solmaz (2018). In addition to this, alongside its use of inclusion, choice of language can also be used to filter out certain audiences, in his post, user D includes some information in Thai alongside the English, meaning that only competent speakers of Thai are able to understand the full message, filtering out users with only a basic level of fluency that would not be able to assist him in his language development. Here the user has considered audience to be an important factor that he wishes to control through careful use of his linguistic repertoire.

Two of the three forms of code switching as identified by Barman, Das, Wagner and Foster (2014) also were identified in the data, a commenter on user A’s post displayed use of Intra-Sentential code switching as he incorporated elements of Spanish into a primarily English comment,

The findings of user C and D are also relevant to Solmaz’s discussion of second language use as a communicative tool to understand and be understood by wider audiences, in this group particularly with its focus on Manchester, the ability to understand and converse in English enables straightforward communication with both native English speakers and speakers of English as second languages, something that is extremely helpful for group members that are new to the city, as many do appear to be, the several instances of English as a second language are therefore to be expected.

As the language exchange group is focused in Manchester, the dominance of English is to be anticipated, a considerable number of posts contained English, used both by first and second language speakers, however the use of English in online contexts in general has been observed by Lee (2016). The user’s use of English undoubtedly widens the potential audience that individuals can reach and allows efficient communication with other group members with other first languages, without the hindrance of a language barrier, it also allows individuals who are new to Manchester to communicate with the natives, for instance user E, a native speaker of Mandarin also uses English and this proves beneficial, she receives several responses, The frequent use of English by users is unsurprising due to the position of English as a global lingua franca. Another noticeable trend that was featured in the literature is the use of English between speakers who do not share a first language, as also noted in research by Lee (2016), for instance, user C uses English to communicate with a native Swedish speaker and other users with a variety of first languages.

Despite the observed hegemony of English within online platforms, Lee (2016) additionally acknowledged a shift towards multilingualism, this seemed to be reflected in the data as although English did appear to be largely dominant, the scope of languages within the group is in no way limited to English, this also reflects multilingualism in Manchester as a whole as the most linguistically diverse city in the UK.

3 Summary

A wide variety of languages have been observed within the Facebook group, representing the multilingual nature of Manchester as a large, heterogenous cosmopolitan city. Despite this, the use of English did appear in an overwhelming majority, this was to be anticipated due to the geographical context of the group and stands for evidence of the dominance of English on online spaces, Lee (2018). As noted in the literature, however, English has by no means completely 'taken over', as seen in the multitude of different languages used and combined by group members.

The term 'multilingualism' simultaneously describes the manipulation of linguistic resources on the individual level and the wider phenomenon of a diverse representation of languages found in a community. Individuals with bilingual and multilingual competence possess the ability to maintain their own unique identities through use of their first language while additionally making connections with individuals that would not otherwise be possible without their multilingual abilities. This report has discussed some general patterns in terms of how the group members manipulate their linguistic repertoires in different contexts and when communicating with different individuals, along with some of the underlying factors that motivate these decisions. Language choice did appear to be influenced by a wide variety of factors of specific related to audience, context and identity, Solmaz (2018). It is important to recognise the fact that these factors are extremely intertwined and not always possible to separate, they are often relevant to the specific topic at a given time, no definite answers can be provided from observation only.

Research into multilingualism on online groups has several useful applications to society, there are many benefits in terms of awareness of the scope of languages both within Manchester and among online contexts as a whole, these findings display a useful picture of the extent of multilingualism and therefore societal policies and planning can be orientated around significant trends. More in depth research is necessary, perhaps use of other methods such as interviews or questionnaires to collect more data on the language tendencies of the group members could prove to be useful, this would provide the perspective of the language user, a method that would like provide rich and specific data. it may additionally be beneficial to analyse other social media platforms to provide a wider array of data and in turn provide a more comprehensive display of the representation of multilingual Manchester in online spaces.

