



Report 2020



The University of Manchester

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The language choices of users in the Manchester language exchange facebook group

Cecilia Rinaldo

Shi Zhi Yang

Jamilah Zaynah Hamzaoui

Emilie Hernandez

1 Research Questions & Methods

Our planned research schedule went to plan week by week, and we encountered little problems with our research methods, besides the questionnaire, although was never intended to be our primary source of data, was not answered by any of the users which we analysed and so we did not use it.

Recalling our research questions, we would like to analyse the relationship between language choice and contexts, what factors underlie them, what effect do they have on readers, and how this relates back to Manchester as one of the most linguistically diverse city in the U.K. (Manchester City Council, 2019)

In Part 2, we will describe the gathered data and discuss our analysis in relation to the scholars identified in our literature review, identifying any general trends and assessing the broader factors that are involved in language choice in CMC.

As we relate to our findings we will refer to users in an alphabetic system, and the comments in reply to the posts of those respective users in a numeric system (see 5. *Appendix: Screenshots*).

2 Findings

User A Summary

User A is a native French speaker who has published a post in English to accommodate to her native English speaking audience. She shows one spelling mistake reflecting her lack of proficiency, yet has nevertheless written a well structured sentence. Emojis are used by User A and in the comments; this digital resource contributes to self representation, since a person's facial expression and body language is inaccessible.

Comment 6 is by a non-native French speakers, who used an English expression with French vocabulary. Whilst the text is not ungrammatical, it would have been more natural to say: "Mon français n'est pas très bon, j'ai besoin de l'améliorer! J'aimerais tous vous rencontrer si vous organisez quelque chose.". This suggests that they are trying to use French vocabulary whilst remaining in an English structure based mindset. This reoccurs with the first sentence of Comment 5.

Comparing English comments to French ones, a reason why some people avoid the use of French could be that their level of the language is much lower. Conversely, their preference for English could be because User A is searching for English speakers, so it is appropriate to express themselves in English to confine with the context and accommodate to their recipient.

User B Summary

User B is a Spanish speaker who has written two posts, both searching for Arabic speakers for assistance in the language. She uses Egyptian Arabic to write both posts, as well as some English in the first.

Her emphasis on being Spanish is purely related to identity purposes. We can hence assume that she decided to write in Arabic here because the post is aimed towards Arabic speakers. She adds a very basic use of English summing up their message, presumably to reach a wider audience, especially since the Arabic she is using is Egyptian Arabic and has a limited audience.

Comments 1 and 4 in reply to this post are in English. Neither User B nor commenters 1 and 4 are native English speakers. However, commenter 1 and 4 have chosen to reply in English. This could be because they speak a different variety of Arabic that an Egyptian Arabic speaker may not understand. Therefore, commenter 1 resorts to the use of English, trusting it to be a common language between the two of them.

Comment 1 has an incorrect structure, which is interesting since in Arabic the sentence's structure would be: **العربية** يمكنني أن أتكم معك (I can speak with you Arabic), exactly how comment 1 has been written.

Comments 2 and 3 show the use of tagging, which allows people to alert someone else about a relevant post, particularly useful here as readers of this post who do not fit the 'female Arabic speaker' category can still tag a possible user that can provide help, since they themselves cannot.

Commenter 5 is the only one who replies in Arabic. However, the Arabic he uses is standard, since his dialect is Libyan. By choosing to use Standard Arabic, we suggest he is not a confident English speaker. Whilst User B does not reply to this comment on the first post, she did when the same person responds again in Standard Arabic to her second post, and User B also uses the standard in response. This shows how standard Arabic is a helpful bridge between Arabic speakers of different varieties, when no other common language, such as English, is present.

User C Summary

User C is a native English speaker who writes two posts in Spanish and aims to organise a language exchange between Spanish and English speakers. He uses Spanish, presumably since his ideal audience is native Spanish speakers. He replies in English to comment 1, written in English, and answers in Spanish to comment 4 written in Spanish. Therefore, he switches languages regarding the person he is addressing, accommodating to their choice of language.

The writer of comment 12 (second post) wrote the same comment both in Spanish and in English. Commenter 12's literal translation of his message in English could be because she is aware that User C is not a native Spanish speaker and his lack of precision may have caused Commenter 12 to assume his proficiency is not high. Alternatively, Commenter 12 may have wanted to display their use of English in order to seem more approachable and an appropriate exchange partner. User C responded to comment 12 in English. We see here that when he is addressed in both Spanish and English, his tendency to use Spanish fades away. From the message being directly available in his native language, he appears to instinctively replies in English.