4 Reference list

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5 Appendix

User A

 24 October 2019

Hello, ❤️ my name is Sophie and I am a languages student at The University of Manchester. I am looking for a Spanish language partner who might want to improve their English and will be happy to meet up for a coffee ☕ so I can practice my Spanish with a native speaker.
Un saludo 🙌

11 19 comments

Like Comment Share

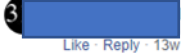
 Mi hija estudia en la universidad de Manchester y es Española. 😊
Like · Reply · See translation · 13w

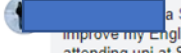
 de verdad!? Me encantaría hablar con ella
Like · Reply · See translation · 13w

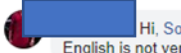
 . Ok. Se lo dire. 😊
Like · Reply · See translation · 13w

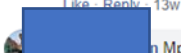
 estas estudiando frances?
Like · Reply · See translation · 13w

 no yo estoy estudiando el español con el chino x
Like · Reply · See translation · 13w

 i Inbox
Like · Reply · 13w

 a Sophie Chapman I can help there. I also need to improve my English especially my writing and speaking. I'm attending uni at Salford so Cafe y conversación sounds nice. let me know 🙌 saludos
Like · Reply · 13w

 Hi, Sophie Chapman we can help here to each other my English is not very good .. but Spanish 100% if u interested thanks...
Like · Reply · 13w

 n Mp
Like · Reply · 13w

User B

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook post and its comments. The post is from a user whose name is redacted with a blue box. The post text is as follows:

3 January at 16:38
Hi everybody!
I'm a French engineer arrived in Manchester a couple of months ago. I want to improve a lot my English and I can be a good mate to make you improve your French too!
Let me know if you're interested in casual/regular meetings!

4 likes · 7 comments

Like Comment Share


The comments section shows several replies:

- Comment 1: [Redacted] PM 😊
Like · Reply · 3w · 1 like
- Comment 2: [Redacted] I'll send a PM too 😊
Like · Reply · 3w · 1 like
- Comment 3: [Redacted] I would be interested in a language exchange, I am Spanish swedish
Like · Reply · 3w · 1 like
- Comment 4: [Redacted] Bonsoir gaaars! If any of you arrange a meet up, let me know!
Like · Reply · 3w · 1 like
- Comment 5: [Redacted] Hi all! My two French flatmates would be interested too, so we can arrange each others to plan something "big" maybe 😊

Below the comments, there are two more replies to the original post:

- Reply 1: [Redacted] af Bonsoir [Redacted]
Like · Reply · See translation · 3w
- Reply 2: [Redacted] ny, comment ça va?
Je suis ingénieur anglais.
Je suis apprendre à parler français avec Duolingo.
My French is still basic, I'm still relearning a lot from school too.
Send me a message if you want an English person to chat too, both in person, and written with messenger. Since I'm in the same profession so we may be able to help with technical language also.
Like · Reply · 5d

User C

 8 January at 19:04


Hi everyone !

Born in France to parents from Czech Republic, bred in Strasbourg, only 20 min away from the German border, I'd love to meet a passionate person with whom I could talk about linguistics for hours, but essentially someone with whom I could build my confidence in English, and of course help with their French.


Looking forward to hearing from you / au plaisir de vous lire !

5 3 comments

Like Comment Share

 You speak german by any chance? I could talk all day about linguistics too


Like · Reply · 2w

 Hi T

I love talk about linguistic and etymology for hours too and I'd also like to bring my old French back to action! I can speak Italian and I can get by in Spanish too.


PM me if you'd like to meet for a coffee 😊

Like · Reply · 2w

 You should join us every Wednesday at Sams Chop HOUse, we had a weekly meet up. There is always interesting people to talk and enjoy the afternoon, and as a plus we practice different languages.

Like · Reply · 2w

User D

 2 January at 15:15

Hello! สวัสดีครับ!

I'm searching for any Thai people that may be interested in a language exchange in the Manchester area 🇹🇼


ผมเรียนที่มหาวิทยาลัยแมนเชสเตอร์และอยากเรียนภาษาไทยนะครับ

I'm a native English speaker myself with TESOL experience so would be more than happy to offer English lessons in return 😊


[See Translation](#)

3 2 comments

Like Comment Share

 e 😊 1

Like · Reply · 3w

 i wish 😊😭 1

Like · Reply · 3w

User E

11 January at 19:32

Hi~

This is Coco from China, I'm just starting to learn Spanish for around one month, I have a friend helps me to practice sometimes but our time is hard to match together, so thought it would be nice if I can practice more.

Some English exchange would be nice too. I am confident with daily talk but there's always space to improve. My English writing skill is not as good so if someone could help me to improve my writing skills that would be awesome.

Currently I am trained to be a professional Mandarin teacher in the secondary school. Would like to do some Mandarin lessons for exchange.

Cheers.

4 6 comments

Like Comment Share

... I am Spanish so if u want I could help u 😊

Like · Reply · 2w

... to Coco, every Wednesday we have a weekly meet-up at some Chop House. We always have native speakers of Spanish, English, Italian and French... So you can practice or learn many languages. Cheers

Like · Reply · 2w 1

... I'm native in Spanish and Cantonese, I would like to exchange for Mandarin please!! If you are interested please pm, thanks!