User D Summary

User D's post is written completely in Russian, with the aim of searching for native Russian speakers to help him. Although non-Russian speakers would be able to translate the post and then still read and

understand it, the use of only Russian excludes any readers without a Russian repertoire, since they would be unhelpful to User D. His language choice also suggests that he is very confident in the language. Alternatively, he may have used a translation service to help his writing, a strong possibility since he is still learning the language.

User E Summary

User E is a native English speaker searching to exchange in Romanian. He begins his post with Romanian, before using English for the rest of his post.

User E has faced some confusion in relation to the distinction between Romanian and Romani languages. He aims to learn Romani, however the language he uses before English is Romanian. These languages have similar names and phonetic similarities, therefore are easily mistaken as one (Matras, 2002). We could also consider a keyboard auto-correction issue, since it is only when he switches to English that he refers Romanian. User E's confusion could have reciprocated misunderstanding within the audience.

With this point discussed, we will continue by referring to the language used in this post and User E's goal language, as Romanian. Initially, User E chose to use the language of his ideal audience, despite lacking confidence and proficiency. However, his following use of English clarified his message. By using it for the most part of his post, User E assumed the popularity of English online will mean that his ideal readers will be familiar with it. Both comments 1 and 3 have been written in English. In response to comment 1, User E also used English. Yet he replied in Romanian to comment 3. This could be because, from accessing his public profile, it can be seen that Commenter 3 is in fact Romanian. So although he chose to use English, Romanian is within his repertoire, and therefore User E has chosen to accommodate this.

User E's English in the post itself is very relaxed, making use of informal sentences. The personal pronouns "I"/"I am" are eliminated in two instances in his writing, a feature commonly found in online messaging for efficiency. Even with these obvious elements missing, the text is still perfectly understandable.

The informal phrase "random stuff" bodies with the informal nature of the text and its place of publication contributing to User E's self-representation of quite a friendly and approachable nature that is effective in attracting people to engage in an exchange.

User F Summary

User F, who is bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian, uses English in her post to attract an English-speaking audience. Being in a multilingual environment, she may have used English in order to be understood by a wider audience (Solmaz, 2018).

User F uses multiple brackets as an expression for smiley faces. This method, without the conventionally attached colon, is specific to Russian online written communication. The origin of this phenomenon is due to the fact that it is inconvenient to type colons on a Cyrillic keyboard (Bezdelev, 2013). This symbol would not be perceived the same way by people from a different language background, therefore it associates her with the Russian speaking community. When replying to User

F, comment 9 displays a grammatical structure odd to English which is perhaps borrowed from the grammar structure of his native language.

3 Discussion

Solmaz (2018) concluded: 'language choice is dependent on audience, context, and identity'. Both User A, and F are foreign to English yet used it in their posts to address a native English-speaking ideal audience. The same pattern repeats itself in all of the User's posts analysed.

In the case of the situations where solely the intended audience's native language was used (User A, B's first post, C, and D), this language choice is effective in attracting a particular audience.

For example, in the case of User C, a native Spanish speaker is likely to read a post written entirely in Spanish as they assume that it is aimed at them. This may be applicable across different areas of online space, but is particularly likely in the MLE group as the nature of the group is searching for and bringing together multilingual speakers based in Manchester.

This proves effective in some comments such as 1-4 in response to User A's post which are written in English, by English speakers which is likely since User A used English to address their audience, supporting the idea that one's audience influences their language choice (Solmaz, 2018) and also gives preference for the language to be used by both parties within the discussion.

User E used the languages of his ideal audience and his own, questioning why the writer feels the need to use their own native language. A lack of confidence in the language that is not their own may cause them to use their native language for clarification. Identity (Solmaz, 2018) may also be a factor, perhaps they have used their native language for self-representation purposes. This establishment of identity could be beneficial for the context (Solmaz, 2018) by allowing an exchange between the two people. These last two points also apply to the two French comments in response to User A. Conversely, in User B's 2nd post, the language of their ideal audiences and English are used, even if it is not their native language, questioning the above points made about identity. Hence not all language choices are determined by the same factors from person to person. The use of English here appears to disprove Solmaz's conclusions, particularly regarding identity, but rather support Lee (2016) regarding the dominance of English online (see Section 3.3). Detecting underlying factors of language choice is not straightforward, and delving deeper into certain analysis could draw different conclusions. With a lighter take on the meaning of 'identity', we could assume the use of English for self-representation by means of prestige. Knowledge of English in a community of non-English native speakers is regarded as impressive and could therefore appear under the umbrella of identity, which again supports Solmaz's findings. User E's uses of the informal phrase "random stuff" represents him as a relaxed person which is effective for his purpose in attracting people for a language exchange. This supports and links Solmaz's identity and context aspects of language choice.

Androutsopoulos' (2013) research concluded that networked multilingualism is specific to individual users, influenced by their 'wide and stratified repertoire' and the context and topic at hand at a given time. User E demonstrates his repertoire whilst using both Romanian and English in his post. The intention of his post accounts for his use of Romanian. Despite it being limited, his knowledge allows him to use it in order to accommodate his audience, as well as the context. The use of English is understandable as it is his native language and appears to have been used in order for him to

successfully and confidently express himself. User D does not use any of the range of languages which he reveals in his post that he knows, contradicting the point that online users tend to exhaust their available repertoire in order to achieve the best communicative outcome (Androutsopoulos, 2013). We will now address the conclusions made by Lee (2016) alongside our findings. Lee (2016) argued how new approaches to communication are used to best reach one's communicative aims. Throughout our findings, a relevant number of users engaged visual tools such as emojis and the use of alphabets other than the Roman alphabet to highlight their own identity, which supports Lee's observation that technological development gave birth to communication practices between users that are specific for CMC. For example, User D represents an emblematic example where technological development allows access to different keyboards, and therefore the ability to convey their identity, or otherwise to target the relevant audience in a more successful way.

The dominant status of English on online platforms was a predominantly supported point of Lee's (2016) throughout our findings, despite the increasing number of languages that are becoming prominent in CMC communication. Also, the use of English as a common language, when none of the first languages in question is mutually understandable. Users B and E relied on the use of English wherever the situation required a common language between different native speakers (Lee, 2016), since it is the closest language that the users involved are able to mutually understand each other. Contrary to Lee's reference to English as a common language, User C and D deliberately resorted to languages other than English to accommodate the audience. Despite the fact that English still has worldwide dominance online, other languages are increasingly gaining popularity resulting from technological development.

In regards to the study of Barman, Das, Wagner and Foster, we did not find any evidence in our findings of the use of "word borrowings". We did, however, approach a similar concept but with borrowing the structure rather than words, in the sense that a foreign/learner speaker of a language used the structure of their native language when attempting to communicate. We will address this in Section 3.5. New Findings below.

Our findings brought us across a new phenomenon within the linguistics topic of commuter mediated communication among multilingual speakers. In our analysis of Comment 5 and 6 of User A, Comment 1 of User B, and Comment 9 of User F, we saw both the users employ a language other than their own native language for practising purposes and intentionally targeting the ideal audience. We saw here, an aspect of what we will refer to as 'structure borrowing', whereby the strategy adopted to structure sentences was unusual. The clause structure presented suggests that the structure's skeleton of the native language in question had been implemented with vocabulary of the language in which the writer was aiming to use.

4 Summary

It is no doubt difficult to predict exactly the cause behind a person's language choice in any particular situation, especially since the factors are very often subconscious anyway. But there are nevertheless many possible causes that we have discussed that could singularly or collectively influence a person's language choice. Whilst Barman, Das, Wagner and Foster were shown little to no support from our research, Solmaz's (2018) conclusion was proved the most strongly supported. From our observations,

we can see that whilst they may tie together at times, the impacts of both audience and identity on language choice can be seen as separate points; the effect of audience may be seen on one particular occurrence of language choice whilst not giving evidence for the effect of identity, and vice versa. Context, concluded as a factor by not only Solmaz (2018) but also Androutsopoulos (2013), however, appears to be a much more embedded effect on language choice. The goal of writers of posts was mostly to attract a speaker of their goal language in order to gain assistance from them. Therefore, the use of the language of one's intended audience was common, supporting context as a factor. Although not as common as the above three factors, the dominance of English (Lee, 2016) also showed to be a fairly relevant factor of language choice, coinciding with the use of English as a common language and also the use of digital resources in order to be more successful in CMC. The causes and factors behind certain languages in certain contexts, and the effects on readers are aspects that have all been satisfied by our findings in accordance with the scholars we observed. Regarding the relation of these elements with Manchester as one of the most linguistically diverse city in the U.K. (Manchester City Council, 2019), the scope of languages used in the MLE Facebook group provides a strong representation, yet only a brief insight into the number of multilinguals in Manchester and the variety of languages across them.