Like · Reply · 2w

... Hi Coco I'm moving to China in a couple of months so will happily help with english in exchange for some chinese 😊 message me if you like!

Like · Reply · 2w

... 晚安Coco~ I don't speak Spanish but would be really happy to help you with any part of your English (I'm an English teacher and my favourite part is actually writing!). I have studied Chinese for a long time, but really want to improve. I love cooking, football, plants and reading. If you think we could help each other, feel free to PM me 😊

Like · Reply · 2w

... Did you know 'coco' is the Spanish word for coconut?

I am trying to learn Mandarin and would like some help. I grew up speaking English/Spanish.

I need to learn some technical words in Mandarin because I am trying to get a small number of things manufactured in China.

Like · Reply · 1w

User F


 17 November 2019 ***

Hello ! I'm looking for someone to practise English with over coffee or drinks
☺️ I can offer French in exchange ☺️

👍 11

6 comments


👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 Ulin Hi, I am interested in meet you for english-french exchange


Like · Reply · 10w

 bunt me in!

Like · Reply · 10w


 n I'd be up for that

Like · Reply · 10w


 s Try going to the exchange on Wednesday at Sam's Chop House

Like · Reply · 10w


👍 2

 s Ça m'intéresse. Je suis anglais et je cherchais des français pour faire un échange linguistique


Like · Reply · See translation · 10w

 s Mon français est affreux et je dois l'améliorer! Je voudrais tous vous rencontrer si vous organisez un échange ou quelque chose ☺️


Like · Reply · See translation · 10w

 s I'm interested. I'm graduated in Italian Literature, quite used to teaching Italian. Let me know if interested

Like · Reply · 14w

 s I'm happy to meet up and practice Italian . I speak Italian to a reasonable standard, but would like to improve. I'm local to Manchester too. Giuseppe

Like · Reply · 14w

 s It would be good if we could meet up as a group ? Maybe once a week or every couple of weeks maybe?


Like · Reply · 14w

 s Ciao Gretel I'm interested! ☺️ I'm a native italian man! I'd like to improve my spoken English. Thank you! Let me know when you will meet next time


Like · Reply · 14w · Edited

 s (m:)


Like · Reply · 14w

 s Im interested. Im brazilian learning italian and want improve my english too

Like · Reply · 14w

 s Im mother language Italian if you need...Im doing Level 2 English I need to practice as well..

Like · Reply · 13w

 s Ciao Greté Ov ☺️ I've just sent you a pm

Like · Reply · 10w

 s Sempre pronto per un caffè a patto sia italiano ☺️ sentiamoci in privato Greta

Like · Reply · See translation · 10w

User G

 **[Redacted]** ••

Hello everyone! I'm looking for anyone to practise Italian with! 😊 I can help out with English in exchange or we could just meet and practise Italian together over coffee or drinks! ☺☺

👍 23 16 comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **Lisa Ortolano** I am interested
Like · Reply · 14w

 **[Redacted]** in tomorrow at Sams Chop House. At 630. You will always get italian speakers to practise and you will meet a lot of interesting people
Like · Reply · 14w 👍 1


 **Viridiana Mon** Thanks! 😊
Like · Reply · 14w

 **Rodriguez** I am interested
Like · Reply · 14w 👍 1

 **[Redacted]** Hi, I am Italian and always up for a coffee if you want to practise 😊
Like · Reply · 14w 👍 1

 **[Redacted]** I am interested on this too as I don't want to forget my Italian and I am more than happy to help with Spanish 😊
Like · Reply · 14w 👍 1

User H

 **[Redacted]** ⋮


12 December 2019


Hola, busco alguien para practicar y mejorar mi español. Quiero algo regular, todos los fines por la mañana/día/tarde (durante la semana es difícil pero no es imposible). Vivo por withington y prefiero algo cerca como fallowfield o didsbury pero puedo venir más centro. Gracias!

[See Translation](#)

👍 2 2 comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **[Redacted]** a PM
Like · Reply · 6w

 **[Redacted]** I'm Colombian, can you vocal messages over whatsapp?
Like · Reply · 6w · Edited

User I

 **[Redacted]** ⋮

14 January at 17:34

I have basic Thai, and would like to practice a bit with someone so I don't lose it. I also speak high basic/low intermediate Spanish, and very basic Korean that I'd also like to refresh - but mainly the Thai.

Anyone up for a Thai/English exchange?

👍 2

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share