5 References

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6 Appendix

Screenshots

User A

The screenshot shows a social media post by 'User A' dated November 17 at 8:59 PM. The post text is: 'Hello ! I'm looking for someone to practise English with over coffee or drinks 😊 I can offer French in exchange 😊'. It has 11 likes and 6 comments. Below the post are three interaction buttons: 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share'. A list of six comments follows, each with a numbered index (1-6) on the left. Comment 1: 'Hi, I am interested in meet you for english-french exchange'. Comment 2: 'Count me in!'. Comment 3: 'I'd be up for that'. Comment 4: 'Try going to the exchange on Wednesday at Sam's Chop House'. Comment 5: 'Ça m'intéresse. Je suis anglais et je cherchais des français pour faire un échange linguistique'. Comment 6: 'Mon français est affreux et je dois l'améliorer! Je voudrais tous vous rencontrer si vous organisez un échange ou quelque chose 🙌'. At the bottom is a 'Write a comment...' input field with icons for emojis, photos, GIFs, and stickers.

User A
November 17 at 8:59 PM

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

1 [Red] Hi, I am interested in meet you for english-french exchange
Like · Reply · 2w

2 [Pink] Count me in!
Like · Reply · 2w

3 [Purple] I'd be up for that
Like · Reply · 2w

4 [Cyan] Try going to the exchange on Wednesday at Sam's Chop House
Like · Reply · 2w 2

5 [Green] Ça m'intéresse. Je suis anglais et je cherchais des français pour faire un échange linguistique
Like · Reply · See Translation · 2w

6 [Yellow] 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 · 2w

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 GIF 🎭

1.1

User B

User B
August 12 at 11:28 PM

انا من اسبانيا و بضور على بنت او ست تكلم عاربي معيا!!
??Women arabic speakers

See Translation

3 5 Comments

Like Comment Share

- 1 [Red] I can speak with you Arabic 😊
Like · Reply · 15w 1
- 2 [Pink] ,tagged,
Like · Reply · 15w
- 3 [Purple] ,tagged,
Like · Reply · 15w 1
- 4 [Cyan] Hi UserB, I could do that text me if you are interested.
Like · Reply · 15w 2
- 5 [Green] استطيع المساعدة
Like · Reply · See Translation · 4w

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 📺 🗿

2.1

User B

November 21 at 4:17 PM ·

احلا بضور على ستات امارس عاربي معهم. للاسف عندي كم خبرة وحشة مع الرجلّة و
مش هغرب تاني معهم. لو انتي عايزة تعلمي اسباني او عايزة صحبة جديدة إكتبيلي!!!

[See Translation](#)

6 Comments



Like



Comment



Share

6

ارغب في تعلم الإسبانية، ليس كل الرجال سواسية

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 1w

7

User B

احترم اللي كتبتّه و إتلع برة من هنة يا سيدي

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 1w 🤔 2

8

لماذا ماذا فعلت؟

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 1w

9

Manchester exchange isn't a place for Gendre discrimination 😊

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1w

10

se llama intercambio de idiomas y cada uno es libre de escribir en el idioma que quiera . Lee las normas

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 1w

11

what are you talking about ?!! I only defended because the lady told him literally to bugger off ! Because she doesn't want any exchange with MEN ! Have a nice day 😊

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1w

Write a reply...



Write a comment...



2.2

User C
July 11

¡Hola a todos! He organizado un intercambio de idiomas para los hablantes de inglés y español. El lugar es foundation coffee house, la dirección es lever street M1 1JB. Vamos a empezar a las 3 y el primer intercambio será este sábado el 13 de julio. Si te apuntas escíbeme para confirmar tu asistencia. Nos vemos este sábado.

[See Translation](#)

17 51 Comments

Like Comment Share

1 Hi, I would like to join this group but I can not make it this Saturday, are you going to do it weekly, every Saturday?Thankss 3
Like · Reply · 20w

2 UserC Yes I'm hoping so, if people are interested then I'll do it weekly. 3
Like · Reply · 20w

3 ,tagged, ,tagged, 1
Like · Reply · 20w

4 Hasta que hora piensan estar ? Yo podría pero después de las 4.30 😊 1
Like · Reply · See Translation · 20w

5 UserC hasta las 7 o hasta que todo el mundo no pueda aguantar más. 1
Like · Reply · See Translation · 20w

6 UserC gracias, al final no puedo ir hoy (no vivo en manchester, estoy allí de visita este finde pero al final no va con mis planes) pero me parece muy buena iniciativa! Buena suerte 😊 1
Like · Reply · See Translation · 20w

7 I would love to attend as well but I am not free this week either. Next week I would love to attend 1
Like · Reply · 20w

User C
August 30

¡Hola a todos! Vamos a quedar mañana a la 1 en el bar grub, el código postal es M1 2AD. Un intercambio de inglés y español. Si quieres asistir, házmelo saber. Un saludo

[See Translation](#)

2 [7 Comments](#)

Like Comment Share

8 **UserC** Vamos a quedar hoy
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 13w

9 Donde estáis?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 13w

10 Hi, are you still there?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 13w

11 Yo tampoco encuentre a nadie
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 12w

12 Hola! Habrá reunión este fin de semana? Hi! Will there be a meetup this weekend? Thanks
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 12w

13 **UserC** Unfortunately I can't do it this Saturday, but I'll be there the weekend after.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 12w

14 Hi **UserC** , does this meet up happen every Saturday at 1pm usually? would love to join but can't come tomorrow. Gracias 😊
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 11w


3.2




User D

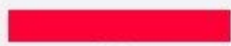
User D ▼
August 30

Привет, люди из прекрасной России, еще раз спрашиваю, не желает ли кто-нибудь дать несколько уроков по русскому языку. Мне очень интересно узнать его взамен, я мог бы научить вас французскому, арабскому или итальянскому языкам. Спасибо.





[See Translation](#)





 2 2 Comments

 Like  Comment  Share

1  Могу давать платные уроки русского языка, 8€ за урок. Так как обмен на вышеуказанные языки мне не интересен.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 13w

2 **User D** Привет ... Спасибо за ваше предложение. Я считаю, что дух этой группы - обмен языками. И я хотел бы остаться в этом духе. Кроме того, я хотел бы чувствовать себя полезным обменяться с языками, которые я знаю. Жаль, что вас не интересуют другие языки. еще раз спасибо
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [See Translation](#) · 13w

4.1

User E

User E October 22

Salut, cineva Romani pe aici? As you can tell - I need to practice Romanian very badly 😊 Can help with English or random stuff in a few languages - based in Bolton but can meet in Manchester or elsewhere

👍 2 4 Comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

1 [Redacted] I think there's a Facebook group called "Romani in Manchester" and if you post there you might be able to find more people?
Like · Reply · 6w

2 User E Thanks
Like · Reply · 6w

3 [Purple] I can help 👍 1
Like · Reply · 2w

4 User E Misto 😊 trimate pm te rog
Like · Reply · See Translation · 2w

Write a comment... 😊 📷 🗣️ 🗨️

1.1

User F

User F
October 30

Hello my name is User F .I from Ukraine.I speak Russian and Ukrainian , if anyone needs my languages ,I will be happy to learn English .))

9 9 Comments

Like Comment Share

1 [Redacted] Hi User F . I'm an English teacher who has started an English conversation group on Wednesday afternoons in Salford, if you're interested.The page is: @SalfordEnglishconversation. I also post things on the page about English, such as vocabulary. 😊
Like · Reply · 5w

2 User F [Redacted] tank you about this but I can't I am working on Wednesday,
Like · Reply · 5w 1

3 [Redacted] That's a shame. You are welcome to follow the page or join the group if you want, anyway. Good luck 😊
Like · Reply · 5w

Write a reply...

4 [Purple] Hey User F I think Russian is an interesting language, i think we can exchange languages i can help you with English . 😊
Like · Reply · 5w

5 [Blue] I'm happy to help improve your English and learn a new language myself
Like · Reply · 5w


6 [Cyan] Hi User F I'd be happy to help you practice on line
Like · Reply · 5w


7 User F [Cyan] we can try online)))Thanks
Like · Reply · 4w 1

Write a reply...

6.1

6.2

8  Hi User F I have sent you a message
Like · Reply · 4w

9  Hi, User F I can learn u speak English... and I love to learn Russian if u want to please ...
Like · Reply · 4w

Write a comment... 